

WAR TRAUMA and ITS SUBJECTIVE MEANINGS: AN
EXPLORATION ON “MEHMEDİN KİTABI:
GÜNEYDOĞU’DA SAVAŞMIŞ ASKERLER ANLATIYOR”

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how the ex-soldiers who fought in the Eastern and Southeastern part of Turkey construct their subjectivities in the face of traumatic experiences of war zone. Another purpose of this study is to elaborate the psychological outcomes of the war on ex-soldiers. For this purpose, first, 41 interviews included in the book of Nadire Mater named Mehmedin Kitabı are analyzed to identify the key themes that were organized and elaborated by using the method of discourse analysis. Moreover, the method of content analysis is also used to construct “trauma symptom profile” involving the post-traumatic symptoms based on DSM IV diagnostic criteria of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Besides post-traumatic symptoms, the narratives are sorted and categorized in order to reveal the psychological symptoms like alcohol abuse, survival guilt and so on. The analysis indicates that sleep disturbances, recurrent dreams of traumatic events and hypervigilance and exaggerated startle response are the most common symptoms among the ex-soldiers. The narratives are categorized into three parts: pre-military service period, military service period, and post-military service period. The analysis of pre-military service period indicates how important to understand the context of these soldiers before going to military service and how the contextual features of pre-military service period affect the military service experience. Regarding to military service period, social and moral order of army and war zone are critical in terms of understanding how war zone experiences of ex-soldiers influence their psychic life and how the ex-soldiers make their traumatic experiences

meaningful. Moreover, the discourses on war zone stressors such as loss of a beloved comrade and killing someone are explored in the narratives of ex-soldiers. Various discourses about war in society are discussed in order to understand how these soldiers do meaning-making of their traumatic experiences after they completed their military service. The findings of this study are discussed in relation with existing literature about war and trauma.

Özet

Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin Doğu ve Güneydoğu'sunda savaşmış askerlerin yaşadıkları travmatik deneyimler karşısında öznelliklerini nasıl oluşturduklarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışma savaşın askerler üzerindeki psikolojik sonuçlarını da incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu amaçla gazeteci Nadire Mater'in "Mehmedin Kitabı" adlı çalışmasında yer alan 41 mülakat, söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak, DSM-IV Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu tanı kriterleri temel alınarak travma sonrası semptomları içeren "travma semptom profili" oluşturulmuştur. Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu belirtileri dışında, askerlerin anlatıları kullanılarak alkol kullanımı, sosyal ilişkilerde zorluklar gibi diğer psikolojik semptomların yaşanıp yaşanmadığı araştırılmıştır. Anlatıların analizi, Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu semptomları arasında yer alan uyku bozuklukları, travmatik olayın sık sık sıkıntı veren biçimde rüyada görme, aşırı irkilme tepkisi gösterme gibi belirtilerin askerler arasında sıklıkla rastlandığını göstermiştir. Anlatılar, askerlik öncesi, askerlik ve askerlik sonrası olmak üzere üç kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Askerlik öncesi dönem, askerlerin içinde yaşadıkları ortamı ve bu ortamın askerlik deneyimini nasıl etkilediğini göstermiştir. Askerlik döneminin analizi, ordunun ve savaş ortamının kendi sosyal ve ahlaki düzeninin askerlerin yaşadıkları travmatik deneyimleri anlamlandırma süreçlerini ne şekillerde etkilediğini göstermiştir. Toplumda yer alan savaşla ilgili söylemlerin, askerlik sonrası dönemde travmatik deneyimlerin

anlamlandırılması sürecini olan etkileri gösterilmiştir. Söylem analizi sonuçları savaş travması literatürü ile ilişkili olarak tartışılmıştır.

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1. Introduction

The study of psychological trauma is one of the most controversial issues in psychology and psychiatry. This is not just an academic controversy, however. Psychological trauma is immersed with politics. The study of traumatic events such as rape, combat, earthquake and other horrific experiences requires the support of a political movement (Herman, 1997).

The aim of this study is to address the way in which self, subjectivity and identity are constructed in traumatic memories of combat. For this purpose, the interviews included in the book named *Mehmedin Kitabı* written by journalist Nadire Mater will be analyzed in detail. The interviews are first-hand accounts of Turkish soldiers who have fought against PKK¹ in the eastern and southeastern part of Turkey. In these interviews, the soldiers talk about the shock of entering military life and the traumas of warfare, the changes in personality and relations with family and friends, the lingering emotional effects of war, and the difficulties in returning to the "real world". Therefore, it is primarily aimed to elaborate the narratives of these soldiers regarding to military life and warfare from the perspective of theories of psychological trauma, memory, and subjectivity. Understanding how these soldiers reconstruct their subjectivities in the face of the traumas of warfare and how the traumas of warfare are recalled by these soldiers are critical.

¹ PKK is abbreviation of Workers' Party of Kurdistan or Party Karkaren Kurdistan (in Kurdish).

This study also aims to be pioneering in the elaboration psychological consequences of the war against PKK on the soldiers. There is no academic study that investigates the effects of the war against PKK from a psychological perspective.

War is one of the universally accepted traumatic events. Experiencing warfare surely has many disruptive effects on human beings. Accordingly, theoretical perspectives on war trauma and its psychological effects on human beings will be elaborated in the following parts of this section. Moreover, personal narratives of ex-soldiers will be focused on in order to understand how the war trauma is made meaningful. Thus, theoretical perspectives on personal narratives will be discussed. Personal narratives are based on war testimonies of soldiers. Then theoretical views on oral testimony are reviewed. A discourse of “masculinity”, which is typically deployed by the soldiers to make meaning of their traumatic experiences, will be explored in detail. So, the existing literature on masculinity will be considered. Before starting the review of existing theories, how the psychological trauma is defined will be discussed.

1.1. Psychological Trauma

What makes a stressor “traumatic” is a debatable issue in psychology and psychiatry. The definitional process of psychological trauma has included different perspectives on this issue. It is generally accepted that three variables are important in definition of trauma: an objectively defined event, the person's subjective interpretation of its meaning, and the person's emotional reaction to it (Green, 1990).

Some catastrophic events such as earthquake, war, torture and so on are, by any objective criteria, regarded as “traumatic”. However, only some of the survivors of these traumatic events suffer from a psychological disorder such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therefore, some researchers have emphasized the importance of the subjective interpretation of events in defining what psychological trauma is and its psychological consequences are. It is also evident that exposure to some non-catastrophic events may lead to PTSD symptoms, too (McNally, 2003). Emergence of PTSD symptoms after exposure to non-catastrophic and non-life threatening events underscores the importance of subjective interpretation of traumatic event. In short, psychological trauma might be defined not only with objective attributes of the stressor but also with subjective interpretation of the survivor.

Psychoanalytically-oriented theories suggest the importance of differentiating the childhood trauma and adult onset trauma in terms the notion of dissociation. According to Krystal (1978), the distinction between childhood trauma and adult onset trauma is as follows: When children encounter a traumatic experience such as abuse, they experience “unbearable distress involving affect precursors and mass stimulation” (p.113). In adults, the trauma experience “is initiated by surrender to inevitable danger consisting of a numbing of self reflective functions, followed by a paralysis of all cognitive and self preserving mental functions” (p.113). Many psychoanalysts point that the dissociative process seems to be different in childhood trauma and adulthood trauma. In

childhood, when a child is abused she/he defensively dissociates unbearable and unmanageable situation she/he is experiencing, and forms dissociated self states encapsulating the traumatic experience. However, in adulthood it is argued that the dissociative process in the face of massive trauma such as torture, war and so on does not create splits in a developed personality (Boulanger, 2002). Boulanger (2002) suggests that the adults' experience of dissociation in which the elements of self such as agency, affect, self-reflection and cognition are collapsed, differs from defensive process of dissociation. Furthermore, it is concluded that these different consequences of dissociative process between children and adults have different implications for the subjective experience and recall of traumatic memories.

1.2. Personal Narratives about Trauma

1.2.1. Cognitive Approach to Trauma Narrative

In accordance with the cognitive theories of traumatic memory, it is argued that traumatic events have negative influences on autobiographical memory for these events. The research on trauma and memory suggests that autobiographical memories for traumatic events are “fragmented” and “incoherent”. However, the literature on trauma and memory indicates a strong debate as to whether traumatic experiences lead to enhanced or disrupted memories (Shobe & Kihlstrom, 1997). Therefore, the research on trauma narrative is important in the sense that it can contribute to this debate.

In line with the theories of traumatic memory, trauma narratives are structurally disorganized and fragmented. In addition, the contents of trauma

narratives are dominated by sensory impressions and perceptual characteristics of traumatic experiences. Trauma narratives are regarded to indicate temporal context disruption. Additionally, trauma narratives are thematically dominated by ineffectiveness and loss of personal agency.

The empirical evidence regarding narrative organization and fragmentation indicates between-study inconsistencies. Major difficulty in these studies is to distinguish between “fragmentation” and “disorganization”. In some studies, these terms are used interchangeably, whereas others use these terms differently. “Fragmentation” generally has been operationalized as repetitions, unfinished utterances, and speech fillers (Foa, Molnar, & Cashman, 1995).

Rubin, Feldman and Beckham (2004) examined the issue of fragmentation and incoherence of autobiographical memories of fifty war veterans diagnosed with PTSD. They asked their participants to recall four autobiographical memories and rate their memories about reliving, sensory properties, re-experiencing emotions, fragmentation and narrative coherence. They found no support for, or against the statement that traumatic memories are less coherent and more fragmented. In short, the existing literature does not provide enough linguistic evidence about the organization and fragmentation of trauma narrative.

Some research findings demonstrate that trauma narratives often include shifts from past-to-present-tense verbs. Several researchers investigated the relationship between past-to-present tense shifts and severity of PTSD symptoms. For instance, Manne (2002) points to a

significant negative association between use of past tense and avoidance symptoms of PTSD.

Klein and Janoff-Bulman (1996; as cited in O’Kearney & Perrott) investigated the quality of self-referential perspective in trauma narrative via linguistic data. They found that there is deficient use of first-person pronouns and more use of other-person pronouns in trauma narratives of women with a history of childhood abuse. Moreover, several researchers indicate that themes of death and dying are more closely related to a sense of threat to self (e.g. Hellowell & Brewin, 2004).

1.2.2. Psychoanalytic Accounts on Trauma Narrative

The notion of memory is regarded to play a key role in integrating different attributes of an experience such as perceptions, affect, and action and to make a whole episode. However, trauma disrupts the integrating role of memory; therefore, the self’s sense of coherence and continuity is collapsed (Boulanger, 2002). In childhood traumas such as childhood abuse, it is argued that memories of trauma are stored in dissociated self-states. Moreover, the memories of most survivors of sexual abuse are distorted and are full of self-doubt and uncertainty regarding what had happened. On the other hand, although some aspects of the traumatic experiences are repressed, the adult survivors know the experience happened. For adults, traumatic experiences disrupt the present and calls into question past certainties and future possibilities (Boulanger, 2002). Therefore, for adults who experienced catastrophic experiences, the important aspect of treatment is not dealing with uncertainty like it is for the survivors of childhood abuse;

rather, it is dealing with the sense of discontinuity and understanding the meaning of what had happened. Therefore, the fear of annihilation due to traumatic experience triggers the dissociative process leading to collapse of sense of continuity of self.

The maintenance of the integrity and continuity of self-organization is an ultimate aim for all people. Further, the continuity of self is linked to homeostatic brain systems. Van der Kolk and his colleagues (1995) documented the disruptive effect of trauma on the brain systems. In line with the neurological consequences of trauma, Boulanger (2002) states that trauma disrupts the core self by changing biology and psychic experience. The core of self is regarded to support the fundamental aspects of psychic experience such as agency, continuity, cohesiveness, and affect all of which are disconnected by dissociation during the actual trauma.

In summary, Boulanger (2002) proposes that traumatic experience disrupts the sense of agency of self and the survivor is no longer a subject but an object of an unreliable and dangerous world. Additionally, the traumatic disruption of memory leads to difficulties in sense of continuity of self. With the disruption of self as subject, the self is no longer an interpreter and conveyer of meaning in the face of trauma.

1.3. War Trauma

Shell shock is a term used during World War I in order to describe psychological casualties that become apparent in the combating soldiers. Due to exposition to exploding shells, soldiers manifest “shell shock” which is characterized by symptoms such as motor paralysis, coarse tremors,

mutism, amnesia, and disorientation (Engel, 2004). Shell shock was considered to be a physical illness resulting from tiny particles and gasses that altered the fine structure of the brain (Engel, 2004). This mainly physical explanation of psychological casualties of combat soldiers during World War I is regarded to be representing the military pressure to keep soldiers functioning at the war zone and prevent their psychological breakdown (Brende & Parson, 1986; Engel, 2004).

In the early years of war, generally, neurologists were charged to heal “shell shock.” The soldiers were held responsible for their symptoms and expected to return to battle rapidly. Therefore, rapid return to war zone became the rule of the military. Even, aversive methods such as application of electro-convulsive treatment (ECT) were used to return soldiers to battle rapidly (Engel, 2004).

In 1919, Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory of “neurosis” replacing the “shell shock” proposed that postwar symptoms were a “war neurosis”, an emotional disorder rather than neurological and organic illness. According to Freud, “war neurosis” was brought about by the inner conflict between a soldier’s “war ego” and his “peace ego”. Moreover, he suggested talking cure, psychoanalysis, in place of impersonal treatment such as electroshock.

By the end of World War I, it was realized that veterans who had psychiatric casualties were not suffering from “shell shock”. Many psychiatrists began to comprehend that emotions, not physiological brain damage, were producing a wide range of symptoms. However, it was still to

be believed that psychological collapse of soldiers was resulting from weakness in the character of soldiers (Bentley, 2005).

During World War II, military psychiatrists rather than physicians played greater role in screening out potential psychiatric problems among enlistees and draftees. In order to reduce psychological disturbances, psychiatrists shifted their attention to screen draftees who were predisposed to break down in combat. Therefore, they used the best available psychiatric testing (Bentley, 2005).

However, it was understood that not just “weak” character caused the breakdown in war zone. As Bentley (2005) reviewed, this is reflected in the change in terminology that “combat neurosis” was replaced with the term “combat exhaustion”.

During World War II, the term “battle exhaustion” was used to describe the physical and psychological exhaustion of soldiers who had been continually exposed to war zone conditions (Brende & Parson, 1986).

Dr. William Menninger appointed a commission of five civilian psychiatrists in order to investigate the nature of the symptoms caused by war. They reported a number of symptoms including fear, helplessness, distrust, loneliness, anger at feeling abandoned or betrayed, guilt over inadequate performance, horror and grief at the loss of buddies, and physical exhaustion from constant exposure to the stress of war. Moreover, psychiatrists investigated the reasons behind the high rates of psychological disturbances among the soldiers fighting in World War II. It was stated that a number of factors including the soldiers’ personality, the extremely long

time many soldiers had remained in war-zone, poor leadership, and lack of belief systems and will power, contributed to the psychological casualties among the soldiers. Further, Dr. Menninger proposed that trauma of killing, the absence of morale building support by leadership, and the death of comrades all together led to psychological disturbances among soldier (Brende & Parson, 1986).

Following the war, veterans' chronic symptoms such as agitated and hostile behaviors were considered to be manifestations of "personality disturbances" related to prewar and childhood problems whereas more specific symptoms such as depression, anxiety, dreams and nightmares were eventually referred to as "traumatic war neurosis" (Brende & Parson, 1986).

In contrast to the traditional labels of posttraumatic symptoms, Robert Lifton's description of symptoms of Hiroshima's survivors indicated a different way of understanding posttraumatic symptoms. Lifton pointed out a "death imprint" as well as a "numbing" defense against the emotional response to traumatic event. Lifton's research indicated that trauma survivors would have changed due to the overwhelming catastrophes. Lifton, moreover, described the trauma survivors' capacity to forget, deny, and be emotionally numb (Brende & Parson, 1986).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, some mental health professionals became interested in providing psychological help for veterans. Therefore, they aimed to formulate a new diagnostic category for Vietnam veterans in the US. The diagnostic labels used since World War I such as "shell shock" or "battle exhaustion" were outdated and no

psychiatrists were using these categories in order to diagnose or treat veterans. Furthermore, few of them were using “traumatic war neurosis” to diagnose Vietnam veterans. Since psychiatrists were unfamiliar with unique symptoms of Vietnam veterans, many veterans received misdiagnosis of schizophrenia or antisocial or borderline personality disorder. This serious problem of misdiagnosis led to a new diagnostic category. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association’s new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) included a new category, namely, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. The rise of post-war care through the influence and institution of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the veterans’ service organizations and increase in societal power and activism among women played an important role in making of the diagnostic category of “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” (Engel, 2004).

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is the most commonly observed psychological casualty among war trauma survivors. PTSD is characterized mainly by three symptom categories, namely, reexperience of traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma and numbing in general responsiveness, and persistent increased arousal. DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for PTSD are shown in Table 1.

In the following part, the war zone stressors, which cause the emergence of psychological disturbances like PTSD, depression, and other, will be discussed.

Table 1

DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

- a. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present
 - (1) The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others
 - (2) The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror
- b. The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in one (or more) of the following ways:
 - (1) Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions.
 - (2) Recurrent distressing dreams of the event
 - (3) Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated)
 - (4) Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event
 - (5) Physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.
- c. Persistent avoidance of the stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:
 - (1) Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
 - (2) Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouses recollections of the trauma
 - (3) Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
 - (4) Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
 - (5) Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
 - (6) Restricted range of affect (e.g. unable to give loving feelings)
 - (7) Sense of a foreshortened future (e.g. does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)
- d. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:
 - (1) Difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - (2) Irritability or outburst of anger
 - (3) Difficulty concentrating
 - (4) Hypervigilance
 - (5) Exaggerated startle response
- e. Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D) is more than 1 month
- f. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning

1.4. War Zone Stressors

According to DSM-IV, the first criterion of diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is being exposed to a universally accepted traumatic event such as accident, severe illness, natural disaster, rape, or combat. In this regard, there has been ongoing research in order to define and operationalize “war zone traumatic events”.

The existing literature on war zone experiences conceptualizes the “stressor” construct in relation with traditional combat events such as firing a weapon, being injured, seeing someone wounded or killed and so on. Exposure to atrocities or exceptionally abusive violence is regarded to be a second stressor in the existing literature.

Historically, researchers paid more attention to detecting the nature of psychological and physiological reactions to traumatic experiences in the war zone rather than codifying the nature of the stressors the soldiers experienced in the war zone. Since the research mainly focused on negative psychological reactions to traumatic experiences, the researchers were more interested in the assessment of the dose of traumatic exposure rather than the assessment of the types of traumatic experiences (e.g. Foy, Sippelle, Rueger, & Carroll, 1984; Keane et al., 1989). It is repeatedly empirically found that there is a significant relationship between the dose of traumatic exposure and PTSD (Roemer, Litz, Orsillo, Ehlich, & Friedman, 1998).

Since the assessment of the dose of traumatic experiences is a primary research interest, there is a growing literature on the development of measures, called combat scales. These measures typically survey

fighting, death of others, threat of death to self, and killing others. Moreover, Laufer and his colleagues (1984) expanded the types of war zone stressors to include the abusive violence (atrocities) as an additional category of traumatic exposure. The landmark National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS) combines data on several types of stressors into one index of war zone stress, which includes combat, death and injury of others, threat of death to oneself, abusive violence and physical deprivation (Kulka, 1990; as cited in Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999). In addition, NVVRS indicates loss of meaning and control as another type of stressor. Another study points to physical deprivation, loss of meaning and control as war zone stressors and combines these three stressors to indicate a malevolent environment (King, King, Gudanowski, Vreven, 1995; King, King, Foy, & Gudanowski, 1996).

King's study (1995), however, indicates a challenging finding in terms of the relationship between dose of exposure to traumatic experiences and PTSD. That study finds that malevolent environment is the war zone stressor that contributes most strongly to the emergence of negative psychological reactions, particularly PTSD. The researchers state that the type of malevolent environment which they call "daily hassles" included "relatively low-magnitude stressors" compared to other traumatic events such as combat, loss of a special comrade, witnessing atrocities and so on.

Although the researchers do not provide a theoretical explanation for this finding, it leads to emergence of some theoretical questions (e.g. Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999). For instance, Fontana and Rosenheck (1999)

wonders if PTSD is first and foremost a reaction to traumatic events, then how can malevolent environment be influential to the development of PTSD rather than combat. In accordance with this, Fontana and Rosenheck (1999) developed a theoretical model revealing the link between war zone stressors and PTSD. They state that war zone stress is traditionally conceptualized into five related areas: fighting, threat of death or injury to oneself, death and injury to others, and committing atrocities. Moreover, they separate “malevolent environment” into two parts, namely the physical conditions of the environment and the conditions of insufficiency and constraint (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999). Moreover, the researchers assert that there has been conceptual redundancy between war stressors. In order to overcome this conceptual overlap, they develop a structural equation modeling addressing the conceptual relationships among the war stressors and between the war stressors and PTSD.

Fontana & Rosenheck (1999) show that malevolent environmental conditions such as harsh physical conditions and insufficiency of supplies do not have direct effects on PTSD. However, malevolent environmental conditions contribute to PTSD as a function of other war stressors and the fighting in which the soldiers engaged. The other important finding is that killing or injuring others has a very strong direct effect on PTSD.

Witnessing the loss of other soldiers does not relate directly to PTSD, however. It contributes to PTSD with the mediation of killing others and perceived threat to oneself (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999).

The findings of Fontana and Rosenheck's study address two important theoretical explanations. First, in order to understand how malevolent environmental conditions of insufficiency and constraints influences PTSD, they refer to Janoff-Bulman's theoretical assumptions. According to Janoff-Bulman (1992; as cited in Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999), the extent to which people's belief in the basic assumptions about the benevolence and meaningfulness of the world is weakened, beliefs about their own self-worth and their invulnerability to harm are undermined too, thereby increasing their psychological negative symptoms.

Second, on the basis of Shay's (2003) accounts about the "berserking" effect of loss of one's comrades, Fontana and Rosenheck explore how death of others contributes both to perceived threat to oneself and killing the other. Shay (2003) describes the "berserking" effect as follows: grief experienced at witnessing the death of comrades transforms into rage and lack of concern for one's own safety. Moreover, the restrictions of civilization on injuring or killing anyone outside of one's own group are almost completely suspended in the war zone. Thus, soldiers who witness the death of their comrades in the front line are likely to experience the "berserking state" to some degree (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999).

Fontana and Rosenheck's model of war zone stressors provide an important frame in exploration of the nature of relationship between war stressors and the soldiers' reactions to these stressors. However, there has been an ongoing debate whether the traumatic stressors can be regarded as fully an objective event or considered in terms of the subjective meaning of

that event. Several researchers discuss that subjective meanings attached to traumatic experiences are critical in the emergence of a psychopathological response to these traumatic experiences (e.g. King, King, Gudanowski, & Vreeren, 1995; Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman, & Gruen, 1985). Lazarus and his colleagues (1985) argue that stressors could not be isolated from personal appraisals, and that stress is a complex phenomenon, which is composed of many interrelated variables and processes.

In an early attempt to create a violence index and explore subjective meanings of traumatic experiences, Laufer, Gallops, and Frey-Wouters (1984) emphasize the need of a multidimensional approach to causes of war trauma. They create a violence index including torture of prisoners, severe mistreatment of civilians, use of cruel weaponry or chemicals and mutilation of bodies. In their research, they indicate that the white Vietnam veterans who participated in abusive violence report fewer symptoms than their black counterparts. Black veterans were more severely traumatized by their experiences and they experienced deep internal conflict and felt a deep guilt for their behaviors. In order to understand why this is the case, they analyze the narratives of both white and black Vietnam veterans. Thus, they stress the importance of elaborating the meanings of “traumatic experiences” when attempting to link traumatic experiences to subsequent psychological symptoms.

Concerning objectivity-subjectivity issue, Solomon and her colleagues (1987) investigate how combating influences psychological reaction by using both objective and subjective stress measures. Subjective

measures of war zone experiences are composed of perceived stress and perceived support during war. They provide significant empirical support for the importance of subjective interpretations of war zone experiences. Subjective measures are strongly related to PTSD measures (Solomon, Mikulincer, & Hobfoll, 1987).

A more recent study conducted by King and his colleagues (1995) address the issue of objective versus subjective conceptualization of war zone stressors among both male and female Vietnam veterans. In their study perceived threat, which is conceptualized as a subjective appraisal, has greater effect on PTSD than either combat or committing atrocities assessed by measures that are more objective for both male and female veterans.

Theoretical discussions about war zone stressors reveal that what makes an experience in the warfare a war zone stressor for PTSD is not only objectively defined criteria but also subjective appraisals of warfare experiences.

Regarding to the issue of subjective meaning of trauma and its effect on post-trauma psychopathology, Paker (1999) underlines the relationship between subjective meaning of torture, worldview and post-torture psychopathology. It is found that political activism plays a crucial role in development of post-torture psychopathology. Although being tortured increases the risk for psychopathology, the likelihood of post-torture psychopathology was lower among the activist torture survivors compared to non-activist survivors. Paker (1999) proposes that political activism

provides a meaning system about torture that allows the torture survivors make their torture experiences meaningful.

Accordingly, in the next part, theoretical debates about the relationship between masculinity and military service and war will be reviewed in order to understand how the soldiers make their subjective appraisals about war zone experiences.

1.5. Masculinity, Military Service, and War

The relationship between masculinity and militarism has been explored by many social scientists in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and psychology (e.g. Altınay, 2005; Duncanson, 2009; Goldstein, 2001; Morgan, 1994; Sancar, 2009; Selek, 2009). It is addressed that military service and war are the most important sites where masculinity is constructed and reproduced. The warrior is considered to be a key symbol of masculinity. Masculinity is generally symbolized with aggression, courage, a capacity for violence, and a willingness to sacrifice (Morgan, 1994). In military service, soldier's identity is formed in opposition with femininity and anything related to femininity is attributed a negative value. In this way, all the values of hegemonic masculinity such as toughness are made soldier's characteristics (e.g. Duncanson, 2009; Goldstein, 2001; Morgan, 1994).

Hegemonic masculinity is a key concept in the scientific exploration of masculinity. It is one form of masculinity that allows man's overall dominance over woman and some men's control over many others to continue (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers

to 'legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'. Military socializes men to comply with the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Across all military institutions, the ideal image of masculinity includes physical toughness, endurance of hardship, aggressiveness, rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and refusal to complain (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001).

It is widely argued in the literature about militarism and masculinity that the traditional masculine ideology is often used to socialize young men to war. It is well documented that military and war play an important role in shaping the imagines of masculinity. During training process, the militarized masculinity is constructed in the form of endurance of pain and hardship and being aggressive. The construction of masculine identity is very important to teach the soldiers to assault others and kill the enemy. During the military training and service, many young men learn to assert strength, force, and power over other men (Whitehead, 2005). Whitehead (2005) argues that ideology of defeating the enemy, which is indeed another man, reinforces hegemonic masculinity since soldiers are taught that they can be men only if they are able to defeat their enemy. Therefore, the ideology of setting dominance over other men is institutionalized in the military training.

Another way of exploring the relationship between the military service and masculinity is in terms of construction of the masculine body. Morgan (1994) asserts that military training involves controlling and disciplining of the body. The haircut and uniform are key tools of

construction of the military masculine body. At times of war, the body is placed at risk, threatened with danger or damage, and subjected to deprivation of food or sleep. Physicality becomes an integral part of masculine identity. The discipline and control of the body and exposure to risk and deprivation of food and sleep distinguish many features of military life from everyday civilian life. Masculinity is identified with physicality.

Military service is an institution that is generally regarded as the central point of the socialization process of men in which a young man becomes a mature man (Sinclair-Webb, 2000). Cross-culturally, military service is defined as “a critical period in one’s life” (McManners, 1993, p.112; as cited in Sinclair-Webb, 2000).

Doing military service undoubtedly plays a very important role in the lives of men and women in Turkey where the army is a primary institutional site of the hegemonic masculinity that has inescapable social and cultural impact on all men and women. In Turkey, unless a man completes his military service, he faces many social restrictions in terms of employment and marriage. For instance, in many job advertisements, for male employees, completing military duty is a requirement for entering a permanent job. Moreover, many men delay getting married until they complete their military duty (Sinclair-Webb, 2000). Thus, doing military service becomes a rite of passage to manhood.

The importance attached by men to military service is also present in family photograph albums. Grandfathers, fathers, and sons all appear in uniforms posing with guns in these photos, which are sent home to family from other

side of the country (Sinclair-Webb, 2000). For many soldiers, military service period is the first opportunity to separate from the family, to see a different part of their country, and so on.

Class background is also very important in order to understand the relationship between images, motivations, and beliefs about going to military service and the images of masculinity. It is pointed out by several scholars that class, in addition to race, and culture, plays a role in the construction of militarized masculinities (Higate, 2003; as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As discussed by Sinclair-Webb (2000), whereas being physically strong and the tests of physical endurance of military service are valued qualities among the men coming from working class in constructing their masculine identity, white-collar men do not view physical endurance tests of military service for proving their masculine identity.

In Turkey, it is men not women who go to military service. Therefore, military service is based upon the discourses about masculinity in society. For this reason, understanding discourses about masculinity in society is crucial for any study that aims to examine narratives of the soldiers about war and about their subjectivity.

1.6. Oral Testimony and Trauma

Oral history is obtained by recording people's life stories. With the help of oral histories, many life stories and witnesses, which would be lost, can be captured and preserved. An oral history memoir is based on recall. That is to say, what people remember and how people remember are very critical in obtaining an oral history memoir. For instance, the Vietnam War

has been remembered and written very differently by participants of war and interpreters of war. According to oral historians (e.g. Prescott, 1999), many veterans of Vietnam War have returned to their home as strangers to their own families. Moreover, it is importantly addressed that what the veterans tell, how they tell it, and what they choose to keep to themselves change in accordance with their experiences, memories and how they make sense of them (Prescott, 1999). Oral histories can be found in the form of interviews, personal narratives and the like. In this regard, personal narratives about traumatic events provide rich materials for oral historians.

John Robinson (1981; as cited in Klempler, 2000) mentions that many trauma narratives are never told by survivors since traumatic experiences would evoke feelings of shame, anger, and guilt in the victim and are considered to be secrets that are kept in oneself rather than stories that can be told freely to other people. He, furthermore, stresses that trauma narratives are qualitatively different in structure and function from other kind of narratives (Robinson, 1981; as cited in Klempler, 2000).

Within psychology, there is a growing body of research focusing on trauma narratives. In the field of traumatology, trauma narratives have been gaining importance as material for diagnosis and therapeutic intervention. Some theorists and therapists suggest that trauma can be cured with restoration of narrative about traumatic experiences (e.g. Howard, 1991; Schafer, 1992). These therapists argue that traumatic events lead to a disorientation and incoherence in one's life story. The aim of narrative therapy is to repair and reconstruct these incoherent life stories (Crossley, 2000; Howard, 1991).

In qualitative research within psychology, there have been important efforts to understand the nature of traumatic events and meanings of these events. Some researchers conduct qualitative research with traumatized war veterans such as Vietnam veterans (e.g. Shay, 2003; Terry, 2006) in order to provide a better understanding of Vietnam War. Moreover, there are many oral history projects being conducted by Holocaust organizations throughout the world, recording the narratives of survivors and witnesses (Klempner, 2000).

Being a pioneer in the study of trauma and oral history, Dori Laub provides a theoretical model. According to Dori Laub, people who are exposed to severe traumatic experiences are unable to register such experiences since these experiences exceed human cognitive capacity to perceive and make sense. In Laub's framework, the listener has a very important role in which he or she becomes a "participant" of the traumatic event. From the point of view of Laub, a trauma survivor can recover if he/she narrates the traumatic experiences. Laub argues that trauma survivors have to deal with trauma memories that have no endings and closures; thus, these memories penetrate into the every aspect of trauma survivors' lives. By the help of therapeutic process, one first constructs a narrative of a traumatic event, and then reconstructs his/her traumatic history. During this process, the meanings of traumatic events change (Klempner, 2000).

Some researchers in the literature of oral testimony and trauma focus on trauma memories and how these memories are recalled. As stated previously, oral testimony studies on Holocaust provide an understanding

and frame for exploration of how survivors of severe trauma like Holocaust and Vietnam War comprehend and remember the extreme traumatic experiences. Holocaust testimony indicates that personal memories regarding traumatic events have several characteristics. Oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors are composed of vivid memories that persist for more than fifty years (Kraft, 2002). Since each remembered episode about traumatic event is loaded with powerful emotions, these memories persist. In other words, the emotional energy is in memory and keeps it alive and powerful (Kraft, 2002). Another factor influencing the persistence of these memories is the condition of uncertainty, namely the situation of not knowing the outcomes of specific events and not knowing what happened to other people. Uncertainty evokes imagination and keeps memories alive (Kraft, 2002). Another characteristic of oral testimonies of Holocaust is that witnesses state that the listeners will not understand them emphatically. Even after a long interview with one witness, Kraft (2002) indicates that the witness wondered whether other people would believe in what he told about Holocaust.

According to Kraft (2002), witnesses experience a state of re-living the past events which is described as “back in the past”. In the state of “back in the past”, images appear in unstructured form, and the testimony is regarded to be incoherent by the listener (Kraft, 2002). Within the framework of cognitive psychology, memory theorists provide an explanation for the survivor’s sense of “being back there”. Ulric Neisser (1994) proposes that individuals experience the “present-self” as being

aware of the “past-self” experiencing the world. However, for trauma survivors this is not the case. In Holocaust testimony, Langer (1991; as cited in Kraft, 2002) describes two levels of memory, namely, “common memory” and “deep memory”. Common memory is comprised of structured narrative accounts whereas deep memory involves unstructured, emotional reliving of the events.

In summary, oral testimonies provide rich materials for trauma researchers in order to elaborate trauma in many respects. In this sense, the current study overlaps with the existing literature on oral history: the interviews used in current study are oral history documents; the present study aims to understand the war against PKK from the point of view of the soldiers engaged in the war through the oral testimonies of the soldiers.

1.7. Historical Background of the Conflict between Turkey and PKK

The roots of Kurdish question go back to early years of Turkish Republic when the new ideology of “Turkish Identity” was intensively applied within the borders of the Turkish State in order to create a modern nation-state at the expense of the other ethnic identities (Cornell, 2001). However, this situation became a problem for those who were not willing to abandon their own ethnic identities for the new Turkish identity. This was the case for a significant portion of the Kurdish population, which was different from the rest of the population in terms of language, social life and so on (Cornell, 2001).

Having its origins in an informal grouping around Abdullah Öcalan dating back to 1974, in 1978, Workers' Party of Kurdistan, Party Karkaren

Kurdistan, or PKK was established as a Marxist-Leninist organization under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. Right before the 1980 military coup, Abdullah Öcalan and some associates moved to Syria and the Beka'a Valley of Northern Lebanon (Cornell, 2001; Pike, 2004). Between the years of 1980 to 1984, Abdullah Öcalan and his associates restructured the PKK in Beka'a Valley. PKK revised its organizational structure, and its armed struggle against the State started in 1984. The first training camp was established in Beka'a Valley in Syria. During 1990s a number of training camps were established in Northern Iraq. In 2000s, it is known that the PKK have several training camps in the mountains that straddle between the border of Turkey and Northern Iraq. The Turkish Army conducted many military operating targeting these training camps (Pike, 2004).

In 1999, Abdullah Öcalan was captured and sentenced to death penalty. This sentence was changed to long- life imprisonment after death penalty was abolished in 2002.

Table 2 shows the death toll under different categories between 1984-95. Killings have continued after 1995. According to the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (2008), until September 2008, 32,000 PKK members have been killed and 17,000 captured alive. Also, 6,482 soldiers and security officials and 5,560 civilians have been killed.

Table 2: Number of Deaths between 1984-1995

Year	PKK members	Civilian	Soldier	Police	Village Guard
1984	11	20	24	-	-
1985	100	82	67	-	-
1986	64	74	40	-	-
1987	107	237	49	3	10
1988	103	81	36	6	7
1989	165	136	111	8	34
1990	350	178	92	11	56
1991	356	170	213	20	41
1992	1055	761	444	144	167
1993	1699	1218	487	28	156
1994	4114	1082	794	43	265
1995	2292	1085	450	47	87

Adopted from the Report of Federation of American Scientists

During this armed conflict, both sides have been continuously criticized for committing gross human rights violations. Human Rights Watch World Reports (1995) address that both state security forces and PKK violate human rights of the civil population in the Southeast.

According to Human Rights Watch Reports, state security forces committed human rights violations including, extrajudicial killings, torture, burning down the villages and eviction of the local people from their villages (HRW, 1998).

Moreover, during the early 1990s, the number of suspicious deaths in the Southeast had been increasing. According to Human Rights Watch, Turkish government did not show any serious effort to investigate the murders (HRW Report, 1993).

According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, PKK also severely violated human rights in Turkey. The PKK killed state supporters including teachers, state servants, and village guards and their

families. Human Rights Watch World Report (1993) noted that many unarmed civilians were targeted by PKK suicide bombers.

2. Method

2.1. Description of the Book

The book *Mehmedin Kitabı* written by Nadire Mater was first published in an important and critical year, 1999, in which Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) was captured and tried in court. In this critical period in terms of the conflict between PKK and Turkish State and Turkish Army, *Mehmedin Kitabı* proclaiming the voices of ex-soldiers brought a different perspective. The book became the focus of a fierce controversy among its supporters, for instance some NGOs, academicians and so on, and its opponents, namely Turkish General Staff, some part of media, and so on. One of the important contributions of the book is that it is a pioneering work, which voices the soldiers' subjective experiences, which had been ignored to date by all parties to this conflict.

Mehmedin Kitabı is composed of 42 interviews conducted with ex-soldiers who fought in the Emergency Rule Zone while doing their compulsory military service between the years of 1984 and 1998. It was first published in 1999 and was republished for 6 times. Furthermore, it was translated into English by Ayşe Gül Antınay and was published in English by Palgrave in 2005.

The writer of *Mehmedin Kitabı*, Nadire Mater, and the publisher of the book, Semih Sökmen were prosecuted by Turkish General Staff on the basis of insulting and denigrating the state's armed forces in the press. The publication and selling of the book was banned. At the end of one-year- trial period, both Nadire Mater and Semih Sökmen were acquitted and the ban

was abolished. During the trial of *Mehmedin Kitabı*, various national and international institutions, organizations, academicians and intellectuals gave support to Nadire Mater and Semih Sökmen.

The book, *Mehmedin Kitabı*, includes four sections: Preface, the longest section entitled “Mehmets speak out,” and last section entitled “Instead of the Ones who cannot speak”. The first section, preface, begins with an ex-soldier’s story and followed by why and how Nadire Mater wrote this book. Next section that is the longest part and entitled “Mehmets Speak Out” includes first-person narratives of forty-one ex-soldiers’ experiences. Further, one narrative is about an ex-soldier who took a medical report that exempted him from military service. Next section entitled “Instead of the Ones Who Cannot Speak” begins with some newspaper reports about offenses committed by ex-soldiers who fought in the Southeast. Additionally, this section includes two interviews with two families whose sons were in jail due to the acts of hijacking an airplane and killing family members respectively. Final section, entitled “Numbers” indicates a set of critical statistics provided by the State, as well as by national and international organizations, on the social, economic, and human dimensions of this war. Moreover, there is an additional part in the fifth edition of the book, which includes articles about *Mehmedin Kitabı* in print-media and the legal case records of *Mehmedin Kitabı*.

Nadire Mater explains her aim in writing this book in the preface as giving voice to those who, willingly or against their will, became the subjects of the war, and raising the public’s awareness of their perspective

of the war. (Mater, p.14). Accordingly, *Mehmedin Kitabı* provides an important opportunity for looking from a different and humane perspective to the conflict which continues since 1984.

2.2. Method of the Book

In this thesis, the 6th edition of the book is used. It includes the narratives of 42 ex-soldiers who participated in fighting in the Southeast while doing their compulsory military service. All interviews, which were tape-recorded and approximately three-hour long each, were conducted by Nadire Mater. However, following the tape-recorded interviews, at least one or two additional hours of off-record conversations are done. The names of the all ex-soldiers are kept anonymous. All of the interviewees were contacted through an acquaintance. The writer had not known all of interviewees, but a few, personally. Although the writer aimed to do interviews in private places, some interviews were done in public places such as kebab restaurants, coffeeshouses, or pastry shops.

Before starting the interview, each interviewee was told what the writer's aim was. She said that "For the last fifteen years, we have been living in an extraordinary 'situation'. All except those who have served 'there' in the Emergency Rule Zone, are speaking 'pro' or 'con' or neutrally. It is very important to see the 'situation' from the standpoint of those who experience it firsthand." Importantly, she avoids using a particular concept that may represent the writer's subjective approach to the "situation".

As it is stressed in Ayşe Gül Altınay's article (1999), the important aspect of Nadire Mater's methodology is her choice of terminology. She paid attention to the issue of avoiding using any term which may reflect her personal views. "I wanted their accounts to be as free of biases as possible. I tried to remain neutral and I tried to establish a language that was neutral. In this country, every concept used in relation to the situation reveals a position. 'War,' 'low intensity conflict,' 'fight against terrorism,' whichever term you use, you suggest a certain political position. So, I said, 'the situation in the region in the past fifteen years' (Mater, p.7). Importantly, almost all interviewees used the term "war" regardless of their political point of views (Altınay, 1999).

The interviews may be regarded as semi-structured. In other words, although there were some predetermined questions, the flow of each interview was mainly determined by the interviewee. The questions were regarding the three phases of these soldiers' lives: premilitary service, military service, and post-military service. All soldiers were asked some demographic questions such as the date and place of birth, where they currently lived, educational status, date and place of basic military training and ultimate unit, and the economic status and occupation of their parents. Some soldiers were unwilling to respond to some of these questions. Second part of questions aimed to reveal the experiences of soldiers regarding the premilitary, military and postmilitary phases of their lives. First, questions about premilitary period such as their thoughts, perceptions and expectations about military service, their occupations, relations with their

families and close friends were asked. Second, questions concerning the military service period included those on the basic training, daily life in the barracks, the first duty, the first combat, relations with their buddies, feelings of pain, anger, revenge, yearning, and love. The concepts of “enemy”, “hero”, and “love for motherland”, “martyrdom, and fighting were discussed. Final part of questions concerning postmilitary period involves those on employment, relations with family and friends, comparisons of their situation before and after military service, and their present approach to the “situation” (Mater, 1999). However, some ex-soldiers talked about their experiences even though they were not yet asked these questions.

In this book, not all-transcribed material is used; however, the writer reviewed it several times by taking out repetitions and unnecessary details such as the height of the commander or how the paperwork proceeded as they were being conscripted. In some cases, the writer changed the order of the conversation, though sticking to the original wording of interviewee. Moreover, she sometimes converted the vernacular into the written language as to provide a smoother reading.

2.3. Method of This Study

This study is based on an analysis of the narratives in this book. The analysis of the narratives is composed of two stages, namely the construction of “trauma symptom profile” of the soldiers and discourse analysis of the narratives.

2.3.1 “Trauma Symptom Profile”

In the first stage, the narratives were sorted and categorized in order to construct a “trauma symptom profile” of the soldiers. For this purpose, each narrative is coded on basis of DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Moreover, other psychological symptoms such as depressive feelings, alcohol use and like were also coded and categorized.

2.3.2. Discourse Analysis

In the second stage, discourse analysis was pursued in accordance with the research interests of this study. Since doing discourse analysis provides the opportunity for discussing the soldiers’ subjectivities in the face of trauma (Willig, 2001), the narratives are analyzed from a discourse analytic framework. More specifically, how these ex-soldiers construct their identities and their experiences of the Southeast before, during, and after the military service is research question of this study. Thus, the narratives are sorted into three main discursive objects during the beginning phase of the discourse analysis (Willig, 2001). These discursive objects are “the experience of and identity in the premilitary service period”, “the experience and identity during the military service period”, and “the experience of and identity in the postmilitary period”. The narratives were read and reread very carefully with an aim of extracting significant themes regarding the construction of each discursive object.

2.3.2.1. Identification of Key Themes

In the first step, I analyzed the narratives to identify the key themes that were organized under discursive objects to make connections and associations with the research question of the study. For this purpose, 41 narratives were read and reread in order to develop a comprehensive taxonomy of narratives about their experiences related to the military service.

There are in fact 42 narratives in the book. One of the narratives is different from the rest in terms of its scope and structure. While the other 41 narratives provide much more information about the soldiers' experiences and identity before, during and after the military service, that one narrative is too-short, and does not provide detailed information. This narrative is also different from the rest in the sense that it is not narrative of the first-person speaking, but the author of the book explains it from the perspective of the third-person. Indeed, the author herself treats this narrative separate from the rest by keeping it in the preface section of the book. For these reasons, this narrative is omitted from the analysis.

In the analysis of premilitary period, I focused on the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about going to military service and the Southeast, and the effect of going to military service particularly going to the Southeast on their life conditions. Pre-military Period categories are as follows:

- a) Feelings and thoughts of family members about going to military service and the Southeast,
- b) Attention to the “situation” before going to military service,
- c) Description of life and personality,
- d) Opinions and feelings about military service,
- e) The effect of going to military service on their life

In order to analyze the “military service period”, I separated this category into two main sub-categories: the first stage of military service called basic training period and second stage of military service called “Usta Birliđi” [expert unit] in Turkish. In the analysis of basic training period, I aimed to reveal how the first encounter with army affected the inexperienced soldiers and the opinions and feelings during adaptation period of social order of army. The narratives are coded for basic training period as follows:

- a) First impressions and thoughts about the army,
- b) Opinions and feelings about basic training,
- c) Opinions and feelings about shooting training,
- d) First reaction to learning that they will be sent to the Southeast and feelings and thoughts about going to the Southeast.

Regarding the second stage of military service, the purpose of coding was to reveal the war zone stressors the soldiers were exposed to and understand their subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings about war zone stressors such as physical conditions, combating, loss of friends, going to military operations, witnessing the other soldiers’ being injured and so

on. Moreover, the analysis of this part involves different levels of self-other representations regarding local people, Kurd, Kurdish soldiers, PKK, other state security officers including gendarme, police special force, and village guard. The coding categories are as follows:

Starting “Usta Birliđi”

- a) Branch and unit,
- b) Travelling to “Usta Birliđi”
- c) Description of daily life,
- d) First guard duty

War zone stressors

- a) Discomfort about physical conditions,
- b) Relationship with military authorities,
- c) Description of military operations,
- d) First combat experience,
- e) Negative events witnessed in army (village venting)
- f) Loss of comrades (what happened, who was killed, and the closeness of the dead comrade)
- g) Mines
- h) Opinions about killing (whether or not he killed anyone),
- i) Thoughts and feelings towards those killed by soldiers
- k) Doing or witnessing atrocities,
- l) Specific dates (e.g. Nauruz)
- m) Contact with civil life (e.g. Communication with family members and close friends)

Self-other representations

- a) Perception Kurdish soldiers
- b) Perception of privates
- c) Perception of PKK
- d) Perception of Commando
- e) Attitudes towards and relationships with Kurdish people,
- f) Perception of other state security officers like gendarme, police, village guard

Discharge

- a) Thoughts and feelings about discharge

Regarding the post-military period, I analyzed the narratives in terms of other people's reactions to returning home, life conditions after return, physical and psychological difficulties experienced. Moreover, I analyzed narratives in order to reveal effects of military service on their thoughts, feelings, perceptions with regard to military service, issue of PKK, society, and state. Finally, the soldiers' views on some concepts such as war, enemy, heroism, and martyrdom are analyzed. Perception and experience of being disabled are coded for disabled ex-soldiers. The coding categories are as follows:

Description of Post-military Service Period

- a) Changes after the war in terms of personality, appearance and life conditions,
- b) Other people's view about being different,
- c) Physical difficulties

- e) Psychological difficulties
- f) Economic and employment situation

Views on Concepts related with war experience

- a) Perception of society
- b) Perception of enemy
- c) Perception of war
- d) Perception heroism
- e) Perception of martyrdom
- f) Changes in opinions and attitudes towards military service
- g) Solutions for PKK
- h) Perception of being disability

2.3.2.2. Discourse analysis

In the second stage, I identified the discursive meanings attached to each phases of military service. All coded material were read and re-read in order to detect the links and networks of meanings which constructed the experience of military service. This progressive analysis led to identification of specific discourses. In the last stage of analysis, particular discursive constructions were chosen and expanded upon using quotations from the narratives. In each discursive construct, quotations are elaborated on by interpretations (Craven & Coyle, 2007; Gillies, 1999)

3. Results

This section is composed of three parts. In the first part, the demographic characteristics of interviewees will be presented. Then, the interviews will be analyzed in order to construct a “trauma symptoms profile” of these ex-soldiers. Then discursive constructs related to military service experience will be explored and interpreted by expanding conceptually upon the descriptive material from the quotations taken from the narratives.

3.1. Demographic Characteristic of Interviewees

The study focused on 42 ex-soldiers whose age at the entrance into army varies between 19 and 41 years. The mean age at the entrance into army is 22 years. The ex-soldiers come from different regions of Turkey including İstanbul, Trakya, Denizli, Aydın, Alanya, Serik, Adana, Çorum, Rize, Samsun, Tonya, and Trabzon provinces and their districts. Moreover, the soldiers come from different ethnic and political backgrounds. Among the 42 interviewees, there are five self-claimed Kurds, one Yörük, one Romany, one Pomak, two Christians (one Armenian, one Greek), and two Alevites.

51, 2 % of the interviewees come from households with two or more siblings. The mean of number of siblings is 4,7. Majority of interviewees seem to come from lower-to- middle class families. 25 % of interviewees were unemployed when the interview was done. 22 % of the interviewees

are elementary school graduates, 27 % high school graduate, 22 % university graduates. The distribution of education levels of the soldiers is shown in the Table 3.

Table 3

The Distribution of Percentages of Interviewees in Terms Education Level

Education Level	Frequencies (N=41)	%
Elementary school	9	22,0
Partial secondary School	2	4,9
High school	11	26,8
Partial high school	1	2,4
College	4	9,8
University	9	22,0
Master Degree	1	2,4
Unknown	4	9,8

Majority of interviewees (41, 6 %) reported that they did their military service as commandos. Moreover, 12 % of the interviewees did their military service as sublieutenants. In the following table, the distribution of branch they were belonged to during military service can be seen.

Table 4.

The Distribution of Branch They were Belonged to During Military Service

Branch Name	Frequency (N=41)	%
Infantry	3	7,3
Commando	17	41,6
Gendarmerie	4	9,8
Artillery	1	2,4
Tanker	1	2,4
Sanitary	3	7,3
Gendarmerie Special Forces	1	2,4
Sublieutenant	6	14,4
Unknown	4	9,8

When the interviewees did their military service, between the years of 1984 to 1998, the official duration of military service was 18 months for privates, 15 months long-term service for university graduate sublieutenats, and 8 months short-term service for university graduate privates. Majority of the interviewees (40,8 %) did their military service for 18 months as privates. The duration of military service cannot be found for 17,2 % of interviewees due to lack of accurate information about duration of their military service. Additionally, 9,8 % of the interviewees (4 ex-soldiers) were not be able to complete their military service. One of these soldiers

had been exempted from military service. The other three soldiers did not complete their service since they were injured while combating and they were amputated. The mean months of total duration of military service was 14,6 months.

The interviews were done by Nadire Mater between the years of 1996 to 1998. The range of time passed between the time of completion of service and the time of interviews varies from one month to 168 months. The mean of time passed was 25,7 months.

3.2. Trauma Symptoms Profile

This part of the result section aims to reveal “Trauma Symptom Profile” of the soldier interviewed by Nadire Mater. Before beginning, it is important to indicate that the interviews in *Mehmedin Kitabı* are not clinical interviews addressing specific information needed to make the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other psychological difficulties. Thus, the symptom profile of the soldiers is not based on systematic clinical interviews, but on what soldiers, without being specifically asked, told about their subjective experiences regarding psychological distress after returning home. Thus, it can be assumed that, in the lack of a systematic clinical inquiry, psychological symptoms reported by the ex-soldiers would be a significant underestimation of the real psychological distress they went through and still go through. Nevertheless, the psychological symptoms they reported, even without being specifically asked, could give us an idea about the most distressing psychological complaints they have.

As it is discussed in the previous section, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most commonly diagnosed psychological disorder among combat veterans, (for instance Vietnam Veterans [Solomon, 1993]). Furthermore, other psychological disorders such as drug and alcohol use and depression are observed among many war trauma survivors. Thus, content analysis was used to evaluate the narratives of ex-soldiers on the basis of DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for PTSD and other reported psychological symptoms. Accordingly, the narratives of soldiers about the psychological difficulties experienced after returning home were examined based on DSM-IV diagnostic criteria of PTSD. Moreover, other psychological symptoms besides PTSD symptoms were investigated.

Table 5 shows frequencies and percentages of psychological symptoms reported by 69.3% (28 out of 41) of the ex-soldiers. Whether the other 31, 7% (13 out of 41) experienced any psychological difficulties or not is unknown. However, it is important to note that not reporting any psychological difficulties does not mean that these ex-soldiers do not experience any psychological difficulties. It is possible that they may be unwilling to share their psychological problems.

Also, it is important to note that there is not enough information in the narratives to conclude whether or not these ex-soldiers experience PTSD symptoms at the time of interview. Thus, these symptoms should not be regarded as “current PTSD”. However, the analyses of the narratives reveal that these soldiers have experienced PTSD symptoms at some time in their lives. So, it is reasonable to consider these symptoms as lifelong PTSD.

Table 5.

Frequencies and Percentages of Number of the Ex-Soldiers Reporting Psychological Symptoms Based on DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Symptom	Frequency (N=41)	%
Persistent Reexperience		
Recurrent dreams of events	11	26,8
Acting and feeling as if the traumatic events were recurring	1	2,4
Persistent Avoidance		
Avoidance of talking about traumatic events	7	17,1
Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma	3	7,3
Diminished interest or participation in significant activities	4	9,8
Numbing in general responsiveness	3	7,3
Restricted range of affect	1	2,4
Feeling of estrangement from others	2	4,9
Increased Arousal		
Irritability and outburst of anger	11	26,8
Difficulty falling sleep	11	26,8
Hypervigilance	7	17,1
Exaggerated startle response	7	17,1
Difficulty concentrating	2	4,9
Probable PTSD diagnosis		
Meeting all criteria	1	2,4
Including subthreshold levels	4	9,8

Three key features of the diagnosis of PTSD are persistent reexperience of traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma and numbing in general responsiveness, and persistent increased arousal. In Table 5, the symptoms found in the narratives about subjective experiences of psychological difficulties are displayed. As it can be observed in Table 5, symptoms in the “increased arousal” category are the most common one observed among ex-soldiers. 26,8 % of the soldiers indicate that they have experienced sleep disturbances especially difficulty in falling sleep and outburst of anger. A soldier describes his sleeping problems as follows:

[...] Having been discharged, I came back home. I felt as if I was in a big vacuum. I had problems sleeping. During military service, half an hour of sleep on the rocks was seen even sweeter than a 24-hour sleep in a bed. I longed for such a sleep, such a life. I felt uneasy in normal bed, therefore I started sleeping on the floor. It went on like this for one-and-a-half years. (Mater, p. 145)

Further, % 17,1 of soldiers have manifested symptoms of hypervigilance and exaggerated startle response.

[...] If a dog knocked down a trash can at 4 a.m., I would jump from my bed. I reacted strongly against the Ramadan [Muslim holy month of fasting] cannon balls. I had little sense of Ramadan itself. When they fired a cannon ball, I threw myself to the ground. When I saw the people around me, I told myself, ‘Calm down, this is Denizli and what they are firing is not a rocket. It is just the Ramadan cannon ball. (Mater, p. 62)

Moreover, reexperiencing of trauma in the form of recurrent dreams of traumatic events is one of the most common symptoms among soldiers.

In traumatogenic situations like war, people are exposed to excessive

amount of aversive stimuli that are difficult to either block out or integrate. Thus, after war ends, it continues in the men's minds (Solomon, 1993). Solomon (1993) indicates that traumatized individuals use the defenses overwhelmingly to get rid of the aversive experiences and the situation of excessive and uncontrolled use of defenses continues after the war ends. Thus, recollection of traumatic events in dreams is a commonly observed way of reliving from their traumatic experiences (Solomon, 1993). Usual themes in dreams are about combat zone and death of friends among the soldiers. One of the soldiers suffers from dreaming of seeing the death of his buddies: "[...] I do dream about my life in the mountains. Last night in my dream I was in a clash, we were fighting, my buddies were falling over me." (Mater, p. 146)

Another soldier has also reported waking from a dream in terror: [...]. Sometimes I have nightmares. One night, I apparently woke up and strangled my wife. She held me by the arms and woke me up. When I woke up, she did not say anything, just gave me a glass of water. Then I went back to sleep (Mater, p. 297).

One of the commonly reported symptoms is avoidance about the traumatic events. 17,1 % of the soldiers reported that they avoid talking about their military service with other friends. Avoidance of a set of behaviors has a function of blunting the pain of traumatic experience. A soldier who lost his best comrade during combating reports that he is in a condition like vegetative state: "[...] I was an introvert when I came back home. It was like living without any feeling... I never talked about my experiences with my friends." (Mater, p. 99)

Most of the soldiers have reported that they suffer from several symptoms at the same time. In the following quotation, the soldier states that he has somatic complaints, sleep problems, diminished interest in activities, and increased tendency to behave aggressively:

[...] I don't get pleasure from flirting as I did in the past. Then I was more enthusiastic. Now I am living the life of a dead person. I resort to violence more than I used to. When I am challenged, I start shouting. I get mad for any reason. I sharply respond to any challenge. I cannot go to sleep until dawn. [...] Looked from outside I might seem O.K., but I am not. When I am speaking with someone, I pretend as if I am listening to them, but indeed I am not. I cannot concentrate. I believe I have a heart problem, But I don't know what exactly. And sometimes I had a terrible headache. I have not gone to a doctor or a psychiatrist. But now speaking with you, I feel relieved of my sufferings. (Mater, p. 114)

Beside PTSD symptoms, ex-soldiers reported other kinds of symptoms. In the following table, the frequencies and percentages of these symptoms are displayed. The symptoms reported by ex-soldiers include various difficulties including alcohol use, problems in social relationships, increase in aggressive behaviors and so on. These symptoms can be experienced additional to PTSD symptoms or alone.

Table 6.*Frequencies and Percentages of Other Symptoms besides PTSD**Symptoms*

Symptom	Frequency (N=41)	%
Alcohol Use	1	2,4
Problems in Social Relations	7	17,1
Somatic Complaints	4	9,8
Adjustment Difficulties	6	14,6
Increase in Aggressive Behaviors	15	36,6
Tendency of Staying Alone	4	9,8
Survival Guilt	1	2,4
Depressive Feelings	4	9,8

The most frequently reported symptom is increased tendency to behave aggressively. 36,6 % of ex-soldiers stated that they became more aggressive after returning from military service. Aggression is an indispensable condition of combat, in other words, the military reproduces its power there by training and encouraging ex-soldiers to apply violence against the enemy (Solomon, 1993). After the combat ends, veterans may

incline to externalize their aggression, even though the need for it has passed. Tendency to be aggressive and to externalize aggression seems to be common among the ex-soldiers. An ex-soldier who lost his leg during combat refers to the difference he perceives in behaviors before and after he goes to military service: Before he was not an aggressive person, after he tends to behave aggressively:

Before military service, I was a calm person, I did not enjoy fighting. But now I easily get mad. This might be what they call the “Vietnam Syndrome.” I can hardly control myself. I feel that I can beat anyone. That’s partly a joke, of course. ... But sometimes I feel I could shoot someone. Now I experience everything with greater intensity and easily become aggressive. (Mater, p. 129)

In some cases, other symptoms are accompanied by somatic complaints. 9,8 % of the interviewees stated that they suffer from bodily symptoms such as headache and stomachache. A ex-soldier tells that he sometimes wakes up with headache in the morning after having a nightmare:

In my dreams I see myself as a soldier. Everybody has been discharged, but I am still a soldier. It is so real that, I beg for it to be a dream. When I get up in the morning I have a headache. I take some pills and sit down, exhausted. (Mater, p. 74)

3.3. Discursive Analysis of Narratives

In this section, I aim to evaluate how traumatic experiences are made meaningful both during and after the military service by reviewing the narratives of ex-soldiers who were exposed to war conditions during their compulsory military service. War conditions admittedly cause traumatic affects on everyone that it is definitely hard to cope with normal

psychological resources. However, the reactions to war conditions are influenced by both the characteristics of the experience and by what it meant to ex-soldiers. Accordingly, in this section, I will try to reveal the characteristic of the Southeast experiences of the ex-soldiers and what it meant to them based on their own words.

This section will be composed of three parts, namely premilitary period, military service period, and post-military period. The contextual features of pre-military period, military service period and post-military service period will be explored. Regarding the pre-military period, soldiers' thoughts about going to military service and the Southeast are particularly very important to understand the context of these young men before going to war. Then, social and moral order of army and war zone will be focused on. Furthermore, how war stressors such as loss of a beloved friend, killing someone, the physical conditions and threat of being dead are constructed will be explored in the narrative of soldiers. In the last part of this section, various discourses about war in society will be evaluated in order to understand how these soldiers do meaning-making of their traumatic experiences after return to home. These ex-soldiers face various discourses including "victory", "heroism", "endless war" and "poor people protects the borders of motherland" in which they reconstruct their traumatic experiences.

Moreover, "commando identity" is important in terms of understanding how the "ideal masculinity" is a fundamental discourse that military service experiences are built on. In other words, narratives of these

men about war experiences are also the narratives of how these young men become and/or not become a “real man”. However, these young men have to yield to terrible war in order to become a “real man”.

3.2.1. Pre-military period thoughts about going to military service

None of the ex-soldiers interviewed in the book were volunteers; they were doing their compulsory military service. In other words, like every young Turkish man, they went to complete their compulsory military service but, but unlike many other young men in Turkey, they were sent by the military to the Southeast. Unlike their counterparts who do their military service in the other parts of Turkey, they were selected to do their military service in a dangerous environment where there is always the risk of military operations, combating, and so on. Moreover, about half of the ex-soldiers interviewed in the book indeed were in commando units. In this regard, the premilitary thoughts about military service is critical in terms of understanding how the ex-soldiers make the traumatic experiences meaningful and find answers to question of why they are there.

The interviews in the book were conducted after the ex-soldiers’ return home. They are based on what they recall about their war experiences after they had been exposed to war conditions. How they remember premilitary thoughts is an important aspect of how they construct the trauma. In this part, I will try to discuss with which motivations, imaginations, and beliefs these ex-soldiers went to the Southeast.

The main discourse in the narratives of ex-soldiers about going to military service is about “manhood”. As it is generally accepted, going to

military service is one of most important steps, which young men have to jump over in the way of becoming a “real man”. It is a well-known discourse that men are regarded as “full men” who have rights to get married, have better job and so on after completing military service. Thus, there is a strong relationship between manhood and military service.

From this perspective, the discourse on “becoming a real man” is the main theme in the narratives of ex-soldiers about going to military service and to the Southeast. Furthermore, another discourse of “being a hero” which is related with “manhood” is also constructed in the stories of ex-soldiers about going to the Southeast. There are different motives behind the desire of doing their military service as commando and going to the Southeast. Some of the ex-soldiers tell that they would express their patriotic idealism by going to the Southeast “voluntarily”. Interestingly, as it was indicated previously, going to military service is a compulsory, not voluntary, duty for every man in Turkey. It can be speculated that the ex-soldiers prove their “patriotic masculine identity” by imagining their service to be “voluntary”.

About “manhood”, ex-soldiers use two languages in the narratives: the language of “patriotism” and the language of “inheritance of manhood”. First, I will try to elaborate how the language of “patriotism” is used in narratives of going to military service and the Southeast. Then, how the “intergenerational transmission of manhood” is influential on construction of “manhood” will be revealed.

Some ex-soldiers point out that going to military service and the Southeast provide an opportunity for becoming a “real man” because they are to protect their family and helpless people from danger actively. As it can be observed in the following quotation, this ex-soldier regards himself to be a good candidate for fighting in the war zone since he comes from the Black Sea region. Moreover, he desires strongly to go to the East to protect the borders of motherland and take the revenge of innocent people who were killed in this conflict:

I wanted to serve in the East. There was more terrorist activity in the years 1993-1994 than there is now. That’s why I wanted to go there. The priority was given to the people from the Black Sea region because they grow up with guns; it is a part of their lives. [...] Three months passed quickly. It wasn’t the way I had expected, but still they tried to give us some training. We were told on our first week there that we were going to serve in the East. [...] When I heard that we were going to guard the border in the East, I started to love military service even more; I worked with enthusiasm. My dreams were going to be realized. I wanted to get involved in combat. I was following terrorist incidents on TV and reading about them in the newspapers. Terrorists had been raiding villages and killing small children. I developed a grudge against them. I said to myself, “I have to take a head or kill three or four of them.” When I was on leave in Rize after completion of my basic training, my mind was constantly in the military. I got bored in fifteen days. A long journey of fifteen months was waiting for me. I wanted to join my proficiency battalion as soon as possible, take part in combats, and start experiencing the situation. (Mater, p. 199)

The same ex-soldier, however, feels disappointment since he could not do what he planned and expected from himself. He says, “[...] Maybe I

didn't get anything [heads of terrorists] and didn't live up to the uniform I wore." (Mater, p. 202)

Some ex-soldiers' narratives reveal how doing military service play an important role in the intergenerational transmissions of manhood. In other words, "manhood" is inherited from father to son in the stories of military service. A father's heroic memories of military service make the son proud. In the following quotation, it can be observed how a ex-soldier feels that something is missing in his life since two important role models, his father and his big brother, did not do military service and did not leave him memories of military service as inheritance. Thus, this ex-soldier wants to do his military service in war zone in order to compensate for what is missing in their family history. He says:

Five or six years before I went into military service, I used to tease my mother that I would go to Şırnak. I mean, even when I was a child, I used to have this kind of envy. I would listen to elderly tell their stories of military service. There was so much pride in those stories. Neither my father nor my elder brother has served in the military. My goal was to go to a decent place and do my military service for all of us. I felt something was missing. My father could never talk about his "military experience" and tell stories. I wanted to have stories I would be proud to tell my son. I had sympathy for the people of the Southeast. I was curious about them. What do these men, whom we call terrorists, want? What is their problem? I partly went there to find my own truths. (Mater, p. 291)

The second important discourse that is related with "manhood" is "being a hero." Most of the ex-soldiers who do their military service are at the beginning of their twenties. They are influenced by the "discourses of

heroism” constructed in the media and popular culture. Moreover, most of the ex-soldiers who did their service in the Southeast mention that they are poor. Becoming a hero with their successes in the war-zone may be a dream for these young and poor men who are in search of an identity in the earlier years of their lives. With this identity, they may obtain the respect they wish from the society. In this regard, some ex-soldiers’ naïve dreams to be a “hero” are built through films and media:

My departure for military service was not a big deal. My uncle accompanied me to Egridir. We both cried while departing. I had even thought of legally increasing my age in order to go to the service sooner because I wanted to put my life in order and because I liked the soldiers very much. After what I had seen on TV and read in the newspapers, I was enthusiastic to go to the East. I wasn’t from a rich family and the people there were poor so I could fit in their class. I thought, “I should be with them.” I worked hard to be a commando. (Mater, p. 97)

In conclusion, they go to military service with the positive expectations regarding future: one is to not only become a “real man” by completing the military service but also become a “hero” in the eyes of the society. Therefore, going to military service and to the Southeast particularly is reconstructed as something that had been looked forward to for some ex-soldiers. However, the reality that was waiting for them was very different. In the next section, first part of the reality, which is social and moral order of army, waiting for them will be explored.

3.2.2. Social Order of the Army

Any army is a social construction with its own formal regulations: defined authority, written orders, incentives, punishments, formal tasks and

occupational definitions. All of these form a social world that most of the ex-soldiers regard as legitimate, “natural”, and personally binding. The social order which ex-soldiers face when they first enter into the barrack is very different from the one which they used to live in. In order to understand the war zone experiences of ex-soldiers and how they influence the psychic life of them, the social space of ex-soldiers should be explored in detail. What is the nature of social relationships in army? What kind of social relationships are constructed? And what are the functions of these relationships in the war environment? The answers given to these questions will provide a broad image of what kind of a social space these men live. In this part, I will try to discuss the role of ethnicity, religious identity, “inferior-superior relation scheme”, and cohortism [*devrecilik*] in social space of the army.

First, the reactions of ex-soldiers when they first come to military service show the psychological influence of going to military service. Some ex-soldiers point out a feeling of disappointment when they first enter into the barrack. They mention that their first days in the barrack are too different from and much harder than what they expected from the army. Their first reaction to the order they face with is feeling shock. From the words of ex-soldiers, the feeling of shock can be understood in a detailed way: “I had never seen so young men with their hair razed to their skin. It was so funny. After this first shock, one can not pull himself together until the end of the military service” (Mater, p. 123).

Especially some ex-soldiers indicate that the first days in the barrack are most difficult part of their all-military service training. One ex-soldier remembers the first days and says: “The early days are difficult. It was rough for me too. One can even have nervous breakdown.” (Mater, p. 117). Another ex-soldier says that it is impossible to forget the entrance to barrack: “One cannot forget the entrance to the Etimesgut Garrison [in Ankara]. As I got in, I said, “Now everything is coming to an end”.

The narratives of ex-soldiers also point out the lack of “individuality” in the military service. “Individual responsibility” and “individual will” gradually disappear in the army and “common will” begins to rule. There is no place for “individuality of ex-soldiers” in the army. Instead, all soldiers are expected and forced to accept “the rules of army” which control every aspect of life, even the most minute details such as how a soldier puts his soap in his cabinet. It may be an exaggerated claim that there is no need for “reasoning” in the army since orders of military authorities do it for the soldiers. One ex-soldier says: “It is like you are newly born. They tell you ‘come’ and you go. You are waiting for an order to ‘stand up’ (Mater, p. 49). Another ex-soldier stresses the disappearance of individuality in army and says: “We were greeted by a noncommissioned officer and a couple of experienced soldiers, who said, ‘Welcome to hell!’ Nice joke! The military has a structure of its own. You go into it and disappear. I disappeared. I was on the verge of crying” (Mater, p. 261).

Some ex-soldiers pointed out that they felt depressed when they first entered the barrack. Where does this feeling of depression come from? It

may be speculated that the discrepancy between what people told about the military service and what they encounter makes ex-soldiers feel depressed. The soldiers are expected to obey and internalize the “inferior-superior relation scheme” as soon as they come to the military service. Their masculine identity, which is constructed on the discourse of “having power”, begins to be challenged by “inferior-superior relation scheme”. However, they came to military service with the assumption that they will be a “real man” when they complete the military service. What is implied by the “real man” is someone who is “powerful” enough to protect both his family and his motherland. There is an unquestioned link between power and masculinity which are both constructed in connection with military service. But these men have to yield to all kinds of abuses such as beating and curses for the sake of becoming a “real man”. A ex-soldier remembers how other more powerful men challenge his powerful masculine identity and says:

I wanted to go to the Southeast. I had heard a lot about the war there. I was curious. But on the first day, I cried. Having people cut your hair and the way senior soldiers or the officers treat you is terrible. In a sense, I was defeated on the first day.(Mater, p. 151).

Another ex-soldier explains how he faced the reality when the army he had imagined collapsed:

I believed I had to go for military service. I wanted to be sent to Şırnak and I was sent there. I grew up in a lower middle-class neighborhood. I was influenced by school, the books I read, and the movies I saw. Moreover, there was the nationalism thing. As it is said, ‘We love over homeland, we are Turkish boys.’ Yet, everything changes as soon as you enter through the gates of the barracks. What you face totally is what you

have so far been told. You are psychologically crushed. Yet there is no going back after you step through the door. Soldiers who were conscripted only three months before you have the right to shout at you, to slap your face. If he wanted, a single officer could beat 400 privates and no one would stop him. You know the dirty advice: 'If rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it.' I took it. And during the three months of basic training I got used to it. 'O.K.,' I told myself, 'Now you are a soldier' (Mater, p. 67).

As it was discussed in the above paragraphs, the social order of the army is totally different from the social order of civil life which the soldiers are accustomed to live. The wire netting surrounding the barrack not only protects the soldiers but also prevents infiltrating of all aspects of civil life into the barrack. The communication with family member and relatives is also too limited.

However, the dangerous and difficult circumstances of the war zone change and reconstruct the nature of "inferior-superior relation scheme". Many ex-soldiers point out that "inferior-superior relation scheme" of the army becomes irrelevant in the war zone. As this ex-soldier indicates, the rigid social relationships between soldiers and officers come to loosen:

The relations between soldiers and officers were very friendly in Mardin. No saluting or anything like that. Even when the highest-ranking officer arrived, it is not a matter if you saluted them or not. They knew that the soldiers were under a lot of stress, so they were careful about their attitude (Mater, p. 27).

The other important social relationship scheme in the military is cohortism [devrecilik]. Cohortism is a social system that is both supportive and oppressive. As the narratives of ex-soldiers reveal in the preceding paragraphs, whenever a soldier enters the barrack, the senior soldiers (*üst*

devre) begin to dominate the newcomers (*alt devre*). This social order of the military is accepted by all. The senior soldiers have the right to order and do everything to newcomers such as beating and passing their own duties to newcomers. From words of a ex-soldier:

During military service, I did cleaning and washed the dishes all the time. In the military, there is this cohort thing. You learn from and obey those who have come before you. The inexperienced soldier acts the same way as his “grandfather.” If he used to break glasses, so does the “grandson.” This whole thing is not good, the new ones do all the job. The guys sit in the military cafeteria and you wait for his orders. Now he wants water, then he wants tea... (Mater, p. 208).

Additionally, senior soldiers have all privileges such as having bath when they wish, having the good part of the meal and so on. A soldier explains this as follows:

The first two months I never had the chance of taking a bath. I was washing the dishes. Hot water was provided only for 10 minutes, the seniors would bathe, and when they left the shower area, well, everybody knew that hot water was already gone (Mater, p. 110).

At the same time, cohortism [*devrecilik*] is possibly the most important social support system for the soldiers. Thanks to cohorts, one can adapt the all-difficult and challenging conditions of the military. A soldier’s cohorts are the ones who are closer than one’s family. A disabled ex-soldier remembers the moment he pressed the mine and tells: “[...] Everyone was shouting, but it is one’s cohort that is touched the most. Because you eat together, drink together, get your training together... They were the ones crying” (Mater, p. 210).

The fate of inexperienced soldiers changes when new soldiers come for military service. Now they gain the right of oppressing the newcomers at the same time they are oppressed by senior soldiers. In this manner, “inferior-superior relation scheme” among soldiers reproduces itself. It appears that a soldier internalizes the main rule of military, that is he learns to obey superiors, who are oppressors, and to oppress the inferiors.

Like cohortism [*devrecilik*], another social support system is ethnic, religious, and regional identities. How the soldiers define themselves in terms of ethnicity, religion, and region they come from is important in understanding how they position themselves in the social environment of the military. It is also important to grasp the idea of “us-and-they” perception in soldiers’ mind. Soldiers spend their free time with the other soldiers who have the same background with themselves. They sit on the same table when they are in the dining room, they go to have some tea, they have bath in the adjacent basins in the Turkish bath, and so on. They make friendship with the others with the same background with themselves.

Sunnites get together and become friendly with Sunnites and Alevis find each other. There were even rightist-leftist fights among the soldiers. There were some communists in the unit, and I being a rightist, would have heated debates with them (Mater, p. 102).

To sum up, there is a unique social order in the military service with its own rules, systems of oppression and support, codes of conducts and so on. This social order plays a very important role in the shaping of both the moral order of the army and the subjective experience of trauma.

3.2.3. Moral Order of the Army

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, any army is a social construction with its own discursive social world. Moreover, any army is a moral construction with its moral rules and its moral discursive world. During the military service, the soldiers face many experiences in which the moral and social worlds intersect. In this part, I will try to explore how moral world of the army is constructed and then how social and moral worlds of the army intersect.

These soldiers find themselves in a very different morality from the one they used to live in. The moral power of the army is so great that it can motivate and make ready the soldiers to kill the enemy. They are caught in the middle of a dilemma of listening to the voice of military authority and the voice of their conscience. These men come from a moral world in which killing someone is religiously, legally and morally forbidden even though with significant reservations and exceptions. In the army, particularly in war zone, killing the enemy is allowed, and even encouraged, in the name of protecting the borders of motherland and honor of Turkish people. Even though military authorities permit the soldiers to kill the enemy in the war zone, the killing experience is one of the most difficult war zone stressors to be made meaningful in the psychic life of the soldiers. A young sublieutenant talks about the complexity of the killing issue. He is in a dilemma between being responsible for protecting fifteen soldiers' lives and killing someone in the lack of an "enemy image" in his mind.

[...] I had fifteen soldiers under my command. I was the assistant team commander. I used to think to myself, 'Will I be able to shoot at a PKK

when he shoots at me?’ It was this question that preoccupied me; I had no sense of enemy. Later, I recognized the mine as enemy. We had orders to kill such animals as the mule when we saw them because they were used for transportation purposes but I could not kill. The privates were more eager to kill. At least I protected the animals by not giving the “kill” order for them (Mater, p. 276).

It is important to say that none of the ex-soldiers was a killer in their civil lives but they are made to act like as killers and warriors in the war. How these young men are made into warriors? In answering this question, what the ex-soldiers told in interviews about the enemy and killing can be very insightful. Dishonoring enemy is a critical mechanism that justifies killing act by producing and sustaining the feelings of rage and revenge. In this manner, most of the soldiers do not engage in a moral questioning of killing.

In the next two parts, discourses on enemy and killing will be discussed in order to understand the moral space of ex-soldiers in the war and the affects of these discourses on their psychological life.

3.2.3.1. Dishonoring the enemy

Shay (2003) argues that traumatized person can recover only if the trauma is communicated safely. In other words, ex-soldiers should be able to talk about what they feel about their experiences in the war zone in such a way that they are listened to empathically, without being judged. In order for trauma to be communicated, the exaggerated feelings of rage and revenge should not dominate over the other feelings like sadness, shame, and survival guilt. Thus, the mechanisms sustaining the intense feeling of

rage should be explored very well in order to understand how and why traumatic experiences could not be communicated.

Dishonoring the enemy is one such mechanism that sustains rage and revenge. Importantly, it has to be underlined that how the soldiers construct the enemy in their minds represents what social and military discourses told them. Therefore, the narratives of ex-soldiers indicate how discourses determine psychological life. Soldiers dishonor the enemy in a variety of ways. First, enemy is denied identity. During the pre-military training period, soldiers are told that there is no real Kurdish identity.

They tried to agitate us by showing videos shot by the military during armed clashes. 'They were clashes here and there. Here, the commander made a wrong decision. You are supposed to put a watch on the highest point and then call the unit to pass from the spot. Because the commander did not put a watch there, fifteen to sixteen of our soldiers were martyred.' These sorts of information were given. To make us feel really agitated against the PKK, they had colonels give some of those trainings. They used to tell us that there was no such thing as a Kurd. These people call themselves Kurd because when they walk on snow, they make these 'kart, kurt' noises. In reality, they are not Kurds, they are all Turks like us,' they told us in these trainings. There was a constant propaganda. In order for us to lose our sense of pity, they told us horrifying things. You get influenced even if you don't want to. When I went for my military service, I was twenty-eight years old. Still, I was influenced. You can imagine how the twenty-year-olds must feel (Mater, p. 42).

Secondly, the enemy is portrayed as violent and atrocious creatures. Soldiers talk about the enemy as if they are creatures who do not behave in accord with the rules of human conduct but with presocial attitude. It is said

that enemy act inhumanely against dead bodies of soldiers, which is apparently an uncivilized behavior. One soldier says: “They used to agitate us: ‘Your ears will be cut off when you fall prisoner in the hands of the PKK” (Mater, p. 110).

Third, the enemy is dishonored by equating it with one of the greatest enemies in the official discourse of Turkey. Soldiers are said that they are fighting with people who are not Kurds but Armenians. Turkish-Armenian conflict is a historical and bitter one. By equating the enemy with Armenians, soldiers’ rage against enemy is further intensified because Armenians are also said to have committed genocide against Turks during the First World War. Equalization of enemy with Armenians also provide legitimacy to the question of why they are fighting.

I believe that the PKK is not made up of Kurds. There are Armenians and Greeks among the PKK. [...] I know from the official records that Abdullah Öcalan is not a Kurd but an Armenian, so he will establish an Armenian Government. (Mater, p. 80)

Fourth, a religion based discourse is utilized for dishonoring the enemy. Religion of the enemy is continuously questioned and it is argued that enemy is not Muslim. Several proofs are referred to show the non-Muslim character of the enemy. Enemy soldiers do not say the Islamic oath (kelime-i şehadet) when they are dying; enemy soldiers are not circumcised as the Islamic belief requires.

It can also be stated that another discourse on religious brotherhood, that is “a Muslim never shoots a Muslim”, makes soldiers question the religion of the enemy. By questioning religion of the enemy and concluding

that they are not Muslim, they come to imagine that they kill someone who does not resemble themselves in any sense. The discourse about the non-Muslim character of the enemy is also complementary with the discourse about the perceived Armenian origin of the enemy.

If there was no ID on the terrorists we captured, how could you know if he was a Turk, a Muslim? We would look if he was circumcised, 60 percent or 70 percent of them would not be circumcised. Their names would be Manukin, Katilian, and so on. They were a lot of Syrian names, as well as Lebanese and Armenians nationalities. (Mater, p. 190)

The narratives of soldiers indicate that discourses on dishonoring the enemy seem to be constructed during the pre-military training period. In the pre-military training period, soldiers are instructed about who their enemy is. First, the enemy is the PKK militants whose Kurdish identity is refused by the military authorities. Soldiers are said in this pre-military training that there is not a Kurdish identity in reality, that Kurdness is something artificial. However, there is no persuasive explanation given to the soldiers why Kurdness is artificial and where it comes from. To the contrary, soldiers do not need to be persuaded about the artificialness of Kurdness, but they are “ordered” about this within the general order and obedience system of the military, to which soldiers often refer to by saying that “logic is left behind when it is entered into the gates of barracks”.

[...] The marches we sang during walking, running, going to the dining hall were all heroic folksongs. When you spend two or three sleepless days and stay in the cold, you ask yourself, ‘Why do I stay sleepless? Why do I lead a miserable life?’ And your answer is, ‘Because of those mean terrorists.’ That’s how you are prepared for the experience (Mater, p. 139).

[...] This meant that I did not participate in the lessons that the other privates participated in. I came across one lesson where they were talking about conquering Athens and making the world miserable for the Greeks. The soldiers sang marches like, ‘Apo bastard, we will come and do you good’ (Mater, p. 282).

Second, and more importantly, pre-military training continuously warns soldiers about the risk of confusing who is friend and who is foe in the local geography of the Southeast Anatolia. Inhabitants of some villages are said to support the state while the inhabitants of some other villages are supporting PKK. For this reason, soldiers are in a setting where they have to distinguish which locals are supporting them and which locals are against themselves. Therefore, enemy is not only the militants but also the local civilian people who support PKK. I shall illustrate how the enemy is portrayed during basic training period (*acemilik dönemi*) from the words of some soldiers in the book:

The training was very heavy indeed, but once you go there, you realize that you need all of it. In fact, we could have benefited from more training. Your first aim is to keep your soldiers alive. If you can also kill some terrorist, that is great success. Going out into field, laying ambush, transfers, the right way to move during transfers, using maps, weapons, leadership training, the history and aims of the separatist terrorist organization, the countries that support them, the right way to treat the local population, the ways in which you can distinguish between pro-PKK and pro-state villages... It was not easy to put all of this into practice. You go into villages with prejudice. After all that training, you look at everyone as a potential terrorist. They teach you to think this way during training, but of course, it goes a little too far. If I did it all over again, I would go to Eğridir voluntarily. If you are going to do something, you need to do it well (Mater, p. 269).

This second type of enemy is even a greater source of insecurity for a considerable part of the soldiers (especially those who have direct contact with the inhabitants of the place where their barracks are present) because they cannot distinguish who is friend and who is foe by just looking into their faces. A person from whom he purchased cloths, for example, may be an enemy giving information about them to the militants. Such a discourse expands and makes ambiguous the identity of the enemy. Enemy becomes rather an abstract entity of which one has always to be aware and careful in order to defend oneself. From the words of soldiers:

During military service, for me the enemy was the local people. People did not like the soldiers even a bit. I remember buying something for 1.5 million TL while its value was 500 TL. I was shopping from someone whose nephew or brother had joined the PKK. I would greet him when we met on the street. Just as I had a grudge against the terrorists and the people of the East, they had a grudge against us. When in the East, we had some authority over the villages; soldiers had some superiority so they couldn't do anything (Mater, p. 202).

Another soldier sees locals in the East as if they were his enemies, because he does not trust them. He says he lost his sense of security and says:

I don't want to talk badly about the people of the region, there were good ones and there were bad ones. When you go downtown, they welcome you, patting you on your back but you can't know what is in their minds. There was lack of trust. Naturally, the bullet is in the barrel when you go downtown. There is fear. To be honest, I didn't feel at ease with the people of the region... (Mater, p. 134).

Another one uses derogating words towards local people. Moreover, he equates local Kurdish people in the East with the PKK. He says:

The town people were poor and religiously fanatic. ... Only a certain section of the Doğu Beyazıt population is friendly with the military. Most don't like the military. They don't make life easy for the military; they don't help the soldiers. Because I knew that the PKK had come out of the Kurdish population, I was distant to them. That is why I went to Doğu Beyazıt both willingly and unwillingly. What a backward people they are. We drink tea together in the coffeehouse during the day and they would shoot us at night. I couldn't understand what kind of humanity, what kind of Islam it was. (Mater, p. 200).

Another soldier's narrative is composed of different levels of discourses. He questions why they fight there to protect the local people who are not friends and supporters of the military. With the feelings of frustration and maybe disappointment, he uses the religious based discourse of dishonoring the enemy and accuses local people for not going to mosque. Again discourse of "they cannot be Muslim" is evident.

The people of the region don't give anything, not even water, to the military. We were there for them but they didn't give a damn. Sometimes their noncooperation is so frustrating that they have no desire to respond to news of, say, a hamlet being attacked. They would kill us if they could. They would be PKK's slaves if the PKK asked for it because they think that PKK fights for the rights and well-being of the Kurds. I wonder if they (PKK) have any conscience. They sometimes shoot a five-year-old child. I never saw or heard a soldier killing a baby in cradle. Such a bad image of military has been created, or maybe it was there from earlier times, that people don't like the military. The look in their eyes is saying, 'You either get lost or die' provokes one. Few times on Fridays, we went to mosque for prayer. There were very few regulars, mostly few elderly. We had to put soldiers around the mosque on guard. If they had the slightest chance, they would kill the soldiers there (Mater, p. 86).

This soldier indicates how physically and psychologically hard conditions of war affect the psychic life of an individual. He says:

The civilians I met in the Southeast were either terrorists or their supporters. Of course there are plenty of people among them. But you never see them, you never go downtown. You are up on the mountains. Once every two or three months you come down, go out and your leave is over by the time you finish your soup in the restaurant. Once again you return to the mountains. Everyday you engage in a clash. A terrible, miserable life. Daily, hourly you are faced with death. And once you survive this and come here to join living , normal people, you still see them all as PKK terrorists. They are not, but they seem to be (Mater, p. 145).

In an indirect way, this discourse about being careful in distinguishing the friend and foe turns the fellow soldiers with Kurdish origin into potential sources of threat, thus the third kind of enemy. Some soldiers complain about their feeling of insecurity when they are together with a number of soldiers with Kurdish origin who speak to each other not in Turkish but in Kurdish. They think that one should not trust but be on the alert against such Kurdish-origin soldiers. This, in turn, deepens the trauma experienced further and makes its effects longer-lasting because it creates a particular type of perception in which one is surrounded by various and widespread sources of threats.

Whereas some soldiers treat Kurdish soldiers as their enemy, other soldiers do not complain about being with and fighting with Kurdish soldiers together. The soldiers' political views is one of the most important factors determining whether or not they treat Kurds and Kurdish soldiers as

enemy. Moreover, soldiers who had combated with enemy directly tend to perceive Kurds and Kurdish soldiers as enemy.

There were twenty to thirty Kurdish soldiers at the station but I couldn't trust them. I mean half of the soldiers were Kurdish. Why? The headquarters claim that people of the East know East better. That's wrong. They were talking Kurdish among themselves. I felt anxiety, fear. By fear, I mean, I was careful not to fall into an ambush... not during combat but in the tent, in the station. There was constant fear. I couldn't trust them. I didn't know my enemy. Since I didn't understand what they were talking about, I was suspicious that they were planning something against us. Are they planning to lay an ambush on us? Although I was not going with them, other soldiers of the station were going with them on guard and ambush duty. They must be making some secret plans if they were using Kurdish (Mater, p. 201).

Pre-military training gives in this way contradictory messages to the soldiers about Kurdish identity. On the one hand, Kurdish identity is denied by saying that Kurdness is an artificial thing. On the other hand, the training constantly warns soldiers about threats that may come from the people speaking Kurdish, whether local or soldier. Thus, the discourse of the training indirectly admits the Kurdish identity, which it denied, when pointing to the different kinds of threats that may harm soldiers.

In the war zone, the third type of enemy is the mines, which are described as an uncanny, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unseen enemy. For some soldiers, the only enemy they face during their military service is the mines. From the words of a soldier who lost one leg due to the explosion of a mine:

They say "Every soldier has his mine," some step on it and some don't. [...] The landmine I stepped on was plastic. If it were a normal one, the

detector would have located it. When there is a normal landmine, the noise that the detector makes echoes all over the mountains, but plastic, not a sound is heard. (Mater, pp. 206-207) [...] I used to say that I was not afraid of the PKK, but what they call the “invisible enemy.”

Landmines were my only fear” (Mater, pp. 210-211).

This invisible enemy, landmine, increases probability of dying and soldiers seem to be helpless and insecure in avoiding stepping on mines and protecting themselves. From another soldier’s words:

Before combat comes the mine... You can see terrorist groups, but you cannot see the mine hidden in the ground. You don’t know when you are going to step on one. Finally you reached the steep hill where we were to set up the base. [...] I had no sense of enemy. Later I recognized the mine as the enemy (Mater, p. 276).

Moreover, another soldier describes stepping on the “undetectable and uncontrollable enemy”, mine, as “losing in gambling”:

You go into an operation and pass through an area with mines-126 people pass in front of you, you are the 127th, and the next person steps on a mine. That happened to me. I was the 127th person and the 128th, a friend stepped on a mine and died... (Mater, p. 256).

To sum up, the soldiers fight not only with real enemies but also socially constructed ones. In any case, soldiers have to survive in an insecure and dangerous environment, which is full of enemies including local Kurdish people, Kurdish soldiers, the PKK terrorists, and the invisible mines.

3.2.3.2. Opinions about Killing

In the moral order of military, the soldiers are permitted to kill the enemy, a dishonorable person who fights against the unity of motherland and honor of Turkish people. However, as indicated previously, these young men are not killers in their ordinary lives. Killing is not a “normal” act in

their civil life. The discourses of dishonoring the enemy strongly stresses that the enemy does not resemble the soldiers in any way. Therefore, killing the dishonored enemy is “normalized” in the moral space of soldiers. The critical and psychologically important point is how a “morally and legally forbidden act in civil life” is normalized in the war zone. In this part, I will try to discuss the discourses on killing.

There are three different discourses detectable in soldiers’ narratives about killing. First, killing is normalized under the proposition that if one does not kill the enemy, he will be killed. Second, killing is seen as a reaction to a wrong-doing which has not been initiated by themselves but the enemy. So, they kill out of rage which is the normal reaction of any human being against the loss of a beloved person in the hands of the enemy. Thus, killing is normalized again. Third, killing is not regarded as an individual act but as a group action. By seeing killing as a group action, soldiers diffuse the moral responsibility of killing to not only everyone in the group, but also to the abstract person of the army.

Killing people is not an ordinary act for soldiers. The enemy soldier deserves to be killed because they killed soldiers. Some soldiers feel insufferable pain due to the death of a special comrade (this issue will be discussed in next part of this section). In order to relieve this pain, they want to take revenge from the enemy. The subjective feeling of revenge reproduces the specific social order of war both by preventing the experience of grief after the death and by motivating soldiers to fight with the belief in the rightness of their cause. It can be speculated that the

following quotation indicates the self-questioning of a soldier who killed an enemy in order to take revenge of his beloved comrade after returning to “civil life”. When he was interviewed, he was out of the “moral order of military” therefore, he may be questioning his act of killing and trying to justify his act by questioning the religion of dead terrorist. He says:

Did I kill anybody? We were extremely close with Mustafa... When I was back from my rehabilitation break, I asked my commander, “Can you give me a chance for revenge?” The first terrorist we captured was executed by three or four of us because he didn’t give us much information and because we were in distress on account of our eighteen martyrs. You don’t feel relieved. I even regretted doing it. I had decided not to shoot at him if he would call Allah’s name. When the others started shooting, I did too. He was very close, 4-5 meters away, if he would have called the name of Allah, I would have heard it. We used to collect the dead bodies together for the television screening. There were already twenty dead bodies on the ground from the operation and we had turned him into the twenty-first dead body (Mater, p. 99).

A sublieutenant also stresses the role of feeling of rage in the “normalization” of killing and points out dehumanized attitude towards the dead enemy (this will be discussed in the following paragraphs) by calling the dead enemy as “carcass”:

Nothing is more painful than your friend being martyred. I had a friend called Devrem who was killed in Karliova. When I say revenge... At that moment, you want to kill them all, you don’t want his blood to remain on the ground, so to speak. In order to survive there, you need to kill. We would call a dead terrorist “carcass” and a wounded one “skunk”. ... In the military, you never talk about death, no one does. Of course you do think about it (Mater, p. 274).

In the war zone, killing the enemy is the condition of surviving. For some soldiers, there is no other alternative except killing the enemy in order to survive. Thus, killing is “normalized”. From the words of a soldier:

I know that I shot at least one person during combat. Now I feel a bad conscience about it. You pull the trigger and he falls. If you don't do it, he will shoot you. This thought makes you believe that you were right in shooting him and you loosened up (Mater, p. 258).

In the social order of army, there is no place for individuality and one's individuality disappears in the social space of army. As it was discussed, soldiers are not treated as separate individuals but they are parts of a huge collective. Regarding this discourse on disappearance of individuality, the responsibility of killing is attributed to not to individual soldier but to the rules of army. At the individual level, soldiers do not take moral responsibility of killing but they attribute all moral responsibility of killing to common will. This soldier attributes all responsibility to common will too:

One thousand to two thousand soldiers take part in big operations. During the fighting, so many soldiers shoot at the same time. There were times when I aimed to shoot at a human but it was impossible to tell whose shot actually hit them. We were about 150-200 soldiers. When seventeen soldiers in a group shoot at one person, it is not possible to say, “I shot him.” But he is shot (Mater, p. 87).

The language used for describing the dead bodies of enemy also indicates “normalization of act of killing within the social order of war”. Special derogatory words are used for the dead enemy as “carcass (leş in Turkish)”, “body (ceset in Turkish)” and “head (kelle in Turkish)”. Among soldiers, there has been a dehumanizing attitude towards the dead enemy.

By using the words “body” and “head”, soldiers regard their enemy as an object. Using this objectifying language helps soldiers put a distance towards the act of killing which is indeed emotionally and morally difficult to give meaning within the ordinary social order to which they used to live in. Therefore, the act of killing is “normalized” and they are able to regard themselves as “no killers”. The feeling of responsibility pertaining to conscience is thus being handled so that a psychological breakdown is avoided. Furthermore, the word *carcass* (leş) turns the dead enemy into animal-like creatures. The function of talking with such a language may increase the feeling of rage against the enemy. Soldiers cannot kill an enemy who is thought to be honorable and like oneself. The enemy must be dehumanized, degraded to less than fully human status in order to adapt to the moral order of war-zone. For instance, one soldier describes the dead enemy as follows: “During our first and biggest fight, we got sixty-eight *heads* (kelle).” (Mater, p. 191). Another soldier uses the word *body* (ceset) for the dead enemy: “We were able to get the three or four *bodies* (ceset) that the Tokat gendarmerie was not able to get. I mean we had small skirmishes. We did not know whose bodies these were” (Mater, p. 11). Finally, a soldier uses the word *head* (kelle): “When I said ‘dawn² 54,’ I came on vacation leave, which was a reward. What was my success? A terrorist’s head. We got head together with a friend.” (Mater, 195).

² The word “dawn” is used as a metaphor by soldiers in order to indicate how many days are left for completing their military service.

3.2.3.3 Abuse of the body of dead enemy

As it can be understood from the words of the soldiers, the abuse of the body of dead enemy is “a reward given to the soldiers by military authorities”. In the difficult conditions of war zone, military moral order wants and encourages the soldiers to mistreat the body of dead enemy in order to motivate them to combat with the enemy and to sustain the rightness of war. Abusing reinforces the rage against the enemy. In addition, abusing the dead body makes soldiers accomplice with military authorities. By abusing the dead body, the soldier breaks up possibly the most basic moral contract with society. He no more complies with the social norms but transgresses them overtly by not even respecting dead human beings. When he is left up with the voice of his conscience, he is facing a cognitive dilemma: on the one hand “I committed an *inhuman* crime”, on the other hand “I am a good human being”. This dilemma is pretended to be solved by using several discourses: the discourse of “I am fighting for the sake of my country” and the discourse of “my enemy did even the worse to my friends”. From the words of a soldier:

I saw transparent things in their hands and asked what they were. They were using them as key-chains. One of them said, “These are ears, man.” I asked: “What ears?” Apparently, they cut the ears of the terrorists they kill, put them in coca cola until the cartilage comes out. Then they use them as key-chains. I mean they, too, have lost it. The Bolu commandos were always in combat and their experiences were very different from ours. They were telling us about how, during operations, they would find their friends dead and raped on rocks, with their pants turned the other way (Mater, p. 186).

Another soldier talks about the encouragement of military

authorities:

Once I saw a dead PKK member, some were kicking it. I couldn't stand it and I cried. My friends asked, "Why are you crying?" I said, "How can you treat a dead person that way and kick it?" He was left naked, a friend took his sports shoes from his feet. [...] The highest-ranking officer ordered the soldiers to come and see him. When they came, he kicked the dead body and said, "I leave him to you." Some tore off his clothes, some took his shoes (Mater, p. 216).

For some soldiers, the disrespectful treatment of the body of the dead enemy such as kicking the dead body, cutting parts of body like ears, considered as "religiously forbidden" and "abnormal". By witnessing such inhuman actions, the soldiers face another traumatic experience that cannot be made meaningful in one's psychic life.

One day, we found the dead body of a fifteen-year-old girl who had died on the wired fences while trying to pass to our side in order to surrender. They usually put blankets or wood on the fences to pass easily. This one had failed, losing a leg and then dying. One unbalanced soldier cut the fingers. If you don't have respect for them when they are alive, of course, you have no respect for their dead. I mean, there is no need to cut parts of their bodies (Mater, p. 295).

We killed sixteen PKK members. We seized sixteen Kalashnikovs and one Kanas rifle. We lay down their bodies on the ground. When we got up in the morning their ears were cut off. The rightists, during night watch duty, had cut their ears. I felt terrible, I had never in my life seen torn corpses like these. The battalion commander was very angry. He asked if there were any imams among us. A few raised their hands. He called them and asked, "Tell us if what they have done is justified. Even if they are enemies, in our Islamic belief harming the dead is a sin," he said. I felt so bad, so depressed (Mater, p. 111).

Mistreatment of the body of the dead enemy is a morally challenging issue for the soldiers. That is, the narratives reveal that soldiers experience a dilemma between the moral order of the army and the moral norms of society. In the moral order of the army, abuse of the dead is again normalized and encouraged in order to motivate the soldiers for combating and in order to sustain the feeling of rage towards the enemy. On the other hand, the moral contract of society forbids the abuse of deaths. Thus, the soldiers become face to face with another traumatic experience that is very difficult to give meaning in one's psychic life.

3.2.4. War Stressors

3.2.4.1 Reactions to the death of a special comrade

In order to understand the effect of the death of a special comrade in the context of war-zone, the attachment between the soldiers should be understood. War conditions intensify the care needs among the soldiers who fight beside each other. A very strong attachment, which is comparable to most deeply felt family relations, emerge between soldiers. At least for some soldiers, the kin relationship, brotherhood, seems to be the most commonly spoken symbol for the bond between soldiers. In war zone, the relationship between soldiers provides the feeling of safety. "Buddy (*badi*)" is the most commonly used word used for describing the relationship between soldiers. "... He was my buddy. That is as close as it gets. You eat from the same plate, use the same spoon" (Mater, p. 69).

In the war zone, the bond with a special comrade is the most valuable thing for soldiers. They share everything including food, water,

difficult physical conditions, and feeling of longing for the people left in the civilian life. Therefore, the death of a special comrade in the war zone is experienced as a very deep loss. For some soldiers, death of a special buddy makes them go out of their mind. In the following quotation, one soldier describes the period after the death of his best friend, Mustafa, as a sort of madness in which he rebels against the military authorities:

After this drum incident, I sort of lost my mind. And then when we couldn't find Mustafa's body, I became even worse. So much so that when the major came and said, 'Pull yourself together, you are a sergeant, an experienced soldier, you should be an example to the others,' I tore off the badge and said, 'From now on, I am a private.' And I didn't wear a badge until the end of my service. Tearing off badges had to be punished but wasn't; it was overlooked. Although it was forbidden, I was sent for a rehabilitation break (Mater, p. 98).

The most common reaction to death is the desire to take revenge from the enemy in the war zone. The rapid transformation of the "normal" grief reaction felt at the death of a special friend into rage may be considered as a way of coping with deeply felt emotional pain. This transformation motivates soldiers to fight and kill the enemy. In the words of another soldier, the relationship between emotional pain and its transformation into rage is evident: "Pain and anger. You start developing cruel thoughts towards the PKK and even towards the villagers, the people from the region. Everyone says, 'I am going to kill them and I will make them experience the violence as they die' " (Mater, p.52).

Moreover, the discourse of "*rage after death*" indicates "the position of military authorities" in the face of killing and death. Some soldiers'

narratives figure out that “moral order of army” reinforces the transformation of rage. According to the moral order of the army, killing a soldier created a debt that could be charged by the blood of the killer. Taking revenge and killing the enemy are normalized in the face of death of soldiers:

When my friend died, I could have skinned a terrorist alive without mercy if only I would have been given one. Personally, I killed terrorists after the incident, too. I don't think that any of our martyred soldiers were unavenged. Although normally I was not a revengeful person, I became one after seeing what has been done to our soldiers. The military turns you into someone who seeks revenge. It is like answering back what been done to you, like making the scores even (Mater, p. 192).

The soldiers' desire for revenge is constructed in the discourse of *kanı yerde kalmadı*³. Conducting military operations is a common reaction to death of soldiers in order to take revenge of the dead. However, military operations do not leave time and space for mourning after dead. In the below quotations, we can see that friends of the death soldiers are not given the opportunity to mourn by the military authorities as they are taken to a military operation for taking revenge:

When our friends were martyred, we cried a lot. Our battalion took the revenge of the martyrs of the Elazığ region. If a soldier was martyred, we sure took one of them down. We immediately organized an operation after losing a martyr. Participation in such operations was only to take revenge, no other reason. Well, it was a duty, but what everybody wanted was only to get hold one of them (Mater, p. 190).

³ “Kanı yerde kalmamak” means taking revenge of a murdered comrade by killing the murderer or members of his group

Bereavement is one of the post-traumatic conditions of war experiences. How it is shared or failed to be shared is very critical in order to understand the griefwork. As it can be found in the soldiers' narratives, after death of soldiers, religious ceremonies like *mevlut*⁴ and killing animals as sacrifice, are the most common tools of griefwork. Especially, the discourse of "Şehitlik" (martyrdom) helps soldiers make meaning of the loss of beloved comrades. The belief that "To die for one's motherland is a privilege" is the most frequently accepted discourse among soldiers, i.e. "I said, 'You can be martyred only for Allah.' I can accept those who fight and die for their country as martyrs as well" (Mater, p. 101). However, because soldiers are taken to military operations for revenge, the griefwork is not completed. Thus, uncompleted mourning deepens the trauma of soldiers and causes it to last longer when they return home, because the death of friend remains as an unfinished work in the psychic life of the soldiers.

[...] A lot of people had died but Hamza's death was very hard on me. He was from Balıkesir. I went to visit his family twice. Sixteen of us from the same batch came together and visited his family. We kissed the hands of his mother and father, we talked to them. We went to his grave and prayed. His family's pain was as fresh as if it were the first day, I don't think I will visit them again. When I go there, I experience everything all over again, my heart beats hard, I can't stand the pain. Maybe you want to forget about everything that happened (Mater, p. 179).

In summary, soldiers can lose a beloved comrade or witness the death of a soldier who is not a close friend in the war environment of the

⁴ Mevlut is a religious ceremony made after a deceased person

Southeast. Both of these experiences are traumatic in themselves. However, the social and moral order of the army leads to deepen the soldiers' trauma. The social and moral order of the army not only prevent griefwork but also encourage rage and revenge so that soldiers return back with unfinished work of losses in their psychic life.

3.2.5 Perception of War

Official state discourse defines the conflict in Southeastern Anatolia not as war but as “the state’s struggle with the terrorist organization against the state” and/or “low intensity conflict”. Even though the state does not admit the existence of the war in the Southeast, what waits for the soldiers there, in fact, are war conditions. Interestingly, as discussed, state discourse views that these men went to the Southeast for doing their military service not fighting in the war zone. However, soldiers experience all the difficult physical conditions of a war and all war stressors such as death of friends, threat of being killed, and killing someone and so on for many times during their military service. In the middle of the incompatibility of the official state discourse about the conflict in the Southeast with the experiences of soldiers, these soldiers try to answer the question of why they are there. Especially, Kurdish soldiers and leftist soldiers continuously question the legitimacy of the war and their position in this war.

Accordingly, these soldiers' thoughts about the war tell us what all these traumatic experiences mean to them. In this part, questions like what the war means to these soldiers, for what and whom they fight against will be addressed through the narratives of soldiers.

According to soldiers who had been in the Southeast at the beginning years of the war (1984), “what was happening in the Southeast” is not “war”. The words of a soldier who did his military service in different regions of Southeast reveal the confusion between defining his experience as military service or a war:

How could we have known that there was going to be a war? We did not experience it as war anyway. Right, this was not how we had envisaged military service, but we have to live through it, we thought. Those days left a significant mark on me. It has almost been fifteen years and there has not been a single night when I don't remember what happened there (Mater, p. 12).

The situation of the soldiers who do not support this war and are against militarism is to some extent both interesting and difficult in the sense that they question why they are there and why they take part in fighting with the enemy. In addition, they have to fight with an enemy that they do not believe in. Thus, these soldiers indicate the contradiction they experience during the war. In the following quotation, a soldier, who is not supporting the war, points out that there are several wars in which he is fighting. According to him, the hardest part of the war is being a part of it:

There are scores of war. Psychologically you are fighting against your adversary. Take part in the conflict or not, you are a part of it, in that sense you have to protect yourself. Plus you also empathize with the other side so you don't want to harm them. And then there is the fight for eating the good-quality canned fish. The toughest part of the war is that you are a part of it, that you are supporting it. I mean the fight that is always inside you, your civil war. You have to continually face this contradiction (Mater, p. 154).

In order to describe what the war means to themselves, some soldiers use the language of “economy”. In others words, they view the war from an economical perspective and they say that it is wasting money for nothing. War is regarded as an economic burden for all people. By using an economic discourse about war, some soldiers point out that the war in the Southeast not only influences them but all the country and the people. Moreover, using the language of “economy” distances the psychological damage of war on psychic life. A disabled soldier who complains about the indifference of society towards the war indicates the economic costs of the continuation of this war. By stressing the economic cost of the war, he may want to call the society’s attention to the war in the Southeast:

I certainly am not a fascist, but now and then I have come to understand such people who believe in force. In a way you need it, O.K.? In this country things are generally dealt with like this, in a mean way. I really love this land, I have always loved it, yet, I have finally concluded that I cannot live here anymore. If I could afford it, I would not live in Turkey, believe me. There are times when even breathing in this land becomes painful. People are dying everyday. Others are robbing the rest of the people. Pardon me, but most of the public are such assholes. If the realities of this war were revealed once. ... Not only Kurds and Turks, all citizens of this country are robbed. Around 80 billion dollars is said to have been spent on this war. Imagine how many universities could have been built with that much money (Mater, p. 127).

We see that this soldier has defined the war and placed it in a certain place in his mind which is that the war is meaningless for the soldiers because they are fighting for someone’s economic interests. Constructing the war in such a way should be very difficult for this soldier because in this

way he is admitting that he lost his leg for nothing in a meaningless war. In the below quotation a soldier mentions that the war is a meaningless one where the inexperienced young people are sent to the front to kill, die, and take revenge:

I believe that war is wrong. “An address is inscribed on every bullet,” they say in the military. I would like to prevent myself from being a target. Even if I am to die, it should have a sound reason. It is better to die fighting than to die accidentally. When you are fighting, you can die, but you also kill. Or, better, nobody should die. Neither you nor the other side should fire any shots. People will be exhausted after a while. That is how this fighting will come to an end. Nobody wants war, neither Turks, nor Kurds. [...] Why this war? It is meaningless. People are hurt. Most of the soldiers have nothing to do with the war. They go to military service straight from their turner shops, construction sites. Those on the mountains are devoted to their cause. They all die and then comes revenge and hate (Mater, p. 128).

Most of the soldiers mention that the biggest war is the war within themselves. They fight psychologically against all hard physical conditions and have to be ready to face all kind of difficult conditions. Moreover, they want to return home being minimally affected psychologically. If they would return home without either physically or psychologically injured, they would win the war of becoming a “real man”. In the following quotation, the soldier reveals that he was not expecting what he faced with in the army before going to the military. He is telling that there are various difficulties of the military service in the war zone: Nature, physical conditions, social order of the army and so on. However, the most difficult

side of this experience according to him is the attempt to handle all these difficulties without being affected psychologically:

You fight against yourself, against nature, against your superiors, as well as against your inferiors. ... Your fight against yourself is probably most difficult. You need to keep yourself together, stay strong. And on your return, you need to begin a new life. You may get into combat, shoot at others, be shot at. That's Allah's will, you cannot do anything about it. Some people fast even when they are going out on duty. I always say, "Allah is protecting the soldiers." Allah is with the soldier. ...I think I have managed to succeed in the war against myself. (Mater, p. 273)

There are many wars inside the war. You fight against yourself, against nature, against the people around you. There is the war with weapons and there is a psychological war. The most difficult one is the war with yourself. I believe that I was successful with that one. I managed to fulfill my responsibilities. You walk on a thin line; sometimes you just stare at the horizon and get lost in your thoughts (Mater, p. 280).

To sum up, the focus of this part is to understand how the soldiers define their experiences in the Southeast, either as doing their military service or as fighting in the war zone. While the official discourse does not admit it as a war and tells the soldiers accordingly, the soldiers refer to their experiences as war. This contradiction between the official discourse and the soldiers' narratives points out to an uncertainty in the minds of soldiers about what their experiences are in reality. The uncertainty shapes the way in which trauma is experienced. It leaves the soldiers in a vacuum of meaninglessness. Even when they attempt to overcome uncertainty and give a meaning to their experiences, they again face the vacuum of meaninglessness because they reach the conclusion that they fight, kill and die for nothing but economic interest of some people.

3.2.6. Commando Identity

Understanding commando identity is important for a thorough analysis of the trauma of Turkish soldiers fighting in the Southeastern Anatolia. In commando identity, we are able to see how some established discourses in the society facilitate soldiers' ending up with trauma. The discourse about masculinity in the society puts the commando identity as an peak point of masculinity. A young man comes to be considered as a "real man" only after he completes his military service. It is a cliché that fathers never "give" their daughters for marriage to those who have not completed the military service. Similarly, a soldier is considered as a "real soldier" only if he does his service as a commando. Being commando means being a full soldier, and a full man. These discourses are found in the narratives of some soldiers. First of all, the relationship between being a real man/soldier and commando identity is seen in the fact/argument that every man cannot be a commando. Commandos are chosen among physically healthy, strong, tall, young men. These qualities fit very well with the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

We were the Special Team. Fifteen of us were selected to join the Special Team from among 370 soldiers. I came first in the shooting exercises among 5700 soldiers. [...] They gathered those of us who were physically fit and good at shooting and sports into a separate team (Mater, p. 291).

Second, the soldiers chosen for commando receive a special war training that is profoundly different from the training of ordinary soldiers. Some soldiers despise the training of the ordinary soldiers. Commando is a

real man because he fulfills another condition of the hegemonic masculinity that is endurance in hard conditions.

Training gets tougher everyday. Military training is unpleasant in every aspect. If it weren't so, all would yearn to undergo military training, right? We were enrolled in the infantry but were given commando training. The officers were quite good, but they forced us so hard that in the summer heat, our uniforms were soaked in mud. We used to creep on the ground at least for 1 kilometer in 40 minutes. During the training, we ambushed each other, we kidnapped, we tied each other. I could tie a soldier's hands and one of his feet with my belt from behind. I recall having to walk barefoot having lost my boots and gun to others. [...] We were ready to go fighting (Mater, p. 123).

Finally, the commando accomplishes the top condition of the ideal masculinity much more than the ordinary soldiers because he "actively" participates in the protection and defense of the homeland, women, children, and honor. Because of all these factors, being commando is a very honorable condition among the soldiers in a given military unit. Again, honor is one of the key concepts of hegemonic masculinity. Thanks to this honorable identity, commandos enjoy a privileged position compared to the other soldiers, through which they have wider access to tangible resources such as better food. In the following quotation, an ex-commando compares being in active duty namely, going to military operations, and combating, to passive duty, which is serving tea and preparing sandwiches in a safer place. He says:

Later on we were sent to the Kamişlı station. I was serving tea, preparing sandwiches. It wasn't a demeaning duty. Such duties as serving teas, preparing sandwiches, watching after the ammunition and the artillery are also important. But those coming back from operations were given

special attention. Sheep were slaughtered as sacrifice or when everybody was eating canned vegetables, we would eat canned fish. We were highly regarded. We would tease those who didn't go into combat, "Shut up! We fight in operations while you sit here idly." We would, for instance tease our clerk, "We fight out there and here you are writing our guard duty schedule" (Mater, p. 179).

This honorable identity of commando is symbolized in his clothings such as "commando beret", "badge", and "commando knife". These symbolic clothings are taken along after completing the military service as a tool of remembering those days. Some soldiers set up a "commando corner" on the walls of their homes in order to exhibit these symbolic clothings. From the words of a soldier: "I have brought back my dagger, my commando knife, my beret, and my brevet back with me. They make me feel proud. I am thinking of making a display corner for them at home" (Mater, p. 274). In the following lines, the soldier reveals the symbolic meaning of commando beret that is attractive for everyone:

This is a photo of me with my beloved cap. We did it all for this cap, so to speak. It is gone; I don't have it anymore. But I would have loved to keep this scarf. Normally, when people finish military service they save these things for their grandchildren. But I was wounded, I could not think of my cap or anything else. I was happy I could make it to the hospital. You see this cap: I would not change it for anything else. It has its own beauty and special look. ... I wanted to go to the Southeast because of the cap, the sense of adventure, and the desire to do something good (Mater, p. 206).

The discourse about masculinity turns commando identity into a much desired dream in the road to become a real man. Therefore, the commando identity encourages some soldiers to have the traumatic

experiences they are to live during the war environment. These soldiers deliberately dive into the sea of war, which is essentially a traumatic setting not only because one's commitment to the moral codes of social order is broken but also because bearing war experiences are much beyond the psychological strength of a person, and fulfills the ideals of the discourse of masculinity. In the following lines, it is seen that one senior soldier recommends another soldier to be a commando on the basis of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity:

One of the seniors said, "If you got to another duty, you will have only one trouble: death. If you stay at the headquarters, you will be responsible for standing guard, dish washing, all kinds of battalion work. On the other hand, if you go on operations, when you are back home, you will be able to say proudly that you have done your military service as commando. You will defend your country. You may be martyred, wounded, or you may not be. Or you may finish your service without facing a combat situation, as God wills." I only listened. In other words, what he meant was, "If you stay at the headquarters, you are in a deep shit." In the companies, they were saying, "If you kill terrorists, there are rewards; you will be sent on vacation, you will be given bonus in cash and all that." The next day, I went on duty without getting any training (Mater, p. 194).

Understanding the self-representation of "commando" is also critical in pointing out the incompatibility between the ideals in their mind and the real acts committed and witnessed in the war environment. There are three characteristics of the self-representation of commandos. First, a commando never applies violence without a morally acceptable reason. In the following quotation, this soldier feels regret and does not regard "applying violence to local people" as suitable for commandos:

When our first lieutenant was transferred to the West, we had a new guy who wanted us to go on an operation every single night. One day, we were informed that there was a meeting in a nearby village. People were seen coming into the village. So we surrounded the village and asked them to surrender. When you cordon off the village, you can easily walk into village and find what you are looking for. We know which house was the meeting place. So we found all fifteen of them right there. When they found out about our operation, one of them got into bed with his friend's wife. We asked him who he was and he said "I am a guest." We captured them around 11 p.m. There was lots of space there and a flag post. We brought them close to the flag post, blindfolded them, and asked them to kneel down. The first lieutenant was sitting on a chair. "What were you doing there?" he asked. "Buying and selling oxen," was their reply. The guy who said this was kneeling on the ground. The lieutenant hit him on the head and he was knocked on the ground. "Lift him up," the lieutenant kept saying and we did. The guy's hands and feet were tied, his eyes were blindfolded. After every question, there was a kick. He wouldn't talk even if you threatened to kill him. The first lieutenant asked him to climb the flag post with his feet up and head below. He did and fell down on his head each time. Our previous lieutenant would not have done such a thing. The officers got promotions based on the number of terrorists they killed. This one was that kind of a guy. This went on till morning. *I mean, I would not have minded it if it were the gendarmerie inflicting the beating, but the commando?* The lieutenant was trying to get them to admit that they were collecting money for the terrorists. He beat those villagers for three days. No custody or anything. In the mountains, we are the judges. As for us, the soldiers, all we did was to lift the men up each time they fell. I did not even hurt an ant during military service. I have this feeling of pity in me.(Mater, p. 37).

Secondly, a commando is *halk çocuğu*⁵ who is amiable and friendly to every innocent person. In the following quotation, a soldier claims that even the Kurdish people does not hate commandos but find them trustable, one from whom one cannot expect unreasonable violence:

On one of rocks, they had written “the infantry is a babe in the woods, the commando is babe in the woods, the gendarmerie is a son of a bitch.” They fear the commandos but they also find them personable. It was the gendarmerie that had destroyed them before, so they hate the gendarmerie. All they do is kill them (Mater, p. 36).

Third, all moral virtues such as honesty and courage are attributed to the commando whereas all negative acts are imagined to be committed by other state security people like “gendarmes”, “police special teams” and “village guard”, who are constructed as the imaginary opposites of commando identity. Unlike the commando, these state security people apply violence much more frequently than commando most of which are without justifiable moral reason. In a very close connection to this feature, these state security people are different from commandos in the fact that they are all being paid. However, commandos are naïve in the sense that they fight with the enemy for the sake of protecting homeland, and without an expectation of a tangible benefit. One ex-soldier states that police special forces fight against the enemy and kill the enemy in return for earning money and he says:

The Special Team people go into heavy and difficult battles, and are paid on the basis of each terrorist they kill. When soldiers go into battle

⁵ Halk çocuğu refers to the child of ordinary people coming from lower classes

together with the Special Team, the terrorists killed by the soldiers are given to the Special Team; soldiers don't take them. (Mater, p. 211)

Another soldier who did his service as Army Special Force called C Team complains about village guards:

The village guards sometimes complain that they don't want to do this for 20-25 million TL. Why not? I come from Lüleburgaz and fight here to protect to your mother and father; you complain about the money. Why? (Mater, p. 295)

Despite all the positive features attributed to the commando identity, these soldiers act in such a way in which they break the social moral code within the violent environment of war conditions. The tension between the self-representation in their mind and the actual behavior that breaks the social moral code deepens the trauma. The negative acts can never be reconciled with the self-representation. Therefore, traumatic experiences cannot be integrated into the psychic life of soldiers. The likelihood of suffering from post traumatic symptoms after coming back from war would be high. Thus, nothing but traumatic symptoms wait for the commando after coming back from war.

The aforementioned aspects of commando identity, that is in compliance with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, are the seemingly positive sides. However, commando identity comes with the price of trauma. Understanding commando identity is necessary also because commandos have direct experience of the war conditions. Commandos either commit themselves or witness the commitment of or are exposed to the acts that are out of the moral code of the social life, such as killing or injuring someone, witnessing the death or being injured of a comrade, and

being exposed to threats of being killed or injured. Therefore, commandos are those who possibly experience the trauma in the deepest way.

Finally, understanding commando identity is necessary because the relationship of the people in society with commandos after their coming back to normal social life has impacts that deepen the trauma further. Having such a high opinion about their own identities, commandos face a social environment where there is no correspondence between people's attitudes and behaviors to commandos and the war in the Southeast. In this social environment, society is complained about for being insensitive and indifferent to the war and to the traumatic experiences of soldiers. Thus, they do not feel themselves like a "hero". Moreover, the lack of a discourse of victory about this war makes them question why they were there and for which sake they had endured all the difficulties of the war. In the following quotation, a soldier voices his feelings of disappointment and anger against the society because of not receiving the expected respect and interest towards him:

When people ask me about military service, it is mostly out of formality that they are asking. I don't get the sense that they really listen to me or that they believe what I tell them. The society in general is not really interested in this issue. It is like gangrene. When the TV reports that there are three martyrs, I don't believe that there are more than a few who say, "God be with him!" (Mater, p. 272).

Furthermore, it can be argued that the soldiers may have a sense of being betrayed. In other words, some soldiers regard themselves as if they are like sheep to be sacrificed, having witnessed the insensitive and indifferent attitude of military authorities to soldiers after the completion of

the military service. A soldier describes his anger and resentment to the state especially military, authorities in a rebellious tone and says:

During one of the combats, a bullet went in from one cheek of a friend and got out from the other. [...] He had twenty days of his service left. He stayed twenty days at GATA and was sent home, “Your military service is completed.” He wrote me a letter, telling about it at all. We collected money among ourselves and sent it to him. He was very poor. Nobody takes care of us. What are we? Guinea pigs? Sacrificial sheep? I don’t know (Mater, p. 102).

3.2.7. Becoming Disabled

One of the most traumatic experiences in the war zone is to become disabled due to combat or more specifically due to landmines. Three soldiers interviewed are disabled. These men had gone to military service for completing an important task in the route for becoming a “real man” just like any other soldier. However, they returned home without properly completing their military service, because they lost parts of their body and became “partial men”. It is a well known fact that completion of military service significantly increases men’s ability to get married and to have a better job. These disabled soldiers complain that the society did not give these rights and opportunities to them. They became “partial men”, and therefore they have “partial rights”. These men fought at the cost of becoming disabled, and after returning to home, they feel themselves generally as “second class citizens”.

A soldier who lost one of his legs in the combat says that disabled soldiers are treated not as that they have honorably fought for the sake of

nation but as if they conducted some dishonorable crime. In addition, being disabled is a threat against fulfilling one's dreams about romantic and/or sexual relations with women, which has its roots in the discourses about masculinity. In the narrative of this soldier, the disappointment and anger he feels is apparent:

Back home, they did not even allow me to marry my girlfriend. I had done nothing bad. I had not robbed the public treasury. I had not raped a woman. I had not stolen. What happened to me was not my choice. But the guy's legs are lost and his fiancée leaves him. In many places, we are treated as second-class citizens. I want to live different things. I might sound silly but I want to fool around with women. I want to live, try my chance. Yet you are injured and... I was indeed a very active person. I had a lot of girlfriends. I used to flirt with several girls at the same time. I was really curious about my future sexual life while I was staying in the hospital. This is indeed very important for a man. A woman might lose her fertility but this is not much of a problem for her. But when a man loses his fertility, this is his end. You are worth nothing. You are physically incapable plus you are impotent. There are people who have lost, pardon me, their penises. They were replaced by transplants. But you cannot give him back his self-confidence. His mind will always be stuck at that: "Will I be able to satisfy my partner?" I have had these fears as well. You feel incomplete. I had plenty of girlfriends after I came back. The bad side is that when you are physically inactive because of your condition, you have an increased sexual desire. For most men, the problem is premature ejaculation while those like me, the problem is delayed ejaculation. This can be difficult; you can tire your partner terribly (Mater, p. 129).

Another issue raised by disabled veterans is the indifference of people and the state to the soldiers. They complain about the disinterest of the state towards their needs. They expect a reward for being a war veteran.

To the contrary, they face exclusion from social life. Being married, having a job, having children (which are indeed all steps to becoming a “real man”) becomes very difficult, even if probable, for them. A soldier explains how the family of his girlfriend prevents their marriage because he is disabled:

I have had a girlfriend for eight years now. I fell in love with her when I was thirteen. Her family doesn't let her marry me. You see, this is another reward of being a veteran of war. If she would run away from home and come to me, I would marry her. She works in the textile business. After the incident I told her to break up but she didn't accept. She says that she will wait till I get well. She is twenty, or twenty-one years old now. She can't come and visit me. Sometimes we see each other in Denizli. When we are seen together, her family is informed of our meeting. They don't want me because I am crippled although my being crippled didn't affect anything. My foot involuntarily twitches or becomes upright. My younger brother can't leave me; he can't work. In other words, my salary is for five people. That's the price we pay for being a war veteran (Mater, pp. 94-95).

In conclusion, becoming a disabled leads to the collapse of existing self-representations regarding who he is. When a young man goes to the military one of the dreams in his mind is to start a new life with a good job, romantic relationships and so on. However, when they turn back home disabled, all dreams about the future vanish.

3.2.8. Returning Home

There are three different discourses about war in the narratives of the soldiers fighting in the Southeast, which give us hints about what the soldiers experience after returning home: First, “this war never ends”; second, “I do not feel as a hero”; third, “we, poor people, not rich people, protect the borders of motherland”. In the making of all these three

discourses, soldiers' feeling of disappointment is crucial in the new setting of civilian life where they realize the indifference and insensitivity of the people around them and the society at large with regard to the war in the Southeast. In this section, I will try to explore the essence of these discourses, how these discourses are constructed, and how these discourses are related to meaning making process of traumatic experiences.

3.2.8.1. "This war never ends"

There is a gradually growing consciousness about the economic aspects of the war, beginning in the military service, but reaching maturity after their return home. It is argued by some soldiers that certain people from both camps of this war are acquiring tangible benefits from the continuation of the war. These soldiers come to the conclusion that since there are people gaining from the continuation of the war, the war will not end in a foreseeable future. This conclusion brings them to question the necessity of what they experienced in the military service. One comes to think that all the negative experiences one lived during the war were not for the sake of a noble cause, but for the continuation of an economic circle. Such a thought definitely brings about a great disappointment, and resentment towards the society in general including the country, the political actors, the army and so on. The belief in the high ideals about homeland and nation is realized to be void. Hence, the traumatic experiences lived during the war now come to be considered as if they were for nothing. Furthermore, they feel cheated because they realize that there are some people who achieve tangible benefits from this war. The people who benefit

from the war are quite extensive. Soldiers meet many persons who become richer thanks to the continuation of the war. A soldier mentions that there are many people who benefit from the continuation of war in the Southeast and says:

Also, there are some citizens of the East whose interests lie in the East: tribal chiefs, gun traders, canned food producers. ...The number of cans consumed is enormous. For instance, the boots that are normally given once a year are given there every three months. Everybody involved, even suppliers of rubber, benefit. Also ranked officers have good salaries. [...] The media also benefits by the way of news. The greatest harm is shared by the local folk who trapped between the PKK and the military (Mater, p. 119).

There is also another form of the discourse that “this war never ends”. Some soldiers believe that there are people in the society who coalesce with PKK and become an obstacle for ending the war. These soldiers do not attribute a bad will to the army (the side where they belong to) unlike those mentioned in the above paragraph. To the contrary, they think that the supporters of PKK in every segment of society from the peasants to the officials in Ministry of Defense and to the National Assembly struggle against the member of the army who devote their lives to the struggle with the enemy.

There will be no end to such things as long as there are PKK members among us. And as it doesn't end, veterans like us, martyrs, mothers, children, women will suffer losses... According to Mesut Yılmaz, it is over. But it will never end as long as the PKK get help from politicians. How does so much food go there, so much gun and ammunition? (Mater, p. 95)

Both discourses point that the soldiers fighting in the Southeast do not end up with a victory. In both cases, it is not the soldiers who get tangible or intangible benefits from the war but there are some people other than the soldiers who are receiving some kind of benefits from the war. The lack of a discourse of victory causes the soldiers once again to question the reason why they experienced all the traumatic conditions of the war environment. If there is not a victory to which the soldier can attach and give meaning to what they experienced, then they are left in a vacuum where all the hard experiences are not internalized within the self.

The lack of a victory turns this war not to be the war in which the soldiers fought, but a war of someone else who gets tangible resources from the war. While soldiers expect to be considered as “heroes” by society and the state, they face the fact that most of the society is indifferent to what they lived in the Southeast. Thus, no one welcomes them as “heroes.”

3.2.8.2. Heroism

Most of the soldiers indicate that they do not feel like a “hero”. According to them, “real heroes” are some historical figures like Atatürk, Hz. Ömer, Çanakkale War martyrs or their dead friends in Southeast. It can be speculated that a “victory” at the end of war is needed in order to be “hero”. However, there is not a “concrete victory story” which these soldiers can tell. This war has been continuing since 1984. Even though thousands of people are dead, the war is still continuing, which suggests that there is not a victor of the war. In the following quotation, a soldier claims that he does not consider himself as a hero. The historical persons regarded as hero by

the soldiers point to the definition of heroism that a hero is someone who became victorious in his just cause.

I don't consider myself to be a hero. Heroism is not a simple term. If someone would consider me to be a hero, I would be happy of course. But real heroes are our martyrs. Many of them put their lives on the line knowing that there was no return. They had faith and became martyrs. It is a high honor to be placed in a coffin covered with national flag. We have survived because we feared. And there are cheap heroes. A terrorist is wounded and the cheap hero goes and shoots a bullet in his head. Not everyone can become a martyr; you need to have faith. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk [the founder of the Turkish Republic] was a hero. I have to know only one hero. General Mete Sayar, commander of the Şırnak Brigade. He was a highly qualified, excellent soldier. I was deeply impressed by him (Mater, p. 73).

Another prerequisite of being hero in the narratives of the soldiers seems to be that the hero must be fighting for a rightful cause in the sake of which one dares to die for. A soldier who does not regard himself as hero says: "For me a real hero is Hazreti Ömer; he was such an honest man. Since we have not consciously fought for a cause it would be absurd to name us "ghazi" (Mater, p. 131).

The soldiers with Kurdish origin cannot regard themselves as heroes because they do not fight a cause they regard as right. To the contrary, they fight against their own people. Therefore, the lack of a sublime cause and the lack of a belief in why one is fighting prevent the soldiers from seeing themselves as heroes. One of the Kurdish soldiers describes his opinions about heroism and going to military service with a regretful tone of voice and says:

My family, my friends, people close to me knew that I had gone there because of necessity. They were not judgmental. They knew that I was taken there because of my training in parachutes. How can I see me as a hero? I fought against my own people. It has been quite some time, almost five years, but I still experience the after-effects. I have very bad memories of military service. I often think that I am very bad person. I sort of had to do it. [...] I don't feel the need to tell people where I did my military service. I know I did not do a good thing. When they ask, I tell them I did it in Kayseri (Mater, p. 27).

The relationship of the people with soldiers also adds to the obstacles for seeing oneself a hero. Soldiers do not feel like a "hero" in their social life after returning home since people are very indifferent to the story of how these soldiers fought for their motherland. In other words, as some soldiers stress, only a small portion of people are interested in what happened to these soldiers in the war and glorify these soldiers. To the contrary, they even feel that some segments of society treat them as if they are stupid since they went to the Southeast for their compulsory military service. A sublieutenant talks about the dilemma experienced between different segments of society in terms of going to the Southeast and says:

People think that those who participated in combat are heroes but I don't see myself as hero. [...] Doing it [military service] in the East gives you some credit among certain people. Someone from the bourgeois class would say, "Look at the fool, he did his military service," and the ordinary people would say, "He deserves all the praise, he went and did his duty." This is also a contradiction (Mater, p. 161).

3.2.8.3. “We, poor people, not rich people, protect the borders of motherland”

One of the most common discourses among young soldiers after returning from war is that fighting for motherland is the duty of poor segments of society in Turkey, not the rich and famous people’s duty. It can be speculated that these soldiers feel disappointed and resentful since they were chosen by the state to fight, be killed, and/or be disabled. Their feeling of resentment reflects their disappointment about the level of social support. The soldiers make their war experience within a discourse of victimization. They think that they are deliberately chosen as victims by the state because they are already economically disadvantaged. Since lower classes have already to struggle with the main problems of Turkey, it is again them who have to bear the difficulties of the war. This feeling of being a victim is closely connected with the widespread idea about the state in Turkish society. The state has been traditionally personalized in the figure of father in Turkey. Turkish people expect the state to protect and take care of themselves. These soldiers who grew up within these discourses also expect the state, the father, to think of the well being of his sons who fought in the name of their father.

In the below quotation, one soldier states that economically disadvantaged people such as peasants bear the difficulties of the war unlike rich people who find ways to escape from going to Southeast:

Who wants to go to the Southeast? What have we got to do there? We are peasant kids. Peasant kids do not have any influential connection to use to avoid going to there. They send those who have no influence,

others are saved. It is up to the poor, the disadvantaged to protect the motherland, the rich know how to go about it. The society does not care unless it affects them directly. If I die I am a martyr, if not I am ghazi (veteran). What if I come back disabled?" (Mater, p. 47)

The feeling of helplessness often combines with the feeling of anger that is embodied in the form of a class antagonism against politicians and wealthy people. It shows that disappointment about one's destiny turns into resentment against others, so that making meaningful the traumatic experiences of war is connected with one's destiny that is imagined in relation with one's position in the social hierarchy. In this respect, the discourse that soldiers are fighting in the Southeast for defending their land turns out to be meaningless for an economically disadvantaged soldier who mentions that he has indeed no land at all to defend at home. Thus, the official discourse becomes insufficient in helping to make the traumatic experiences of war meaningful.

This homeland belongs to all of us. It cannot be defended just by me and the son of the mechanic Mehmet. I would like to see the sons of our ministers there. Go and talk to the soldiers, and you will find out that wealthiest one will own a small shop. I don't even own a piece of land as big as this ashtray. Which land am I going to defend? I want to see the sons of the Sabancı family or Tansu Çiller's sons there. These are the troubling aspects of military service" (Mater, p. 292).

With a similar emphasis, one soldier tells the story of the son of a high-rank officer who had first been sent to the Southeast but then was taken back to somewhere else that is much safer. Soldiers of lower-classes have to engage in the unsafe environment of the war, while this son of a high-rank

officer is guaranteed to serve in the secure environment of office-jobs, thanks to his father's position. Politicians are again criticized for not sending their sons to the warzone.

I love my country and my nation, but I love my own life more. Why don't you investigate if any captain or major or businessman has a son serving in the East? They had sent the son of major who worked under the Army Commander İsmail Hakkı Karadayı to our brigade by mistake. When he came, he told us that he would probably be taken out of there in two days. Indeed, two days later a Sikorsky transported him to Diyarbakır. Gods knows where he went after Diyarbakır. So, these things happen in the military. What has the poet said? 'What makes a flag a flag is the blood on it/ What makes a country a country are those willing to die for it' So, where are the sons of politicians like Tansu Çiller or Mesut Yılmaz? Why are they not serving in the Emergency Rule Zone? They are the ones who decide on the war. They should at least put a spoon in the soup" (Mater, p.258).

4. Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to understand the meaning making process of the traumatic experiences of war. The study also aims to address how ex-soldiers construct different subjectivities in their war trauma memories. For this purpose, the oral testimonies of 42 ex-soldiers who did their compulsory military service in the Southeast between the years of 1984 to 1998 are elaborated. The oral testimonies of soldiers are analyzed by using the methods of content analysis and discourse analysis.

The findings of content analysis demonstrated that the most commonly observed PTSD symptom category among the ex-soldiers is the “increased arousal” category. Moreover, 26,8 % of the ex-soldiers indicate that they have experienced sleep disturbances especially difficulty in falling sleep. Reexperiencing of trauma in the form of recurrent dreams of traumatic events is another most common PTSD symptom among soldiers. Additionally, the symptom of avoidance about the traumatic events is frequently observed in the narratives of ex-soldiers. 17,1 % of the soldiers reported that they avoid talking about their military service with other friends. Beside PTSD symptoms, ex-soldiers reported other kinds of symptoms. The most frequently reported symptom is increased tendency to behave aggressively. 36,6 % of ex-soldiers stated that they became more aggressive after returning from military service. In some cases, other symptoms are accompanied by somatic complaints. 9,8 % of the interviewees stated that they suffer from bodily symptoms such as headache and stomachache.

The findings of discourse analysis indicate that soldiers use common discourses available in the society in their attempt to make their experiences meaningful and construct their subjectivities in the face of trauma. Additionally, the findings reveal important common points as well as differences among the soldiers' narratives. Consequently, I will summarize the findings in a coherent narrative form that includes both these common and different discourses on war trauma experiences. Moreover, I will illustrate the contributions of this study to the existing literature of war trauma.

The official state discourse defines the conflict in the Southeastern Anatolia not as war but as "the state's struggle with the terrorist organization against the state" and/or "low intensity conflict". Accordingly, as it is discussed in the book, *Mehmedin Kitabı*, the writer of this book, *Nadire Mater*, aims to use a relatively neutral word in order to describe "what has been happening in the Southeast" and uses the word "*situation*". Interestingly, it is observed in the narratives that all the interviewees have used the term of "*war*" in order to name "what has been happening in the Southeast" and "what they have experienced there". The analyses of the narratives reveal that soldiers, especially Kurdish and/or leftist ones, continuously question why they are there. The soldiers use several discourses in order to describe the meaning of the war. Some soldiers view and describe the war from the perspective of economics. For them, the war is wasting money for nothing. Furthermore, the most common description of

the war is fighting psychologically with all the hard conditions of the war and returning home both psychologically and physically injured.

The narratives of soldiers are composed of three main parts: Pre-military period, military service period, and post-military period. All “healthy” male Turkish citizens are required to do their military service when they come to their early twenties unless they are employed abroad or are university students. The overwhelming majority of 42 ex-soldiers who voiced their experiences in the Southeast and East parts of Turkey did their military services between the ages of 19 to 23 years. To put it another way, they are exposed to the hard conditions of the military service in a period between late adolescence and early adulthood. This is an early life stage in which their identities and worldviews are in a formative process. Moreover, the soldiers are coming from different parts of Turkey and different ethnic and religious backgrounds including Turks, Kurds, Alevites, Christians, Yoruk, Romany, and Pomak.

They go to military service having grown up in an environment where there is a strong relationship between the military and masculinity. In other words, completing military service successfully is a precondition of the passage from childhood to manhood (Sancar, 2009; Selek, 2008; Sinclair-Webb, 2000). The analysis of the soldiers’ narratives reveals that soldiers use similar discourses about masculinity and military service in order to talk about how they go to the army. Importantly, these soldiers’ military service period is surely very different from others in the sense they are exposed to hard and dangerous conditions of a “war”. They are exposed

to combating, witness loss of their friends, threats to being killed or injured, and various malevolent environmental conditions. Different from the soldiers who make their military service in other parts of the country; soldiers who are exposed to war conditions make more use of the discourses about nationalism and patriotism in their process of making military-service experience meaningful. The impact of the discourses about nationalism and patriotism is two-layered: At the first level, themes of love for the country and the need to protect the citizens frequently appear directly in their testimonies. At the second level, ideas about patriotism reshape their masculine subjectivities. Different from a standard “man” who passed from childhood to manhood, these soldiers also become a “warrior” who are selected to actively protect the borders of motherland and honors of their family and Turkish people. Moreover, they own very honorable memories about military service which their families can be proud of and can be inherited to their sons.

When these soldiers enter the barrack, they encounter an undoubtedly different reality of the army. The first days in the army are very difficult and disappointing for the soldiers. As the narratives of soldiers reveal, the “individuality of soldiers” gradually disappears; instead, “will of the military authorities” begins to rule. They come face to face rigid and controlling rules of army.

Like all armies, Turkish army is a social institution with a social order. The narratives illustrate that ethnic and religious identity of the soldiers, “inferior-superior relation scheme” and cohortism (*devrecilik*)

characterize the social order of the army. In the “inferior-superior relation scheme” of army, there is a strict hierarchy based on power among men. That is, less powerful men have to obey all rules applied by men who are more powerful. “Inferior-superior relation scheme” is found among not only between soldiers and officers, but also among soldiers themselves.

Another social relationship scheme based on power struggle among men in the social order of army is “cohortism” which can be regarded as both a social support system and a social oppression system. The narratives of soldiers call attention to the domination of inexperienced soldiers by senior soldiers in terms of privileges in every aspect of military life such as having a bath, having the good part of the meal and so on. Moreover, the inexperienced soldiers have to deal with violence applied by senior soldiers. Cohortism is also the most important social support system for soldiers in order to adapt the hard and challenging conditions of military service.

The analysis of narratives further reveals that being a member of an ethnic group or religious group or regional group (*hemşehricilik*) is another important social support system. Like cohortism, these groups provide a supportive environment for soldiers to deal with difficult conditions of the army.

The unique social order of the military contributes to shaping the moral order of army and meaning-making process of soldiers in the face of traumatic experiences of war.

When the soldiers start their military service, they find themselves in a very different moral world. The narratives indicate that the moral order of

the army has a powerful effect on how these soldiers become ready for fighting against the enemy. This statement is also echoed in a recent study conducted by Litz and his colleagues (2009) about moral and ethical challenges that American soldiers encounter during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that the military culture promotes an intensely moral and ethical code of conduct, that is, in the war zone, being violent and killing is normal. Moreover, witnessing violence and killing is, to a degree, prepared for (Litz et al., 2009). The analysis indicates that the soldiers experience a moral conflict between the voice of military authority and the voice of their conscience. In the moral order of military, injuring and/ or killing the *enemy* are permitted and even encouraged in the name of honor of the country. Therefore, it may be argued that the moral discourses of army provide a “meaning system” that enables soldiers to deal with the issue of experiencing moral conflicts during their military service. This finding is parallel with Litz et al.’ study (2009). In other words, Litz et al. (2009) argue that most army members are able to assimilate most of what they do and see in war due to training and preparation, the warrior culture, their role, and the messages and the behaviors of peers and leaders. However, when army members are separated from military culture and context, some army members experience difficulty making sense of their experiences (Litz et al., 2009) This situation is also evident in the narratives of the soldiers whose testimonies are investigated in this study.

As it is discussed, the moral world of the army allows the soldiers to act violently and kill or injure the enemy. This situation leads to an

important question: how does the army legitimize the act of killing. The response given to this question concerns how the enemy is portrayed. The narratives of the soldiers demonstrate that the enemy is continuously dishonored in a variety of ways, for instance, by denying the Kurdish identity of the enemy and equalizing the enemy with Armenians, one of the greatest enemies in the official discourse of Turkey, and portraying the enemy as violent and atrocious creatures which act inhumanly against the dead bodies of soldiers.

During the pre-military training period, before going to the Southeast, the soldiers are taught who their enemy is. In the pre-military training, they are instructed that Kurdishness is something artificial. On the other hand, they are also trained to discriminate who is friend and who is foe among the local people of Southeast Anatolia: Speaking Kurdish is the primary sign to differentiate sources of potential threat among the locals. Therefore, the enemy is not only the PKK militants they are fighting against, but also the local inhabitants of the region become potential enemies against whom they have to be vigilant and careful. Additionally, the discourse about being careful in distinguishing the friend and foe expands to fellow soldiers with Kurdish origin. In other words, Kurdish soldiers also turn into potential sources of threat. Some soldiers do not trust but are on the alert against the Kurdish soldiers, especially at the times when they are speaking Kurdish among themselves.

The soldiers are surrounded by various and widespread sources of enemy. In line with, another type of enemy that is described to be

unpredictable, uncontrollable, and unseen is the mines. This invisible enemy increases the feelings of insecurity and helplessness since the soldiers cannot control whether or not they would step on mines.

Hence, the soldiers have to fight not only with real enemies but also with socially constructed ones like local people and Kurdish origin soldiers during their military service. Further, there is also uncontrollable and unseen enemy, mine, that contributes to the insecure and dangerous environment of soldiers.

Another important aspect of the moral world of the army is the “normalization” of killing and injuring the other. Parallel to what is discussed by Shay (2003), the analysis of the narratives reveals that dishonoring the enemy, which is based on claiming that the enemy does not resemble the soldiers in any sense, is an important mechanism to normalize the act of killing. Using special derogatory words like “*body*”, “*carcass*”, and “*head*” indicates the dehumanizing attitude of the soldiers against the enemy. As it is discussed by Shay (2003), in the war zone, dehumanization of the enemy was commonly observed among the American soldiers who were fighting against the Vietnamese. Moreover, killing the enemy in order to take revenge of the death of beloved comrades is another important discourse used in the normalization of the act of killing.

During war conditions, another important situation in which the moral code of conduct is violated is witnessing or committing atrocities, that is mistreatment of the body of the dead enemy or witnessing the abuse of the dead body. The narratives demonstrate that the abuse of the body of

dead enemy is encouraged by military authorities in the war zone. It can be argued that encouragement of the mistreatment of dead bodies increases the feeling of rage against the enemy and motivation for fighting.

To summarize, the soldiers are exposed to various morally questionable situations during their military service. Litz and his colleagues conceptualize the situation in which the soldiers commit, or witness, or fail to prevent acts that transgress deeply the existing moral beliefs as *moral injury*. According to Litz and his colleagues (2009), soldiers not only become physically or psychologically injured but also they may experience moral injuries. Moreover, experiencing moral injury during military service may have long-lasting psychological, behavioral, and social impacts on soldiers. Although the narratives of soldiers in the book of *Mehmedin Kitab* are not clinical interviews, it can be observed that some soldiers who are “*morally injured*” experience psychological difficulties. Particularly, the soldiers who report that they killed the enemy question the act of killing when they leave the moral world of army. The existing research on military atrocities and killing provide supporting evidence. For instance, Beckham and his colleagues’ study (1998) indicates that the self-reports of committing atrocities are significantly related to chronic PTSD in Vietnam veterans. Furthermore, Fontana and Rosenheck’s study (1999) points out that killing and injuring others are associated with PTSD. They indicate that killing is a better predictor of chronic PTSD than combating, and witnessing atrocities (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1999).

Litz et al. (2009) importantly underscore that the subjective responses given to those morally challenging acts are to be more critical in the shaping of long term psychological consequences of these acts. They found that the inability to make sense of morally challenging acts like committing atrocities or killing or injuring someone is likely to result in long lasting psychological impacts like chronic PTSD symptoms. Supporting this contention, King et al. (1995) stress the importance of elaborating subjective responses to combat and other traumatic experiences in the war zone. Coming together, as it is also echoed in this study, how the traumatic experiences in the war zone are made meaningful by the soldiers in terms of their own subjectivities and social discourses is critical in understanding long terms outcomes.

Within the unique social and moral world of army, the soldiers are exposed to various war zone stressors. The analysis of the narratives reveals that the death of a friend in the war is experienced as a very deep lost. The emotional pain evokes the feeling of revenge towards the enemy that further motivates the soldiers fight and kill the enemy. In line with this contention, Shay (2003) described a “berserk” state that is aroused by the various stressors of war. In the “berserk” state, a soldier is overwhelmed with grief and anger at the death of his comrades and seeks taking the revenge of his comrades. In the “berserk” state, life, morality and other people do not mean anything for the soldier (Shay, 2003).

Importantly, the narratives underscore that the moral order of the army encourages transformation of grief into rage. Killing which is one of

the strongest prohibitions of civilized society is normalized in the discourse of “*kanı yerde kalmadı*”.

After completing the military service, majority of the soldiers report that they find themselves in a new setting of civilian life where they realize the indifference and insensitivity of the people towards the war in the Southeast. Shay (2003) describes a similar situation towards the American soldiers returned from Vietnam. The American soldiers were not welcomed as heroes; even they were accused of fighting in Vietnam due to the political context in the US. It can be argued that this situation contributes negatively to meaning making process of the soldiers.

Moreover, the soldiers become aware of the fact that various kinds of people who gain economical benefits want the continuation of this war. At the end, these soldiers have fought in a war in which victory seems to them unreachable. Further, some soldiers may feel resentment and even betrayed since all the negative experiences one lived during the war were not for the sake of a noble cause, but for the continuation of an economic circle.

Further analysis of the narratives demonstrates that majority of the soldiers do not feel themselves as heroes not only because of the lack of a concrete victory in the face of fighting a rightful cause, but also of the indifferent and insensitive attitude of the society towards the soldiers. Additionally, most of the soldiers feel very disappointed and angry since they notice that they are chosen by the state as victims to fight, be killed, to

kill, and/or to be disabled, since they come from economically lower sections of society.

The narratives reveal that the major part of the subjectivities of the soldiers is constructed around the commando identity. The hegemonic identity is embodied in the commando identity. In line with the discourses of hegemonic masculinity, commandos are physically healthy, strong, tall, and they show endurance in hard conditions. Moreover, they actively fight to protect the honor of his motherland. The discourses on manhood are reproduced in the creation of the commando identity.

4.1. Limitations and Future Directions

The limitations of this study should be noted. There are some methodological shortcomings of this study. The oral testimonies used in this study are obtained by a journalist who does not aim to make a clinical interview. Because interviews are not conducted for clinical purposes, trauma and its psychological outcomes are not the primary focus of the interviews. Therefore, psychological outcomes of traumatic experiences are investigated in the current study in an indirect way. The second shortcoming of the present study, which is also related with the first one, is that the oral testimonies used in this study are already edited by the writer of the book. In other words, the testimonies are not full records of the interviews. Some words that may be important in the investigation of trauma may be excluded in the book by the writer who did not aim to conduct a clinical study.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the degree of the representational nature of the study sample. This limitation is a very

common one in all in-depth qualitative studies, especially the ones on difficult and sensitive topics that would make participant recruitment an extremely difficult job. Thus, while we cannot claim that the sample in this study represents *all* soldiers fought in the Southeast, the study can still provide valuable insights and contribute to designing further studies.

The analysis of the oral testimonies in this study suggests interesting questions in terms of the relationship between trauma and masculinity. As it was discussed previously, discourses about manhood are primarily used by the soldiers in the process of meaning making of traumatic experiences. The “commando identity” observed in the oral testimonies is an important representation of the discourses on manhood and militarism and war. Hence, a research study on commando identity and meaning making of the traumatic experiences might be fruitful for the literature on manhood and war.

Furthermore, the oral testimonies of the soldiers reveal interesting findings about the discourses on morality in war and trauma. It is observed in the narratives of the soldiers that the moral order of the army plays a crucial role in the meaning making process of war trauma. It is discussed that the soldiers experience many morally challenging experiences in the war zone such as killing or injuring someone, witnessing atrocities and so on. How these morally challenging experiences are made meaning of is critical in understanding the psychological outcomes of war trauma. Therefore, a research study about the relationship between morality and

meaning making of the traumatic experiences might be fruitful for the literature on war trauma.

Finally, there seems to be a need to systematically explore the relationships between various meaning making mechanisms around traumatic experiences and psychological well-being and post-traumatic symptomatology.

The current study also adds to the existing psychotraumatology literature that traumatic experiences such as war create significant psycho-social suffering not only for civilians but also for fighting soldiers. In Turkey, there are tens of thousands of ex-soldiers who fought in the Southeast. It is clear that a significant portion of them have suffered and still suffer from various psycho-social difficulties which are generally overshadowed by an intense nationalistic, militaristic, and patriarchal political culture.

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