THE LONG SHADOW OF THE 1980 ÇORUM MASSACRE ON THE ALEVI-SUNNI RELATIONS: HISTORICAL TRAUMA, COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND CAUTIOUS INTEGRATION IN MIXED RURAL VILLAGES*

1980 Çorum Katliamı'nın Alevi-Sünni İlişkileri Üzerindeki Uzun Gölgesi: Karma Kırsal Yerleşimlerde Tarihsel Travma, Kolektif Bellek ve Temkinli Bütünleşme

Der lange Schatten des Massakers von Çorum von 1980 auf den alevitisch-sunnitischen Beziehungen: Historisches Trauma, kollektives Gedächtnis und vorsichtige Integration in gemischten ländlichen Siedlungen

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the enduring impact of the 1980 Çorum Massacre on contemporary Alevi–Sunni relations, focusing on five mixed rural settlements, Eymir, Harmancık, Karaca, Emirbağı, and Fındık, where Mosques and Cemevis coexist. Drawing on 109 in-depth interviews and 14 months of participant observation conducted between 2013 and 2016, this study analyzes how historical trauma intersects with optimal intergroup contact conditions in everyday rural practice. The theoretical framework integrates Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, Halbwachs' (1992) collective memory, and Alexander's (2004) cultural trauma to explain the negotiation of sectarian boundaries in the aftermath of violence.

* This article represents a secondary analysis of qualitative data originally collected by the author (Birol Topuz, 2013-2016) for doctoral research at the University of Potsdam. All participants' identities remain confidential; villages are anonymized as V1-V5. The research was approved by the University of Hitit Ethics Committee (2013) and University of Potsdam Ethics Committee. The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of village residents and communities that participated in the original research.

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Methodological rigor was enhanced through NVivo-assisted thematic analysis with inter-coder reliability protocols, peer debriefing, and stringent ethical protocols to prevent re-traumatization. The study's primary contribution is the conceptualization of "cautious integration," a dual structure in which mistrust and historical grievances persist at the symbolic and emotional levels, while economic interdependence, kinship ties, and shared rituals strategically reduce social distance in daily practice.

The findings reveal that rural mixed structures foster a resilient form of "mandatory/compulsory peace", unlike the spatial and emotional segregation observed in urban centers." Local religious leaders, Imams and Dedes, function as "mediatory actors" whose inclusive practices provide crucial symbolic infrastructure for social cohesion." The research demonstrates that sustainable coexistence is achieved through the strategic development of a "living-with-trauma" approach rather than the erasure of trauma. The Çorum case suggests that when supported by cultural intimacy and localized religious mediation, grassroots solidarity practices can remain remarkably durable against macro-level political polarization, though long-term sustainability ultimately depends on institutional recognition and formal reconciliation mechanisms at the state level.

Keywords: Çorum Massacre, Alevi–Sunni Relations, Cautious Integration, Collective Memory, Intergroup Contact Theory, Cultural Trauma.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, cami ve cemevlerinin bir arada bulunduğu Eymir, Harmancık, Karaca, Emirbağı ve Fındık adlı beş karma kırsal yerleşime odaklanarak 1980 Çorum Katliamı'nın günümüzdeki Alevi-Sünni ilişkileri üzerindeki kalıcı etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışmada, 2013-2016 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilen 109 görüşme ile 14 aylık katılımlı gözlemden elde edilen veriler doğrultusunda, tarihsel travmanın gruplar arası temas için gerekli uygun koşullarla gündelik kırsal yaşamda nasıl kesiştiği analiz edilmektedir. Kuramsal çerçeve; şiddet sonrasında mezhepsel sınırların nasıl müzakere edildiğini açıklamak amacıyla Allport'un (1954) gruplar arası temas kuramını, Halbwachs'ın (1992) kolektif bellek yaklaşımını ve Alexander'ın (2004) kültürel travma kuramını bir araya getirmektedir.

Araştırmanın yöntemsel güvenilirliği; kodlayıcılar arası uyum süreçlerini içeren NVivo destekli tematik analiz, meslektaş değerlendirmesi ve katılımcıların yeniden travmatize olmasını önlemeye yönelik sıkı etik ilkeler aracılığıyla güçlendirilmiştir. Çalışmanın temel katkısı, "temkinli bütünleşme" kavramsallaştırmasıdır. Bu kavram, sembolik ve duygusal düzeylerde güvensizlik ile tarihsel kırgınlıkların devam ettiği; buna karşılık ekonomik karşılıklı bağımlılığın, akrabalık ilişkilerinin ve ortak ritüellerin gündelik yaşamda toplumsal mesafeyi stratejik biçimde azalttığı ikili bir yapıyı ifade etmektedir.

Bulgular, kırsaldaki karma yerleşim yapılarının, kent merkezlerinde gözlemlenen mekânsal ve duygusal ayrışmadan farklı olarak, dirençli bir "zorunlu barış" biçimi geliştirdiğini göstermektedir. Yerel dinî önderler olan imamlar ve dedeler, kapsayıcı uygulamalarıyla toplumsal bütünleşme için gerekli sembolik zemini oluşturan "arabulucu aktörler" olarak işlev görmektedir. Araştırma, sürdürülebilir birlikte yaşamın travmanın silinmesiyle değil, stratejik bir "travmayla yaşama" yaklaşımının geliştirilmesiyle mümkün olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çorum örneği, tabandan gelişen dayanışma pratiklerinin kültürel yakınlık ve yerel dinî arabuluculukla desteklendiğinde, makro düzeydeki siyasal kutuplaşmaya karşı dikkate değer ölçüde kalıcı olabileceğini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu yapının uzun vadede sürdürülebilirliği, devlet düzeyinde kurumsal tanımaya ve resmî uzlaşma mekanizmalarının oluşturulmasına bağlıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çorum Katliamı, Alevi-Sünni İlişkileri, Temkinli Bütünleşme, Kolektif Bellek, Gruplar Arası Temas Kuramı, Kültürel Travma.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende Studie untersucht die anhaltenden Auswirkungen des Massakers von Çorum 1980 auf die heutigen alevitisch-sunnitischen Beziehungen, indem sie sich auf fünf gemischte ländliche Siedlungen – Eymir, Harmancık, Karaca, Emirbağı und Fındık – konzentriert, in denen es sowohl Moscheen als auch Cem-Häuser gibt. Auf Grundlage von 109 Interviews, die zwischen 2013 und 2016 geführt wurden, sowie 14 Monaten teilnehmender Beobachtung analysiert die Studie, wie historisches Trauma und die für intergruppalen Kontakt notwendigen Bedingungen im alltäglichen ländlichen Leben miteinander verschränkt sind. Der theoretische Rahmen verbindet Allports Kontakthypothese (1954), Halbwachs' Ansatz des kollektiven Gedächtnisses (1992) und Alexanders Theorie des kulturellen Traumas (2004), um zu erklären, wie konfessionelle Grenzen nach Gewalterfahrungen verhandelt werden. Die methodische Zuverlässigkeit der Untersuchung wird durch NVivo-gestützte thematische Analyse unter Einbeziehung interkoderischer Übereinstimmungsverfahren, Peer-Review-Prozesse sowie strikte ethische Richtlinien zur Vermeidung einer Retraumatisierung der Teilnehmenden gestärkt. Der zentrale Beitrag der Studie liegt in der Konzeptualisierung der „vorsichtigen Integration". Dieser Begriff beschreibt eine doppelte Struktur, in der auf symbolischer und emotionaler Ebene weiterhin Misstrauen und historische Verletzungen bestehen, während zugleich wirtschaftliche Interdependenzen, verwandtschaftliche Beziehungen und gemeinsame Rituale im Alltag die soziale Distanz strategisch verringern. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass gemischte ländliche Siedlungsstrukturen im Gegensatz zu den in urbanen Zentren beobachtbaren räumlichen und emotionalen Segregationsprozessen eine widerstandsfähige Form eines „erzwungenen Friedens" herausgebildet haben. Lokale religiöse Autoritäten – Imame und Dedes – fungieren dabei als vermittelnde Akteure, die durch integrative Praktiken den symbolischen Rahmen für gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt bereitstellen. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass nachhaltiges Zusammenleben nicht durch die Verdrängung von Trauma erreicht wird, sondern durch die Entwicklung eines strategischen Umgangs mit dem „Leben mit dem Trauma". Das Beispiel Çorum zeigt, dass von der Basis ausgehende Solidaritätspraktiken, wenn sie durch kulturelle Nähe und lokale religiöse Vermittlung unterstützt werden, gegenüber makropolitischer Polarisierung eine bemerkenswerte Stabilität entfalten können. Ihre langfristige Nachhaltigkeit hängt jedoch von institutioneller Anerkennung auf staatlicher Ebene sowie der Etablierung offizieller Versöhnungsmechanismen ab.

Schlüsselwörter: Massaker von Çorum, alevitisch-sunnitische Beziehungen, vorsichtige Integration, kollektives Gedächtnis, Kontakthypothese, kulturelles Trauma.

Introduction

The 1980 Çorum Massacre represents one of the most consequential episodes of sectarian violence in the history of modern Turkey. Coordinated attacks targeting Alevi communities between late June and early July 1980 resulted in at least 57 documented deaths, injuries exceeding 200, displacement of over 600 families, and extensive property destruction. Despite the magnitude of these events, they remain incompletely documented in English-language academic literature, and few studies have examined their contemporary ramifications in rural contexts where Alevi and Sunni communities maintain daily co-existence. This article addresses this gap by examining how the 1980 trauma continues to shape intergroup perceptions, emotional landscapes, and patterns of social contact in five mixed villages within Çorum province.

1. Research context and significance

This study reanalyses original fieldwork (Topuz, 2013-2016) conducted at the University of Potsdam. Methodologically, we distinguish between history (chronological events) and memory (lived, selective, emotional, and constitutive remembrance). This study centres on collective memory, the interpretive, affective dimensions of shared diaspora experience rather than historical facts alone. The original fieldwork researcher conducting this reanalysis enables deeper contextualization and nuanced interpretation of qualitative material without the constraints limiting external analysis, thereby strengthening interpretive validity."

Sectarian conflicts such as Çorum and Maraş, provide sociologists with critical insight into how religion functions as a mechanism of social differentiation, fragmentation, and conflict (Eren, 2008). However, these same cases reveal that religion can equally serve as a foundation for coexistence, provided that structural conditions support intergroup contact.

Since the pre-1980s, the Alevi–Sunni divide in modern Turkey has been increasingly politicized since the pre-1980 period, shaped by ideological polarization and the strategic instrumentalization of sectarian identities by political actors (Coşkuner & Aslan, 2020). The 1978 Maraş Massacre similarly illustrates the interplay between sectarian motives and political manipulation (Sezan, 2025). Within this political context, the Çorum Massacre must be understood not solely as a sectarian rupture

but as a reflection of broader social change, urban transformation, and shifting patterns of intergroup interaction (Mazlum, 2025).

Persistence of the "Alevi Question" in Turkey

The Alevi communities' historical experience includes centuries of Ottoman persecution of Qizilbash groups, republican-era marginalization, and repeated cycles of violence. These historical experiences have produced lasting effects on younger generations, shaping political orientations, religious identities, and perceptions of social belonging (Odabaşı, 2021). For many Alevi participants in this study, the 1980 Çorum Massacre is not perceived as an isolated event but as part of a centuries-long chain of "being targeted" due to their beliefs—a perception rooted in memories of the Battle of Karbala, Ottoman repressions, and modern sectarian violence.

Research questions and contributions

This study makes the following three original contributions to the field:

1. This study provides the first systematic empirical examination of how historical trauma interacts with optimal intergroup contact conditions in rural Alevi–Sunni settings, moving beyond theoretical application to document the actual mechanics of "contact under trauma."

2. It introduces and theoretically grounds the concept of "cautious integration," demonstrating how communities navigate the tension between practical cooperation and persistent symbolic distance in the aftermath of collective violence.

3. Through thick qualitative description and comparative analysis, it demonstrates how local structural conditions can buffer national-level polarization while simultaneously revealing the fragility of this local resilience absent institutional support.

The central research question is not only how Alevis and Sunnis coexist today but also how they maintain meaningful daily cooperation under the shadow of shared yet asymmetrically experienced trauma. The Çorum case offers a compelling lens through which to examine the complex interplay between memory, identity, and intergroup relations in contemporary Turkey and, by extension, in other contexts marked by historical violence.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Data Source: Secondary Analysis

This study employs a distinctive methodological approach: secondary analysis of their dataset conducted by the original fieldwork researcher. While "secondary analysis" traditionally refers to external reanalysis of published or archived data, this case involves the author (Birol Topuz) reexamining qualitative material collected for doctoral research (2013-2016, University of Potsdam) through new theoretical frameworks and research questions developed subsequently to original fieldwork.

This methodological choice offers the following significant advantages for validity:

1. **Contextual Depth:** The author possesses intimate knowledge of interview contexts, nonverbal communication, relational dynamics, and field conditions that cannot be fully preserved in transcripts or field notes alone.

2. **Reduced Risk of Miscontextualization:** Unlike external secondary analysts, the original researcher avoids misinterpreting participant intent, local terminology, or seemingly minor details.

3. **Transparency of Authorial Intent:** The author's explicit acknowledgment that this represents a reanalysis of their own data reduces the likelihood of unconscious bias masked by claims of objectivity.

4. **Refined Coding Against Saturation:** As the general content landscape is already known, the author's prior familiarity with the dataset permits efficient coding in the secondary analysis phase; new codes are introduced only when truly novel themes emerge.

Simultaneously, this approach presents the following specific methodological challenges:

1. **Confirmation bias risk:** The author may unconsciously code data to support theoretical preconceptions developed since the original fieldwork.

2. **Loss of analytical distance:** The emotional investment in the original fieldwork and relationships with participants may unconsciously shape interpretation.

3. **Changed Contextual Frame:** Data collected in 2013-2016 (post-AKP period, pre-coup attempt, and pre-COVID-19) are now analyzed in 2025 (post-political polarization and post-pandemic) through a retrospective lens that may inadvertently read contemporary concerns back into historical data.

To mitigate these risks, the following analysis was employed:

- Validation of independent secondary coders (Section 2.4)
- Explicit disconfirming evidence protocols (identifying data that contradict theoretical expectations)
- Peer debriefing with researchers unfamiliar with the original fieldwork
- Documented audit trail of the analytical decisions

These safeguards are particularly important given that the author has vested intellectual interest in the conclusions of the dataset.

2.2 Sample composition and demographic profile

A total of 109 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three generations of residents (aged 18–85 years). The sample comprised approximately 55% Alevi (n = 60) and 45% Sunni (n = 49) respondents. The demographic composition reflects the population distribution of the villages, although sampling included deliberate oversampling of direct witnesses to 1980 events and village opinion leaders (Imams, Dedes, and headmen).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents by gender, age, and religious affiliation

Demographic Variable	Alevi (n=60)	Sunni (n=49)	Total (n=109)	Percentage
Gender				
Male	34	28	62	56.9%
Female	26	21	47	43.1%
Age Groups				

18–35 years	18	14	32	29.4%
36–55 years	22	19	41	37.6%
56+ years (adult witnesses)	20	16	36	33.0%
Occupational Background				
Agricultural/Pastoral	38	32	70	64.2%
Artisanal/Craft	12	10	22	20.2%
Service/Commerce	8	6	14	12.8%
Unemployed/Retired	2	1	3	2.8%
Educational Attainment				
Primary or less	28	25	53	48.6%
Secondary	24	18	42	38.5%
Tertiary	8	6	14	12.8%
Residential Status				
Lifelong resident	48	41	89	81.7%
Returned migrant	10	7	17	15.6%
Recent settler	2	1	3	2.8%

Note: Educational attainment and occupational background show minimal inter-group stratification (Cramer's $V = 0.08$ for occupational category, $p = 0.76$; $\chi^2 = 1.23$ for educational attainment, $p = 0.54$), supporting Allport's contact theory's structural equality assumption in these settings. Gender representation is reasonably balanced, though female respondents tend to be concentrated on the 36–55 age bracket due to migration patterns among younger women.

IMPORTANT: Gender imbalance in witness narratives requires acknowledgment. Among respondents aged 56+ who directly witnessed the 1980 events, 65% were male (males: 20, females: 16), reflecting women's younger age profile in 1980 and potentially gendered migration patterns (women marrying into/out of villages). This demographic skew may result in underrepresentation of female-gendered trauma experiences, which the interview corpus did not systematically document. This limitation is addressed in Section 7.1.

2.3 Data collection methods

The study employed a triangulation of qualitative research methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and extensive literature review.

Interview Protocol: Interviews lasted 45–120 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview guide covering: (1) personal and family memories of the 1980 events; (2) household composition and residential history; (3) everyday intergroup practices and social contact patterns; (4) participation in religious ceremonies and shared rituals; (5) perceptions of state institutions and legal status; and (6) attitudes toward intergroup relations and future coexistence. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit informed consent and transcribed verbatim within 2 weeks of collection to preserve accuracy and permit preliminary thematic recognition during ongoing fieldwork. The interview guide remained consistent across all five villages to ensure comparability, though the semi-structured format permitted follow-up probes tailored to individual respondent contexts.

Participant observation: The researcher conducted approximately 14 months of cumulative participant observation across multiple village visits spanning three years (2013-2016). Observation encompassed: religious ceremonies (mosque prayers, Djemevi cem rituals, and Muharram commemorations), communal work events (agricultural harvests, animal slaughtering, and house repairs), life-cycle rituals (weddings, funerals, and circumcision celebrations), and informal social gatherings. Field notes were recorded daily in a structured format capturing: (a) direct observations of behaviors and interactions, (b) temporal and spatial context, (c) participant demographics, (d) researcher reflections on positionality and potential biases, and (e) emerging analytical insights. This resulted in 47 detailed observation notes averaging 1,000-1,500 words each.

Researcher Positionality: The researcher, a sociologist born in Çorum but not currently living there, explained his academic interest in intergroup relations to all participants. While the researcher's outsider status may have facilitated frank discussions of sensitive issues with some participants (reducing concerns about local gossip), the construction of Turkish identity and institutional affiliation likely shaped certain aspects of disclosure and trust-building, particularly in the early phases of fieldwork. Male-headed households occasionally displayed greater caution in disclosing certain information to a male researcher; conversely, some female respondents appeared not comfortable discussing intimate experiences

with a male interviewer. The gendered dynamics of the research encounter are not fully documented in the available field notes and represent a limitation of data preservation.

2.4 Data Analysis Process: NVivo-Assisted Thematic Analysis with Coder Validation

Data analysis of the original 2013-2016 fieldwork dataset was not conducted during the original research period because the doctoral dissertation employed a different analytical framework focused on integration patterns rather than trauma-memory intersection. This study contributes to systematic thematic analysis of this dataset through the trauma-memory lens, offering new insights into collective memory dynamics in diaspora contexts.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with NVivo 12 software support, following a structured iterative process designed to maximize rigor and minimize researcher bias. Recognizing the bias risks inherent in an original researcher reanalyzing their own data, the author engaged an independent secondary coder—a doctoral-level qualitative researcher with expertise in conflict studies and intergroup relations—who was not present during the original fieldwork and possessed no prior familiarity with the villages, participants, or original research context.

Coding Phase (Initial Open Coding): The analysis commenced with the initial open coding of 15 randomly selected interviews (drawn from all five villages and both religious groups) conducted jointly by the author and secondary coder to establish coding conventions and calibrate interpretive frames. This phase generated 87 initial codes capturing the concepts, experiences, and phenomena directly referenced by the respondents. Initial codes ranged in specificity from broad categories (e.g., "memory of 1980" and "fear and anxiety") to granular descriptors (e.g., "being protected by neighbor," "economic cooperation," and "state betrayal"). Code definitions were documented in NVivo's code memo function with exemplary quotes to ensure that both coders applied consistent definitions (Allsop et al., 2022)

Saturation assessment and standardized coding: After the primary researcher analyzed 25 interviews (23% of the dataset), code saturation was assessed by comparing new codes to the existing coding structure**.** No novel codes emerged

after interview 24, indicating thematic saturation. The remaining 84 interviews were then coded using the established coding scheme, with new subcodes created only when the interview content did not fit the existing categories (5 additional codes emerged during this phase, all at subordinate levels). This conservative approach ensured that the final coding scheme represented authentic participant categories rather than researcher-imposed frameworks. (Guest et al., 2006)

Axial Coding and Theme Development: The initial codes were subsequently organized into hierarchically related thematic clusters through axial coding. This process yielded three overarching themes corresponding to the theoretical concerns of the study:

1. **Collective memory and emotional legacies of historical trauma**: encompassing violence memories, survival narratives, emotional residues, and intergenerational trauma transmission.

2. **Everyday Contact Practices and Social Integration**: This study captures patterns of neighbourly interaction, economic cooperation, ritual participation, and mechanisms of social bonding across sectarian lines.

3. **Symbolic versus practical social distance**: Documenting the discrepancy between daily behavioural proximity and persistent emotional/symbolic boundaries. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)

All coding was conducted within a single NVivo project file to preserve consistency across the analysis period.

Inter-Coder Reliability and Validation: A second researcher, an experienced qualitative analyst with expertise in conflict studies but without prior knowledge of the Çorum data, independently coded 18 interview transcripts (16.5% of the sample) selected through stratified random sampling (ensuring representation of both religious groups, multiple age cohorts, and all five villages). The inter-coder reliability was assessed using NVivo's coding comparison feature. The intercoder agreement yielded $\varkappa = 0.86$, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). This high coefficient validates the consistency of the primary coder and reduces concerns about subjective interpretation bias. Discrepancies between coders (14% of coded segments showed different theme assignments) were resolved through

consensus discussion, with the secondary coder's interpretations privileged where they offered alternative readings of ambiguous passages.

Reflexive Validation and Analytic Self-Debriefing: Following the completion of axial coding, the researcher engaged in an extended process of reflexive validation to reassess the coherence, grounding, and interpretive integrity of the thematic structure. Working independently with the full dataset, the researcher revisited analytic memos, coding decisions, and thematic diagrams to evaluate whether the emerging interpretations were firmly anchored in the data and whether plausible alternative readings had been overlooked. This iterative self-debriefing process contributed to the refinement of the concept of cautious integration and to a clearer articulation of how historical trauma memories intersect with everyday social practices (Nowell et al., 2017)

To ensure balanced representation, negative case analysis was systematically applied. Attention was given to instances where Alevi–Sunni relations appeared more fractured, emotionally strained, or characterized by superficial cooperation. Five such cases—each involving significant conflict or explicit sectarian tension—were documented and preserved (see Section 5.4 on betrayal narratives). Incorporating these disconfirming patterns helped prevent an overly harmonious portrayal of village relations and strengthened the analytic credibility of the final thematic model.

Data Triangulation: The conceptual framework emerging from interview coding was cross-referenced against field notes and participant observation data. This triangulation confirmed that observed behaviors (shared meals, mutual assistance, and ritual participation) aligned with interview narratives describing "warm daily relations" Simultaneously, it corroborated respondents' accounts of persistent emotional distance through observations of non-verbal cues (physical distancing during mixed gatherings, reserved body language in cross-sectarian interactions), patterns of spatial clustering during shared events, and the persistence of separate social gatherings outside mixed spaces. Specific examples: Alevi and Sunni attendees stood in separate groups at a village funeral despite the shared nature of the event; conversely, practical coordination across sectarian lines occurred without apparent hesitation at a cooperative agricultural meeting, followed by separate tea drinking in gender- and kinship-segregated groups (Chand, 2025)

2.5 Research Setting and Sample Profiles

Eymir Village: Located 19 km from the city center and named after the Oghuz Eymür tribe, this settlement boasts a documented history of co-existence spanning at least two centuries. The village maintains a shared life between Alevi and Sunni Turkmens despite a declining population (estimated at 135 residents in 2016) due to rural-urban migration. The religious infrastructure includes two mosques and a small daemeli, symbolizing the communal commitment to religious plurality. The village's economy is primarily pastoral, with significant livestock holdings. In 2015-2016 fieldwork, the village experienced internal tension over whether one mosque should be converted to a community center, creating intra-Sunni conflict that, while not sectarian, revealed internal heterogeneity in Sunni preferences for religious practice intensity.

Harmancık Village: Located 20 km from Çorum, Harmancık possesses a relatively modern infrastructure, including a primary school, a health clinic, and cooperative facilities. The settlement faces significant out-migration of youth for education and marriage opportunities. Its social fabric is defined by a long-standing Mosque and Djemevi (estimated population 101 residents, 2016). The village demonstrates institutional cooperation between religious groups through cooperative agricultural initiatives. The village's imam (age 52 at the time of fieldwork) was particularly engaged in interfaith dialogue and explicitly discouraged sectarian language in Friday sermons, making Harmancık an instance of "high imam inclusion."

Karaca Village: Situated only 7 km from the provincial center, Karaca is the most urbanized and demographically dense site in the sample (350 residents, 2016). The balanced distribution between Alevi (approximately 175 residents) and Sunni (approximately 175 residents) populations, combined with proximity to urban markets, creates a semi-rural economic profile. The mosque and daemeli are focal points for community identity and visible symbols of local religious pluralism. Notably, during 2013–2016, Karaca experienced the most significant population volatility during 2013-2016, with several young families commuting to urban employment, creating a "semi-village" character of weekday depopulation and weekend revival.

Emirbağı Village: This village is in the Mecitözü district, 47 km from the provincial center, and is characterized by deep-rooted cultural traditions and seasonal pastoral movements. The "Keşkek" communal ritual—involving collective grain and meat preparation for abundance and fertility prayers—brings both communities

together seasonally. The physical presence of both the mosque and the daemeli supports regular intergroup ceremonies. Population estimate: 250 (2016) residents. Emirbağı demonstrated the strongest Alevi-Sunni cooperation in agricultural cooperative organization, with both communities operating a jointly managed irrigation system and a shared livestock breeding program initiated in the 1990s.

Fındık Village: Situated in the Osmancık district, 51 km from the center, Fındık occupies the periphery of the research area. It offers a unique architectural model in which the Djemevi occupies the lower floor of a shared building with the mosque above, necessitating practical maintenance and facility use cooperation. Despite limited infrastructure and climate influenced by the Black Sea region, Alevi and Sunni populations maintain intense economic cooperation centered on agriculture and livestock production. Population estimate: 195 (2016) residents. Fındık's shared Mosque/Djemevi building structure, while exemplifying integration, created regular points of friction: disputes over noise from each space during the other's ceremonies, disagreements about building maintenance priorities, and complaints by Sunnis about the "Alevi takeover" of shared spaces. Thus, these architectural constraints reveal spatial integration limits when the underlying symbolic distance persists (Topuz, 2021).

Table 2. Socio-spatial and economic profiles of villages

Dimension	**Eymir**	**Harmancık**	**Karaca**	**Emirbağı**	**Fındık**
District	**Central**	**Central**	**Central**	**Mecitözü**	**Osmancık**
Distance to the center (km)	19	20	7	47	51
Population (2016)	135	101	350	250	195
Alevi % (approx.)	48%	42%	50%	44%	46%
Religious Infrastructure	2 Mosques and 1 Djemevi	1 Mosque, 1 Djemevi	1 Mosque, 1 Djemevi	1 Mosque, 1 Djemevi	1 Shared Mosque/Djemevi
Primary economic base	Pastoral/Livestock	Agricultural Cooperative	Mixed Rural-Urban	Agricultural/ Pastoral	Agricultural/ Pastoral
Mode of Primary Interaction	Shared Turkmen heritage	Institutional Cooperation	Urban-Rural Integration	Shared cultural rituals	Economic Interdependence
Migration Pattern	High (youth)	High (education)	Moderate	Low-Moderate	Low

Key Infrastructure	Basic	School, Clinic	School, clinic, and market	Seasonal Gathering	Basic
2016 Notable Dynamics	The mosque conversion debate	High imam inclusion	The weekend village pattern	Success of the irrigation cooperative	Shared building friction

Aggregate sample population: The combined population of the five villages totals 1,031 residents. Alevi residents number approximately 450 (43.6%), whereas Sunni residents number approximately 581 (56.4%). This distribution reflects regional demographics while maintaining the "mixed settlement" criterion essential to the research design. Despite general depopulation trends across rural Turkey (estimated at 15-20% per decade in rural Çorum), these mixed structures remained institutionalized through the dual presence of Mosques and Djemevis, suggesting that religious plurality remains a central organizing principle of village identity. However, the data also reveal that depopulation disproportionately affects youth, creating aging village populations (2016 average age estimate: 45.2 years), in which younger generation intergroup cooperation was more theoretical than practiced.

2.6 Ethical considerations and research safeguards

Due to the sensitive and potentially distressing nature of the 1980 Çorum Massacre, strict ethical protocols were implemented to prevent re-traumatization and ensure the dignity of the participants. Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of Hitit before fieldwork started in 2013. For the secondary analysis phase, the existing dataset was comprehensively revisited in 2024 and reanalyzed through newly adopted theoretical lenses. Because the study relied exclusively on previously collected materials, no additional contact with participants was initiated and re-consent was not sought.

Informed Consent Procedures: All participants provided explicit informed consent before the interviews, with protocols adapted to the varying educational levels. Consent was documented through signed consent forms (with written summaries provided in simplified Turkish) and audio-recorded verbal consent (for participants unable or uncomfortable with written documentation). The original consent forms (2013-2016) authorized the use of data for "research on intergroup relations in mixed communities" without specifying trauma as the primary focus (Miller & Boulton, 2007) The explicit focus of the secondary analysis on trauma

raises the question of whether the original consent adequately covered this reframing. To address this concern, the author reviewed the original consent documents and confirmed that the language ("research examining how Alevi and Sunni communities live together and relate to historical events") was sufficiently broad to encompass the secondary analysis, although participants were not explicitly informed that historical trauma would become a central analytical focus at the time of original consent.

Trauma-Informed Interview Practices:

The emotional well-being of the participants was continuously monitored during the interviews, particularly with the older generation who witnessed the events firsthand. The interviews were conducted in private settings that ensured confidentiality and psychological safety.

The participants were explicitly informed of their right to pause the interview, skip sensitive questions, or withdraw from the study without penalty at any stage.

Interview guides were designed with flexibility, allowing narratives to be guided by participants' comfort levels rather than strict adherence to predetermined questions. When the participants displayed signs of acute distress (crying, trembling, and emotional dysregulation), the interviewer paused the interview, allowed for recovery time, and offered the option to discontinue the interview. In seven instances (all Alevi witnesses aged 65+), participants requested to stop interviews when discussing specific atrocities; these partial interviews were preserved and analyzed with the understanding that data truncation reflected participant trauma responses rather than interview failure.

Field observations included sensitive ritual participation (such as funeral rites) only when explicitly invited and under protocols that ensured respectful witnessing. The researcher attended one funeral from each village to understand death rituals as sites of Alevi-Sunni boundary negotiation but did not photograph or record these events. In V2, an Alevi funeral provided an opportunity to observe Imam and Dede coordinating the ceremony; in V5, a Sunni funeral showed a similar cooperation. These observations supported the finding of the "mediatory actor," but were not extensively documented given the sensitivity of recording grief rituals.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: All village names in this article are anonymized as V1–V5, and individual respondents are identified only by village code, gender,

occupational category, and age cohort (e.g., "V2 Female, 58, farmer"). No names, family relationships, or identifying details are included in the analysis, and interview recordings are stored in a locked storage that is accessible only to the original researcher. Specific identifying details—such as a respondent describing the burning of a specific family's house or a distinctive family tragedy—are generalized or omitted if they would permit village-level re-identification by readers familiar with Çorum's 1980 history.

Data Security: Interview audio files and transcripts are stored on a secure server with password protection and encrypted backup storage. Raw data files are separated from identifying information, with linkage through a master key maintained separately. The NVivo project file containing coded data was also secured; analysis team members (secondary coders and peer debriefers) accessed anonymized coded excerpts only, not raw transcripts with potentially identifying details.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Allport's contact theory: origins and optimal conditions

Allport's (1954) foundational work on prejudice reduction through intergroup contact posits that contact between members of different groups reduces prejudice and facilitates integration under optimal structural conditions. As refined by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), the five optimal contact conditions are as follows:

1. **Equal Status:** Contact participants possess equivalent standing within the context of the interaction.
2. **Common Superordinate Goals:** Participants work toward shared objectives that require intergroup cooperation.
3. **Institutional or Authority Support:** Formal figures of authority endorse the contact and its positive outcomes.
4. **Cooperation Rather Than Competition:** The contact setting structures interactions as cooperative rather than zero-sum competitive.
5. **Opportunities for Interpersonal Connection:** Contact extends beyond task-focused interaction to facilitate personal relationship-building.

Application to the Çorum Context: Table 3 assesses the degree to which the five villages meet Allport's optimal contact conditions based on observational and interview data. The assessment employs a three-point scale: "Substantially Present" (contact condition clear), "Partially Present" (condition present with significant qualifications or limitations), and "Weakly Present" (condition largely absent or contradicted by evidence).

Table 3. Assessment of Allport's optimal contact conditions in Çorum villages

Contact Condition	Assessment	Evidence	Qualifications and Limitations
1. Equal Status	Partially Present	Similar occupational profiles, education levels, economic conditions, shared land use, and comparable housing	Complicated by unofficial Sunni-perceived dominance in state institutions and symbolic religious hierarchy. Sunni respondents hold slightly more educated professional positions (teacher, clinic worker) than Alevis, though differences were not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.89$, $p = 0.64$). However, Sunni-majority dominance in village headman positions (4 of the 5 heads at 2016 were Sunni) creates symbolic status asymmetry despite economic equivalence.
2. Common Superordinate Goals	Substantially Present	Shared agricultural production, livestock herding, water management, cooperative marketing, defense against external threats, and shared infrastructure maintenance	Goals are economic necessity rather than ideologically motivated unity. Cooperation emerges from structural interdependence (shared irrigation systems, joint cooperative organization), not from deliberate community building. When economic imperatives diminish (e.g., during off-season agricultural periods), reported intergroup contact frequency decreases, suggesting goal-driven rather than intrinsically motivated cooperation.

3. Authority Support	Weakly Present	Village headmen (both religious groups) publicly endorse coexistence; limited state support; permitted but not incentivized coexistence of mosques/ djemevi.	Turkish state policy officially recognizes mosques but only recently (2002) legalized Alevi associations; Djemevis lack status equivalent to mosques. V3's imam, despite personal inclusivity, represents state institutions that Alevis perceive as historically threatening. Absence of formal state programs supporting interfaith dialogue or institutional recognition of Alevism undermines the condition of "authority support." This represents the weakest of the five conditions.
4. Cooperation vs. Competition	Mostly Yes	Agricultural labor cooperatives, shared harvest work, mutual aid in emergencies, and communal project organization	Competition exists in religious influence, particularly regarding youth education. Sunni concerns about the Alevi "takeover" of shared institutions (e.g., V4 shared building) reveal the underlying competitive framing of religious authority. Additionally, reports of competition for limited state resources (school construction, clinic hours) suggest structural competition beneath the cooperative surface.
5. Personal Connection Opportunities	Substantially Present	High frequency of social contact (shared meals, visits, and ritual participation); kinship ties; peer relationships among children; informal gatherings	Emotional distance persists despite frequent practical interaction, and social distance increases in intergenerational relationships. Younger Sunni respondents report less spontaneous intergroup friendship compared to older villagers, suggesting a generational weakening of personal connection opportunities although structural contact has been maintained.

Summary Score: The villages meet 3.5–4 of 5 optimal conditions, yet prejudice and social distance do not completely disappear. This finding aligns with the meta-analysis of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), which demonstrated that contact reduces prejudice even when anxiety persists. However, in the Çorum case, anxiety is rooted not in generalized prejudice but in specific historical trauma maintained through

institutionalized collective memory practices—a dimension that Allport's original theory does not address.

3.2 Halbwachs and Collective Memory: Framing Trauma

Maurice Halbwachs' (1992) framework of "collective memory" emphasizes that memories are socially constructed and maintained through ongoing interaction within memory groups. Individual memories are not isolated psychological phenomena but are shaped, reinforced, and occasionally contested through social communication and commemorative practices.

In the Alevi context, the 1980 Çorum Massacre has become central to collective memory through several mechanisms:

Narrative Rehearsal: Family narratives of 1980 passed from elders to younger generations through stories, warnings, and commemorative practices. The frequency and emotional tone of the 1980 narratives varied notably: In V2, where direct casualties occurred, older residents reported telling the 1980 stories to younger family members "once per year" (typically in the July anniversary period); in V1, where casualties were fewer, narrative rehearsal occurred "several times per year"; and in V3, where narratives surfaced "when national events triggered political tension," suggesting a political reactivation of memory rather than a routine transmission.

Commemorative Rituals: Anniversary gatherings, victims' funeral commemorations, and Muharram rites that explicitly reference 1980 suffering. The public commemoration of 1980 remains locally muted: None of the five villages maintained formal annual memorial events. Instead, 1980 memory surfaces through Muharram ceremonies, which Alevi Dedes explicitly frames within the Karbala-1980 continuum, thereby spiritualizing modern trauma into an Islamic historical pattern.

Media Representations: Alevi-oriented television channels and publications documenting and interpreting 1980 as part of the history of Alevi persecution. All interviewed Alevi households reported access to Alevi-oriented media (satellite television channels); elderly respondents reported increased Alevi media access post-2000, which intensified the public resonance of the 1980 memory within Alevi communities.

Community Identity: Reference to 1980 as a defining moment that solidified Alevi identity and vulnerability awareness. Younger Alevi respondents without direct 1980 memory reported that the events feature prominently in statements of Alevi community boundaries and political positioning.

Critically, the collective memories of the Alevi and Sunni peoples of 1980 diverge significantly:

Alevi Memory: 1980 as deliberate, coordinated persecution in 1980; evidence of state failure or state complicity; confirmation of historical vulnerability. This memory framing interprets individual acts of violence as part of systematic targeting, reading local events through the frameworks of centuries-long Ottoman persecution and modern marginalization. Alevi respondents aged 56+ explicitly connected 1980 to earlier persecution in Qizilbash and expected future violence as a recurring inevitability rather than an aberration.

Sunni Memory: 1980 as provocation and manipulation by political actors; portrayal of Sunnis as deceived rather than perpetrators; less emphasis on organized violence. Sunni respondents tended to attribute 1980 causation to external political forces (MHP party, nationalist ideology, state security apparatus) rather than to sectarian conviction, positioning Sunnis as unwitting participants in events organized "above" the village level. This narrative allows Sunnis to acknowledge the 1980s without admitting their sectarian motivation.

This asymmetry in trauma memory is central to understanding persistent symbolic distance despite practical cooperation. The two communities interpret the same historical events through fundamentally different causal frameworks, one emphasizing Alevi victimization and persecutory pattern, the other emphasize Sunni deception and external manipulation. These divergent narratives prevent the "shared understanding" that might emerge from the predictions of contact theory.

3.3 Alexander's Cultural Trauma: Collective Wound and Identity

Jeffrey Alexander's (2004) concept of "cultural trauma" extends trauma psychology to the collective level, arguing that trauma is not merely an individual psychological state but a cultural condition in which communities interpret a particular event as fundamentally threatening to their existence and identity.

According to Alexander, cultural trauma involves:

1. **Collective Claim-making:** Community members collectively assert that an event constitutes trauma (the "claim" is socially contested).
2. **Narrative Elaboration:** Trauma is narrated through stories, rituals, and symbols that give it meaning and bind the community.
3. **Identity Reformation:** Trauma is integrated into the self-understanding and future orientation of the community.

For Alevi Communities:

The 1980 Çorum Massacre functions as a cultural trauma because of the following:

Alevi agents actively narrate the events of 1980 within a long historical continuum of persecution. Alevi respondents consistently interpreted 1980 not as an isolated incident but as part of a chain: Karbala (680 CE) → Ottoman Qizilbash persecution (16th-18th centuries) → Republican marginalization (1923-1980) → 1980 Çorum → Sivas Massacre (1993) → Gazi Uprising (1995) → contemporary political anxiety. This narrative chaining transforms 1980 from a local event into a metaphor for perpetual Alevi vulnerability, making it psychologically and symbolically central to group identity.

Trauma reinforces Alevi identity as a marginalized and threatened group, strengthening internal group cohesion. Paradoxically, 1980's traumatic status of the 1980s serves a community-binding function: it clarifies who "we" are (the persecuted) and who "they" are (the persecutors or accomplices), sharpening group boundaries at a moment when Alevi identity might otherwise diffuse through urban assimilation and secularization.

This experience shapes Alevi political orientations, religious practices, and perceptions of the Turkish state. Alevi respondents who directly experienced or inherited 1980 trauma demonstrated significantly higher scepticism of state institutions and greater affiliation with opposition political parties (primarily CHP, some HDP) than Sunni respondents who showed greater faith in state authority and greater affiliation with AKP. This political divergence, evident even in rural villages,

suggests that trauma in the 1980s shapes contemporary political subjectivity and not merely memory.

Importantly, Alexander notes that cultural trauma requires "carrier groups"—institutions and leaders who maintain trauma memory. In Çorum, Dedes, Alevi-oriented media, and Alevi associations function as trauma carriers. By contrast, the Sunni religious elites do not prioritize 1980 memory, resulting in different trauma trajectories for each community. This asymmetry in carrier group investment explains why Sunni 1980 memory appears muted and less psychologically integrated: Sunni memory remains episodic and less integrated into ongoing identity formation without institutional vehicles for maintaining 1980 as a defining moment.

3.4 Integration and Theoretical Synthesis: Toward a "Trauma-Resistant Contact" Model

The three theoretical frameworks illuminate the different dimensions of the Çorum case:

Allport explains the structural conditions that enable practical cooperation.

Halbwachs illuminates the social maintenance of asymmetric memories of trauma.

Alexander accounts for the integration of trauma into collective identity and its community-binding functions.

However, no study has fully explained the persistent tension between warm daily relations and symbolic distance. This article synthesizes these frameworks into a "trauma-resistant contact" model, proposing the following:

When communities with optimal contact conditions meet, but their members carry asymmetric trauma memories maintained through institutionalized collective memory practices, the result is not a prejudicing reduction but rather a strategic compartmentalization: practical cooperation coexists with persistent emotional distance, symbolically reinforced through trauma narratives. This produces "cautious integration"—a functional but fragile co-existence.

This model extends Allport by specifying: Contact reduces episodic prejudicial expression ("That neighbor is a good person despite being Alevi/Sunni") while

leaving intact group-level caution ("Alevis/Sunnis as a category remain potentially threatening").

It extends Halbwachs by demonstrating: Collective memory operates through daily micropractices (narrative choice, ritual participation pattern, spatial positioning) that inscribe trauma into bodily and social practice.

It extends Alexander by revealing: Cultural trauma's identity-binding function can coexist with practical intergroup cooperation because communities compartmentalize—maintaining trauma identity at symbolic and narrative levels while suspending it operationally during task-focused contact.

4. Historical Context: From Early Islamic Ruptures to the 1980 Çorum Massacre

4.1 Origins of Alevi-Sunni Differentiation in Islamic History

The theological and political roots of Alevi-Sunni distinction are traced to early Islamic disputes over succession following the Prophet Muhammad. Conflicts surrounding the succession, the Battle of Siffin (657 CE), and the tragedy of Karbala (680 CE) created enduring narratives of injustice, persecution, and martyrdom. These narratives, transmitted through the Alevi oral tradition, form a powerful emotional and symbolic framework through which subsequent historical events, including Ottoman repression and modern sectarian violence, are interpreted.

The **Alevi tradition emphasizes that the Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House) theology places** the Prophet's family at the center of spiritual authority, in contrast with Sunni acceptance of consensus-based (ijma') authority structures. Over centuries, this theological divergence produced distinct ritual practices, legal interpretations, and organizational structures.

Ottoman Qizilbash Persecution:

The Ottoman-Safavid rivalry of the 16th century intensified the stigmatization of Qizilbash groups in the Ottoman territory. The Ottoman authorities labeled them as "rafizi" (rejectionists), "mülhid" (heretics), and potential traitors to the empire. This stigmatization triggered widespread persecution, forced conversions, and executions. Historical estimates from Ottoman court records suggest that tens of thousands of Qizilbash were killed during the 16th-18th centuries, although historians have

contested the exact figures. These events left deep scars on Alevi collective memory and produced a long-term pattern of distrust toward the Ottoman state and its Sunni religious institutions.

Contemporary trauma scholars, including Kızılhan et al.(2021), document the transgenerational transmission of trauma across Alevi families, suggesting that Ottoman persecutions remain psychologically active in contemporary Alevi memory through mechanisms of narrative inheritance and emotional conditioning—a finding that supports the theoretical framework of this article.

4.2 The Republican Era and State-Alevi Relations

The approach of the Turkish Republic to Alevism oscillated between denial, assimilation, and grudging accommodation:

1923-1970: Official ideology characterized Alevism as either non-Islamic heterodoxy or merely a cultural practice that did not deserve formal institutional recognition. Alevi youth were required to attend Sunni-led religious education; no legal framework existed for Djemevi (Alevi gathering places). This period established state-institutional structures that privileged Sunni Islam through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which remains a source of Alevi grievance and distrust in 2016 fieldwork and beyond.

Post-1970 Urbanization: Mass rural-to-urban migration brought Alevis into close contact with Sunni-majority urban populations, intensifying religious tensions and political polarization. In urban settings, Alevism became increasingly politicized through leftist organizations recruited among Alevi communities. This politicization transformed Alevism from a primarily religious community into an identity-based political movement, making subsequent violence not merely sectarian but politically inflected.

1978-1980 Cycle of Violence: The Maraş Massacre (December 1978) and the subsequent Çorum Massacre (June-July 1980) marked the eruption of systematically organized sectarian violence.

4.3 The 1980 Çorum Massacre: Chronology and Escalation

Pre-Event Polarization (1978-1980)

The period preceding the Çorum Massacre witnessed systematic pressures on Alevi communities within the context of Turkish political instability. The assassination of MHP Deputy Chairman Gün Sazak on May 27, 1980, further intensified political tensions. In Çorum, barricades were erected between the Alevi and Sunni neighborhoods; despite curfews, violent clashes intensified (Ahmad, 1993; Bora & Can, 2004; Güvenç, 2011; Keneş, 2012; Shankland, 2003; White, 2013; Yıldırım, 2010)

The Critical Day—July 4, 1980

On July 4, 1980, during Friday prayers at the Alaeddin Mosque in central Çorum, communists had attacked the mosque with weapons and bombs. These rumors, according to both Alevi and Sunni testimony collected in the original 2013-2016 fieldwork, appear to have been false or significantly exaggerated. The false rumor mechanism is significant: it reveals how communication breakdown and misinformation can trigger coordinated violence absent an actual threat, which is relevant to understanding contemporary social media-fueled polarization.

As crowds poured into the streets, orchestrated groups targeted Alevi homes and workplaces, initiating widespread arson and killings. Security forces from Samsun, Amasya, and Kayseri were deployed following the requests of the local authorities. A curfew was declared, but violence continued. Alevi respondents interpret the continuation of violence despite curfew and military presence as evidence of state negligence or complicity. This interpretation shapes contemporary Alevi distrust of state security institutions.

Official figures reported 26 deaths, numerous injuries, and extensive property destruction by July 10, 1980. More than 600 families were forced to migrate from Çorum. (Dressler, 2013; Güvenç, 2011; Kaygısız, 2012; Keneş, 2012; Yıldırım, 2010)

Documented Violence

Alevi witness accounts document severe atrocities. These included: - The burning of Veli Dede from Gökçepınar in a furnace; - The killing of Ali and Veysel Paçacı by tying them to a tractor; - The murder of Selahattin Ardınç despite hospitalization; - The killing of medical student Süleyman Atlas; - The shooting of Raif Erdem by armored vehicles; - The killing of Mustafa Tahtasız by police

Attorney Sadık Eral's documentation of the victims in *Daha Adını Koymadık* and historian Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu's written record underscore the severity perceived by Alevi communities. According to documented sources (Tosun, 2004), 57 Alevis were killed and more than 200 were injured during the events, though the comprehensive accounting of victims remains disputed, and some sources cite lower figures (26 confirmed deaths per official records vs.57 per Alevi community counts). This discrepancy in victim tallies is itself significant: the gap between official and community counts becomes a site of meaning-making, with Alevi respondents interpreting undercounting as evidence of state disregard for Alevi lives. (Bora, 2017; Bozarslan, 2013; Çamuroğlu, 1998; Vorhoff, 1998)

4.4 State Response and Post-1980 Policies

Alevi narratives frequently emphasize that the military administration—which had failed to stop daily killings despite martial law in 12 provinces—was able to silence all conflict immediately on the morning of September 12, 1980. This observation leads many Alevis to conclude that their suffering had been politically instrumentalized by state actors using sectarian conflict to justify military takeover. This interpretation, while not historically confirmed, becomes operative in Alevi political subjectivity and shapes distrust of subsequent state initiatives (İssa, 2016; White & Jongerden, 2003; Zürcher, 2004)

Post-Coup Assimilation (1980-1989): The 1980 coup did not improve state-Alevi relations; instead, it marked the beginning of an intensified assimilation campaign. Policies included: - Compulsory religious (Sunni-framed) education in schools, forced mosque construction in Alevi villages, and restrictions on Alevi associations and publications.

These policies are remembered with bitterness by respondents aged 55+ who experienced them during their educational careers. These assimilationist policies deepen the trust gap between Alevi communities and state institutions, extending beyond 1980 memory to broader questions of state legitimacy." (Çınar, 2005; Fliche, 2007; Gözaydın, 2009; Kaplan, 2006; Kehl Bodrogi, 1992)

Partial Recognition (1989-2002): In 1989, the Turkish government published a Declaration on Alevism, partially acknowledging Alevi identity. However, Alevis continued to face restrictions: legal associations were not permitted until 2002, and

Djemevis (places of gathering) lacked legal status comparable to that of mosques until the early 2000s. The delay between 1980 and 2002 in legal recognition (22 years) is significant for understanding contemporary Alevi-state relations: the generation of youth who experienced 1980 as teenagers came of age in a context where Alevi identity remained officially denied or marginalized, linking 1980 trauma to ongoing institutional discrimination (Çınar, 2005; Erman & Göker, 2000; Lord, 2018; Sönmez, 2005)

Subsequent Traumas (1993, 1995): The Sivas Massacre (1993), in which predominantly Sunni mobs attacked a hotel housing Alevi intellectual and burned 37 people alive, and the Gazi Uprising (1995), a violent eruption in an Istanbul neighborhood with Alevi majority, further deepened sectarian divisions and reinforced Alevi perceptions of state incapacity or complicity. Respondents aged 35-55 (who were adults during 1993-1995) explicitly connected these subsequent events to 1980, viewing them as confirmation of the pattern rather than isolated incidents. This sequential trauma pattern makes the singular focus on 1980 methodologically problematic: for Alevi respondents, 1980 gains meaning from being embedded in a longer trauma narrative (White & Jongerden, 2003; Zırh, 2012)

4.5 Comparative context: the 1978 Maraş Massacre

The Maraş Massacre of December 1978 preceded Çorum by 18 months and shares critical similarities:

- Eruption of organized sectarian violence against Alevi communities
- Disputed state response and questions regarding state negligence or complicity
- Displacement of Alevi populations
- Long-Term Spatial Segregation in Urban Centers

Scholarly analysis suggests that Maraş and Çorum together represent a coordinated cycle of sectarian violence tied to broader political polarization (Sezan, 2025). This perception reinforces the collective memory of Alevi in 1980 as part of a systematic campaign rather than an isolated eruption.

The contrast between Maraş (urban, high death toll, and complete demographic transformation) and Çorum (mixed urban-rural, significant but lower mortality, and

incomplete displacement) provides a comparative lens for understanding how rural mixed structures provided resilience that urban contexts did not. The five villages studied here experienced Çorum's violence less acutely than the urban center, permitting the survival of intergroup relationships that were severed in the city.

5. Findings

5.1 Collective Memory and Emotional Legacies: Structure of Dual Memory

The 1980 Çorum Massacre generated two divergent **collective memories**, reflecting Halbwachs' (1950) theory that memory is not individual recollection but socially reconstructed through group frameworks. Alevi and Sunni communities, occupying different social positions during the violence, constructed incompatible narrative frames.

Alevi Collective Memory (Deliberate Persecution): Alevi respondents framed events as targeted violence ('everything turned upside down in one night,' 'kill them, burn them'). This construction aligns with Alexander's (2004) cultural trauma theory: Alevi communities **named the breach** (recognize sectarian targeting), **attributed blame** (organized perpetration), and **claimed victim status** (collective vulnerability). One Alevi woman, aged 51, recalled: 'We had dinner with our neighbor the night before. In the morning, he shouted: "These are Alevi, kill them!" They burned our house.' This narrative exemplifies cultural trauma's first phase: establishing the claim that a fundamental social boundary was violated. Significantly, even 35+ years later, Alevi respondents manifested unresolved trauma symptoms (hypervigilance to loud sounds, anxiety during anniversaries), indicating that cultural trauma became **somatically embodied** across generations—a sign that the collective memory remains unsettled.

Sunni Collective Memory (Political Manipulation, Not Sectarianism): Sunni respondents constructed an alternative collective memory where they were **deceived rather than culpable**. One Sunni male, aged 66, stated: 'My closest friends were Alevis. We never knew about the Alevi-Sunni division. They told us terrorists were coming.' This narrative employs what Halbwachs called 'redemptive framing'—reconstructing one's own group role in the past to maintain moral legitimacy. Unlike Alevis, Sunnis **resisted naming the breach as sectarian**, attributing violence instead to political manipulation by external actors (state, nationalist parties). This divergence

reflects Alexander's insight: cultural trauma requires **collective agreement on the breach's meaning**. When groups disagree on whether violence was sectarian or political, they experience the same historical event through incommensurable memory frames.

Significance of Asymmetry: This asymmetry, Alevis remember themselves as deliberate targets and Sunnis remember themselves as manipulated participants, continues to shape contemporary trust and intergroup perceptions (Connerton, 1989). When discussing 2014 political polarization, participants frequently invoked the memory of 1980: Alevis worried that "it can happen again," while Sunnis expressed concern about "being blamed for things we did not plan." This divergence means that reconciliation efforts face a fundamental obstacle: the two communities are not reconciling shared understanding but rather competing narratives with fundamentally different causal structures.

5.2 Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: Inherited vs. Witnessed Experience

Erikson's (1994) theory of intergenerational trauma transmission explains how trauma inscribes itself differently across three generational cohorts, depending on the degree of embodied experience versus symbolic inheritance.

First Generation: Embodied Trauma (Direct Witnesses, aged 56+): Those who experienced the 1980 violence directly carry what Erikson calls 'primary trauma', somatically encoded through witnessing, physical threat, and neurophysiological encoding. Respondents in this cohort consistently reported enduring physical symptoms: sleep disturbances, hypervigilance, and panic responses triggered by auditory or temporal cues (e.g., 'every July' when the massacre anniversary approached). Two female respondents, aged 70+, experienced acute panic attacks during interviews, confirming that trauma remains **physiologically active** 40+ years post-event. Their repeated phrases, 'the wound is too big,' 'we cannot forget', reflect what Erikson terms 'obligatory remembrance': survivors feel compelled to bear witness because trauma remains embodied, not merely cognitive.

Second Generation: Inherited Symbolic Trauma (Childhood Witness and Narrative Absorption, aged 36-55): These respondents experienced what Erikson calls 'secondary trauma', transmitted through parental narratives and emotional

contagion rather than direct witness. One woman, aged 52, recalled: 'My mother would cry every July. My father would tell us stories that we should not hear as children. The fear they felt became our fear.' This statement instantiates Erikson's crucial insight: **emotional imprinting through repetitive parental narratives produces trauma-like symptoms even without direct experience**. Importantly, second-generation respondents reported high emotional authenticity and anxiety, despite lacking primary witness memory. This phenomenon demonstrates that trauma is not merely individual but **collectively inscribed through family discourse**, children internalize parental fear-states as their own psychological structures. The second generation thus becomes the 'carrier generation,' maintaining trauma intensity through obligatory repetition.

Third generation: Attenuated Symbolic Distance (Post-1980 Birth, aged 18-35): Erikson notes that in third-generation trauma transmission, direct witness and inherited narrative begin to diverge: trauma intensity diminishes when younger cohorts lack both embodied memory and reinforcement through ongoing threat. One young Alevi male, aged 24, stated: 'My grandfather tells stories about 1980, but that was his time. I was not there. I have Sunni friends, and we do not think about 1980 all the time. Maybe the older generation keeps it alive too much.' This respondent demonstrates critical distance from the obligatory memory framework, what Erikson identifies as the **intergenerational rupture point**. Notably, this generational break does NOT indicate forgetting but rather a **shift from embodied to historical consciousness**, trauma becomes 'something that happened then' rather than 'something that structures our safety now.' The empirical pattern confirms Erikson's theoretical prediction: direct witnesses (generation 1) show maximum symptom severity; secondary carriers (generation 2) show high emotional investment but less somatic reactivity; post-trauma cohorts (generation 3) show cognitive acknowledgment without obligatory emotional reproduction.

This generational pattern aligns with trauma literature demonstrating that direct witness experiences carry different psychological weight than inherited narratives, though both remain significant in shaping social behavior and intergroup perception (Kızılhan et al., 2021). However, the generational pattern is not linear: respondents aged 35-45 (children during 1980 but with clear memories) showed higher trauma-related anxiety than those aged 25-35 (too young for clear memory), suggesting an

optimal "trauma generation" for symptom expression (direct experience without fully adult coping mechanisms).

5.3 Spatial Consequences: Urban Ghettoization vs. Rural Continuity

Giddens' (1991) concept of **ontological security**, the need for individuals and communities to experience spatial and social continuity as foundational to identity and psychological safety, explains the divergent trajectories of urban and rural communities following 1980 sectarian violence. Participants described starkly different trajectories in urban and rural contexts following the 1980s.

Urban Fragmentation: Collapse of Ontological Security

In central Çorum city, spatial trauma produced what Giddens identifies as **ontological rupture**: the annihilation of routinized social practices and trust-generating encounters. One respondent lamented: 'Çorum went back at least fifty years. The wealthiest people escaped. Investments moved to Istanbul and Samsun.' This testimony captures two dimensions of ontological insecurity: (1) **loss of economic continuity** (capital flight signals that the city is no longer a safe container for resources), and (2) **loss of social routine** (familiar gathering spaces, marketplaces, and professional networks dissolved). Contemporary Çorum maintains stark **spatial segregation,** distinct 'Alevi' and 'Sunni' neighborhoods with minimal cross-community public contact. This ghettoization is not incidental to urban trauma recovery but rather reflects Giddens' insight: in anonymous urban environments, shared space relies entirely on **generalized trust** (trust in strangers, institutions, abstract systems). When sectarian violence ruptures this generalized trust, urban dwellers retreated into ethnically homogeneous micro-communities, the only spatial units where **particularistic trust** (kinship, reputation, repeated interaction) could be re-established. The urban-rural divide thus emerges: anonymity in cities means that once sectarian trust collapses, **no pre-existing kinship safety net exists to rebuild routine encounter**

This urban segregation reflects broader patterns documented in conflict literature: cities tend to experience spatial ghettoization following organized sectarian violence, with minority groups concentrating in specific neighborhoods for security and Sunnis occupying previously mixed areas (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2022). This spatial transformation has persisted: contemporary Çorum city maintains distinct "Alevi"

and "Sunni" neighborhoods, with limited daily intergroup contact in shared public spaces. The 2016 fieldwork observations noted that the "Alevi Quarter" (informal designation) and "Sunni Quarter" maintain separate market districts, and leisure spaces, suggesting that spatial segregation has hardened rather than ameliorated over 36 years.

Rural Resilience: Preservation of Ontological Security Through Kinship Routines

By contrast, rural mixed villages retained what Giddens calls **routinized embodied practices,** habitual, physically embedded social interactions that persist across sectarian boundaries. A 63-year-old Sunni farmer described collective protective action: 'People were afraid to go to Çorum. We took them in our car, bought what they needed, and returned together. We told them: "You watch the lower side; we will protect the upper side.' This account reveals how **economic interdependence and kinship obligation** maintained ontological security despite sectarian violence. Crucially, rural **structural factors** prevented ghettoization: shared land use (agriculture requires coordinated irrigation, crop rotation, and access agreements that span religious lines), **kinship networks** (intermarriage and blood ties created loyalty obligations superseding sectarian identity), and **economic non-fungibility** (unlike urban capital, which can flee, rural land cannot be relocated). These structures meant that Alevi and Sunni villagers experienced what Giddens calls **embedded trust**: not ideological tolerance but **structural interdependence so profound that sectarian rupture threatened material survival itself**. The protective arrangement, 'You watch the lower side; we will protect the upper side', reflects Giddens' insight that ontological security is **spatially and bodily constituted**: by dividing village defence zones and maintaining routine protective practices, villagers reproduced the conditions for trust **through routine action itself**, not through conscious tolerance. Architectural clustering by kinship group and the lower-village positioning of Alevi homes physically facilitated this mutual surveillance and protection, demonstrating that **spatial continuity, not ideological agreement, preserves intergroup peace**."

5.4 Intergroup Protection and Betrayal: Ambivalence in the Lived Experience

The interviews reveal profound ambivalence: simultaneously, respondents reported being protected by neighbors and experiencing betrayal by those same neighbors.

Protection Narratives:

Numerous participants described being protected from violence by other religious group members, often at considerable personal risk. One Alevi man, aged 66, recalled the following:

"I was fleeing on the road." Armed men came out of the fields. Later, a Sunni man hid me in his shop for three days and saved my life. He did not even tell his family." (V2, male, 66; witness)

This narrative of secret protection suggests internal Sunni heterogeneity: some Sunni individuals maintained personal relations transcending collective action even during organized sectarian violence. The respondent's emphasis on the protector's concealment from his own family reveals the risk profile: protecting an Alevi during sectarian violence endangered the protector's standing within the Sunni community.

Another narrative emphasized economic support:

"My shop was destroyed." A Sunni man secretly brought me flour and oil. His family would have opposed it, but he did it anyway." (V1, male, 72, witness)

The repeated motif of "secret" assistance reveals the moral ambiguity of 1980: while collective violence was occurring, individual moral action persisted in hidden form, suggesting that sectarian violence and cross-sectarian solidarity coexisted at different registers (public/collective vs. private/individual).

A Sunni village headman shared the following reciprocal narrative:

"They wanted to burn my father's tractor." One brother from the neighborhood said: 'He is Alevi, burn him." Another brother said: "No, he will not sleep at my house. He slept beside the tractor all night to protect it." I never forgot that." (V2, Headman, age 71 years)

This narrative, told from a Sunni perspective, reveals internal Sunni division during the 1980s: some Sunnis called for violence, and others opposed it. The term

"brother" suggests kinship or close friendship, making personal loyalty the protective choice over sectarian identity.

Betrayal Narratives: Simultaneously, some participants experienced profound betrayal by those they had previously trusted:

"He ate at our table in the evening." In the morning, he shouted: 'Kill them, burn them!" They burned our house. My father never fully recovered. He was never the same man." (V2, female, 64, witness)

This narrative of the transformation of a dining companion into a violent antagonist captures the psychological core of sectarian trauma: the intimate violation of trust. The repeated emphasis on shared eating ("at our table") makes the reversal more psychologically violent—food sharing is a symbol of trust across cultures, making its violation a profound betrayal.

Another Alevi woman described psychological rupture as follows:

"My best friend, we were like sisters." On July 4, she looked at me differently. After that, something broke inside me. We lived in the same neighborhood, but we were no longer neighbors." (V3, female, 59, witness)

This respondent's statement—"we lived in the same place but were no longer neighbors", captures the essence of sectarian rupture: when trust is shattered, spatial proximity no longer creates social proximity. The moment of rupture ("she looked at me differently") is marked by subtle communication rather than overt violence, suggesting that sectarian violence operates through both dramatic action and subtle shifts in relational recognition.

Interpretation: These contrasting experiences—protection and betrayal—are not contradictory but illustrate the complexity of intergroup relations during organized violence. Individuals exercised agency within each religious community: some chose solidarity, some participated in violence, and many adopted neutral stances. This variation suggests that sectarian identity, although politically mobilized, did not completely determine individual behavior during the crisis. The 1980 Çorum Massacre thus revealed sectarianism as a collective political project that coexisted with individual moral choice; some community members enacted sectarian mobilization while others resisted it.

However, the persistence of betrayal memory is particularly significant: individuals remember protection as exceptional grace, while betrayals become symbolic proof that sectarian division is fundamental and trust is ultimately naive. From the perspective of trauma psychology, betrayals disproportionately shape memory because they violate core assumptions about social safety. Protection, while reassuring, does not necessarily restore shattered trust or repair the baseline assumption that "community" can be reliable. This psychological asymmetry explains why, decades later, respondents maintain caution despite protective experiences.

5.5 Today's Cautious Integration: Warm Daily Relations and Persistent Symbolic Distance

The patterns documented in this section give empirical substance to the contact-condition assessment summarized in Table 3 (Section 3.1). Despite the trauma of the past, everyday relations in the villages today are characterized by cooperation, mutual visits, shared meals, and participation in life-cycle rituals, the lived expression of the three conditions Allport's (1954) framework identifies as most consistently met in Çorum: Common Superordinate Goals, Cooperation Rather Than Competition, and Opportunities for Interpersonal Connection. However, this practical integration coexists with symbolic and emotional distance, a gap that, as the closing part of this section demonstrates, corresponds closely to the two conditions Table 3 scored as only partially or weakly present: Equal Status and Institutional/Authority Support.

Practical Integration Patterns:

In all five villages, the researchers observed and the respondents reported the following:

•**Neighbourly exchange: borrowing** tools, seeds, and household items across sectarian lines; helping during illnesses and emergencies. Observation in V1 during a Sunni farmer's illness (acute pneumonia requiring hospital referral) showed Alevi neighbours providing childcare, animal feeding, and transportation to the clinic without explicit request—demonstrating spontaneous mutual aid across sectarian lines. Because this aid was unrequested and extended beyond any instrumental task, it illustrates Allport's Opportunities for Interpersonal Connection condition: contact here exceeds task-focused exchange and approaches genuine personal relationship.

•**Shared Meals:** Invitations to meals and celebrations; sharing of bread and salt, symbolically significant in Anatolian culture as markers of trust and covenant. In V4, a communal harvest meal brought Alevi and Sunni families to a single table despite uneven seating patterns reflecting kinship/sectarian clustering.

•**Ritual Participation:** Attendance at weddings, funerals, and circumcision celebrations across sectarian lines and participation in shared seasonal festivals. Observation of three weddings across the five villages (one mixed Alevi-Sunni wedding in V3 and separate Alevi and Sunni weddings in V1 and V4) revealed gender-segregated participation that roughly followed sectarian lines, though family kinship ties created cross-sectarian presence.

•**Economic Cooperation:** Shared agricultural labour, cooperative marketing initiatives, and collective livestock management. The irrigation cooperative in V4 operates through a jointly managed water-sharing schedule with Alevi and Sunni farmers alternating seasonal access, a system established in the 1990s and maintained continuously despite 1980 tensions. This pattern operationalizes Allport's Cooperation Rather Than Competition condition: the irrigation schedule structures contact around a shared, interdependent task rather than a zero-sum allocation of water rights.

•**Childcare and Education:** Children from both communities attending the same primary schools; informal childcare arrangements among neighbours. In V2 (smallest village), all children aged 6-11 attend single primary school with mixed Alevi-Sunni enrolment; the teaching staff is 50% Alevi and 50% Sunni, reflecting the village composition.

One Alevi woman, aged 58, described her relationship with her Sunni neighbor as follows:

"We have the keys to each's houses." We are like sisters. If something happens to me, she knows where my medicines are. I do not want those things to happen again. Therefore, we stay close." (V2, female, 58)

This respondent's statement— "I do not want those things to happen again, so we stay close"—reveals how practical integration serves as a strategy for preventing trauma. Proximity and trust-building become insurance against future sectarian

rupture; they represent the active management of trauma risk rather than simple neighborliness.

Taken together, these five practices indicate that three of Allport's (1954) five optimal contact conditions—Common Superordinate Goals, Cooperation Rather Than Competition, and Opportunities for Interpersonal Connection—are robustly and consistently present across the villages, corroborating the "Substantially Present" and "Mostly Yes" ratings recorded in Table 3 (Section 3.1). This convergence between the theoretical assessment and respondents' lived testimony helps explain why daily cooperation has remained functional despite the trauma of 1980: where the structural conditions for positive contact are met, practical cooperation follows, regardless of unresolved historical grievance.

Persistent symbolic distance: Yet this warmth coexists with caution. This persistence is consistent with Allport's (1954) framework: Common Superordinate Goals, Cooperation, and Personal Connection Opportunities alone are insufficient to dissolve prejudice when the remaining two conditions—Equal Status and Institutional/Authority Support—remain only partially or weakly present, as Table 3 documents. Alevi participants frequently expressed that they do not feel as free or secure as Sunnis; they worry about state institutions and harbor concerns about potential conflict. Common statements included:

"We have no problem here, but we are worried about the country's situation." (V1, Alevi male, 54)

This respondent's anxiety is future-oriented: local relations are fine, but political conditions at the national level threaten local stability. This pattern reflects how local peace remains contingent on macro-level stability; in the absence of state-level institutional support—what Allport (1954) terms Institutional/Authority Support, grassroots integration is insufficient to guarantee security.

"We live together, but we know what happened in Çorum; we cannot forget." Tomorrow, something could change." (V4, Alevi female, 49)

The phrase "tomorrow something could change" encapsulates cautious integration: present cooperation is real, but emotional preparedness for potential rupture remains operative. This is not cynicism but rather a pragmatic psychological defense based on historical experience.

Sunni respondents acknowledged the fragility of intergroup relations:

"We are neighbors, we help each other, but the history is there. There is always something below the surface." (V5, Sunni male, 62)

This Sunni respondent's acknowledgment of the persistent "something below the surface" suggests that Sunnis, too, recognize the incompleteness of their intergroup relations—that is, practical cooperation coexists with acknowledged but unresolved tensions. This incompleteness aligns with the symbolic status asymmetries recorded in Table 3—Sunni-majority headman positions in four of the five villages despite comparable occupational and educational profiles—which leave Allport's Equal Status condition only partially satisfied even where daily cooperation functions smoothly.

"I do not think much about Alevi-Sunni in my daily life. But when something happens nationally, I remember 1980." It makes me worry about whether it can happen again." (V3, Sunni female, 57)

This respondent describes how national political events reactivate the memory of 1980; political polarization at the macro level triggers micro-level anxiety and defensive positioning, suggesting that local integration is vulnerable to distant political shocks.

5.6 The Concept of "Cautious Integration": Theoretical Elaboration

The tension between warm daily relations and persistent caution reveals a distinctive pattern of intergroup coexistence that neither "integration" nor "segregation" adequately captures. Read against the three frameworks developed in Section 3, this tension is not anomalous but predictable: Allport's (1954) optimal contact conditions account for the cooperative half of the pattern, while Halbwachs' (1992) collective memory and Alexander's (2004) cultural trauma account for the persistence of distance. This article proposes "cautious integration" as a theoretically grounded concept that synthesizes these three frameworks into the "trauma-resistant contact" model introduced in Section 3.4.

Definition:

Cautious integration is a state of intergroup co-existence characterized by the following:

Practical Cooperation (Allport, 1954): Dense daily contact, economic interdependence, and frequent positive interaction across sectarian lines operationalize three of Allport's optimal contact conditions, Common Superordinate Goals, Cooperation Rather Than Competition, and Opportunities for Interpersonal Connection, each rated "Substantially Present" or "Mostly Yes" in Table 3 (Section 3.1). Observable frequency of cross-sectarian interaction in the five villages: shared agricultural work 3-5 times per week during the growing seasons; shared meals approximately monthly per respondent report; and ritual attendance (weddings, funerals) approximately 2-4 times per year per respondent.

Symbolic Distance (Halbwachs, 1992; Alexander, 2004): Persistent emotional caution, memory-based mistrust, and awareness of sectarian differences are maintained at the psychological and narrative level. This distance is the direct product of the asymmetric collective memories documented in Section 3.2, Alevi narratives of deliberate persecution versus Sunni narratives of political manipulation, compounded by the cultural-trauma dynamics described in Section 3.3, whereby Alevi carrier groups (Dedes, Alevi-oriented media) continue to narrate 1980 as constitutive of group identity while Sunni elites do not. This distance is expressed through narrative asymmetry, differential access to state institutions (Sunni-majority village headmen, reflecting the only partially present Equal Status condition), and subtle non-verbal cues (spatial positioning in mixed gatherings reflecting sectarian clustering).

Strategic Management (the trauma-resistant contact model, Section 3.4): Active, often unconscious effort to balance the benefits of cooperation against the risks of deepening engagement, sustained by emotional "insurance" (i.e., heightened vigilance). This is the behavioral signature of what Section 3.4 terms strategic compartmentalization: villagers suspend group-level trauma narratives during task-focused contact while reactivating them at the symbolic and narrative level—allowing Allport's contact effect to reduce episodic prejudice ("that neighbor is a good person") without resolving categorical, trauma-based caution ("Alevis/Sunnis as a category remain potentially threatening"). This management includes calculated self-disclosure ("I trust him on practical matters but not with political opinions"), dual social network maintenance (sectarian-specific friendship circles alongside mixed working groups), and narrative containment (stories of 1980 shared primarily within sectarian communities, not across them).

Institutional Support Dependency (Allport, 1954): Maintenance through local religious leaders, cultural intimacy, and structural conditions that make separation costly; fragility stemming from the weak presence of Allport's Institutional/ Authority Support condition (Table 3, Section 3.1). Without state-level institutional validation of Alevi identity and rights—formal recognition of Djemevis, legal parity with mosques—local peace practices remain contingent on personal relationships and economic necessity rather than normative institutional structures, leaving them exposed to the carrier-group dynamics of Section 3.3 whenever national political polarization intensifies.

Cautious integration is not passive coexistence, but an active, strategic balance maintained between distrust embedded in collective memory and daily rural life's socioeconomic necessities. In Allport's terms, the three conditions robustly met (Common Superordinate Goals, Cooperation, Personal Connection) generate genuine prejudice reduction at the interpersonal level, while the two conditions that remain weak (Equal Status, Authority Support) leave categorical, group-level caution intact—precisely the compartmentalized outcome the trauma-resistant contact model predicts. The "caution" is therefore not primarily fear of imminent violence but emotional preparedness: villagers maintain sufficient distance to protect themselves from disillusionment should conflict recur, while investing in relationships that sustain the material and social fabric of rural life.

Cautious integration represents a "working peace" rather than reconciliation. It is not a deficient or incomplete instance of contact-theory prediction, but a distinct equilibrium produced when optimal contact conditions co-occur with unresolved, institutionally maintained collective trauma—achieving practical coexistence without the trauma resolution, memory integration, or forgiveness that "true" integration or reconciliation would require.

5.7 Religious Leadership as a Mediatory Practice

Field observations and interview data revealed that local religious leaders—Imams and Dedes—function as "mediatory actors" whose inclusive practices provide crucial infrastructure for social peace.

Inclusive Imam Practices: In three of the five villages (V2, V3, and V4), imams engaged in practices that explicitly transgressed sectarian boundaries:

- Attendance of Alevi funeral rites and participation in mourning rituals
- Visit the Djemevi and engage in dialogue with the Dedes.
- Publicly emphasizing shared Islamic principles and the Qur'anic injunction to respect neighbors
- Avoid sermons that demonize Alevism or emphasize theological differences.

One imam, aged 58, explained his approach:

"I am an imam for all villages." I have Alevi and Sunni brothers. The Prophet said that the best neighbor is the one who is the kindest, not the one who prays the same way. Every Friday, I speak about kindness and neighborliness because I believe people need to hear this." (V2, Imam, 58)

This imam's theology emphasizes neighborly ethics as an Islamic principle that transcends sectarian boundaries. According to interview respondents, his Friday sermons explicitly reference Qur'anic verses emphasizing neighbor's rights and warning against religious arrogance, thereby constructing a theological frame that de-emphasizes Alevi-Sunni theological differences in favor of shared ethical commitments.

The impact of such inclusive leadership was evident in the interview data. Sunni respondents in villages with "open-minded" imams expressed significantly less prejudice toward Alevi theology and practices. One Sunni woman, aged 44, described watching her imam visit a Djemevi:

"I thought Alevism was something dangerous." Then I saw [Imam name] was welcomed there and treated with respect. It made me think. If the imam respects their ceremonies, maybe I should too." (V3, female, 44, Sunni)

This respondent's transformation of attitude through observation of her imam's behavior reveals how religious authority can either reify or transgress sectarian boundaries. The imam's welcoming reception in the Djemevi signals Alevi practice's institutional legitimacy, thereby weakening prejudicial interpretation.

Dede's Emphasis on Neighborhood Rights: Alevi Dedes similarly emphasized the principle of "komşu hakkı" (the rights and responsibilities of neighbors), a

concept rooted in Islamic ethics but prominently featured in Alevi tradition. This principle was explicitly invoked by Dedes to discourage vengeful rhetoric tied to 1980 and reinforce communal solidarity.

One Dede, aged 71, stated:

"In daemeli, we teach that the neighbor's right is the first right before God." We cannot be Alevi if we do not respect the dignity of our neighbors. The blood of 1980 is spilled, but we do not spill more blood. That is not our way." (V5, Dede, 71)

Dede's statement explicitly manages 1980 trauma memory through an ethical principle: acknowledging the "blood spilled" (validating trauma) while prohibiting vengeful responses, thereby containing the potential of trauma to generate counter-violence. This represents active trauma management at the level of religious leadership.

Comparative Impact

Importantly, inclusive religious leadership was not uniform across villages. V1 and V5 had less explicitly engaged Imams/Dedes in interfaith practices, and these villages showed more pronounced sectarian clustering in daily life and more frequent mention of sectarian tension in interviews. This variation supports the finding that individual religious leader agency significantly shapes local integration, though structural conditions (economic necessity, kinship networks) provide a floor below which integration cannot drop and a ceiling it cannot exceed.

5.8 Cultural Practices and Rituals as Integrative Mechanisms

Shared cultural rituals substantially reduced social distance and fostered intergroup intimacy.

Hıdrellez and Nowruz (Spring Festivals): These spring festivals, which are associated with renewal and abundance, are celebrated as shared cultural events in all five villages. While possessing specific Alevi religious meanings in some contexts, they have largely transformed into secular or pan-Anatolian cultural events that bring both communities together. Respondents described preparing communal meals, lighting bonfires, and performing ritual elements together with minimal sectarian boundary maintenance.

Observation in V2 (May 5th, Hıdrellez celebration, 2014): The village organized a shared feast with both communities contributing dishes; Alevi Dede and Sunni imam jointly blessed the meal using language accessible to both communities. The participants were not explicitly segregated by religion, although kinship clustering remained evident.

Ashoura (Muharram Commemoration): Ashoura (aşure) commemorations organized by the Alevi—involving collective grain and meat preparation, distribution to neighbors, and memorial services for Imam Hüseyin—emerged as particularly powerful integrative rituals. The ritual explicitly invites Sunni neighbors to share the ashoura, and Sunni participation increased significantly over the research period in several villages.

One Alevi woman, aged 54, described the Ashoura practice as follows:

"We prepare Ashoura with love." We think of those who suffered. Then, we give it to everyone—Sunni, Alevi, whoever. Eating from the same pot is how we stay together." (V4, female, 54)

This respondent explicitly frames shared eating as a mechanism of solidarity ("eating from the same pot = how we stay together"). The Ashoura ritual transforms Alevi religious commemoration (mourning Imam Hüseyin) into shared community activity through the redistribution of food, thereby creating cross-sectarian participation in Alevi ritual without requiring Sunni doctrinal acceptance of Alevi theology.

Sunni respondents reported that participating in Ashoura and witnessing commemorative practices of Alevi had reduced their prejudice and increased their understanding of Alevi religiosity:

"I thought Alevism was about politics or communism." Then, I went to Ashoura, and I saw people remembering the Prophet's family and suffering. Islam is just different from what I learned." (V1, Sunni male, 46)

The reframing of this Sunni respondent— "It is Islam, just different"—represents a theological accommodation that permits Sunni acceptance of Alevism without requiring the abandonment of Sunni identity. By recognizing Alevism as variant

Islam rather than anti-Islam, this respondent achieves integration at the doctrinal level without doctrinal capitulation.

Increased Sunni Interest in Fasting in Muharram: In recent years, Sunni participation in Muharram fasting practices has increased, traditionally associated with Alevi commemoration. In the 2016 fieldwork, approximately 30% of the Sunni respondents reported fasting during Muharram or eating less meat (partial observance), compared with reports of negligible Sunni participation 20+ years prior. This shift, while still a minority practice, suggests the emergence of religious syncretism or at least the desectarianization of ritual practice among younger villagers.

This shift toward shared ritual practice is significant for understanding integration mechanisms: shared rituals permit intergroup participation without requiring participants to abandon sectarian identity or adopt the complete theological worldview of the other group.

5.9 Shifts in media, visibility, and contemporary perception

The emergence of Alevi-oriented media, particularly television channels (such as Cem TV, which includes Alevi programming) and online platforms—has significantly reshaped Sunni perceptions of Alevism. The participants highlighted several effects:

Accurate Information: Access to documentaries and programs explaining Alevi theology, history, and ritual practice, reducing misinformation. All interviewed Sunni households reported access to satellite television, permitting viewing of Alevi-oriented programming. Approximately 65% of Sunni respondents reported having watched Alevi-specific programming at least once.

Visual Witnessing: Sunni viewers could directly observe Djemevi rituals, correcting misconceptions that Alevi worship was secret, heretical, or politically radical. Respondents mentioned specific television programs that visually demonstrated Alevi religiosity ("I saw a program about cem ceremony"/ "they showed a documentary about the Pir Sultan Abdal festival").

Alevi Visibility and Pride: Alevi participants reported feeling less isolated and more socially recognized through media representation. One Alevi male, aged 41, stated: "When I see Alevi programs on television, I feel less alone. The younger generation sees Alevism on TV and thinks it is not very shameful."

One 52-year-old Sunni man described the media's impact:

"Before, Alevi practices seemed strange and wrong. Now I can watch it on the television. They explain their beliefs. When you see people praying respectfully, you understand that they are religious, just differently." (V4, male Sunni, 52)

This respondent's narrative arc ("seemed wrong" → "watch on television" → "understand they are religious, just differently") illustrates how media representation facilitates the reduction of prejudice through non-direct intergroup contact. The television format permits repeated exposure to positive Alevi imagery without the need for sustained face-to-face interaction.

This observation aligns with social psychology research on intergroup perception: vivid, positive media representation of outgroup members reduces prejudice and increases willingness for contact (Greenberg et al., 2006). Media effects in the Çorum villages are notable because rural communities historically had limited exposure to diverse media representations. The introduction of satellite television and internet access post-2000 represents a significant communication environment shift that may explain generational differences in intergroup attitudes (younger cohorts with media access show greater openness than older cohorts with limited pre-internet media exposure).

6. Discussion

6.1 Confirming and Extending Contact Theory: The Trauma-Resistant Contact Model

Allport's contact theory predicts that intergroup contact reduces prejudice under optimal conditions. The Çorum data confirm this prediction: the five villages meet 3.5–4 of Allport's five optimal contact conditions, and measurable reductions in prejudicial statements and increases in positive intergroup attitudes occur. Younger generations demonstrate fewer categorical stereotypes and greater openness to intergroup relationships.

However, the data reveals a critical complication: prejudice reduction and complete integration are not equivalent outcomes. Even as prejudicial statements diminished, emotional distance persisted. Respondents maintained what might be termed "cautious" attitudes: they recognized the humanity and virtue of individuals

from the other group while simultaneously maintaining group-level wariness and emotional preparedness for potential conflict.

This pattern aligns with the meta-analysis of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), which documented that contact reduces prejudice even when anxiety persists. The Çorum case extends this finding by specifying the nature of persistent anxiety: anxiety rooted not in generalized group prejudice but in specific historical trauma and its collective memory.

A "trauma-resistant contact" model that extends Allport's framework is proposed:

Conditions: When communities with (a) optimal contact structures meet (b) significant historical trauma maintained through institutionalized collective memory, the result is not prejudicing reduction alone but rather a compartmentalization of attitudes: behavioral integration coupled with persistent emotional distance and heightened vigilance. Contact reduces episodic prejudice (negative statements about outgroup members), while trauma memory maintains group-level caution (preparedness for future conflict).

Mechanisms: This pattern is sustained through the following:

Narrative Asymmetry: Different trauma memories (Alevi as targets vs. Sunni as manipulated) create divergent interpretations of 1980, preventing a complete shared understanding. The two communities cannot reconcile because they do not interpret the same historical events through shared causal frameworks.

Emotional Insurance: Villagers maintain sufficient emotional distance to protect themselves from disillusionment should conflict recur; this distance does not manifest as overt prejudice but as heightened awareness of sectarian differences. This represents a form of "defensive pessimism": assuming worst-case scenarios to protect against future disappointment.

Selective Trust: Trust is extended in practical, task-focused contexts (economic cooperation, neighborly exchange) while withheld in contexts perceived as higher stakes (religious instruction of children, political alliance, and intimate life decisions). Respondents explicitly report different levels of trust for different domains: "I trust him with my agricultural work but not with my child's religious education."

Ritual Reinforcement: Both communities maintain separate commemorative practices that reinforce trauma memory and group identity, even as shared rituals foster practical cooperation. Muharram ceremonies (Alevi), Friday sermons (Sunni), and Hıdrellez celebrations (shared) all occur, with each serving different community functions: identity reinforcement vs. integration.

6.2 Urban-Rural Divide: Structure and resilience

The contrast between urban segregation and rural integration in Çorum reflects broader patterns in conflict studies. Urban environments, characterized by anonymity, spatial fluidity, and weak kinship ties, permit rapid sectarian ghettoization following violence. Rural environments, characterized by kinship networks, repeated daily interaction, and economic interdependence, provide structural buffers against complete separation.

Gökarıksel and Secor (2022) document "sectarian precarity" in urban Turkey, where the presence of Alevi in mixed neighborhoods is continuously shaped by vulnerability and fear of renewed conflict. The Çorum urban data align with this analysis: post-1980, urban Alevi-Sunni relations are characterized by spatial separation and emotional distance.

The rural villages studied here suggest that structural conditions—specifically, the economic necessity of cooperation, the impossibility of spatial separation due to land ownership patterns, and the presence of dual religious infrastructure (Mosque and Djemevi)—can resist the centrifugal forces that produce urban ghettoization.

However, rural resilience remains conditional. Without state-level institutional support for Alevi rights, without formal recognition of Djemevi, and without reconciliation mechanisms that address historical trauma, local peace remains vulnerable to disruption by national-level political polarization. The 2016 coup attempt—which occurred after fieldwork but was mentioned by respondents during discussions on secondary analysis—demonstrated exactly this risk: national political instability triggering local intergroup anxiety.

6.3 Sustainability Question: Local Peace and Macro-Level Support

A critical finding of this study concerns the fragility of local integration absent state-level institutional support. While villagers have developed sufficient trust to

entrust house keys to each other and share meals across sectarian lines, the fear of "everything turning upside down overnight"—a direct residue of 1980—persists as an emotional foundation of their caution.

The participants articulated this explicitly:

"We are neighbors here." We live together, but the government is somewhere else. The government can change the rules. Then, what? We cannot protect ourselves; we can only hope it does not happen again." (V2, Alevi male, 61)

This statement captures the fundamental asymmetry: Local communities have constructed meaningful coexistence through their own efforts and cultural resources, yet they lack security or recognition. The association of Alevi with political opposition parties (CHP, HDP), combined with the historically inconsistent policies of the Turkish state toward Alevism, leaves Alevi respondents uncertain whether their hard-won local peace can survive national political shifts.

Therefore, the sustainability of "cautious integration" depends on institutional conditions extending beyond the village level:

Legal Recognition: Formal legal status for Djemevis (equivalent to mosque status) and Alevi associations. As of 2024, Djemevis remain unlisted in national religious infrastructure registers, remaining ambiguously legal/tolerated rather than formally recognized. This administrative ambiguity creates vulnerability: at any moment, legal status could shift, threatening the institutional basis of local practice.

Educational Reform: Curriculum reform eliminated compulsory Sunni-framed religious education and incorporated Alevi theology and history. The current Turkish curriculum remains Sunni-dominated; Alevi inclusion remains supplementary rather than integrated. This educational asymmetry transmits the message to younger generations that Sunni Islam is normative and Alevism is deviation.

Reconciliation mechanisms: Truth commissions, public acknowledgment of 1980 suffering, and formal apologies from the state and perpetrator communities. No official truth commission has examined the 1980s; no state institution has formally acknowledged the suffering of Alevi communities. The absence of institutional validation leaves trauma memory entirely in the private realm, limiting public/official recognition.

Equitable Resource Distribution: State support for Alevi religious institutions is comparable to historical support for Sunni structures. The Directorate of Religious Affairs funds Mosque construction, imam salaries, and Qur'anic schools, but has only recently (post-2002) extended equivalent support to Alevi institutions. This resource asymmetry reinforces symbolic hierarchies.

6.4 Religious Leadership: Micro-Level Practice and Macro-Level Context

The research revealed that imams and Dedes significantly influence local integration through their theological interpretations and social practices. Imams and Dedes who emphasized shared Islamic principles, neighborhood ethics, and human dignity over sectarian distinction fostered greater intergroup cooperation. Conversely, religious leaders who emphasize theological differences or maintain separate ritual spaces reinforced sectarian boundaries.

However, the efficacy of individual religious leaders is constrained by the macro-level institutional context. In villages where the Imam was isolated (V1), his inclusive practices had a limited impact; in villages where municipal authorities and community elders supported his efforts (V2, V3, V4), inclusivity was amplified. This pattern suggests that religious leadership operates within institutional structures: supportive contexts amplify the influence of religious leaders, whereas unsupportive contexts limit it.

This finding suggests that sustainable religious mediation requires the following:

Training and Support: Theological education for Imams and Dedes emphasizes conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, and trauma-informed practice. Currently, imam training (conducted at the theological schools of the Directorate of Religious Affairs) emphasizes Orthodox Sunni theology with minimal exposure to Alevi theology or interfaith dialogue. Dede training remains entirely within the Alevi community structures without formal certification or state recognition.

Institutional Backing: State and community recognition of interfaith religious leadership, including institutional support for such initiatives. Such backing is largely absent in contemporary Turkey, leaving individual religious leaders without institutional resources dependent on personal moral conviction and community support.

Peer networks: Connections among interfaith religious leaders to reinforce and provide mutual support for inclusive practices. Very limited interfaith Imam-Dede networks exist; most religious leaders operate in isolation, making them vulnerable to criticism from sectarian hardliners.

6.5 Generational dynamics and direct trauma reduction

The generational differences documented in this study are significant: younger respondents who lack direct memory of 1980 express greater openness to intergroup relations and lower levels of trauma-based caution. This pattern suggests that while trauma memory is transmissible across generations, it diminishes emotional intensity absent reinforcement through lived experience.

Specific data: Respondents aged 18-35 reported 0.8 mean anxiety responses to hypothetical scenarios of sectarian conflict (on a 5-point scale) compared with 3.2 mean anxiety among respondents aged 56+ who directly experienced the conflict in 1980. This 4-fold difference in anxiety levels suggests a diminishment of generational trauma.

This observation provides cautious optimism: if institutional conditions stabilize and political polarization does not trigger new violence, the emotional grip of 1980 memory may gradually loosen as direct witnesses pass away, and younger generations inherit narrative memory rather than embodied trauma.

However, this optimism is tempered by the observation that new violence can reactivate and re-embodie traumatic memories. For instance, the Sivas Massacre (1993) and the Gazi Uprising (1995) reactivated trauma in 1980 and reinforced Alevi perceptions of systemic vulnerability. Similarly, contemporary political developments (post-2016) suggest that when national conditions create renewed threat perceptions, sectarian memory remains mobilizable.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

7.1 Acknowledged Limitations

Temporal Constraints: This study analyzes data collected between 2013 and 2016, making the findings descriptive of conditions approximately 10 years before publication (2025). Significant developments have occurred since the fieldwork:

The 2016 coup attempt and subsequent political polarization: Turkish politics underwent significant realignment following the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. The failed coup was followed by extensive arrests, purges, and a state of emergency that lasted until 2018. This political instability likely affected local intergroup relations in ways not captured by 2013-2016 data.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and its effects on rural community structures: Rural villages experienced pandemic-related isolation differently than urban centres. Movement restrictions, health crises, and economic disruption likely affected intergroup cooperation patterns not observable in pre-pandemic fieldwork.

Recent religious and educational policy shifts: Post-2016 Turkish government policies have included curriculum reforms and institutional changes affecting Alevi-Sunni relations that were not reflected in 2013-2016 baseline data.

The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and its effects on intergroup dynamics in border regions: While the Çorum villages are not proximate to the Syrian border, regional refugee impacts and changing demographics may indirectly affect rural intergroup relations.

Importantly, the author did not conduct post-2016 follow-up fieldwork, limiting the ability of the study to assess whether the cautious integration observed in 2013-2016 has strengthened, weakened, or transformed under contemporary political conditions. This temporal limitation is particularly significant given that the secondary analysis conducted in 2024-2025 is assessing 2013-2016 data through the retrospective lens of post-coup political developments.

Geographic Scope and Generalizability: The study encompasses five villages in a single province (Çorum), limiting generalizability to the following:

Other regions with different demographic compositions: Western Anatolia (with different Alevi-Sunni ratios and historical trajectories), Kurdish regions with Alevi populations (particularly in Dersim/Tunceli, with distinct historical experience), and heterodox Islamic regions (such as Hatay, with Alevi Turkmen, Sunni Arab, Alawite, and other communities).

Different historical trajectories of sectarian conflict: Maraş (site of 1978 incidents with greater urban concentration and higher death toll), Sivas (site of 1993 incidents with different triggers and victim profiles), and other mixed villages in these regions.

Urban contexts: The study explicitly focuses on rural villages; urban Alevi-Sunni relations demonstrate markedly different patterns (spatial segregation, institutional polarization, and limited daily cooperation) not adequately represented by rural case studies.

The Çorum region's specific characteristics—predominant Turkmen Alevi populations (distinct from Kurdish Alevi identity), moderate distance from major urban centers, and relatively stable land ownership patterns—may not represent conditions in other mixed villages throughout Turkey or broader Middle Eastern contexts with similar sectarian composition.

Gender and Intersectionality: Although the study achieved gender balance in interview sampling (43% female respondents), the analysis did not fully explore how gender intersects with sectarian identity in shaping trauma experience and intergroup relations.

Specific limitation: Women frequently mentioned sexual violence during the 1980s ("Our women were attacked," "Girls were taken," and "My sister was assaulted"). However, this dimension received limited systematic analysis in the finding section. The 2013-2016 fieldwork notes contain sparse documentation of sexual violence experiences; the interview questions did not specifically address gendered trauma. This represents a significant gap: gender-specific violence (sexual assault, forced displacement, widow-headed household creation) shapes trauma memory differently than gender-neutral violence categorizations would suggest.

Additionally, the interview sample shows gender imbalance among direct 1980 witnesses: of 36 respondents aged 56+ (direct witnesses), 65% were male, and 35% were female. This skew reflects women's younger age profile in 1980 (fewer clear adult memories) and potentially gendered migration patterns; however, it results in underrepresentation of the female witness perspective.

Future research should employ explicitly feminist analytical frameworks to examine how gendered violence affects trauma memory, intergroup trust, and women's specific roles in maintaining or challenging sectarian boundaries.

Methodological Constraints of the Secondary Analysis: This study employed secondary analysis of data collected for different research objectives. While the secondary coder validation ($\varkappa$ = 0.86 inter-coder reliability) and peer debriefing process enhanced reliability, the original data collection instrument was not optimized for the specific research questions addressed here. Some relevant topics were not exhaustively documented in the original fieldwork:

Economic stratification within villages: The analysis notes general economic equivalence but does not systematically examine intra-group economic inequality (landless households, wage-worker stratification) or how economic position correlates with intergroup attitudes.

Detailed kinship mapping: The analysis mentions that kinship ties facilitate integration but does not provide systematic kinship network analysis showing how kinship structure enables/constrains intergroup contact.

Extensive observation of daily intergroup interaction patterns: Although 14 months of observation is substantial, the observation was not systematically structured around documented intergroup interaction (e.g., market transactions, school interactions, and shared work patterns)—observations were more impressionistic than quantified.

These constraints do not invalidate findings but rather identify areas where future systematic research would strengthen understanding.

Secondary Analysis and Researcher Bias: As noted in Section 2.1, the author's reanalysis of their dataset presents specific bias risks. Although independent secondary coder validation and peer debriefing mitigated these risks, the following possibility remains:

Confirmation bias shaped code selection: The author may have unconsciously coded data supporting this concept more readily than contradicting evidence, having developed the "cautious integration" concept during preliminary analysis.

Emotional investment in fieldwork relationships: The extended 14 months in villages created personal relationships (acknowledged in field notes) that may have unconsciously shaped the interpretation of participants' statements toward positive/cooperative framing.

Changed analytical context: The author analysing 2013-2016 data in 2024-2025 does so in retrospective awareness of subsequent political developments (2016 coup, 2018-2023 elections, and economic crisis), potentially reading contemporary political concerns back into historical data.

These risks are inherent to author-conducted secondary analysis and cannot be eliminated, but their acknowledgment allows readers to contextually evaluate the work.

7.2 Suggestions for future research

Longitudinal Design: Updated fieldwork in the same villages would permit the assessment of the following:

Whether local integration has strengthened or weakened given post-2016 political developments

How generational turnover affects collective memory and intergroup relations (specifically, whether the passing of a direct witness generation reduces the intergenerational transmission of trauma memory)

Whether interventions (e.g., religious leader training and reconciliation initiatives) produce measurable effects

Comparative Cases: Research examining other mixed villages in the Maraş and Sivas provinces would permit the assessment of whether the "cautious integration" model characterizes other post-sectarian violence contexts or whether Çorum's pattern is regionally specific. Maraş (with higher urban concentration and greater displacement) and Sivas (with different violence triggers and institutional contexts) might show different integration patterns.

Quantitative Triangulation: Although this study employed robust qualitative methods, the integration of quantitative measures would strengthen the following causal claims:

Standardized social distance scales (Bogardus/Emory scale) permitting quantitative assessment of change in attitude across variables. (Bogardus, 1933)

Attitude surveys on specific propositions ("Alevi/Sunni neighbors are trustworthy," "intermarriage is acceptable," and "sectarian conflict could recur") with statistical analysis of demographic correlates.

Network analysis documents actual intergroup contact patterns (cross-sectarian friendship networks, work partnerships, and institutional participation) rather than relying on self-reporting.

Institutional Analysis: A detailed examination of how state policies, educational curricula, and institutional frameworks shape local intergroup relations would clarify the mechanisms through which macro-level conditions affect grassroots integration. Comparative policy analysis across Turkish provinces with varying institutional support for Alevi rights might reveal how policy conditions constrain/enable local integration.

8. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of the 1980 Çorum Massacre on Alevi–Sunni relations in five mixed rural villages where Mosques and Djemevis co-exist. Based on 109 in-depth interviews (55% Alevi, 45% Sunni), 14 months of participant observation, NVivo-assisted thematic analysis with inter-coder validation (κ = 0.86), and rigorous qualitative analysis employing three theoretical frameworks, the following key findings were obtained:

8.1 Primary findings

Persistence and Asymmetry of Collective Memory: Historical trauma continues to shape perceptions, particularly among Alevis, who interprets the 1980 Incidents as part of a centuries-long history of marginalization and targeting. By contrast, the collective memory of Sunni Muslims emphasizes political manipulation and deception rather than active perpetration. This narrative asymmetry remains a structural feature of contemporary intergroup relations, preventing complete shared understanding despite practical cooperation. The two communities literally interpret 1980 through different causal frameworks (Alevi: intentional persecution; Sunni:

external manipulation), making reconciliation of memory narratives extraordinarily difficult.

Strong Everyday Integration amid Persistent Symbolic Distance: In the villages studied, neighborly relations, mutual visits, shared meals, participation in life-cycle rituals, and economic cooperation appear normalized and cross sectarian lines regularly. Measured frequency: cross-sectarian agricultural work 3-5 times weekly during the growing season; shared meals approximately monthly; ritual attendance 2-4 times yearly. However, this practical integration coexists with acknowledged emotional caution, a persistent awareness of sectarian differences, and explicit statements that coexistence remains fragile. No respondent spontaneously stated that "the Alevi-Sunni divide is resolved" or "sectarianism is irrelevant." Instead, respondents consistently described a careful balance between cooperation and caution.

The Model of "Cautious Integration": This pattern—warm daily relations coupled with persistent symbolic distance—is conceptualized as "cautious integration," an active, strategic balance between distrust embedded in collective memory and the economic and social necessities of rural life. Unlike "integration" or "segregation" as binary categories, cautious integration captures the lived complexity of coexistence under the shadow of trauma. This concept has theoretical significance beyond the Çorum case: it identifies a distinctive pattern of intergroup relationships that contemporary theories inadequately capture.

Structural Conditions as Enablers and Constraints: The five villages meet Allport's optimal contact conditions (3.5–4), facilitating practical cooperation. However, the absence of state-level institutional support (legal recognition of Djemevis, educational reform, and formal reconciliation) renders local peace inherently fragile. In the short term, local resilience can buffer national-level polarization but cannot indefinitely substitute for institutional recognition. Respondents explicitly articulated this dependency: "We manage here locally, but if the government changes policy, we are vulnerable."

Religious Leadership as Mediatory Practice: Imams and Dedes function as "mediatory actors," whose inclusive theological interpretations and practices significantly facilitate local integration. Villages with imams emphasizing Islamic shared principles (neighborly ethics, human dignity transcending sectarian lines)

demonstrated greater intergroup cooperation than villages with imams emphasizing theological distinctiveness. However, the efficacy of individual religious leaders depends heavily on institutional and community support; isolated inclusive leadership has a limited impact. This finding suggests that both personal moral conviction and institutional backing are required for religious mediation.

Cultural Intimacy and Ritual as Integration Mechanisms: Shared cultural practices (Assman, 2011), Hıdrellez, Nowruz, Ashoura, and Keşkek, reduce social distance and foster intergroup intimacy. These rituals permit cross-sectarian participation without requiring participants to abandon their sectarian identity or theological positions. They achieve integration at the practical and emotional levels while leaving theological boundaries largely intact. Media representation of Alevi practice has increased understanding and reduced prejudice among Sunni respondents.

Generational Differences in Trauma Processing: Direct witnesses to 1980 carry deep emotional scars and persistent anxiety (mean anxiety score 3.2/5.0); younger respondents born after 1980 approach intergroup relations with greater openness (mean anxiety 0.8/5.0). This 4-fold difference suggests a significant generational diminishment of trauma intensity, though trauma memory remains transmissible through narrative inheritance. Notably, respondents aged 35-45 (children during 1980 with clear memories) showed intermediate anxiety levels, suggesting an optimal "trauma generation" for symptom expression.

8.2 Theoretical implications

Extending Contact Theory: Trauma-Resistant Contact Model

This study extends Allport's contact theory by introducing a "trauma-resistant contact" model. When communities with optimal contact structures simultaneously carry significant historical trauma maintained through institutionalized collective memory practices, the result is not prejudicing reduction alone but compartmental attitudes: behavioral integration coupled with persistent emotional caution.

This extension is significant because it identifies conditions under which the predictions of contact theory are partially confirmed (prejudice reduction in episodic interactions) while remaining incomplete (group-level caution persists despite individual-level rapport). The model specifies that trauma memory operates

orthogonally to prejudice: reducing prejudicial stereotyping does not automatically dissolve trauma-based caution because it addresses future risk (might violence recur?) rather than current prejudice (are individual outgroup members trustworthy?).

The Complex Role of Collective Memory

Halbwachs' concept of collective memory is invaluable for understanding how communities maintain asymmetric interpretations of shared historical events. The divergent trauma memories of the Alevi and Sunni communities—constructed and maintained through narrative rehearsal, commemorative rituals, and media representation—create persistent interpretive divergence even as practical cooperation increases. Memory is not a neutral record of past events but a socially constructed and continually reinforced interpretive framework. This finding has implications beyond the Çorum case: post-conflict societies often assume that sharing factual information about historical events will create shared understanding, but the Çorum case demonstrates that divergent causal narratives (Alevi: persecution; Sunni: deception) can coexist with shared factual acknowledgment, limiting the effectiveness of "truth commission" absent accompanying narrative reframing.

Cultural trauma and group identity

Alexander's framework illuminates how trauma is integrated into collective identity. For Alevi communities, 1980 functions as a defining moment that solidifies the group identity as fundamentally vulnerable and threatened. Paradoxically, trauma strengthens internal group cohesion: the shared experience of victimization clarifies group boundaries and justifies collective mobilization. This suggests that trauma resolution cannot assume that reducing group distinctiveness is desirable. Instead, sustainable peace may require legitimizing group identity and acknowledging historical distinctiveness while building cross-group institutional cooperation.

8.3 Practical implications for policy and intervention

For policymakers and practitioners seeking to support sustainable intergroup coexistence in post-conflict contexts:

Recognize local resilience: Communities affected by historical violence develop mechanisms for coexistence that warrant recognition and support rather than dismissal as insufficient. The Çorum villages have constructed meaningful

intergroup integration through their own cultural resources and structural necessities; external interventions should build on these existing practices rather than imposing externally designed reconciliation models.

Addressing Institutional Gaps: Without state-level institutional support, local peace remains fragile. Policymakers should prioritize the legal recognition of minority religious institutions, curriculum reform addressing historical trauma, educational inclusion of minority perspectives, and equitable resource allocation across religious groups. These institutional measures would strengthen local practices by providing formal validation and removing policy reversal vulnerabilities.

Support Religious Leadership: Training and institutional support for inclusive religious leadership can amplify local integration efforts, but only when embedded within broader institutional reform. Religious leaders should be trained in conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, and trauma-informed practice. Peer networks among interfaith leaders reinforce inclusive practices and provide mutual support.

Leverage Cultural Practice: Shared cultural and ritual practices are powerful mechanisms for reducing social distance. Policies that support cultural exchange, inter-ritual participation, and shared celebration can facilitate integration. Importantly, these practices should emphasize cultural/secular dimensions rather than requiring doctrinal consensus, allowing participation without abandoning sectarian identity.

Attention to Generational Dynamics: Recognizing that trauma effects diminish across generations, interventions can be timed to build on this natural process while ensuring that new violence does not reactivate trauma memory. Educational programs targeting younger generations may prove particularly effective when older witnesses' trauma narratives are still accessible for documentation and processing.

8.4 Broader Significance of the Çorum Case

For international audiences studying sectarian conflict and intergroup relations, the Çorum case offers several broader lessons:

Coexistence Under Trauma: Communities can achieve meaningful, daily cooperation even in the aftermath of organized violence, particularly where interdependence is supported by structural conditions. These findings challenge

the assumption that trauma necessarily produces prolonged separation or violence cycles.

The Limits of Contact Alone: Contact is a necessary but insufficient condition for sustainable peace. Trauma memory, institutional marginalization, and political uncertainty constrain the effects of contact. Conflict resolution theories must move beyond contact-based approaches to address the psychological and social dimensions of trauma.

Rural-Urban Divergence: The stark contrast between rural integration and urban segregation in the Çorum case suggests that residential structure, anonymity, and economic conditions significantly shape intergroup dynamics in ways that prejudice reduction theoretical models do not fully capture. Similar patterns likely exist in other post-conflict contexts (Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and Rwanda), where rural communities show greater integration than urban centres despite comparable historical violence.

Memory and Forgetting: Rather than expecting communities to forget historical violence, sustainable peace may require the development of a "living-with-trauma" approach in which communities maintain historical awareness while committing to contemporary co-existence. The Çorum case demonstrates that trauma can be contained rather than resolved: communities can acknowledge historical wounds while preventing them from determining present behaviour.

8.5 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations qualify for the conclusions above and warrant explicit acknowledgment alongside the study's contributions (a fuller discussion appears in Section 7):

Temporal Scope: The data were collected in 2013–2016 and analyzed retrospectively in 2024–2025. Absent post-2016 follow-up fieldwork, it cannot be determined whether the "cautious integration" documented here has since strengthened, eroded, or transformed under the political realignment following the 2016 coup attempt, the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recent policy shifts.

Geographic and Demographic Generalizability: The findings derive from five villages in a single province with a predominantly Turkmen Alevi population.

Extension to other sectarian-conflict contexts (e.g., Maraş, Sivas, Dersim/Tunceli) or to urban settings, where this study's own evidence suggests markedly different dynamics prevail, should be made cautiously.

Gender Representation: Despite balanced overall sampling, direct 1980 witnesses interviewed were 65% male, and gender-specific violence during the massacre—referenced by several female respondents—did not receive systematic analysis. This is a substantive gap rather than a minor omission, since gendered violence plausibly shapes trauma memory differently than gender-neutral categorizations suggest.

Secondary-Analysis Positionality: As a reanalysis of the author's own doctoral fieldwork, the study carries an inherent risk of confirmation bias and retrospective reinterpretation. Independent coder validation ($\varkappa = 0.86$) and peer debriefing mitigate, but cannot fully eliminate, this risk.

None of these limitations undermines the core finding that cautious integration constitutes a distinct, theoretically meaningful pattern of post-trauma coexistence; they define, rather, the boundaries within which that finding should be interpreted and extended.

8.6 Final reflection

In a global context where Alevi–Sunni relations are often framed through conflict and polarization, the mixed villages of Çorum offer an alternative narrative: one of wounded yet persistent togetherness, where historical trauma and contemporary social proximity coexist in a delicate but meaningful balance. The residents of these villages have accomplished what national-level political leaders have not: they have constructed a working coexistence without waiting for institutional permission or formal reconciliation.

However, their accomplishments remain incomplete and precarious. The key to transforming "cautious integration" into sustainable peace lies in institutional recognition, legal reform, and formal acknowledgment of historical suffering. When state-level institutional justice supports local coexistence, the remarkable resilience demonstrated in Çorum villages can mature into what we might term a genuine, rather than negative, peace.

The villages of Çorum demonstrate that coexistence is possible. The challenge for Turkish society and other post-conflict contexts is ensuring that macro-level institutional structures support rather than undermine local peace. The answer to "Can Alevi and Sunni communities live together?" appears to be yes—but only if they are permitted and supported to do so.

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