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From Past to Present: The Role of Communication and Historical Narrative in Transgenerational Transmission of Historical Trauma in Kurdish Alevi Diaspora in Germany

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Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

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For all those who planted the seed from whose blossom we now see and reap.

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Resumo

Se a possibilidade de uma cura psicológica adequada para traumas históricos não for dada, os indivíduos afetados podem transmitir seus efeitos de uma geração para outra, resultando em trauma transgeracional. Enquanto inúmeros estudos se concentram no trauma transgeracional em sobreviventes do Holocausto e indígenas, poucos exploraram os sobreviventes do Massacre de Dersim em 1938. Este estudo baseia-se em pesquisas preliminares para entender melhor os processos de trauma transgeracional, visando prevenir a transmissão de traumas para futuras gerações. Isso será investigado focando em duas questões de pesquisa, primeiramente como e o que foi comunicado sobre os eventos do massacre de Dersim entre 1937-38 e seu papel no bem-estar da segunda e terceira geração da Diáspora de Dersim e, em segundo lugar, qual papel os lembretes contemporâneos desempenham na perpetuação do conflito e trauma presentes na segunda e terceira gerações. Para isso, entrevistas individuais foram realizadas com (netos) filhos de indivíduos que viveram durante o massacre, residindo na Alemanha. As entrevistas foram transcritas e analisadas por meio de análise temática, usando MAXQDA. Os resultados enfatizam a complexa interação dos canais de comunicação em sustentar a narrativa do trauma, a contínua exploração do contexto histórico e o papel sociopsicológico do conflito contínuo. Esta pesquisa contribui para a teoria, integrando traumas históricos e teorias de conflitos sociopsicológicos e para os poucos estudos que lidam com as consequências de assassinatos em massa, perseguição étnica e conflitos duradouros, especificamente relacionados à comunidade curda.

Palavras-chave: trauma transgeracional, análise temática, Dersim Alevi, comunicação, bem-estar, trauma histórico, conflito, identidade coletiva

Abstract

If the possibility of adequate psychological healing of historical traumas is not given, individuals affected can pass down its effects from one generation to another resulting in transgenerational trauma. While numerous studies focus on transgenerational trauma in Holocaust and indigenous survivors, few have explored the survivors of the 1938 Dersim Massacre. This study builds on preliminary research to better understand transgenerational trauma processes, aiming to prevent trauma transmission to future generations. This will be investigated by focusing on two research questions, once how and what was communicated about the events of the Dersim massacre between 1937-38 and its role in well-being of second and third generation Dersim Diaspora and, secondly, what role do contemporary reminders play in perpetuating the conflict and trauma present in the second and third generations. For this, individual interviews were conducted with (grand)children of individuals that have lived through of the massacre, living in Germany. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis, using MAXQDA. The findings emphasise the complex interplay of communication channels in sustaining the trauma narrative, the ongoing exploration of historical context and the socio-psychological role of ongoing conflict. This research contributes to theory by integrating historical trauma and sociopsychological conflict theories and to the few studies that deal with the consequences of mass killings, ethnic persecution, and long-lasting conflict, specifically related to the Kurdish community.

Keywords: transgenerational trauma, thematic analysis, Dersim Alevi, communication, well-being, historical trauma, conflict, collective identity

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Introduction

Amidst the aftermath of war, genocide and unspeakable turmoil, survivors carry the burden of trauma that spans generations. Left untreated, these profound scars have the power to shape the lives of coming generations, perpetuating a cycle of psychological suffering. As the weight of this legacy weighs on the collective conscience, understanding and addressing the impact of transgenerational trauma is critical to finding a path to healing and resilience. Besides the tremendous history of a number of indigenous peoples, a variety of ethnic minorities in non-western countries share similar experiences not only that of a noxious event on their community, but also the consequences of years of conflict, oppression, and persecution (Dalgaard et al., 2019; Karenian et al., 2010; Melander et al., 2016; Somasundaram, 2007). This has also been the case in the Kurdish Alevi community, which is a religious-ethnic minority in eastern Turkey.

The Kurdish Alevi community in Dersim, an eastern region of Turkey, has a history marked by persecution and discrimination. This predominantly Kurdish community, belonging to the Alevi faith, has endured significant trauma and historical injustices, including the notorious Dersim massacre of 1937-1938. Carried out by the Turkish government, this massacre aimed to suppress a rebellion by the Alevi Kurdish people, resulting in the death of thousands of villagers and the forced relocation of many others (BBC, 2011; McDowall, 2004). The Dersim massacre is a crucial component of the broader historical context in which the Kurdish Alevi community has faced marginalization and oppression. These traumatic events have had enduring consequences for individuals and subsequent generations (Kizilhan et al., 2021; Celik, 2015; Dangeleit, 2015). This paper explores the psychological repercussions and transgenerational implications of the Dersim massacre on the affected community. Although previous research has extensively examined transgenerational trauma in contexts such as Holocaust survivors and indigenous populations, limited attention has been given specifically to the survivors of the Dersim massacre. Furthermore, this paper builds upon the lack of integration of contemporary strains that may perpetuate trauma over generations. Accordingly, a socio-psychological element ought to be included, for instance when dealing with groups that have not only experienced drastic collective trauma, but are also affected by intractable conflict, which may affect fundamental aspects of a person, such as identity, belonging, cultural expression, and others.

In such cases of historical trauma, the impact goes beyond the individual level to the collective one. This is characterized by either a series of traumatic events or one major prolonged event that led to an interference of the social functioning which eventually might

shape an entire culture (Celik, 2015). The idea behind such a phenomenon is when a society is confronted with an event that threatens its security or its resources, certain mechanisms play out first at the individual-level by causing psychological reactions, then at the family-level by disrupting family dynamics, and finally at the societal-level by shaping collective memory and values (Celik, 2015). For instance, if a community feels jeopardised because of its culture, religion, or ethnic origin, it may have to adapt the associated rituals, practices or even its identity to the circumstances, hence, interfering on the development of its culture.

Consequently, the implications of such a development also affect the well-being of members of such cultural groups. In line with this, Mohatt et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual framework that emphasizes the transgenerational impact of trauma and the significance of historical context in comprehending and addressing traumatic experiences. The framework, known as the historical trauma narrative model (HTNM), identifies four key components: the historical context of trauma, collective memory of trauma, effects of trauma on individuals and communities, and the potential for healing and resilience (see Appendix A, Figure 2). Unlike previous models, HTNM underscores the role of social and cultural factors in shaping the experiences of trauma and its transmission across generations. The model highlights the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that address historical injustices and transgenerational trauma, recognizing that public narratives play a crucial role in either promoting healing or perpetuating the cycle of trauma.

That is, as suggested by Mohatt et al. (2014), persisting oppressive structures could lead to an existing negative narrative among affected groups of people that perpetuates the trauma of the past. Relatedly, Bar-Tal (2007) has attempted to outline the social-psychological mechanisms that come about when one has to exist in an environment of prolonged and complex conflict. Bar-Tal developed a conceptual framework called the socio-psychological infrastructure of intractable conflict highlighting how such conflicts shape individual but also group attitudes, beliefs, and emotions (see Appendix A, Figure 3). The framework emphasized the emergence of a shared socio-psychological repertoire among individuals involved in the conflict, influenced by their collective experiences and challenges. Collective memory and group dynamics, a component of social identity, plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviours within the conflict context. This aligns with Mohatt et al.'s (2014) Historical Trauma Narrative, which emphasizes the role of historical narratives in shaping collective memory and identity, impacting the well-being of traumatized groups. However, it should be noted that Bar-Tal's model lacks consideration of power dynamics, which is addressed by the HTNM. Power dynamics can influence the transmission and

perpetuation of historical traumas, with dominant groups controlling narratives and potentially suppressing the experiences of subordinate groups (Garagozov, 2012; Funk & Said, 2004). On the other hand, a narrative can strengthen the collective sense of belonging and promote well-being, particularly for marginalized groups (Brave Heart, 1998). Social identity theory supports the idea that individuals derive their identity and belonging from the groups they belong to, influenced by shared histories and experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Cultural continuity, the transmission of cultural practices across generations, contributes to mental health and well-being, providing connection and purpose for marginalized communities (Berry, 2006).

Beyond the collective consciousness and impact of historical trauma, the literature in the field of trauma studies has so far pointed to some possible explanations for the transmission of past trauma. The transgenerational transmission of trauma is influenced by various driving mechanisms. Amongst the most pivotal are parental behaviours and attachment patterns, as parents who have experienced trauma may struggle with regulating their own emotions, leading to insecure attachment patterns and less sensitive caregiving behaviours (Schore, 2009). However, not all trauma necessarily leads to transgenerational trauma, as the role of parental style and context is important in preventing its transmission (Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2003). Furthermore, communication styles, both functional and dysfunctional, play a crucial role, as open and modulated disclosure can promote understanding and healing, while dysfunctional communication such as the common phenomenon of silence can perpetuate secrecy and negative family dynamics (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015). However, amid such difficult climate, positive effects, such as gratitude and finding meaning in past traumatic experiences, can also influence the transmission of trauma (Melander et al., 2016). The type of trauma and the context of the community involved can shape the effects and developments of descendants, with different traumas having specific effects (Lev-Wiesel, 2007). Ultimately, effective communication and coping strategies are crucial for individuals and families to deal with the long-lasting psychological effects of trauma.

The role of historical narratives, collective memory, and transgenerational trauma is recognized, as well as the role of power dynamics, attachment patterns, and communication styles in trauma transmission. However, while previous studies have explored how events were communicated and associated with coping strategies, the specific role of *what* was communicated received limited attention. Moreover, the study expands on previous research by including both second and third-generation participants from the Dersim Alevi diaspora in

Germany, emphasizing the intercultural environment. The research questions aim to examine the channels of communication used between generations and the content of communication regarding the Dersim massacre and its impact on well-being. Additionally, the study investigates the role of contemporary reminders in perpetuating conflict and trauma within the Kurdish Alevi community. To address these questions, a qualitative approach was employed, involving one-to-one interviews with participants living in Germany. Thematic analysis was conducted using a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive methods, with reference to existing models and theories.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

1.1 Historical Context in Dersim

The Kurds are not only the largest ethnic group without a state in the middle east but also have a number of different languages and religious affiliations, which contribute to their diverse makeup (Sofuoglu, 2018). After the collapse of the Ottoman empire at the end of the First World War, the lands that were inhabited by the Kurds were split into four national states, namely Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. The subsequent experiences of the Kurds in the individual states have partly developed differently due to several reasons. Necessary for the context of Kurdish Alevi is the region of Dersim in eastern Turkey. It is one of the Kurdish regions which is characterised by the majority of Kurdish Alevi living there. Besides the largest number of Kurds who belong to the Muslim faith, a relatively smaller number belong to the Alevi faith. Alevi identity can be understood as a "cultural-religious" identity that is based on a complex interplay of religious and cultural factors, and its beliefs and practices reflect the influence of pre-Islamic Central Asian and Anatolian cultures (Cicek, 2012; Sökefeld, 2004). Distinct Alevi religious practices are often centred around the *cemevi*, which is a gathering place for Alevi rituals and ceremonies. These ceremonies are practised together with women, men, and children, which is a distinctive difference from mainstream Islam, where there is a strict separation by gender. The cem is typically led by a *dede*, who is a religious leader and guide. It often involves music, chanting, and communal meals, and is considered a sacred space for Alevi spiritual practices (Sökefeld, 2004). The Alevi community is decentralised and does not have a formal hierarchy or priesthood. Instead, dedes (religious leaders) play an important role in guiding the community's religious practices and the transmission of Alevi traditions and beliefs from generation to generation. Dedes are believed to have inherited their religious knowledge and spiritual authority through their family lineage. By not being part of Sunni Islam and following the same religious practices, Alevi Kurds in Turkey have faced a history of persecution and discrimination dating back to the Ottoman Empire (Celik, 2015; Dangeleit, 2015; Gurses, 2018; Hallam, 2016).

The founder of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, played a crucial role in shaping the newly disintegrated ottoman empire. Attempting to unify Turkey into a strong modern nation-state that could successfully compete with European nation-states, the adoption of Pan-Turkism and the homogenisation of culture and society meant the persecution

and the resulting genocide of minorities such as the Christian Armenians and Alevi Kurds in the Dersim region (McDowall, 2004).

1.1.1 The Dersim Massacre 1937-38

The Dersim massacre was a violent military campaign carried out by the Turkish government between 1937 and 1938 in the predominantly Alevi Kurdish region of Dersim, now known by its Turkish name Tunceli (bronze fist) province. The campaign was aimed at suppressing a rebellion by the Alevi Kurdish people, who were seeking autonomy and resisting assimilationist policies (McDowall, 2004). The Turkish government sent a large military force, including infantry, artillery, and aircraft, to crush the rebellion and subjugate the population (McDowall, 2004). This massacre had the specific intention of eradicating the cultural heritage and identity of these Kurdish Alevi through the murder of thousands of villagers, the forced relocation from their villages and the tearing apart of families to forcibly assimilate the children in larger cities. According to the Turkey government, the total number of people affected by the massacre is estimated at around 13,160 (BBC, 2011). Though other sources seem to vary much more in their estimated numbers with up to 40,000 deaths (McDowall, 2004). However, it is widely agreed that 3-4,000 residents were forcibly relocated (McDowall, 2004). The Turkish government has officially acknowledged the events as a massacre and issued an apology in 2011, though some Alevi Kurdish activists and scholars continue to call for further recognition and restitution (BBC, 2011). Officially, the events are described as a massacre, although some authors have tried to officially declare it a genocide, while others argue that it is not a genocide but an ethnocide, as it was a systematic destruction of the culture, language, customs, and traditions of a particular ethnic group (van Bruinessen, 1997).

The repression of the affected people did not stop after the end of the massacre. In the following years, by banning the Kurdish language, religious and cultural practices, the Turkish state not only maintained a constant state of fear and oppression but also denied equal opportunities to the Kurds concerned. The conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish minority further escalated in the 1980s with the emergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a militant Kurdish organisation that sought to establish an independent Kurdish state in south-eastern Turkey. The PKK launched a series of armed attacks against the Turkish military and civilian targets, triggering a brutal response from the Turkish state. The conflict has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people (Human Rights Watch, 1990). According to the Upsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) the causalities

from 1989-2022 have caused over 30,000 deaths (UCDP, n.d.). The Turkish state has been accused of human rights violations, including the destruction of Kurdish villages, the forced evacuation of civilians, and the targeting of Kurdish political activists and journalists (Bozarslan, 2001; Turkey: Crackdown on Kurdish opposition, 2017). The Kurdish minority has been marginalised and discriminated against in areas such as education, healthcare, and employment (Dangeleit, 2015; Hallam, 2016; Unal, 2013).

In recent years, the Turkish government has taken steps towards addressing the Kurdish issue, such as lifting the ban on the use of the Kurdish language in some public settings and engaging in peace talks with the PKK. However, tensions and violence continue to simmer, with occasional outbreaks of violence and clashes between Turkish security forces and Kurdish militants (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.).

Within this context of historical trauma, it is important to examine the psychological consequences and transgenerational impact experienced by affected communities. While previous research has extensively explored transgenerational trauma on holocaust survivors and indigenous populations, almost none have looked at the survivors of the Dersim massacre. A study published in 2021 focused on three generations of survivors, those directly having suffered from the events (n=8), the children of those (n=10), and the grandchildren of those that were born and grew up dislocated from Dersim (n=12 (Turkey or Germany) (Kizilhan et al., 2021). With a mixed methods approach, the authors wanted to get a better understanding of the interaction between coping strategies, communication patterns, and stressors related to the trauma. They identified a pattern of behavioural and pathological symptoms that were shared by each generation, yet the frequency decreased over the generations (Kizilhan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, family-, behavioural- and attitudinal patterns from the first generation were taken on by the second and third generations, particularly negative emotions related to the trauma (e.g., feeling a loss to one's roots, guilt, envisioning traumatic experiences or avoidance behaviour). The presented study may be one of the rare ones in the field of psychology directly focusing on the Dersim massacre and its impact on those affected and their descendants, but the results nevertheless point to important findings. Although the events are almost a century old, the negative effects they had on the community have continued to reach current generations.

In addition to these findings, other authors have also demonstrated the impact of the massacre on the culture of the Kurds in the Dersim region and how years of historical neglect and oppression prohibited individuals from healing (Celik, 2015; Soyalp, 2020). Hence, after the massacre in 1938, individuals of this community were and are still dealing with existing

obstacles and conflicts; it might not only be essential to understand the existing effects on current generations but also how these effects are reinforced through a continuation of current life events (e.g., denial of an own state or equal rights to Kurdish Alevi). Therefore, the general goal of the present study is to continue the existing research on transgenerational trauma, focusing on the Kurdish-Alevi community, to get a better understanding of which processes might be related to historical trauma. Additionally, this study seeks to fill existing gaps in the trauma literature, including the lack of socio-cultural factors (Hinton & Hinton, 2002; Kirmayer, 2004) and the neglect of the role of social justice and social change (Hobfoll et al., 2012).

The Kurdish Alevi community has specific features that contribute to this field of psychology in three key aspects:

(1) Firstly, they have a history of historical trauma stemming from the Dersim massacre and the long-standing oppression and neglect by state structures.

(2) Secondly, the Kurdish Alevi community belongs to a cultural group that must navigate existing repressive structures and discrimination. This creates specific experiences and burdens that can impact transgenerational trauma.

(3) Thirdly, a significant number of Kurdish Alevites live in the diaspora, whether in Turkey or abroad, including large communities in Europe. The experiences and challenges faced by this diaspora community contribute to the complexity of transgenerational trauma and provide valuable insights for the literature.

These three aspects of the Kurdish Alevi community are crucial to the trauma literature as they offer unique perspectives and experiences that may not have been adequately addressed in previous research. By considering these factors, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of transgenerational trauma and contribute to existing theories and derive appropriate measures to mitigate the impact of trauma on affected communities and strengthen resilience.

1.2 Trauma Theory

Survivors of war, genocide, ethnic or racial persecution and other forms of conflict are often scarred by the aftermath of their traumatic experiences. If not addressed or treated, they can have even more profound consequences. The resulting scars can spread to the descendants of the people affected if the possibility for psychological healing is not given, hence passing them down from one generation to another. This is transgenerational trauma (DeAngelis, 2019).

The origins of transgenerational trauma theory can be traced back to the work of psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud in the early 20th century. However, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that this theory began to be developed and refined in contemporary research on trauma as a response to growing recognition of the long-term effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. This, though, has a decades-long history of development in its wake. Early days classical trauma theory was based on that a person experiences an intense event that their consciousness is unable to process fully, resulting in the fragmentation of the psyche or ego (Balaev, 2018). The memories of these events are believed to trigger protective or defensive mechanisms such as dissociation, amnesia, anxiety, or hysteria (Balaev, 2018).

However, classical trauma theory has been criticised for several reasons. Firstly, it has been developed and tested mainly in Western cultures, and some argue that it may not be as applicable to other cultural contexts (Kirmayer, 2004). Secondly, it has been accused of overemphasising individual pathology and neglecting the broader social and cultural factors that contribute to trauma (Hinton & Hinton, 2002; Kirmayer, 2004). Thirdly, some scholars suggest that it has focused too much on the negative effects of trauma and ignored the potential for post-traumatic growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Finally, classical trauma theory has been criticised for not addressing social justice issues and for prioritising individual healing over broader social change (Hobfoll et al., 2012). Therefore, it is suggested that classical trauma theory needs to be broadened and contextualised to be more relevant to diverse populations and to better address the social and cultural factors that contribute to trauma.

The critiques of classical trauma theory have led to a shift in understanding the trauma that acknowledges the importance of cultural, psychological, and social factors. There has been a move towards developing culturally sensitive approaches to trauma that consider the impact of culture, ethnicity, and social context on the experience of trauma. Among the best-known academics in this field is Cathy Caruth, who presented her own model of trauma in her book Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History (1996). She emphasises that trauma is an event that shatters identity, remains outside of normal memory, can cause dissociation, and has effects that transcend the immediate moment and reverberate across time, highlighting the transhistorical effects of trauma on memory and narrative retrieval (Balaev, 2018). Following on from this, a pluralistic approach of trauma emerged which challenges the notion that trauma is unspeakable by nature and emphasises the variability of traumatic representations. This approach takes into account both the structural dimensions of trauma

(such as its dissociative effects on consciousness and memory) and the cultural dimensions that shape the meaning and representation of traumatic experiences. It recognises that traumatic memory is not necessarily pathologically fragmented, and it explores the different values and particular meanings attributed to traumatic events. It also recognises the role of external, cultural factors, in influencing the memory and representation of trauma.

Particularly in psychotherapy with individuals with exceptional circumstances, for example, an approach that emphasises the unique needs and preferences of the client is very important and valuable. Cooper and McLeod (2007) for instance, introduced a pluralistic approach to psychotherapy that embraces and combines various therapeutic approaches and techniques. This approach highlights the importance of collaboration between the therapist and client, acknowledging that each individual has distinct needs and preferences when it comes to therapy. Al-Roubaiy et al. (2017) have expanded based on therapy for Iraqi refugee men in Western countries. They combined Cooper and McLeod's approach by focusing on cultural sensitivity, metacommunication and feedback, in combination of the use of Rogers' core conditions (empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard). By integrating these elements, Al-Roubaiy et al. (2017) aimed to provide a comprehensive framework that respects the cultural backgrounds of clients, facilitating effective therapy in complex contexts. Hence, understanding trauma requires considering not only the traumatic event but also the surrounding cultural and contextual factors that influence trauma responses and therapy. Recognizing the influence of external cultural factors is crucial for a comprehensive and effective approach to trauma.

A conceptual framework proposed by Mohatt et al. (2014) centres on the transgenerational impact of trauma and the role of historical context in understanding and addressing traumatic experiences. The authors argue that historical trauma consists of public narratives that link traumatic events in the historical past to current local contexts so that trauma becomes part of the contemporary cultural narrative. The historical trauma narrative model (HTNM) includes four key components: (1) the historical context of trauma, (2) the collective memory of trauma, (3) the effects of trauma on individuals and communities, and (4) the potential for healing and resilience. In relation to the previous trauma models, HTNM emphasises the role of social and cultural factors in shaping the experiences of trauma and its transmission across generations. It highlights the need to address historical injustices and transgenerational trauma in a culturally sensitive and community-focused way. The model proposes that historical trauma is transmitted across generations through public narratives, which are stories and discourses that are shared within and between communities (Mohatt et

al., 2014). These narratives shape how individuals and communities understand and interpret historical trauma and can either promote healing and resilience or perpetuate the cycle of trauma.

This is specifically relevant for people who have suffered from colonial or structural disadvantages that have led to a loss of land, culture, autonomy and forced assimilation, to name a few. In such cases of historical trauma, the impact goes beyond the individual level to the collective one turning into an interference of the social functioning which eventually might shape an entire culture (Celik, 2015). For instance, if a community feels jeopardised because of its culture, religion, or ethnic origin, it may have to adapt the associated rituals, practices or even its identity to the circumstances, hence, interfering with the development of its culture. Such cultural adaptations, for instance, the suppression of one's language, traditions, and spiritual or religious expression in turn can serve as a perpetuation of historical trauma as it contributes to a loss of cultural identity and a sense of disconnection from one's heritage (Brave Heart, 1998). Collective memory in form of shared cultural narratives can reinforce these feelings of loss, disconnection, and grief. Conversely, it can also be a powerful tool for healing and resilience by providing a sense of connection and belonging (Brave Heart, 1998). For example, when traumatic experiences are not acknowledged or are denied, they can become buried in the collective memory and continue to affect subsequent generations. In addition, when the trauma is acknowledged but is not processed or healed, it can continue to be passed down through generations and manifest in physical and mental health problems.

The recognition of the development of trauma theory can also be seen in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). While the criteria for diagnosing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in older versions were based on an event, a stressor that was outside the normal human experience, the DSM-5 recognises that trauma can be experienced in a range of contexts, not only through direct experience of the traumatising event, but also through personal co-experience with others, family members or through repeated confrontation with traumatic events (secondary traumatisation) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Additionally, the DSM-5 criteria acknowledge the importance of cultural factors in how trauma is experienced and expressed and emphasise the need for a broader understanding of the impact of trauma on individuals and society as a whole (Friedman, 2013; Kirmayer, 2004).

1.2.1 Trauma on a Collective Level

Based on the few studies on the Kurdish community of Dersim, we can draw the conclusion, as also proposed by the historical trauma narrative model by Mohatt et al. (2014), that the descendants of this group who experienced historical trauma are experiencing the consequences of this trauma up to the third generation. The study by Kizilhan et al. (2021) has amongst others highlighted the impact of current life situations, struggles with discrimination and denial of the state as facilitators of the transition of trauma and hence the negative emotional outcomes subsequent generations may inherit. The reason for this could be that individuals cannot come to terms with the events that their community suffered from, as they still have to fight against the same repressive pattern manifested in current conflicts against their community. In view of this, in societies dealing with conflict situations, often the narrative to which they adhere can contribute to how individuals in that society feel about the conflict.

Bar-Tal (2007) attempted to understand and describe the context of socio-psychological dynamics in prolonged, complex, conflicts with his conceptual framework of the socio-psychological infrastructure of intractable conflict. Such conflicts are often associated with deeply rooted attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that shape the way the individuals involved respond to the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal et al., 2012). This deeply rooted 'shared socio-psychological repertoire' often emerges in response to experiences and challenges that societies face in conflict situations. These can be reinforced or discoursed through institutionalisations (cultural, societal or political) which then form a collective memory of the experiences and challenges. In addition to the conflict ethos and collective emotional orientation, collective memory, which refers to shared memories, experiences and beliefs of the group, is a fundamental component of group identity and plays an important role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in the context of conflict. This fits with Mohatt et al.'s (2014) Historical Trauma Narrative because it highlights the importance of historical narratives in shaping the collective memory and identity of traumatised groups and the impact on their contemporary health and well-being. Hence, in the context of intractable conflict, depending on the contemporary reminders of historical trauma and their salience to the individual historical, trauma can either contribute to negative effects and the perpetuation of conflict or help promote positive well-being and potential resolve intractable conflict.

In view of this, the narrative formed about a conflict might serve as a strategy that helps individuals to cope with the negative psychological effects. In addition, others have also suggested it may be linked to aspirations they have for the future (Canetti et al., 2016).

Individuals being constantly exposed to violence from time to time have also experienced increased psychological distress and perceived threat which in turn gives them more reason to adhere to a narrative that compensates for these feelings (Canetti et al., 2016). For instance, being exposed to political violence may shape individuals' attitudes about the conflict such that they may be less likely to adhere to a solution involving compromise (Canetti et al., 2016). Hence, the narrative, which can be formed by the exposure and the information about the conflict, has the potential to impact not only the way individuals define and feel about the conflict but also their well-being.

In other words, in addition to the support a narrative can give a community in conflict situations, it can also be used as a means to keep the conflict going. Many authors, for instance, have argued that narratives serve not only to define the boundaries of group identity but also help understand group dynamics and how narratives can shape the relationship between in- and out-group (Garagozov, 2012; Hammack, 2010; Funk & Said, 2004). Others have also elaborated on ways in which narratives legitimise violence and provide a basis for collective action (Garagozov, 2012). People tend to view the world through the lens of their own narratives. When individuals or groups with different narratives come into conflict, they often frame the conflict in terms of their own narratives and use this to justify their actions. For instance, while one group may view their conflict as a struggle for survival or self-defence, the other group may see it as a fight for justice or freedom. Both groups may use their narratives to justify their actions and portray the other side as the aggressor.

Thereby, it is important not to forget the role of power dynamics, which could be especially relevant for conflicts with a long history. Several studies on different conflicts seem to demonstrate that it may be a common phenomenon in post-conflict societies that different groups constructed their own narratives about the conflicts to justify different approaches, to reinforce the power of the dominant group, create a sense of victimhood among opposite or marginalised groups, and perpetuate conflict, hence given the process the potential to become highly politicised, with different groups using historical narratives to promote their own interests and agendas (Bilali & Mahmoud, 2017; Ljubojević, 2012; Psaltis et al., 2017). Therefore, dominant groups may be less willing to engage with alternative or dissenting narratives, as they may see such as a threat to their position of power. On the other hand, marginalised groups may be more willing to engage with conflict narratives, as they may see these as a means of challenging dominant narratives and advocating for their own rights and interests.

In addition to that it is worth noting that while Bar-Tal's model of socio-psychological infrastructure has provided a template for understanding why and how intractable conflict can become a vicious cycle that can be applied in many different contexts, it leaves out the crucial element of power. This, however, is complemented by the HTNM by Mohatt et al. (2014), which emphasises how power dynamics can influence the transmission and perpetuation of historical traumas across generations. For instance, the dominant group may control the narrative of the traumatic events, suppressing or distorting the experiences of the subordinate group. This can lead to a lack of acknowledgement, validation, or justice for the trauma survivors and their descendants, which can further perpetuate the trauma. Conversely, the model also says that a narrative can strengthen the collective sense of belonging and that many positive aspects can result from this, especially for marginalised groups (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; González & Carretero, 2013; Usborne & Taylor, 2010).

This is supported by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), suggesting that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from the groups they belong to, which can include shared histories and experiences. This means that one's understanding of oneself as a member of a group is influenced by the group's history, values, and beliefs. Furthermore, it is closely linked to cultural continuity, which refers to the extent to which cultural practices and beliefs are transmitted across generations within a given society (Berry, 2006) and is said to be linked to promoting mental health and well-being (Kirmayer et al., 1993; Usborne & Taylor, 2010). It involves the passing down of cultural traditions, norms, and values from one generation to the next, which helps to maintain cultural identity and cohesion over time. This, in turn, can provide a sense of connection, identity, and purpose for individuals within indigenous or marginalised communities (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).

Hence, there is an awareness that a sense of belonging, meaning and significance can be protective factors for individuals affected by prolonged conflict. These can be conveyed through a strong cultural identity, which in turn can be reinforced through cultural memory and narratives. This is supported, among others, especially by studies on Palestinian individuals or communities living in the context of conflict, historical trauma and structural violence. For example, studies found that reliance on strong social networks and family support, cultural traditions and identity, and religious practices helped maintain a sense of resilience in the face of persistent adversity (Aitcheson et al., 2017; Atallah, 2017; Mahamid, 2020). Furthermore, a recent study on the influence of life narratives on resilience and life outcomes found that individuals who framed their life narratives in terms of growth and change (i.e., themes of transformation, redemption and growth) tended to report higher levels

of resilience and life satisfaction than those who framed their narratives in terms of adversity (i.e. themes of victimisation, struggle and injustice) (Ramasubramanian et al., 2022). This underlines the importance of the message communicated through a narrative on its impact and well-being on individuals and communities.

1.2.2 Trauma on an intra-family level

Besides the historical context and socio-cultural and collective factors that may facilitate trauma transmission throughout generations, studies have focused on the effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their descendants, giving rise to profound research in the field of transgenerational trauma in psychology. The existing literature has identified several mechanisms that facilitate the transmission of trauma, including parental behaviours, communication patterns, and cultural and societal factors.

Among these, epigenetics offers a biological explanation of how trauma may be transmitted through epigenetic changes, which can alter gene expression and affect brain development and function. These changes can then be passed down to future generations, leading to an increased risk of trauma-related disorders. Yehuda et al. (2016), for instance, argue that Epigenetic changes are alterations to DNA that do not change the sequence of the DNA itself but can affect how genes are expressed. Yehuda et al. (2016) propose that exposure to trauma can lead to epigenetic changes in sperm and eggs, which can then be passed down to offspring, resulting in an increased risk for PTSD and other stress-related disorders. This is in line with findings highlighting higher vulnerability to stress, PTSD-related symptoms, and mental well-being in children of Holocaust survivors (Dashorst et al., 2019; Payne & Berle, 2021).

Other researchers offer further insight into possible behavioural and attachment patterns that may facilitate unhealthy outcomes for offspring. Schore (2009), for instance, suggests that the effects of early life trauma can be transmitted across generations through disrupted attachment and parenting behaviours. Parents who have experienced early life trauma may have difficulty regulating their own affective states, which can lead to insecure attachment patterns and less sensitive, less responsive caregiving behaviours towards their own children. This, in turn, can lead to disruptions in the developing child's attachment and affect regulation systems, eventually contributing to transgenerational trauma (Schore, 2009). Hence, parenting styles and attachment patterns can play a crucial role in the transmission of trauma. Children of traumatised parents may be more likely to develop insecure attachment

patterns and experience emotional dysregulation, which can increase their vulnerability to trauma-related symptoms.

However, if one or both parents have experienced trauma, it is not necessarily expected for its effects to be passed on to their children. In a study on child survivors from the Holocaust and their daughters (Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2003), it becomes clear how important the role of parental style and context is not only as a risk factor but also in preventing the transmission of trauma. The study reported that while child survivors expressed symptoms of PTSD, their daughters did not differ in their attachment styles compared to a control group. Hence, pointing out that not all trauma necessarily leads to transgenerational trauma. In the case of the child survivors, Sagi-Schwartz et al. (2003) proposed reasons for why this might have been, namely: (1) being part of a large community with a collective memory (Israeli Holocaust survivors) as a protective factor or (2) that the traumatic events were not created by the attachment figure but by an inhuman social-political force (the Nazis) or because (3) the survivors had experienced several years of normal family life before the Holocaust, during which they may have developed basic trust in attachment figures, empowering the child survivors after the war to cope with the challenges of adapting to normal family and social life again and become attachment figures themselves. Still, there may be more factors to consider when investigating the mechanisms of transgenerational transmission.

Kellermann (2001), for instance, differentiated between two types of processes to look at when trying to understand how such transmission may occur. Thereby the author stresses that it is essential to understand the different ways in which the trauma can be manifested in subsequent generations. This issue refers to content transformation, which is what was passed from parent to child. Kellermann (2001) identified four types of problems that may occur in children: Problems around the self, cognition, affectivity, and interpersonal functioning. These are in line with Complex PTSD (CPTSD), which is a subtype of PTSD recognised by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). It arises from exposure to multiple traumatic events and repeated interpersonal trauma that impairs the development of self-regulation and interpersonal skills person's sense of identity, relationships, and ability to cope with stress (Cloitre et al., 2018). It is defined by syndromes that include the core PTSD symptoms, along with additional symptoms related to disturbances in self-organisation, emotional dysregulation, negative self-concept, interpersonal problems, problems with somatisation, and dissociation (Cloitre et al., 2018, 2020).

Besides identifying the possible psychological responses of offspring, Kellermann (2001) outlines a set of different possible processes of transformation, among which he

describes on the one side that emotions from the first generation that could not be consciously experienced may be given over to 2nd generation. Thus, the child absorbs repressed and insufficiently worked-though experiences that can lead to an unhealthy relationship between parents and children. In addition to that, child-rearing practices such as parental rejection, overprotection, or harsh, inconsistent discipline can perpetuate negative outcomes in the development of the child, such as anxious behaviours learned by the parents through modelling. In some cases, the parental-child role may even reverse to such an extent that the child takes upon themselves the role of being parents to their own parents through "invisible loyalties" (Kellermann, 2001, p. 263), leading to children becoming orphans themselves with unfulfilled dependency needs of their own. In other words, parenting styles and attachment quality seemed to be exacerbating these adverse outcomes that may be adopted after trauma. Facing devastating events such as mass murder, persecution, and genocide, to name a few, can lead to disruption of one's lifestyle, in addition to negative health consequences. When not adequately processed they leave open a wound that children themselves might adapt and pass on to the next generation.

This corresponds to Danieli (1985), who proposed that trauma can be transmitted across generations through a complex interplay of individual, family, and societal factors. She emphasised the importance of addressing trauma at both the individual and systemic levels to prevent its transgenerational transmission. She discusses a range of mechanisms that can facilitate the process in which trauma can be transmitted across generations, including family secrets, attachment disruptions, and emotional numbing, among others. Survivors who develop feelings of fear and mistrust, for instance, strive strongly for loyalty to family members, while those who adopt numb adaptation styles participate minimally in the upbringing of their children (Danieli, 1985). Those children adopt the behaviours and values instilled in their upbringing, thus carrying the burden of their parent's trauma. Other studies have expanded on this, looking at indigenous people who face not only the challenges of past repressed traumas such as colonisation, but also the challenges of structural disadvantages that perpetuate and reinforce past traumas (Gameon & Skewes, 2021; Pride et al., 2021; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2008).

The aforementioned studies have set out how transmission of trauma can be influenced through interpersonal relationships, specifically between parent and child. In the context of the Kurdish Alevi affected by the Dersim Massacre, different types of communication styles (open, indirect, music, art, rituals, or others) also seem to play a role in how subsequent generations process the experiences psychologically (Kizilhan et al., 2021).

For instance, indirect communication about the events made it difficult for (grand)children to process the events themselves. Respecting their grandparents' decision, the silence created a taboo about the topic, which made it difficult to come to terms with what had happened.

This is in line with earlier research that focused on the impact of positive/functional communication (e.g., openly addressing traumatic events in everyday conversations) or negative/ dysfunctional communication (e.g., unspoken assumptions, silence, taboo, and secrets) (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015; Melander et al., 2016). Whereby the latter are associated with negative aspects for those affected, as well as for their offspring. Hence, how past traumatic events experienced by parents are communicated (whether functional or dysfunctional) potentially determines the possible effects this may have on offspring. For the phenomenon of dysfunctional communication, Danieli (1985) coined the term *conspiracy of silence*, which describe Holocaust survivors' feelings that their experiences could not be understood, and nobody would listen or ask them about their past which in turn made them remain silent about their trauma. Danieli's (1985) conspiracy of silence suggests that trauma is passed down through generations due to a lack of open communication and emotional withdrawal exhibited by survivor parents. In other words, if the experience is not communicated openly or functionally, often only partial experiences are recounted in fragments, which can also lead to contradictory stories (Melander et al., 2016). This, in turn, makes it difficult for parents and children to engage in a deeper dialogue to clarify ambiguities, uncertainties and confusions and thus avoid secrets within the family. Possible negative effects this can have on family dynamics and children's well-being are powerlessness, paralysis in family relations, and disbelief or a lack of understanding from the side of children towards the stories from their parents (Melander et al., 2016). Thus, suggesting that for parents who want to maintain a healthy and upright relationship with their children without letting their traumatic past get in the way, regular communication should be facilitated that allows them to talk openly about what they have experienced.

However, some researchers argue that communicating per se does not equate to healing and positive outcome. A systematic review of 25, peer-reviewed studies contained empirical observations of parental patterns of trauma communication with children in refugee families (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015). The review included both qualitative and quantitative (single or multiple case studies) studies related to trauma, transgenerational communication, refugees, family, various databases such as PubMed and PsychINFO. The results revealing two studies indicating the negative effects of open communication (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015). In this case, silencing strategies may be a protective factor for

children, as being confronted with the past of their parents was associated with anxiety in children (Angel et al., 2001, as cited in Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015; Montgomery, 1998, as cited in Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015), though this seems to be more likely the case for children with direct trauma exposure. Nine studies supported the hypothesis that there is a need for disclosure associated with healing mechanisms, and 16 studies supported the hypothesis that modulated disclosure is a protective factor especially for exile-born refugee children (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015). Modulated disclosure is a proposed "style of intrafamily communication in which timing and manner of disclosure are emphasised" (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015, p.581). Hence, it offers to break the cycle of silence by creating a safe and supportive environment in which individuals can disclose their traumatic experiences, which can help to promote understanding, empathy, and healing. Ultimately, not every experience and family dynamic can be generalised, as it depends on the individual conditions of each family, as well as their type of trauma.

Investigations also provide insight into other facets of trauma and what possible positive turns these can have alongside negative ones. In addition to negative feelings such as sadness and grief, also positive effects such as gratitude can be a means of trauma. Finding out from one's (grand)parents what it means to have gone through such tragic experiences and witnessing its consequences first-hand may help to appreciate what one has (Melander et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies have revealed the difficulty of family members in communicating the events to their offspring (Kizilhan et al., 2021; Lev-Wiesel, 2007; Melander et al., 2016). However, by doing so, the survivors could pursue a strategy to process the events. For instance, among holocaust survivors and their descendants, it might be clear that healing the Holocaust might not be possible, yet keeping the memories of the historical events alive might serve as a family mission transferred from one generation to another for showing loyalty to those that experienced the trauma and process its psychological effects (Lev-Wiesel, 2007). Hence, it can indeed help to have conversations, especially those that lead to making peace with what has happened and communicating this to one's descendants.

These results suggest that what is communicated is also important and that certain effects and developments of the descendants are related to values, future perspectives and possible explanations about the events experienced by them and their community are communicated. For instance, studies have looked into how and what has been communicated among Palestinian families that have experienced forced relocation from their homelands (Dalgaard et al., 2019; Melander et al., 2016). They revealed that parents were open about communicating the negative consequences of numerous oppressions and conflicts while also

trying to find meaning in the ongoing conflicts, which sometimes had a positive aspiration, like the hope for a resolution of the conflict (Melander et al., 2016). Hence, in line with the families of holocaust survivors, healing and resilience were amongst the types of information that were conveyed to offspring. However, contrary to that, healing among Palestinian families can only be achieved once they can go back to their homelands. If one generation has not achieved this goal, the trauma may pass on to the next generation with the aim of coming closer to healing (Lev-Wiesel, 2007). Therefore, different traumas can have specific effects related to the experiences and context of the communities involved. However, there seems to be a consensus on the mechanisms that unfold depending on not only how but also what is communicated, serving as a coping strategy for individuals and families to deal with the psychological effects that last long after the events have taken place.

1.3   The Present Study

As of this point, the present paper has discussed the theories and models related to trauma and its transgenerational effects. Trauma theory in psychology acknowledges the long-term effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. There is a shift towards understanding trauma within a socio-cultural context, considering the impact of cultural, psychological, and social factors. The importance of historical narratives, collective memory, and transgenerational trauma is recognized. It also highlights the role of power dynamics, attachment patterns, and communication styles in the transmission of trauma. Two crucial models introduced are the historical trauma narrative model (Mohatt et al., 2014), which emphasizes the role of historical context, collective memory, and cultural factors in shaping trauma experiences and, additionally, the socio-psychological infrastructure model (Bar-Tal, 2007), highlighting the influence of deeply rooted attitudes, beliefs, and emotions within communities in intractable conflicts. Within the context of the Kurdish Alevi affected by the Dersim Massacre 1937-38, the study by Kizilhan et al. (2021) highlights the specific experiences of their community, shedding light on the role of communication styles and the challenges faced in processing and transmitting trauma within this context.

However, Kizilhan et al. (2021) have mainly investigated how events were communicated and how they were associated with coping strategies, but not precisely the role of what was communicated to subsequent generations. However, the effects of the transmission of trauma can depend on what is communicated to the subsequent generations (Dalgaard et al., 2019). Moreover, the present study will present a different sample as that in the study by 2021, were only the third generation were diaspora living in Germany. In the

present study both second and third generation will represent Diaspora living in Germany, also emphasizing the role of cultural adaptation and intercultural environment. Therefore, with the first research question, the channels of communication used by the second and third generation of the Dersim Alevi diaspora in Germany will be examined, with the focus being on how and what was communicated about the events of the Dersim massacre between 1937-38 and its role in the well-being of the subjects.

In the context of Kurdish Alevi, it can be assumed that the aforementioned studies could also be relevant to the existing Kurdish-Turkish conflict. As demonstrated in previous studies, the effects of genocide, structural oppression, and forced displacement from their homeland, among others, seem to be amplified by conflicts that are still ongoing (Dalgaard et al., 2019; Kizilhan et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been emphasised that significant challenges are faced by Kurdish Alevi in navigating their identity, particularly in the context of Kurdish nationalism and Sunni dominance in Turkish society (Celik, 2015; Dangeleit, 2015; Gurses, 2018; Hallam, 2016; Unal, 2013). Additionally, it has been reported that Alevi in the diaspora often emphasise their cultural identity over their religious identity as a way of asserting their distinctiveness and resisting marginalisation (Sökefeld, 2004). However, the relationship between religion and culture is complex and contested among Alevi, with different interpretations of Alevism and competing claims to Alevi identity (Sökefeld, 2004). This is in line with other studies on Kurdish Alevi living in Europe and Turkey, who struggle with questions of identity and belonging as they negotiate their religious and cultural heritage and try to find new ways of defining what it means to be Alevi (Keles, 2014; Sözen, 2019). In light of this, and the ongoing forms of discrimination faced by Alevi Kurds in Turkey but also in the diaspora, it would be worthwhile to find out the role of the historical narrative and contemporary reminders in individual's and community well-being and sense of belonging. Therefore, to understand how the transmission of trauma may be perpetuated through contemporary reminders of historical trauma one must consider the role of current life situations of Kurdish Alevi. For this reason, in addition to the first research question on communication styles and well-being, the second research question focuses on the role of present memories of historical trauma, more specifically the question what role contemporary reminders play in perpetuating conflict and trauma present in the second and third generations.

CHAPTER 2

<center>**Empirical Part**</center>

2.1   Method

2.1.1 Research design

The present paper aims to explore once, how and what was communicated about the events of the Dersim massacre between 1937-38 and its role in the well-being of the subjects and secondly, what role contemporary reminders play in perpetuating conflict and trauma present in the second and third generations. To address both research questions, a qualitative study was conducted to capture the unique experience of individuals affected by the Dersim massacre and the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. It was relied on data provided through one-to-one interviews with participants living in Germany. Interviews were transcribed and analysed via thematic analysis whilst shifting back and forth between deductive and inductive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

2.1.2 Study participants

The target population of this paper are ethnic-religious minorities that have suffered from genocide and ethnic-religious persecution. Within this population, the present study focused on Dersim Alevi Diaspora. More specifically, on second (children) and third (grandchildren) -generation survivors of the Dersim Massacre of 1937-38. Furthermore, studies have shown that being displaced from the homeland can play a particular role in trauma and trauma transmission (Dalgaard et al., 2019; Kizilhan et al., 2021). Hence, participants of Dersim Alevi ethnic-religious affiliation who were born and or raised in Germany were recruited.

For the 2nd generation participants, the sample consisted of 3 males and 3 females, with a mean age of 53 (ranging from 44-63). Among them, 2 were born in Germany, while 4 were born in Dersim and later migrated to Germany in the late 1970s. All participants had at least one child, with a maximum of 3. It is worth noting that all participants were fluent in both German and Turkish, with 2 individuals speaking Kurdish (Zaza or Kurmanji), 2 understanding Kurdish, and 2 nor speaking or understanding Kurdish. Additionally, all participants possessed at least one university degree and were employed.

Regarding the 3rd generation participants, the sample consisted of 1 male and 6 females, with a mean age of 29 (ranging from 20-44). All participants were born in Germany and did not have any children. Similar to the 2nd generation, all 3rd generation participants were fluent in both German and Turkish, with only a few having a limited understanding of Kurdish (Zaza or Kurmanji). Among this group, 4 individuals had completed A-levels as their

highest educational qualification, while 3 participants held a university degree. Four participants were employed, 2 were students, and one was undertaking an apprenticeship.

2.1.3 Participants Recruitment

Participants were recruited via convenience sampling methods, such as snowball selection through WhatsApp and using flyers to contact community centres and associations (e.g., at Alevi Community Centre in Germany). Being part of the same community as the target sample, I was able to reach out to relatives and community members that helped to get into contact with potential participants. Only participants that were of Dersim Alevi origin, speak fluent German, were at least 18 years old, and that had at least one relative that lived through the Dersim Massacre (e.g., as an eyewitness, loss of relative) were considered for interviews. Subjects receive written informed consent before starting the interview (see Appendix B).

2.1.4 Data collection and interview script

Information and data regarding the research questions were gathered through one-to-one interviews that were conducted via the communication platform *Zoom* or phone calls. Interviews took on average 67 minutes. The interview had three sections.

Once, the warm-up aimed to ensure an atmosphere of comfort and safety for the interviewee and get the interviewee familiar with the interview process. Secondly, the main questions with two subsections, each focusing on one research question (communication styles and well-being, and contemporary reminders). First, interviewees were asked about their first encounter with the Dersim Massacre 1937-38, with emphasis on how what was communicated to them (e.g., What type of information do you remember being exposed to regarding this historical event in 1937/38? How was this information communicated to you?). In addition, the focus was on getting a better understanding of how this encounter had affected interviewees, focusing on their well-being (e.g., Have you perceived any impact this information may have had on you/ your family?). Lastly, the interview shifted from the past-to the present conflict by getting an understanding of what other themes and narratives subjects had formed about the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, their identity and possible challenges. Participants were asked about certain aspects around their culture and how they feel about these (amongst others, stories, memories, traditions, and challenges). The third part included the end of the interview, where interviewees had the opportunity to share any additional information that they may had with the intention that the subject left the interview with no negative feelings or thoughts (to view the entire interview guide, see Appendix C). For the use

of the interview content in later analysis, with the consent of interviewees, interviews were recorded via audio recording, to be deleted after completion of this study.

2.1.5 Analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis to capture participants' experiences and their meaning within the research context. Thematic analysis is often used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two types of approaches, deductive and inductive. Whereas the former is a top-own process that relies on prior categories from the literature the latter is a bottom-up process that aims to form own categories form the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). However, qualitative analysis can be a dynamic process in which both deductive and inductive approaches can be used in a hybrid approach, where one can switch back and forth between deductive and inductive approaches. The steps conducted following the analysis included generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. Table 1 presents an example of the process of thematic analysis within one of the themes. The specific procedure is described in the following paragraphs.

Patterns in the transcripts were identified, drawing upon existing literature (e.g., Kizilhan et al., 2021; Mohatt et al., 2014). Additional themes were established if the existing literature was insufficient. Starting with a deductive approach, a set of codes was created (see complete codes system in Appendix D). These codes are based on the two focus questions. For the first research question, communication styles were categorized as functional (open) communication, which refers to elements in which subjects openly and directly communicated about the Dersim Massacre 1937-38, or dysfunctional (indirect) communication, which refers to elements in which subjects indirectly perceived the Dersim Massacre 1937-38. In addition, Subjects' emotional expressions were also coded with the aim of identifying elements of well-being that might be related to one's awareness of the massacre. Regarding the second question, the model of Mohatt et al. (2014) was followed. As suggested in the model for historical trauma narrative, public (e.g., structural inequalities) and private reminders (e.g., discrimination or personal trauma) were separated and based on this, topics not directly related to the massacre were coded.

At the same time, however, the data was examined with an open eye for an inductive approach. Meaning that for instance, while it was initially expected to categorize data into functional (open) or dysfunctional (indirect) communication, the element of communication cleared out to be more complex. Hence, categories were adopted based on the situations rather than the type of communication in which subjects were confronted with the trauma, the past,

and history of the massacre, such as the subcategories household/family, community centres/associations, and cultural/public symbols.

The codes used are descriptive and aim to capture the general idea of the data. Simultaneously, they also intended to capture values, attitudes and beliefs of participants. Therefore, the method of coding eventually employed was a hybrid of descriptive and values coding.

MAXQDA 2022 software was used for analysis, ensuring methodological integrity.

Table I. Example of the process of thematic analysis within one of the themes – Transfer Medium of Historical Trauma.

Interview excerpts	Codes	Subcategory	Category
'from this older generation of students in the 70s, we were also politically influenced […] just slowly brought the questions and raised the discussion of how Dersim genocide happened.' 'there were some books written in a one-sided way by the Turkish authors. But only later, in the 80s, 90s, more and more critical books about genocide were written. Many of our generation dealt with the genocide in later years, both politically and literarily.'	• Indirect communication	• Peers • Media Content	Community Centres/ Associations
'Only when I became active in the community in my early teens, I think at 14, only then did people understand what it's really about, what the subject matter of it actually is.' 'I think it was also through this association that I got in touch with the student association. [...] we also had our seminars, of course, where people came from outside and gave seminars on certain topics. But we read a lot on our own and read into it and dealt with it'	• Direct communication		

2.1.6 Ethical Consideration

As the interviews addressed issues such as historical trauma, well-being and political orientations or opinions, it is crucial to ensure ethical integrity for the sake of the participant's
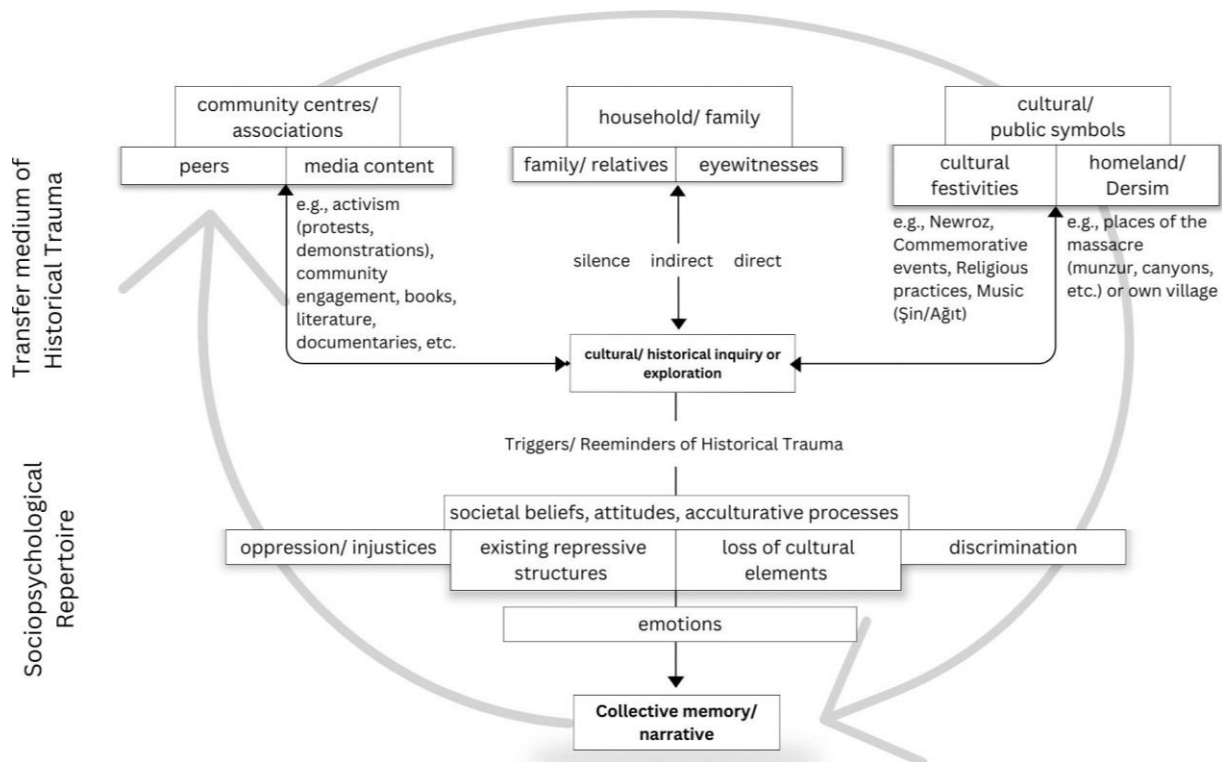
confidentiality, safety and well-being. Specifically, this is in line with APA ethical code of conduct, namely with the ethical principles according to the Belmont Report. These include *respect for persons*, which is ensured through an informed consent, *beneficence*, and *justice* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). To confirm the application of these principles, the study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee at Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon (Process number 51/2023, dated 03/05/2023).

Participants were informed about all concerns and their rights regarding participation in the research. This was provided through informed consent together with insurance of confidentiality of their data, meaning that all data is processed and saved in a manner that will make sure that it is not possible to trace the data back to participants. As a further note, in order to ensure transparency, I introduced myself to participants before the interview as coming from a Kurdish Alevi family from Dersim. At the end of the interview, all participants were given time to ask questions or leave comments to ensure that subjects will not be left with any negative feelings, thoughts, or concerns.

2.2 Results

The goal of the present study was to get a better understanding of which processes might be related to the transgenerational process of historical trauma focusing on the Kurdish-Alevi community. To meet this objective this research project focused on two questions; once, to examine the channels of communication, how and what was communicated about the events of the Dersim massacre between 1937-38 and its role in the well-being of second and third generation Dersim Alevi diaspora in Germany; and secondly, the role of contemporary reminders in perpetuating conflict and trauma present in the second and third generations. In order to explore these questions, interviews were conducted which, with a thematic analysis, identified a set of different themes, categories and subcategories (see Figure 1). Each research question has one theme based on Bar-Tal's (2007) Sociopsychological Infrastructure of intractable conflict (see Appendix A) and the Historical Trauma Narrative model by Mohatt et al. (2014) (see Appendix A). In Figure 1, the theme of the first research question is represented as *transfer medium of historical trauma*, whereas the second theme is understood as the *sociopsychological repertoire*. This section will serve to explore and elaborate the identified themes and categories based on the 7 interviews conducted.

Figure 1

community centres/ associations | household/ family | cultural/ public symbols

peers | media content | family/ relatives | eyewitnesses | cultural festivities | homeland/ Dersim

e.g., activism (protests, demonstrations), community engagement, books, literature, documentaries, etc.

silence   indirect   direct

e.g., Newroz, Commemorative events, Religious practices, Music (Şin/Ağıt)

e.g., places of the massacre (munzur, canyons, etc.) or own village

Transfer medium of Historical Trauma

cultural/ historical inquiry or exploration

Triggers/ Reeminders of Historical Trauma

Sociopsychological Repertoire

societal beliefs, attitudes, acculturative processes

oppression/ injustices | existing repressive structures | loss of cultural elements | discrimination

emotions

Collective memory/ narrative

Transfer medium of historical trauma

Household/ Family

What emerged through the interviews is that the history of the Kurdish Alevi in Dersim is always present through different means of communication. Individuals learn about the events through different circumstances and channels, be it through children learning that something had happened, for example, indirectly through conversations from parents or family members, while at the same time not being able to grasp what exactly happened. One third generation participant (Interviewer (I) 3, Generation (G) 3) remarked:

> But it was always something that was not really said at home. We knew that something had happened and that my mother had lost some of her relatives. But we didn't really talk about it. It was more like taking note and then that was it.

Another third-generation participant (I4, G3) noted the secretive nature surrounding these events:

> it is made a secret and the adults also mostly spoke to me, that is, they talked in the mother tongue, so that the children do not understand. That means you only have something coming in a very specific way, if at all.

One individual also explained this feeling as "something that somehow hovers over us but has shaped our family, but I can't pinpoint it." (I6, G3), hence indicating a sense of pervasiveness and ever-present nature of the events felt indirectly through the history of the family or

community. Others have also directly learned from the elders or contemporary witnesses who emphasized that the memories over the events should be kept alive by telling their stories. One second-generation participant (I1, G2) reflected on his family's history, stating:

> Dersim 37/38 the massacre there, genocide there, was a constant topic in our family. A constant topic because in 1937/38 my father experienced and survived this military operation, this genocide, as a contemporary witness. He was one of the very few survivors of his time who survived it.

Another second-generation participant (I2, G2) noted the hesitance among the older generation to discuss these traumatic events:

> then I also got to talk with my grandparents and with the oldest ones who lived in the village at that time, in my parents' village [...]. they were a bit more reserved when it comes to the genocide in 37, 38. More reserved, in that they were afraid that something like that would happen again.

Cultural/ Public Symbols

Some families maintained silent about the events and their identity, only communicating their grief through cultural or public symbols, for example through cultural or religious festivals or laments:

> My grandmother and my mother always sang songs. The voice always sounded beautiful, we always thought it was very, very beautiful back then. It was only when I grew up that I realised that they were ağıtlar, these laments in which they packed their sadness and just sang to themselves. And whenever I heard that, I started to cry. To this day I don't know why. (I4, G2)

Another third-generation participant (I6, G3) reflected on the profound realization of their connection to the trauma when visiting a significant historical site with their father:

> In my mid-20s, I was in Dersim with my dad [...] then we were on the road there and then he had shown me the place, [...] the place, where at that time in the genocide all the people were then thrown down from this cliff and the whole Munzur river then also flowed red for days. [...] Then I knew it is also my family history, it is not something that happened somehow outside of us, but it is in the middle of it and I belong to it, even if I do not want to, but I belonged to it, it is my history.

Community Centers/ Associations

Especially for the participants, who hardly got any information or only indirect information about the events from home, the exchange through members in community

centres and associations was an access to information where students "raised questions about how Dersim genocide happened." (I2, G2), that sparked their curiosity. Through participation in these "actions, and the concerts" (I3.G2), they then "somehow realized that something had taken place." (I3, G2) and "Only when I became active in the community in my early teens, I think at 14, only then did people understand what it's really about, what the subject matter of it actually is." (I3, G3). For some parents intended to educate their children through cultural events and literary sources about the events and the history of Dersim:

> My parents also took me to events. The thing is that my parents did not want to educate me politically or religiously. They told me that from the fifth or sixth grade on, we raised you this way because we want you to choose your own path, and they also raised me in such a way that I have to find things out for myself. (I4, G3)

Accordingly, it was more meaningful how subjects came into contact with knowledge about the past and specifically about the Dersim massacre, which in turn provided information about the type of information and whether direct or indirect communication was utilised.

Cultural/ Historical Inquiry or Exploration

There seems to be a process of cultural/historical enquiry or exploration in which subjects, after the experience of a pervasive and ever-present nature of the past, that hovered over families, enquire and contact others to learn more. During this exploratory phase, a range of general historical contexts are often formed in order to gain an understanding of the fragmentary information perceived through the so-called ever-present nature. One participant reflected:

> In this time of adolescence, when you deal with yourself and ask the question, who am I, what am I, because when you grow up with two very different, very different two or three very different cultures. [...] When you deal with it yourself, who am I, what am I and so on. Then I started to deal with it and started to study my history and to read myself into it. (I5, G2)

While some participants were on their own: "I grew older and actually I had to find that out for myself. [...] I really had a long phase from fifth to seventh grade, when I asked myself who I was, where I came from." (I4, G3), others had help on this exploration through the support of their parents:

> After I had the certain input through the community or also through the exchange with other people and where I then also understood it, of course, I then went over to my mom and asked, what is this, what have you experienced, what can you say about it,

how do you cope with it now. [...] At that moment I think she recognized that I somehow have an curious about the subject, that I would like to educate myself further and recognize my roots. (I3, G3)

Highlighting the value of self-education and parental guidance, another third-generation participant (I5, G3) mentioned:

These questions of why, why and why never came up as a child, they came much, much later, of course, that you thought how could this happen. [...] But I am also very grateful that my parents never gave me ready-made answers. They always said, look at this and that happened in history, you can look it up here and there, take a look at it [...] who always said, no, you have to educate yourself.

Through this process they build their own repertoire about their own origins, identity and cultural roots. It is an individual, dynamic, iterative process in which, on the one hand, individual research is carried out using, for example, existing literature, and, on the other hand, an exchange with other community members takes place and, finally, one falls back on one's own family. Political circumstances, the social environment, one's own experiences, the family history and the way the massacre was dealt with within the family can determine the various degrees of weight given to the transfer media. These transfer media were defined under the following categories: Household/ family, community centres/ associations, cultural/ public symbol, cultural/ historical inquiry or exploration.

Sociopsychological repertoire

Societal Beliefs, Attitudes, and Acculturative Processes

It was also possible to observe some subcategories that were repeatedly mentioned by the participants and which, in addition to the historical trauma of the Dersim massacre, play a crucial role in how the individual processes and evaluates what they have learned, thus shaping their sociopsychological repertoire and narrative. This sociopsychological repertoire has been categorized, as *societal beliefs*, *attitudes* and *acculturative processes* that tries to capture collective memory and understanding of past injustices and suffering. They also seek to illustrate the perpetuating impact of historical trauma through present-day oppression. Participants reported a sensitivity towards present, past and other injustices not only towards their own in-group but also other minority groups with a similar history of oppression. On participant recounted:

> The problem is that after the genocide there was no end in sight. This is something that, in my opinion, still has an impact on us, in the sense that, for example, in 1996/94 there was another military offensive in Dersim and in its region, and I think my father was aware of this and he said that 1938 had repeated itself. (I4, G3)

Building on this sense of shared experiences with other oppressed communities, another participant expressed it as a "a kind of solidarity with all other people who have suffered similar fates, especially […] to all the people who had to suffer the same fate or are still suffering it today." (I5, G3). This sensitivity also extends to contemporary social issues, as voiced by another participant:

> What has been passed on from my father's generation to my generation or to me, has also been passed on to my daughters or has also been taken up by my grandparents, is that we react extremely sensitively in situations where exclusion, racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism are felt and seen. (I1, G2)

The same level of awareness applies to existing repressive structure particularly present in Turkey and Dersim that represent a continuous reminder of past trauma and reinforce their perception of how their group is and has been treated and is viewed as by the out-group.

> They were afraid of experiencing the same thing again and being murdered again. This feeling was felt very strongly again in the 1980s, because after the military coup in the 1970s and 1980s, most young people from the Dersim region experienced arrests and persecution. This brought the memories of the first generation of children of the genocide back to life. (I2, G2)

> We also knew that this pressure still exists today, that children from the region are still structurally disadvantaged. [...] I simply knew that you always have to perform, because there is an organisation that doesn't want children from our region to get ahead. (I5, G3)

> As a direct outcome of the massacre that can still be perceived today by participants are elements of their culture that increasingly dissolve across generations. These elements include their native language, their understanding of certain cultural traditions and religious practices and to some degree their connection to that culture. For instance, one participant reflected on the diminishing influence of their mother tongue and its impact on generational ties to culture:

> When I hear a song in my language of origin, my mother tongue, I understand the song and feel affected by it at times, but my children, when they hear that song at times, it doesn't mean much to them. It's not so much formative for them, but for our

generation it's more formative in terms of culture and faith. [...] If the language is not spoken, abroad of course or outside Dersim, it will also be lost. (I2, G2)

This sense of cultural decline, especially in terms of language, was further reinforced by another participant, who expressed feelings of guilt after being "In Dersim, the locals often tell us that it's really bad that we don't all know Zazaki, my family, my cousins and I and those who grew up in Germany. [...] are the reason why our language is dying out" (I1, G3). Similar to the existing repressive structures that represent a reminder of past trauma, are subjects experience with discrimination, may it be in their homeland in Dersim or their travels to Dersim through Turkey or their experiences as Diaspora in Germany. Here an intersection of their cultural and religious identity and their identity as a Diaspora living in Germany with a migration background becomes salient. One participant expressed the complexity of their identity, being a minority in both their homeland and their adopted country:

I come from a family that comes from Dersim, in Turkey we are an oppressed minority. Then I come to Germany, I was born here, I am even in the minority society. A minority society that is still oppressed or discriminated or marginalized even within the minorities, whatever you want to call it. My friends without migration history find it very difficult to explain my own identity, so even today I sometimes find it difficult to explain my own identity, because they don't understand what actually makes me. (I3, G3)

Echoing this sentiment, another participant discussed the perpetuation of outsider status despite generations living in Germany:

The reality in Germany, in other countries, they make you feel very well, no matter how many generations you've come into the world here, as soon as you're from a migrant family of origin, it shows on your face, then you're also treated like a foreigner, they make you feel that in one way or another. (I5, G2)

The experiences of discrimination were not limited to the participants but extended to their parents as well, who bore their own insecurities from past oppression:

These certain insecurities that they (parents) had later [...] because they also experienced certain things, experienced oppression because of their identity. [...] There was naturally a fear, because they were not allowed to live out their Kurdish identity in the village. (I6, G2)

The discomfort with imposed identities and the feeling of alienation was a predominant sentiment among participants. As one individual stated:

In Turkey, however, we very often felt the need to hide. Therefore, one cannot speak of well-being at all. We did not feel comfortable in this country, we did not feel welcome. I have to say that quite openly and honestly, I for one still don't. I haven't travelled there for years because people are constantly trying to impose this nationality on you that you reject, that you don't want, that is not accepted. [...] I still feel uncomfortable within the Turkish community in Germany. I don't feel welcome in this community with my background. I continue to feel resentment, racism, aggression and denial towards my background. (I5, G3)

Emotions

In addition to the sociopsychological repertoire of societal beliefs, attitudes and acculturative processes, the category of emotions gives insight into the perceived outcome on individuals well-being. What is shared by most participants is the emotional sympathy when the acts of genocide are remembered or commemorated. Feelings that emerge are often, helplessness, sadness, anger, lack of understanding for the atrocities, as stated by second-, and third-generation participants:

It made me very sad, very affected. A kind of anger, a kind of helplessness and also the question why, why did this happen? How could it come to this? […] it had an unbelievable impact on me and certainly led to the fact that I work for the community today, which is no surprise. (I1, G2)

Whenever I go to Dersim, my blood freezes in my veins when I think about the atrocities that took place, when I am in these canyons, [...] that so many people were killed [...] and it always takes me a few minutes to compose myself, because you don't see a memorial anywhere, for example, about where what took place, how many families were killed, how many people were killed. That actually haunts me all the time. (I3, G2)

[…] there has been a feeling that keeps rolling up and rolling up. [...] This is unfair, and of course you feel very small, because what am I supposed to do? (I1, G3)

This feeling was reinforced by the fear often perceived by witnesses, parents or elders, who either expressed the fear by being overcautious or indicated it by their silence:

Until the end of his life [my grandfather] was restless, still thinking about başka yere gitmeyin (do not go anywhere else), living together, you have to support each other when something happens from the outside. So again, and again this worry, it could start again [...] You have this feeling of cohesion in our parents' generation, but also a

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little bit. Also, the issue of thoughtfulness, people were always careful when and to whom they revealed their identity. [...] You could feel the fear that they shouldn't mess with them again [...] not to have thoughts of revenge. (I5, G3)

These certain insecurities that they (parents) had later [...] because they also experienced certain things, experienced oppression because of their identity. [...] There was naturally a fear, because they were not allowed to live out their Kurdish identity in the village. (I6, G2)

Besides the negative impact reported by subjects, there is also a sense of gratitude for being able to learn about the events from eyewitnesses, "I'm also glad that [...] I still have this story from the first sources, so to speak, from the living source" (I2, G3), and an acknowledgement for one's culture:

There were times when I cried, there were times when I was angry, which of course lasted longer. There were also wonderful times when we experienced and learned and got to know the beautiful positive sides of the culture and the people and the area. (I5, G2)

The Process of historical trauma transmission

The unique experiences gained by the Kurdish-Alevi diaspora from the present sample throughout the cycle of cultural/historical enquiry or exploration and thus forming their own sociopsychological repertoire, ultimately present the process of forming a narrative historical trauma transmission.

The first main themes referring to the transmission medium of historical trauma, highlights the different channels through which knowledge and feelings about the massacre are passed on. Various actors are involved in this direct, indirect or silent communication - from immediate family members to peers and from explicit conversations to subtle cultural cues. This constant and varied transmission creates an environment in which the impression of trauma is constantly present, even when there are no open discussions, thus promoting individuals to switch back and forth between historical investigations and personal family contexts.

The second theme, socio-psychological repertoire, captures the complex interplay of social beliefs, attitudes, acculturation processes and emotional reactions. The existing conflict, manifested in contemporary memories, acts as a mirror that reflects and reinforces the historical trauma. Such memories perpetuate the trauma narrative. Thus, the past is not a

distant history, but a living narrative interwoven with the contemporary experiences and challenges of Kurdish Alevi.

It becomes clear that the transgenerational transmission of historical trauma is not linear but cyclical. It is a self-perpetuating cycle in which the Dersim massacre, constantly refreshed by present-day memories, feeds a deeply rooted socio-psychological narrative. This narrative in turn feeds into the collective memory of the community, ensuring that the legacy of past experiences of the trauma persists and leaves its mark on the identities and experiences of subsequent generations.

CHAPTER 3

Discussion

This study investigated the processes involved in the inheritance of historical trauma particularly for vulnerable groups with ongoing conflict. The focus of this study laid upon the Kurdish Alevi Diaspora from Dersim, living in Germany. This group has been affected by the Dersim massacre in 1937-38, carried out by the Turkish government, targeted the Alevi Kurdish people in Dersim, resulting in the death and forced relocation of thousands, aiming to eradicate their cultural heritage and suppress their rebellion (McDowall, 2004; BBC, 2011). This atrocity is a notable part of the broader history of persecution faced by the Kurdish Alevi community in Turkey. Post-massacre, repressive measures continued with bans on Kurdish language and cultural practices, and the conflict intensified in the 1980s with the rise of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), leading to continued tensions and occasional violence between Turkish forces and Kurdish militants (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, n.d.). Given this context, the research was focused on two key questions; Once, how and what was communicated about the events of the Dersim massacre between 1937-38 and its role in the well-being of second and third generations Diaspora and secondly, what role contemporary reminders play in perpetuating conflict and trauma present in the subjects.

The Dersim Massacre stands as a critical event that not only reflected historical trauma but also initiated a chain of actions within a continuous conflict. Information about this trauma and associated issues within the conflict are conveyed across generations through various communication sources. These sources encompass family members, peers, and culture-specific aspects. The modes of these communications can range from being direct, indirect, or even silent. Alongside this, there is an ever-present nature to the trauma, intertwined with the ongoing conflict, fostering a continuous exploration of the past. This

exploration becomes a dynamic, iterative process where individuals shift between collecting historical and cultural information and comparing it to their family's history in that context. Besides the historical past, the existing conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish minority reinforces further challenges for the Kurdish Alevi, serving as reminders of the historical trauma. These lived experiences cultivate a sociopsychological repertoire consisting of societal beliefs, attitudes, acculturative processes, and emotions. Together they form the overarching narrative or memory. This creates a cycle that continuously preserves the cultural narrative of historical trauma and the layered socio-psychological implications of the ongoing conflict across generations.

This framework presents a social psychological perspective on historical trauma that holds a contemporary position in the academic landscape. Unlike conventional approaches that tend to look at trauma in individually, this approach integrates socio-cultural developments holistically with the broader socio-political context. This integration is particularly important in light of years of conflict that underpin the trauma experience of Kurdish Alevi from Dersim. This work fills meaningful gaps in the literature and offers a comprehensive perspective through which the complex interplay between historical trauma and larger societal dynamics can be explored. This innovative approach not only highlights the depth and complexity of historical trauma, but also provides a solid foundation for future research and interventions.

3.1 Individual implications and family dynamics of historical trauma

The present study provides findings on communication that are more in line with previous assumptions. For example, it was recognised that, among other things, indirect communication can play a complicated role on subsequent generations and that open communication that invites conversation tends to promote positive outcomes. However, the interviews with subjects also pointed to the complexity of communication, which was made clear by the fact that historical trauma does not simply rely on the communicative transmission of parents or grandparents but can also become conscious through other channels. The complexity here is shown by the different levels at which subjects come into contact with various pieces of information, often in a fragmentary way. Not only the immediate family plays a role, but also the cultural circle and exchange with peers.

The traumatic experience of the historical massacre has often elicited two psychological reactions, among others, in those affected. On the one hand, there is the defence mechanism, which manifests itself in behaviours such as secrecy or silence about the trauma.

Such responses can occur as a reaction to different emotions, such as the feeling of fear. According to Cohen-Chen and Halperin (2021) different emotional processes can occur during a phase of conflict situation, particularly in the case of intractable conflict. Avoidant behaviours serve as a function to reduce this fear or to escape possible trigger points that could induce this fear, such as an urge for caution. This mirrors Danieli's (1985) observations of the families of Holocaust survivors, particularly the 'victim families', where a culture of alertness and mistrust prevails to prepare offspring for possible recurring trauma scenarios. Such guarded communication can in turn lead to fragmented narratives, as Melander et al. (2016) point out. These pieces of information hinder deeper dialogue between generations and leaves many with unresolved feelings and unanswered questions.

Conversely, some individuals employ coping mechanisms that actively address the trauma. This is manifested, for example, in resilient behaviours such as giving testimony. Such actions, which arise from future generations with a sense of obligation towards them, aim to keep traumatic memories alive and ensure that they are acknowledged and remembered. This parallels Lev-Wiesel's (2007) observation of families of Holocaust survivors who have taken as a transgenerational task to ensure the preservation of memory as an act of loyalty to the ancestors involved. This proactive approach to trauma usually promotes open communication and nurtures feelings of gratitude and trust. Consequently, the type of communication within the family, whether defensive or proactive, may have a considerable imprint on the psychological outcomes for the descendants.

The content of communication within the family can have a substantial role in caregiving dynamics. While diminished or avoidant communication can lead to less sensitive caregiving, potentially resulting in insecure attachments and detrimental effects on children's well-being and perceived family functioning (Schore, 2009; Brandão et al., 2022), the opposite is not automatically beneficial. For example, participants who have overheard traumatic narratives may themselves engage in avoidant behaviours because they are overwhelmed by the emotional burden of what they have heard. Similarly, those directly involved in such dialogues may have difficulty processing the intense emotions they evoke. This is in line with findings from Kellermann (2001) and Kizilhan et al. (2021). Whereas Kellermann (2001) posits that unprocessed emotions from one generation can affect subsequent ones by inheriting the traumas of the ancestors and address them, Kizilhan et al. (2021) observed subsequent generations adopting trauma-related negative emotions with varying coping mechanisms. So, while it is important to share family stories and engage younger generations in ancestral narratives, it is equally important to create an environment

that allows for emotional expression and processing in order to protect the well-being of these younger members.

Contrary to expectation, the practiced communication about the massacre did not exclusively happen with the two distinct communication categories (open or indirect). Instead, trauma remains pervasive over families, through various channels like direct or indirect conversations with family, cultural symbols, festivals, or laments. Similar to previous research, the interviews revealed that participants learned about historical events and perceived their severity in different ways. This is consistent with previous studies such as Kizilhan et al. (2021) who stated that the massacre itself is not always directly addressed, but memories of it are kept alive through various media such as music, history, and rituals. This is especially true for the second generation, who often have a closer connection to their homeland, Dersim, and the first generation, while for the third generation a more indirect perception was implied, which made them feel that something was not right without being able to address this. These elements provide a constant presence of trauma that subjects must face at some point.

3.2 Cultural implications of historical trauma and the collective

Navigating through this shadow of trauma demands a period of introspection and cultural/historical inquiry. Primarily, this journey occurs when individuals, especially during adolescence, set out to better understand their own social identity. As proposed in the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner (2004), people seek to find meaning, understand their roots, and undergo processes of learning and self-realization. Imaginably, subjects who lack support from their household or families, due to their avoidant behaviour may face difficulty in the process of finding their social identity which in turn potentially contributes to negative outcomes on well-being (Cruwys et al., 2014). Some, in their quest for understanding, have turned to peers who offer insights, emphasizing the innate desire for connectedness. For some generations, like the second, this is further amplified by the direct impact of past traumatic events, with family narratives of loss and pain resonating more deeply. In contrast, the third generation, often living in diaspora, grapples more with the abstract concepts of cultural identity, distanced from their ancestral lands and traditions.

In the midst of this pursuit of identity and belonging, existing conflicts take on a central role, as they not only shape the collective consciousness, but can also strongly affect individual experiences and reactions (Bar-Tal, 2007; Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2012; Mohatt et al., 2014; Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2021). Conflicts can pose certain challenges for the society in

question, with each challenge having its own role in managing the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). For instance, a society might exhibit the need to resist the enemy, which may be manifested through solidarity, mobilisation, and action in the respective society (Bar-Tal, 2007; Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2012). This can also be observed among the current group of participants. Most of them are engaged in some way in the community or for the community. Through this work, efforts are made to counter perceived challenges. The annual commemoration of the atrocities and the sharing of the experiences of the witnesses serves to counteract perceived misconceptions of the other side. Some participants, for instance, have encountered views suggesting that the Dersim massacre was merely a response against a rebellion. Another form of challenge can also be the satisfaction of basic needs, which among other things performs the function of forming, maintaining and strengthening social identity (Bar-Tal, 2007). The importance of reclaiming identity, for example, is also particularly clear in the case of Indigenous youth as they directly challenge prevailing perceptions and seek to reconnect (Krieg, 2016). The desire for cultural continuity, both in tangible practices such as food traditions, and intangible ones, such as beliefs, is crucial (Krieg, 2016). This may also be true for youth from minority backgrounds in majority foster care, who value this continuity, but also want the autonomy to define their identity (Hansen, 2022). Thus, in the context of identity formation and cultural continuity, it is crucial to recognising lost identity and restoring cultural connections for holistic well-being and self-understanding.

Structural disadvantages, especially in Dersim, and constant discrimination based on their identity are elements that further pose challenges based on existing power dynamics in the conflict. This is an element neglected by Bar-Tal's (2007) Sociopsychological Infrastructure but emphasized in the Historical Trauma Narrative Model by Mohatt et al. (2014). Such experiences serve as a contemporary reminder of a group's historical trauma (Mohatt et al., 2014). The Kurdish Alevi identity, for one, illustrates this in the present group, which has been restricted in its expression due to oppressive experiences, which is in turn leading younger generations to experience so-called identity crises today. There is, for example, the so-called phenomenon of group-based emotions, which traces back to feelings that individuals experience due to belonging to a certain group (Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2021). The concept is based on the idea that people not only have personal emotions due to individual experiences, but also emotions due to events or situations that affect their group (Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2021). Participants have reported feeling emotions not only in relation to their own group, but also in relation to other groups or minorities, especially when they perceive injustice. This can be seen as an extended form of group-based emotion, where

individuals show empathy or solidarity with other minorities or marginalised groups, especially when they see parallels to their own group's experiences. Conversely, this can explain how certain ways of thinking, feeling and behaving are passed on from generation to generation within a community.

Thus, power structures may have profound implications on members of a culture who find themselves in a disadvantaged position and need to adapt in response to their circumstances. For the Kurdish Alevi in the current dataset, for instance, the trauma of the past has affected collective cultural practices such as language use, which has undergone setbacks in its development due to neglected use and transmission. Ultimately, this leads to subsequent generations either not fully adopting this linguistic heritage or losing it altogether. This perceived fading of cultural markers can reinforce feelings of loss and grief in community members (Brave Heart, 1998). These emotions in turn serve as a collective reminder of historical events such as the massacre and their marginalised status within a wider society. Consequently, such experiences underscore the salient role of social injustice in the shared experiences of historical trauma in affected communities.

These processes illustrate the role of power dynamics. Based on the structures given after the Massacre community members were forced to adjust their behaviours to survive. Hence, it was the environment of the Turkish nation state under which they were unable to speak their native language and practices their traditions and thus were forced to adapt their respective sociopsychological repertoire. Such experiences reinforce and solidify their narrative as a marginalised group and serve as both evidence and drive for their collective beliefs. The constant confrontation with these discriminatory acts and structural prejudices, combined with the weight of historical events, fosters feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and anger within the community and allows the longevity of trauma to persist not only in personal memory, but is also embedded in cultural development. It thus becomes clear that the collective narratives of the Kurdish-Alevi community of Dersim are shaped not only by historical events but also by their positioning within the larger socio-psychological infrastructure.

The dimension of the ongoing conflict between Turkey and the Kurds, especially in relation to the Kurdish Alevi affected by the Dersim massacre, is apparent in the emotional reactions that contribute to the persistence of the historical trauma. As described earlier, there are different emotions that occur during the different phases of a conflict, each playing a specific function in managing such deep-rooted conflicts (Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2021). A central emotion in the last phase, the de-escalation and peace-making phase, is anger (Cohen-

Chen, & Halperin, 2021). Anger is one of the five collective emotions that form part of the socio-psychological infrastructure (Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2012). In contrast to fear, anger more often leads to action-oriented behaviour, such as collective action (Smith et al., 2007). Participants frequently reported feelings of anger, especially when reflecting on personally experienced or observed injustices. It is noteworthy that a large proportion of the study participants are actively involved in their community. This involvement can be seen as a form of collective action. It highlights the deep connection and need of individuals to make a difference and foster a sense of belonging within their community. This collective action can be seen as a way to mitigate the effects of trauma and shape a more positive future for the community.

Another feature that also contributes to shaping the collective narrative of the Kurdish Alevi community of Dersim is the role of the diaspora in maintaining and changing their identity. Keles (2014) has noted that many Kurdish Alevi feel distanced from Alevism. They tend instead to identify themselves by being Kurdish. One of Keles' main arguments is that there is a lack of crucial religious leaders who would serve to pass on religious meanings and traditions. Similar to the fragmented information about the massacre, this process takes place on at the cultural level, resulting in fragmented information about religious aspects. Particularly noteworthy is the difference between the third and the second generation. While the second generation was still more influenced by the conflict and the associated restrictions in their identity formation, the third generation experiences more freedom in their diasporic environment. They are less restricted by the conflict and its effects and can therefore live their identity publicly and redefine it for themselves. These aspects complement and deepen the understanding of how the collective narratives of the Kurdish-Alevi community of Dersim are shaped. It becomes clear that their positioning and experiences in the diaspora and the freedoms and restrictions that come with it are also crucial factors for their development of a socio-psychological repertoire.

In terms of further generational differences between the two sets of participants, no necessarily fundamental differences become noticeable. The mechanisms that were outlined aforementioned may take place in each generation. Differences can rather be seen in the social-political climate individuals were socialized in. For instance, with participants of the older age group emphasising the impact the political movement of the 80s and 90s have had on the collective and their cultural identity. Whereas participants of the younger age group stressed out the complexity of their multifaced identity and struggles to figure out where they belong, because of their predominant lives in Diaspora.

3.3 Relevance of the study and contribution to literature

The present study tried to fill existing gaps in the trauma literature, including the lack of attention to socio-cultural factors (Hinton & Hinton, 2002; Kirmayer, 2004) and the neglect of the role of social justice and social change (Hobfoll et al., 2012). This was upheld by its findings that highlighted both the historical and socio-cultural context that plays a relevant role in understanding the historical trauma and its effects on the community and culture. Traumatic events, when amplified by ongoing systemic oppression or injustice, can further entrench trauma, making its effects pervasive and difficult to address. The findings of this study give voice to those affected by marginalisation and demonstrate how the ongoing lack of justice serves as a constant, oppressive reminder of past trauma and deepens its impact. It is not only about the traumatic event itself, but also about the subsequent societal responses, acknowledgements and reparations or lack thereof that shape the trauma narrative. Thus, this study is a testament to the intertwining of historical trauma, socio-cultural dynamics and the pervasive quest for social justice and change. It expands the boundaries of trauma studies and challenges the academic community to take a more holistic, multi-faceted view when examining the impact of historical trauma.

This research uncovers the complex dynamics of trauma communication in families. While the nature of the transference can vary, the core of the challenge lies not in the type of communication, but in the supportive environment available to offspring. In coming to terms with their traumatic history, the need for validation is central, highlighting the need for counselling and a community that encourages dialogue and sharing.

Life in the diaspora brings additional layers of complexity. The loss of one's mother tongue and the constant struggle to find one's cultural identity in a country other than that of origin reinforce the importance of maintaining cultural continuity, which underpins to be the pillar of individual well-being. This struggle is not only about overcoming historical trauma, but also about establishing one's own identity in an adopted homeland.

Moreover, the role of power dynamics in the transmission of trauma is unmistakable. Building on Mohatt et al.'s (2014) focus on the role power plays, the current study offers a tangible illustration of its manifestation. Narratives from dominant groups can distort or suppress the stories of the marginalized. This impact of the trauma narrative reinforces feelings of discrimination and leads to a profound sense of cultural loss. The journey to understanding historical trauma is not just a personal effort, it is closely tied to larger social constructs and power dynamics.

This research is important because it gives light to the experiences of the participants. As this study has brought forward it is important for a community affected by historical trauma (1) to have a feeling of their history being acknowledged, (2) for their identity to be seen and understood, as the notion of not understanding the complexity and history of their identity has been a subjects in participants experience, and also (3) the notion of social justice that comes with an understanding of community members experiences and pathway.

3.4 Limitations

The study's design possesses several noteworthy limitations. Primarily, the convenience sampling method for recruitment might have introduced a selection bias, especially as most participants were actively involved in community centres or associations. This active participation suggests that their views might not be entirely representative of the broader Kurdish Alevi Diaspora from Dersim in Germany, potentially presenting intensified feelings or perceptions about the trauma. Coupled with a limited participant size, there's a cautionary note on the generalizability of the findings to the wider population. Furthermore, the gender imbalance in the sample, with fewer male participants, means male perspectives within the community may be underrepresented.

Another limitation pertains to the reliance on self-reported data, particularly concerning family dynamics and communication. Participants provided their perspectives without cross-referencing with other family members. Without supportive reports from family members, the study might not capture the full depth, nuances, or potential discrepancies in the narratives surrounding the trauma and its transgenerational transmission. Consequently, the study captures a singular viewpoint, which may introduce a subjective bias. Moreover, participants might present their experiences or feelings in a manner they believe aligns with the researcher's expectations or with what is socially acceptable within their community.

Despite these constraints, it's crucial to note that while the study offers a specific snapshot of a unique group's experiences, the insights provided can be instrumental in socio-psychological understandings of trauma, especially for communities in similar contexts, considering the universal human experiences at the core of the research.

3.5 Recommendations for future studies

For future research in this area, it is recommended to use a more diverse sampling strategy that goes beyond community centres and captures a broader range of experiences of

the Kurdish Alevi diaspora from Dersim in Germany. A larger sample would increase the validity of the study, and a more gender-balanced sample could provide insights into possible gender differences in trauma transmission. It is noteworthy that during the course of the interviews, hints emerged—especially from the elder female age group—toward the intersectionality of their roles as daughters, sisters, and mothers. These cues point towards a complex interplay of cultural, familial, and gendered roles in the context of historical trauma. An interesting starting point for further research would therefore be to examine the differentiated effects of gender roles on the transgenerational transmission process. This exploration can shed light on how being a daughter, sister, or mother within the Kurdish Alevi diaspora affects the ways in which trauma narratives are inherited, understood, and shared.

In addition, to the aforementioned points, a deeper exploration of cultural and acculturative aspects could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the interplay of historical narratives, present-day experiences, and the process of acculturation shapes the perception and transmission of trauma. The diaspora's role, especially its impact on younger generations, emerges as a crucial consideration in this discourse. Being part of a diaspora often entails a unique blend of one's culture of origin and the 'host culture'. Understanding how this dual influence shapes the experiences of younger subsequent generations can inform ways of transmitting and coping with historical trauma. Acculturation theory by Sam and Berry (2010) could be a tentative starting point, describing the processes of sociopsychological and sociocultural change that occur when two cultural groups come together. Furthermore, the literature suggests that different acculturation strategies can have different effects on the health of those affected. For instance, research indicated that best outcomes on well-being is obtained through integration (maintain both heritage and host culture) compared to marginalisation, segregation & assimilation (Berry & Hou, 2017). It is therefore interesting to further investigate how experiences of Kurdish Alevi Diaspora may shape their acculturative strategies and in turn may affect their health in addition to the implications though the historical trauma.

A focused examination of the role of identity in trauma perception and transmission is recommended, as it plays an inherent role in individuals' experiences and narratives. Recent studies emphasise the importance of identity in the context of cultural adaptation. For example, a meta-analysis by Nguyen & Benet-Martínez (2012) highlights the positive outcomes associated with biculturalism, suggesting that individuals who align with both the dominant culture and the culture of origin show better adjustment than those who predominantly align with either culture. This relationship between identity-related stressors

and health outcomes is also illustrated by other studies. For example, Ahmed et al. (2011) found an overlap between perceived discrimination, acculturative stress and mental health problems among Arab-American adolescents. Similarly, Pittman et al. (2017) found an association between racial stress and risky drinking behaviours in marginalised groups. These findings highlight the need to explore the complexity of identity, particularly when it is situated in the context of historical trauma, ongoing conflict and diasporic experiences. Future research should not only deconstruct the layers of identity, but also explore interventions that support positive identity development and coping mechanisms in communities affected by trauma.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

The present study delved into the transgenerational impact of historical trauma, focusing on the Kurdish Alevi Diaspora from Dersim living in Germany, who were affected by the Dersim massacre of 1937-38. This topic is of importance as it underscores the profound and lasting implications of traumatic historical events on generations who were not themselves directly exposed to the original event and addressing their role in the socio-cultural development, identity formation, and mental well-being.

The research posited that historical traumas like the Dersim massacre have enduring consequences that transcend generations and are communicated and interpreted differently through family channels, cultural symbols, and rituals. This transmission, intertwined with socio-political and socio-cultural dynamics, forms a perpetuating cycle that shapes the collective narratives and identities of affected communities. Some might argue that the effects of historical trauma fades over time and younger generations, especially in diasporic settings, become detached from past atrocities. However, this study has illustrated that trauma narratives, even as they evolve, remain embedded in the cultural, familial, and individual consciousness. Especially in the face of ongoing conflicts and socio-political injustices, the trauma gets continuously reinforced.

As the nuances of historical trauma are deeply intertwined with identity, culture, and ongoing socio-political contexts, it is crucial to facilitate dialogue, ensure recognition, and advocate for social justice to ensure that affected communities do not remain marginalized. Future research should pursuit to delve deeper into aspects like gender roles within transgenerational trauma communication, acculturation strategies for diaspora communities,

and the multiple layers of identity in the context of transgenerational trauma. Such research will not only provide richer insights but will also pave the way for interventions that aid in healing, reconciliation, and positive identity formation.

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Appendix A

Conceptual Models
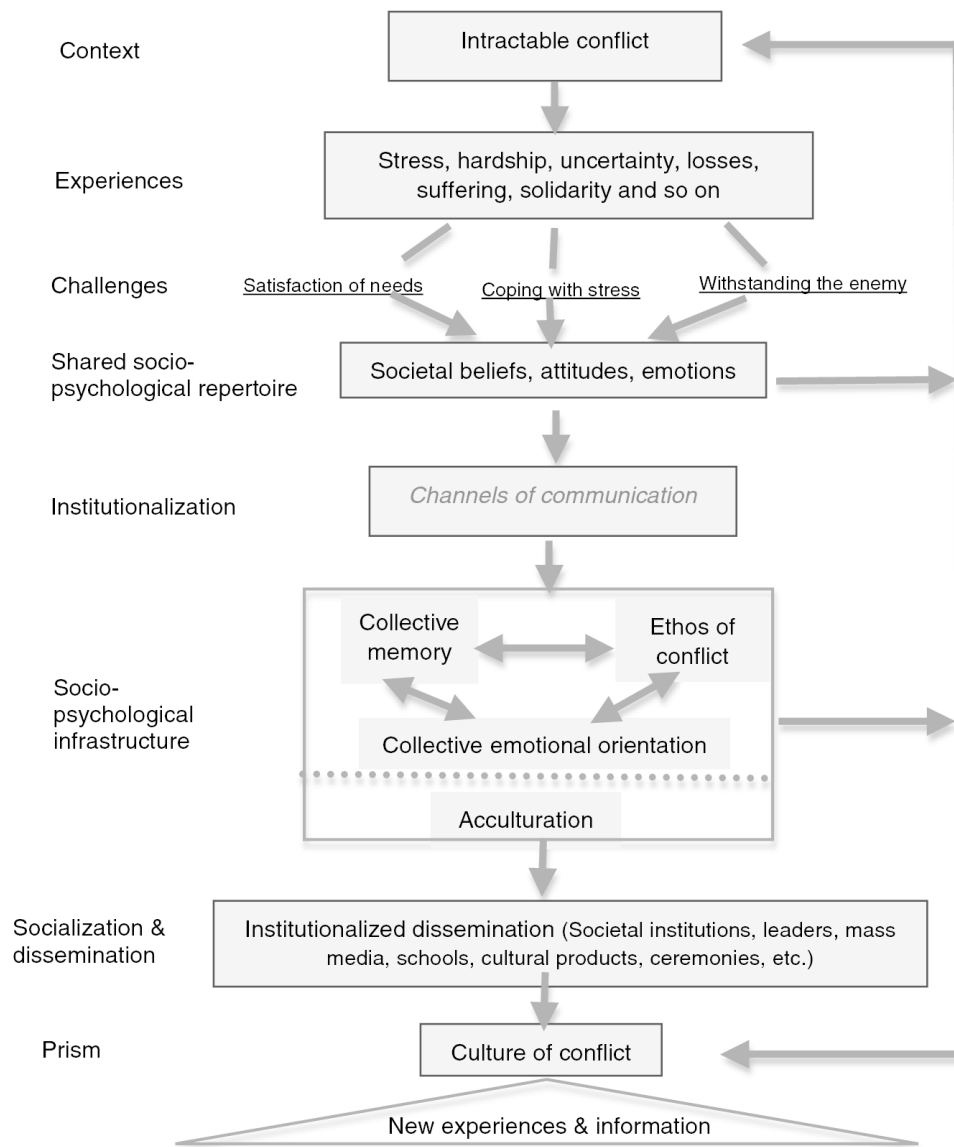
Figure 2

Historical Trauma Narrative Model
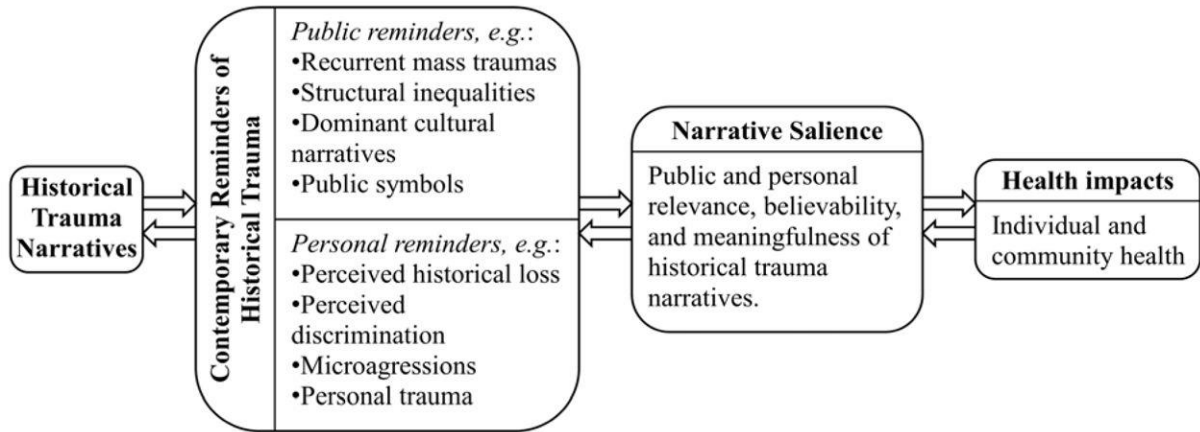
Source: Mohatt, N. V., Thompson, A. B., Thai, N. D., & Tebes, J. K. (2014). Historical trauma as public narrative: A conceptual review of how history impacts present-day health. Social Science & Medicine, 106, 128–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.043

Figure 3

Sociopsychological Infrastructure of Intractable Conflict

Context	Intractable conflict	
Experiences	Stress, hardship, uncertainty, losses, suffering, solidarity and so on	
Challenges	Satisfaction of needs Coping with stress Withstanding the enemy	
Shared socio-psychological repertoire	Societal beliefs, attitudes, emotions	
Institutionalization	*Channels of communication*	
Socio-psychological infrastructure	Collective memory ⟷ Ethos of conflict / Collective emotional orientation / Acculturation	
Socialization & dissemination	Institutionalized dissemination (Societal institutions, leaders, mass media, schools, cultural products, ceremonies, etc.)	
Prism	Culture of conflict	
	New experiences & information	

Source: Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable conflicts. American Behavioral Scientist, 50(11), 1430–1453. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207302462

Appendix B

Informed Consent

This study is part of my Master Thesis Project taking place at **Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa.**

The aim of my study is to gain a general understanding of the different perspectives of the Kurdish (kirmanc-zaza, kurmanc) - Alevi community in Germany. Specifically, I wish to create a deeper awareness of the challenges faced by a culture that has not only experienced a genocide but is also involved in an ongoing conflict. Your participation in the study is highly valued as it will help expand knowledge in this field of study for the Kurdish-Alevi community. In the interview, we will discuss your specific experiences related to intra-family communication and cultural or collective narratives. The conversation should take about 60 minutes.

The study is conducted by Zelal Ağ (zagle@iscte-iul.pt) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Ricardo Borges Rodrigues (rfprs@iscte-iul.pt), who are responsible for the processing of your personal data that are collected and processed exclusively for the purposes of the study, legally based on Article 6(a) and Article 9(2)(a) of the GDPR. You may contact her to clear up any doubts, share comments or exercise your rights in relation to the processing of your personal data. You may use the contact indicated above to request access, rectification, erasure, or limitation of the processing of your personal data.

Your participation in this study is **confidential**. Your personal data will always be processed based on the duty of secrecy and confidentiality. The use of appropriate techniques, organizational and security measures to protect personal information is always assured. The investigator is required to keep all personal data confidential.

In addition to being confidential, participation in the study is strictly **voluntary**: you may choose freely whether to participate or not. If you have decided to participate, you may stop your participation and withdraw your consent to the processing of your personal data at any time, without having to provide any justification. The withdrawal of consent shall not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.

Your personal data will be kept for the duration of the ongoing study during which they will be anonymised in order to make sure that no personal data can be traced back to you. Furthermore, their anonymity being assured in the study's results, being disclosed only for purposes of statistics, teaching, communication in scientific meetings, books or articles.

There are no expected significant risks associated with participation in the study neither Iscte nor the investigator discloses, or share with third parties, information related to its personal data.

Iscte has a Data Protection Officer who may be contacted by e-mail: dpo@iscte-iul.pt. If you consider this necessary, you also have the right to submit a complaint to the Portuguese Data Protection Authority (CNDP).

I declare that I have understood the aims of what was proposed to me, as explained by the investigator, that I was given the opportunity to ask any questions about this study and received a clarifying reply to all such questions.

Appendix C

Semi-Structures Interview Template

1. Introduction

- Welcoming interviewee
- Introducing myself
- Explaining the procedure of the interview
- Giving space for questions
- Double checking for agreement with the informed consent and audio recording

2. Warm-up questions

2.1 Tell me something about yourself (first name, age, profession, hobbies, marital status, ...)

2.2 What made you decide to participate in my study?

3. Individual- & Intrafamily communication and well-being

3.1 **What** type of information do you remember being exposed to regarding this historical event in 1937/38

3.2 **How** was this information communicated to you?

3.3 **What** was your reaction to this information?

3.4 Did you have a **relative** that has personally experienced these events?

3.5 When you think about how you learned about these events, or even what you learned, how do you think knowing about these events has affected your own wellbeing or that of family members?

    5.1 (If any negative aspects were mentioned): Can you remember what the reaction was? How it was/is dealt with?

3.6 What do you think could be done to **improve** communication and understanding of the massacre (among your community)?

4. Collective/cultural mechanisms as a means of perpetuating past trauma in the present

Present memories

4.1 Can you tell me about any **stories or memories** related to these challenges that have been passed down through your family?

4.2 Can you tell me any **practices or habits** related to these stories or memories that you were taught or have taught your children?

4.3 Do you know of any **traditions** that have been passed down in the community because of this/ that might have been shaped by these stories, memories, habits?

Own experiences/ narrative salience

4.4 Have you ever experienced any **challenges or difficulties** in your life that you think might be related to your **cultural background or identity**?

4.5 How do you think your cultural background has **shaped your views and experiences** in the world?

Perceived present conflicts

4.6 What do you think are some of the most important **issues facing the community** today?

4.7 How do you think these historical events have impacted the community in their **development**?

Coping strategies

4.8 Can you think of **approaches that may have helped** the community to overcome these problems/challenges?

Appendix D

Coding System

Communication

indirect   direct

well-being

| feelings towards Dersim 37/38 | values | attachment (to culture/ Dersim | collective action |

Contemporary Reminders of Trauma

personal reminders

| perceived historical loss | perceived discrimination | micro-aggresions | personal trauma |

public reminders

| recurrent mass traumas | structural inequalities | Dominant cultural narrative | public symbols |

Meaningsfulness/ Salience

Identity   Affiliation