ABSTRACT

One of the most challenging experiences in life is the exile of a person from the land where she/he was born and lived for political or punitive reasons and the prohibition of her/his return back to the homeland. Beyond the heavy burden of all vital difficulties and limitations caused by the exile event, the constant feeling of homelessness, inaccessibility of the motherland, and the vitality of memories, the losses during exile have a shocking effect on the individuals. The therapeutic effect of time cannot explain the recovery from the psychological effects of losing the closest relative (mother, father, brother, grandfather, grandmother, etc.) in a locked and wrecked wagon. A total of 59 Ahiska Turks, who had lost their relatives and witnessed these losses, were interviewed. The age of the participants ranged from 75-94. The feelings and thoughts of the participants about the pre-exile life, exile life, after exile life, today's life and future life were recorded by a video. The face-to-face interviews took an average of one to two hours. Qualitative analysis of video recordings was performed with MAXQDA 12, and a total of 182 memo records were recorded. It was observed that there were losses in the four groups: Relatives who died in the war while in exile, relatives who died in wagons on the journey of exile, relatives who did not return from the military and lost and relatives who died immediately after the exile. It has been observed that the memories and negative psychological effects related to these losses have been reflected in the discourses despite long years.

Keywords: Psychology of exile, Ahiska Turks, loss of loved one, long-term effects of trauma, older adults
INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging experiences in life is the exile of a person from the land where she/he was born and lived for political or punitive reasons. Since the exile is an involuntary movement to another land and includes the prohibition of her/his return back to the homeland, there are several emotional burdens. There is a growing population of immigrants around the world over the last twenty years (Miller et al., 2002a; Miller et al., 2002b; Perez, 2016; Sachs et al., 2008; von Werthern et al., 2018). Researchers have been investigating the psycho-social consequences of exile experiences. Trauma (Sachs et al., 2008), psychological distress (Lacroix & Sabbah, 2011; Miller et al., 2002a), stress (Miller et al., 2002b), adjustment problems (Hosin, Moore, & Gaitanou, 2006), psychological symptomatology (Roizblatt, & Pilowsky, 1996; Stell et al., 2011) and psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (von Werthern et al., 2018) have been examined in the literature.

Exile can be defined as a harmful process. It is defined as a bereavement for the loss of land (Muronz, 1980, p.227) and mourning to loss of a land (Espin, 1987, p.489). Perez (2016) identified the exile as a “lifelong ambiguous loss” since the event happens suddenly and the reason “why” questions are asked frequently (p.324). Similarly, it is mentioned that exile includes lots of changes that appear before and after the event (von Werthern et al., 2018). For instance, individuals are more likely to compare old cultures with the new one, which results in an increment of familial conflicts (Roizblatt, & Pilowsky, 1996). Considering those studies, researchers have not examined previous life and the event itself although it is mentioned that sufferers of exile have frequently shared bitter memories about their past in the clinical practice (Akhtar, 1999). They have been mentioned difficulties exist in post-migration life, such as living and resettlement problems (Laban et al., 2005; Lacroix & Sabbah, 2011), cultural problems (Hosin et al., 2006), familial conflicts (Roizblatt & Pilowsky, 1996), economic problems (Perez, 2016), work problems, and education problems (Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker 2011).

Psycho-social aspects of exile have been investigated with different samples. For instance, Chilean’s exile experience in Great Britain was examined in bereavement context (Munoz, 1980). Tibetan’s exile to India was investigated about mental health and coping (Sachs et al., 2008). Bosnian’s exile was examined with stress sources (Miller et al., 2002b). Studies conducted with those communities have explored one exile experience. Ahiska Turks who have two exile experience within 40 years have not been investigated extensively.

As mentioned above, losses are extremely important for exiled individuals and researchers emphasis on loss of land (Espin, 1987; Muronz, 1980; Perez, 2016). However, whether exile includes loss of loved one have not been examined. Aim of the present study is to investigate the exile of the event and losses among Ahiska Turkish older adults who experienced two times of deportation within 40 years. In this context, the main purpose of this research is to determine the nature of losses among individuals experienced by a shaky traumatic event many years ago.

Method

Participants
The people living in the Ahiska region (Ahiska, Adigün, Aspindza, Ahilkelek and Bogdanovka districts), which are now within the borders of Georgia and located in the former Soviet geography, were known as Ahiska Turks (Agara, 2004) and were exiled to Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) in 1944. More than 40,000 men between the ages of 15 and 50 were taken to the military service in 1944 (Seferov & Akis, 2008) which is exactly a part of exile (Aydıngün et al., 2006). Before the exile took place on November 14, 1944, the death and disappearance letters of thousands of Ahiska soldiers (Seferov & Akis, 2008) (the so-called "black letter" by Ahiska Turks interviewee in the present study) had reached their families in the Ahiska region.
Ahiska Turks were living in Turkey borders of the Soviet Union during the war. The Soviet Union blamed Ahiska Turks as assumed to cooperate with Turkey. To keep the Soviet Union-Turkey border, it was decided to exile Ahiska Turks to Central Asian countries. Cattle wagons were used in exile. There were also newborn babies, older people, and sick people in the exile wagons. Thousands of people lost their lives on the roads because the human needs of the wagons were not provided (nutrition, cleaning, toilet, etc.). People could not even meet their toilet needs in the wooden wagons used to transport animals with no heating system, no ventilation system, and with holes. For this reason, hundreds of women who could not meet their needs died and thousands of patients and children died due to cold and airlessness. In the wagons, which were the residence of one month of exile, 80 thousand people were deported and more than ten thousand people died (Osmanov, 2001). The dead people were randomly thrown off the wagons without religious ceremonies.

After being exiled to Central Asia, Ahiska Turks were subjected to “martial law” in the countries they exiled to. From 1944 to 1956, for twelve years, the transition from one village to another village was only partially possible with strict administrative permission or they could not visit their relatives because of this permission (Buntürk, 2005). The Ahiska Turks who were left to die in the deserts of Central Asia after being removed from the abundant fertile lands of the Ahiska region, were condemned to mass death because they could not support both hunger and harsh winter cold. In addition, patients, children and elderly people died within the first six months of exile.

The present study was carried out with 59 Ahiska Turkish older adults, who were forcibly removed from their homes one night and forced to a one-month journey in locked and debris wagons and sent to Central Asian countries indiscriminately in November 1944. They experienced the second exile in 1989 from Georgia to different countries around the World. The majority of the participants were male older adults; 28.8 % women (n = 17), 71.2 % men (n = 42). When the data is collected, the participant age ranged between 75 and 94 (M = 81.63, SD = 4.79). At the moment of the experience of deportation, the participant age ranged between 2 and 22 (M = 9.63, SD = 4.79). Of the participants, 50.8% (n = 30) reported that they lost at least one person who was a relative during deportation. The period in which the participants live in Turkey varies between one year and twenty-two years (M = 10.12, SD = 6.58).

Procedure
After the approval of Bolu Abant Izzet Baysal University Human Research Ethics Committee, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Participants were reached through the address bank of the World Union of Ahiska Turks (DATUB), which contains information on the residence of Ahiska Turks. The participants were informed about the purpose and content of the study, the privacy policy was guaranteed, and their consent was obtained for voluntary participation. The data used in this research is a part of our project. The feelings and thoughts of the participants about the pre-exile life, exile life, after exile life, today's life and future life were recorded by a video. If traumatic reactions were observed, the second visit was conducted to older adults, and psychological help was recommended to them. The face-to-face interviews took an average of one to two hours. Qualitative analysis of video recordings was performed with MAXQDA 12.

Results
Qualitative analysis of video recordings was performed with MAXQDA 12, and a total of 182 memo records were recorded from 59 participants. Most of the participants were reported loss (N=50). It was observed that there were losses in the four groups: Relatives who died in the war while in exile, relatives who died in wagons on the journey of exile, relatives who did not return from the military and lost and relatives who died immediately after the exile (Table-1). Fifty (84.75) out of 59 respondents stated that they experienced at least one of these four types of loss. The average number of memo associated with these losses was 3.64.
Considering relatives who died in the war while in exile, thirty-two (54.24%) interviewee reported their father (N=14), brother (N=8) or relatives (N=14) died in the war before 14 November 1944. Considering relatives who died in wagons on the journey of exile, twenty-two (37.29%) interviewee stated loss of mother or father (N=14), sister or brother (N=14) and relatives (N=16). Considering relatives who did not return from the military, twelve (20.34%) interviewee reported that their family members or relatives did not come back from the military. Lastly, considering relatives who died immediately after the exile, twenty-seven interviewees reported loss of family members (N=16) or relatives or neighbors (N=18).

During interviews, their expressions were highly traumatic. One of them is “They put us in cars, when we were leaving the village, pipes were passing over the road, and my grandmother's head touched that pipe. My grandmother fell from the car, we all shouted and stopped the car. They didn't leave our grandchildren with my grandmother. The elders went and looked, and the woman died while she was there. When my mother said, ‘We're not going anywhere without burying my grandmother,’ the soldiers grabbed their arms and dragged them into the car. My grandma stayed on the side of the road. We haven't heard from her yet. In the 1970s, my wife and I came to Ahiska, when we went to the village, the Georgians said, ‘We have no information about the dead from you. You only have old cemeteries, look there.’ We couldn't find his grave there. Too bad a dead man doesn't even have a grave. At least if he had a grave, we'd pray with him.” Other example was “After the kids arrived at the station, they were playing in the circle of soldiers. My little brother was showing the wagons and telling his other friends: How would he know that the road would never bring him back and he would die of illness ...” Another one was “I don't know where, but the train stopped in a mountainous area. When they opened the doors for ventilation, an older adult aunt lowered her grandson under the wagon to satisfy his need for a toilet. Whatever happened, the train suddenly moved. I saw with my own eyes how the old aunt and her grandson mow the wheels of the wagons.”

**Discussion**

The study is aimed to explore losses during and after the exile among Ahiska Turkish older adults having experience of deportation twice within 40 years. Using open coding process, loses were grouped into four; relatives who died in the war while in exile, relatives who died in wagons on the journey of exile, relatives who did not return from the military and lost and relatives who died immediately after the exile.

**Table-1. Type of losses**

| ANY of the FOUR TYPES of LOSS | Interviewee with Lost Experience | Ratio of the Interviewees Exposed to the Loss | Total Number of Memos Related to Loss | Average Memo |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| In the WAR BEFORE the EXILE | 32                              | 54.24%                                      | 62                                   | 1.94         |
| Number of Lost              | Father                         | 14                                          | 18                                   | 1.29         |
|                             | Brother                        | 8                                           | 14                                   | 1.75         |
|                             | Relatives                      | 14                                          | 30                                   | 2.14         |
Results reveal that exile is not only about bereavement for the loss of land (Muronz, 1980, p.227) and mourning to loss of land (Espin, 1987, p.489). Individuals have experienced multiple losses during the journey and after settled to another country. Those loss experiences might increase the ambiguity of the event, as Perez (2016) argued that exile is a “lifelong ambiguous loss” (p.324). Therefore, individuals are needed to receive psycho-social help while dealing with several losses. During the interview, they shared memories emotionally with the one who had died. It is considered that in addition to challenging aspects of accommodating to a new country, they are dealing with their past. This study adds exile is not only “a bereavement for the loss of a land” (Muronz, 1980, p.227) and mourning to loss of land (Espin, 1987, p.489) but also mourning to loss of a loved one. Our results were consistent with relevant literature. The population of the Ahıska Turks, which exceeded 120 thousand in total before the exile, decreased by more than half and decreased to fifty thousand people in the first six months after the exile (Veyseloglu, 1999). Therefore, the carrying out of psycho-social intervention programs are essential among emigrant population, which is rising around the world (von Werthernet al., 2018).

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