

Relational Wounds: Dialogical Systemic Praxis at the Intersection of Trauma, Postmemory, and Moral Injury

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Abstract

This article develops the concept of relational wounds as a framework for understanding and responding to collective historical wounding within systemic psychotherapy. Writing from my situated position as a migrant Kurdish-Zaza Alevi woman from Dersim and a systemic psychotherapist, I bring personal, cultural, spiritual, and professional knowledge into dialogue with trauma theory, postmemory, moral injury, agential realism, and transmaterial worlding. The article begins with the limitations of diagnostic and individualising accounts of trauma, which tend to locate distress within bounded persons, events, or family systems. Although intergenerational and transgenerational trauma and postmemory extend trauma across time and generations, they can still imply that trauma is a substance transmitted from past to present. Drawing on Dersim's history, the 1937–38 massacre, and Dersimi Alevi cosmology, I instead conceptualise historical harm as an ongoing material-discursive and relational process involving bodies, memories, silences, institutions, landscapes, sacred places, and more-than-human life. Relational wounds name historically constituted relational fields in which collective harm, oppression, silencing, and moral violation remain materially active in contemporary relationships and therapeutic encounters. Bringing dialogical practice together with Alevi relational ethics and Barad's agential realism, the article proposes accountability, polyphony, and response-ability as central to anti-oppressive praxis. It concludes that collective historical wounds are neither fixed inheritances nor closed histories, but ongoing intra-actions through which relational futures remain constrained yet radically open to ethical remaking and shared becoming.

I have spent a considerable part of my life reflecting on my history and on what it means to come from Dersim, a geographical and political space that was made to disappear by 1936 through its absorption into the borders of neighbouring counties, municipalities, and townships (Keiser, 2011; Deniz, 2020). The story and history of Dersim, and its endurance in our collective

consciousness, have shaped both my sense of belonging and my intellectual preoccupations. In seeking to understand my own experiences and those of my community, and the incongruence between our embodied experiences, our stories, and our recorded history, I turned to the concept of intergenerational and transgenerational psychological trauma (Çelik, 2015). Given the scale of destruction and devastation experienced by Dersimis (people who identify as being from Dersim), I took the concept of trauma on board to describe the collective pain and suffering, which led my work to trace how trauma eventually became an essence. I deconstructed it as something remembered, silenced, and transmitted across generations, shaping the emotional, relational, and political lives of Dersimli people.

As I explored the impact of “unlived” trauma on subsequent generations, and in moving beyond the diagnostic limitations of psychological trauma, I turned to postmemory, a concept proposed by Hirsch (2008, 2012) that offers a more situated account of the traumatic as an embodied and affective inheritance of memories of events not directly experienced. Through this lens, I became increasingly aware of how I was positioning psychological trauma and people as distinct entities, even while attempting to honour their profound entanglement. This recognition pushed me to confront the Cartesian separation of mind and matter and to situate my inquiry within a social constructivist perspective, perhaps with a critical vengeance toward post-positivist paradigms that assume ontology precedes epistemology. Instead, I argued that epistemic regimes actively generate the ontological realities through which trauma, postmemory, and identity become thinkable, speakable, and liveable.

Drawing on Haraway’s (2001) notion of situated knowledges, which posits that all knowledge is shaped by the knower’s social, political, historical, and embodied location, and on Kirby’s (2007) argument that matter is active, responsive, and meaning-making, helped me re-situate myself in relation to Dersim. This shift enabled me to move away from Western diagnostic and literary framings of psychological trauma and to reconsider it instead as a relational, embodied, and esoteric matter in engaging with the entanglement of the histories and stories of subsequent generations. Concepts such as migrant, displaced, nomadic, oppressed, activist, politically traumatised, intergenerationally wounded, historically threatened, culturally erased, assimilated, marginalised, minoritised, womanhood, feminism, voice, agency, silence, and resilience have always saturated both my scholarly curiosity and my therapeutic positioning. Yet my academic and clinical training, embedded in Western epistemic traditions preoccupied with formal Terms of Reference, often felt misaligned with the embodied, esoteric, and tacit knowledge practices that shaped my sense-making as a woman of Dersim, attuned to esoteric ways of knowing where matter and mind are not considered separate but are, as I read it, co-constitutive.

Re-locating myself to Dersim spiritually, intellectually, and personally, rather than solely through lineal historiography or gesture toward cultural inclusivity in systemic thinking, enabled me to reflect on and even welcome the encroachment of embodied knowledge into my systemic practice, particularly as I grappled with the limits of social constructionism. Agential realism, which situates knowing in material-discursive intra-actions rather than representational accounts, became important here. Barad’s (2007) critique of social constructionism’s claim for interactions suggested that it reduced psychological trauma from an ongoing dynamic experience to a concept that is being interacted with and postulated multiple representations as the production of an infinite number of truths and realities of subjectivity. Agential realism became a critique *and* an extension of social constructionism in which matter and meaning were not co-constructive but co-constitutive of intra-actions.

Extending this framework, where knowing is not merely representational but emerges through entanglement with “direct material engagement” (Barad, 2007, p. 49), allowed me to rethink how systemic psychotherapy might expand its understanding of the “social” to include the non-human, material, and affective dimensions of lived experience. Simon and Salter’s (2019, p. 2) notion of “transmaterial worlding” further supports this move, highlighting how worlds are continuously made and remade through human and more-than-human entanglements that shape the experiential realities of trauma, memory, and relational life.

From Displacement to Situated Knowing: Positioning the self as a Systemic Psychotherapist

I begin this article with reflections on being a migrant. Although the term nomad often manifested, it did not fully resonate with me, perhaps owing to the poetic ring it has, signalling choice and agency and forsaking the harshness of the former as a way of existing. My journey of displacement and migration starts around the age of four, when my mother and I left our village, Kizilcik, Dersim (in the present-day city of Tunceli in Eastern Turkey), and joined my dad in Southern Turkey. Years later, when I reflected on the place, I had left behind, calling it home and everywhere else not, I confronted myself about what constituted home. I considered a great deal at the level of belonging: being a minority, ethnically Kurdish and Zaza and religiously Alevi in Turkey; being from Dersim, where the state treated you as a terrorist and others treated you almost with reverence owing to the intensity of the collective suffering endured; and being a woman in a very gendered collective, a foreigner, and a non-Indigenous citizen. I found myself displaced wherever I was.

Home eventually materialised as the substance of my most cherished memories, where time stands still, unbothered by the past or future, only presence. I often returned to a single enduring moment from early childhood: I am three or four years old, standing at the doorway of our mudbrick house at dawn. The sun has just risen, laying a soft warmth over my skin, while a faint breeze lifts the edges of my long, gold-coloured hair. The tall poplar trees opposite our house sway gently, their movement slow and reassuring, as if the land itself is breathing gently. This snippet of a world keeps replaying in my mind. I stand by the doorway of the mudbrick home in the tranquillity of the early morning. From where I stand on the slope, I hear the first sounds of the animals making their way along the path. Soon, a long line of cows and water buffalo moves below me, their rhythmic footsteps sending dust into the air and turning the morning light into a soft amber haze. I do not yet know happiness because I do not yet know its absence; no fear, longing, or separation has entered my world. There is only the fullness of that moment, and there I do not ask whether I am home or where home is.

During my journey toward qualification as a systemic psychotherapist, questions of where home was or where I belonged surfaced. Reading Derrida (2000), I came to understand how being a foreigner in the UK positioned me persistently as a guest, a position I experienced as disqualifying within a profession that implicitly assumes the therapist occupies the place of host. Derrida’s account of hospitality exposes the tension between host and guest, showing how hospitality itself unsettles ownership, authority, and belonging rather than securing them. From this perspective, my difficulty in locating myself as either guest or host did not signal a personal inadequacy but revealed the instability of the dichotomy itself, inviting a rethinking of therapeutic authority as relational rather than territorially, culturally, or nationally grounded (Derrida, 2000; Kirby, 2007). This reorientation

also drew me toward questions of belonging shaped by trauma, where home is not a stable location but a relational and historical fidelity that is firmly anchored in childhood memory and sustained through solidarity with an unlived past (Hirsch, 2008).

Embodied Memory, Sacred Land, and the Ecology of Trauma

Dersim, no longer merely a geographical space, endures as a site of belonging indelibly marked by massacre and trauma. For ethnically Kurdish and Zaza and religiously Alevi communities, it continues to signify a cultural, spiritual, and political ecology shaped by autonomy, resistance, and violent disruption. Its mountainous geography and relative inaccessibility long enabled forms of life that remained partially beyond the reach of centralising state power (van Bruinessen, 1997), while simultaneously rendering the region legible to imperial and Republican authorities as a “problem space” resistant to governance, assimilation, and linear narratives of modernity (Beşikçi, 1991 [1977]; Çelik, 2015).

Historically, Dersim was a multi-faith, multi-ethnic, and multilingual region in which Armenians, Kurdish and Zaza speakers adhering largely to Alevi/Kızılbaş belief systems, alongside smaller numbers of Sunni Muslims and Turkomans, coexisted within social formations organised primarily through tribal affiliation rather than state administration (White, 2003). Authority operated through confederations of aşiret, some linked to ocak lineages whose power was both spiritual and social (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1997; Neyzi, 2003). While hierarchical, this authority was relational and ethically contingent, sustained through accountability, wisdom, and the maintenance of communal harmony rather than sovereign command.

Dersimi Alevis self-identify as Muslim, yet their religious practices diverge sharply from Sunni orthodoxy (Dersimi, 1997 [1954]; Riggs, 1997). The absence of mosque-centred worship, non-adherence to the five daily prayers, Ramadan fasting, or pilgrimage, and the privileging of inner (batıni) meanings over outward (zahiri) forms have repeatedly positioned Alevis as religiously suspect (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2003). Sunni theological discourses that cast Alevis as heretical legitimised centuries of prejudice, violence, and social exclusion (White and Jongerden, 2003; Vorhoff, 2003; McDowall, 2004). These accusations did not merely target belief but sought to disqualify Alevi ways of being ethical, relational, and human.

Although Alevis constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey, they are internally diverse, with significant regional variations in belief and practice (Melikoff, 1998). Dersim is exceptional in that the Alevi faith is deeply esoteric and relational, bearing traces of pre-Islamic belief systems, including elements associated with Shamanism and Zoroastrianism. Scholars describe it as a syncretic formation combining pre-Islamic, Shi’a, and local cosmologies (McDowall, 2004). What distinguishes Dersim, however, is not syncretism alone but the extent to which belief is embedded in land, nature, and material relations.

Dersimi cosmology attributes sacred significance to specific geographical sites - mountains, rivers, springs, trees, and fire - often associating them with mytho-historical figures and ancestral narratives. In every village, there is a sacred water source, a rock, or a tree encountered in daily life. Passing these sites involves a moment of mindful acknowledgement: an expression of gratitude, a pause for hope or longing. Other sites are visited collectively, where offerings are made and food and intention are

shared. I miss this way of not merely passing through places but being attentive to their presence. This attentiveness is grounded in the understanding that life is built through relationships between human and non-human beings that permanently produce and reproduce life. Human and non-human beings are situated as being of equal worth and functioning complementarily, with neither superior to the other. Dersimi culture is built around an awareness of this mutual harmony and rhythm. It is in being aware of this compatibility and harmony that music and dance are central to worship practices, mediating relations between the divine, history, and the mundane.

The strong poetic and musical traditions of Alevis have produced countless poems and songs that describe the human not as superior to the world but as mirroring the divine and the ecology. For example, verses from Âşık Dâimî's song "For I Am a Human Being" articulate an understanding in which truth emerges through the intra-action of human and ecological life. While the poem signals that the divine is not to be sought outside the human, it is often read as political resistance to monotheistic authority, thereby questioning singular epistemology and critiquing ontology. This resonates with what Barad (2007) describes as becoming: "the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of matter" (p. 180).

I am the mirror of the universe,
 For I am a human being.
 I am the ocean of the Truth's existence,
 For I am a human being.
 The human is in the Truth, the Truth is in the human.
 If you seek it, look within the human.
 There is no lack, no incompleteness in the human,
 For I am a human being.

The Poet: Âşık Daimî (1932–1983)
translation by Filiz Celik

Although the verse "For I am a human being" may appear to place the human at the centre, within the relational and esoteric traditions of Alevilik, the human is not understood as a sovereign being standing above the world, but as *can*: a living and relational being constituted through connections with the divine, other people, ancestors, future generations, land, water, animals, and the wider cosmos. Here, the mirror neither creates nor controls what it reflects. Rather, it comes into being as a mirror through the act of reflection and is therefore continuously becoming with what it reflects. The human consequently occupies no privileged position in the universe but is ethically accountable to all that is reflected, precisely because the human "*can*" exists within, and not apart from, these relations.

It is within this relational ontology, where land, bodies, histories, and more-than-human presences intra-act (Barad, 2007), that Dersim's cosmology bears a striking resonance with Simon and Salter's (2020) notion of transmaterial worlding. The violence enacted in Dersim did not only target human lives but systematically disrupted relational ecologies linking people, ancestors, and landscapes. Psychological trauma, in this context, unfolds across intergenerational and transgenerational processes, not merely as a legacy to be located and resolved but as an ongoing pattern of intra-action that matters deeply in systemic therapy. This perspective invites therapeutic curiosity toward human experience and also toward the non-human agents implicated in wounding, survival, and continuity.

The Making of Trauma: From Event to Epistemology

The concept of trauma has evolved considerably within psychiatric and psychological discourse, emancipating itself from madness—understood as more akin to moral and social deviation than disorder (Szasz, 1960)—and becoming a substrate of numerous mental health conditions and, increasingly, a mental health condition in its own right. This occurred through evolving diagnostic descriptions that reflect not only shifts in epistemological frameworks but also the interests of the pharmaceutical industry and insurance companies in the United States (Herman, 1992; Young, 1997; Starcevic, 2002).

The epistemology of trauma in DSM-I and DSM-II was largely grounded in its conceptualisation as a transient reaction to stress, with enduring symptoms attributed to individual vulnerability, neurosis, or characterological weakness. The introduction of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in DSM-III in the 1980s emerged in response to the recognition of persistent symptoms among Vietnam War veterans and marked a critical epistemic shift, relocating trauma from constitutional pathology to exposure to an external event “outside the range of usual human experience” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980). Subsequent editions progressively broadened this framework, expanding the definition of traumatic exposure to include chronic, cumulative, relational, and indirect forms of harm, with DSM-5 explicitly recognising repeated exposure, witnessing, and vicarious trauma (APA, 2013).

Although DSM-5 expands the parameters of traumatic exposure, it continues to privilege individual symptomatology, limiting its scope to conceptualise trauma as exceeding the lifespan and as a phenomenon that can be experienced collectively and psychosocially. Plurality in approaching trauma comes from psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and cultural traditions, where cumulative, collective, and transgenerational experiences are foregrounded, and trauma is understood as something that is remembered rather than simply as a response to an event. Caruth (1996), for example, drawing on a Freudian lineage, conceptualises trauma as an unassimilated experience that returns belatedly, disrupting narrative continuity. Within this tradition, trauma is often described as a substance of memory that remains inaccessible to conscious recall, yet persists in fragmented, intrusive, and unspeakable forms.

Systemic epistemology stands in tension with the DSM’s predominantly individualising framing of trauma, in which traumatic distress is organised through discrete symptoms located within a person. Although a relational approach to trauma does not deny trauma’s material and biological dimensions, in the psychological trauma literature, we encounter the work of Bessel Van der Kolk (2014), who argues that traumatic experience can reshape both brain and body, affecting memory, bodily awareness, emotional regulation, and relationships. Similarly, Babette Rothschild (2013) draws attention to the psychobiology of trauma and to somatic memory, demonstrating that traumatic experience may persist through bodily sensations, autonomic responses, movement, and affect even when it is not possible for it to be articulated into a coherent narrative. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman’s (2013) cognitive approach appraises psychological trauma as a sheer force that can shatter our assumptions about the benevolence, worthiness, and meaningfulness of the world. Psychological trauma’s processes of materialising across bodily, neurobiological, affective, cognitive, and relational domains are all acknowledged. Systemic approaches extend these processes by deconstructing individual accounts of trauma and situating experience within relational, interactional, social, cultural, and political contexts, attending explicitly to power relations and mobilising relational resources as part of

the therapeutic process (Bateson, 1972; White and Epston, 1990; Burnham, 2012). Trauma is thus reframed not as a bounded psychopathological entity but as a psychosocial phenomenon constituted through relational processes and contexts, resonating with Barad's (2007) conception of mattering as emergent and relational rather than fixed.

While systemic approaches have enacted a significant epistemic shift away from intrapsychic models, reorienting analytic attention towards disruptions in communication, intimacy, flexibility, meaning-making, and adaptive processes within families and wider relational systems (Vetere and Dallos, 2009; Anderson, 2017), systemic scholarship has largely privileged praxis over theory. The literature has predominantly focused on clinical skills, intervention models, and therapeutic practices (Figley and Figley, 2009; Papero, 2017; Coulter, 2013), rather than advancing an explicit ontological and epistemological account of trauma. This practice-led orientation aligns with systemic psychotherapy's engagement with post-structural and Foucauldian critiques of power, particularly its interrogation of how knowledge, authority, and expertise are produced within the therapeutic system (Foucault, 1980). Central to this critique is the decentring of therapist authority and the repositioning of the therapist as a participant in dialogical, co-constructed meaning-making processes (Hoffman, 1990; Vetere and Stratton, 2016; Bertrando and Lini, 2019). These analyses extend to wider social, institutional, and cultural systems, highlighting how trauma is shaped and mediated through structural inequalities and dominant discourses (Burnham, 2012; Krause, 2018).

This limited interest in theory and emphasis on praxis are reflected in how systemic therapists limit their understanding of trauma transmission to family systems. Systemic accounts of intergenerational trauma largely confine analysis to familial communication, attachment, and functioning, drawing on established frameworks such as multigenerational transmission, relational ethics, attachment-informed, narrative, and resilience-based models (Bowen, 1993; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973; White and Epston, 1990; Byng-Hall, 2008; Vetere and Dallos, 2009) to guide intervention rather than advance a coherent systemic theory of trauma (Coulter, 2013).

Trauma as Wound: Mattering the Wounding Beyond Diagnostic Criteria

I am drawn to the etymology of trauma, a word that originally meant "wound" in ancient Greek, and to how this later transposition from the body to the psyche, attributed to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) marks this shift by describing trauma as a wound inflicted on the mind (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). This framing continues to inform description of psychological trauma in the DSM manuals and shape clinical and cultural discourse, inadvertently reducing trauma to an identifiable and healable condition. Yet the metaphor of the wound gestures toward meanings far richer than those contained in diagnostic categories; it refers to a matter as I read this alongside a verse widely attributed to 13th-century Sufi scholar and poet Jalaleddin Rumi: "In the heart of every wound, there is a light through which you find your way." Here, the wound becomes not only a site of injury but also an opening, painful yet illuminating, through which transformation and new forms of knowing and becoming is invited and an entanglement of the time, space, event, material and the human is inviting a more relational, embodied, and situated understanding.

Despite revisions of DSM acknowledging the social and relational aspect of trauma, it still remains ontologically fixed as an individual psychopathological condition, rendering its collective, relational, and historically transmitted dimensions conceptually secondary or invisible. Theorists such as Figley

(1995) extended the concept through vicarious traumatising to account for relational exposure beyond direct threat; however, this largely remained intragenerational and continued to privilege the individual as trauma's primary locus. Efforts to theorise inter- and transgenerational trauma challenged this by arguing that trauma cannot be contained within a singular time, place, or event, but circulates across generations through relational, social, and cultural processes (Danieli, 1998; Volkan, 2006; Fenton, 2018), while also raising concerns about the pathologisation of populations (Maxwell, 2014; Levy, 2024).

In the absence of a more adequate framework through which to understand the Dersim Massacre, I turned to the trauma literature to situate it within existing categories of collective traumatising. Collective experiences of trauma are situated within traumas of disaster, which are roughly categorised as natural disasters, large-scale technical or industrial accidents (Fullerton et al., 1995), and human-made disasters characterised by group-based violence, including ethnocide and genocide (Hinton, 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2010). Human-made disasters are consistently identified as the most psychologically and socially devastating, as they involve deliberate acts of dehumanisation and violence enacted by one group against another (Norris et al., 2002; Ursano et al., 2007; Bohleber, 2018). Human-made disasters rupture not only individual lives but also the moral and relational fabric of communities (Danieli, 1998). Suárez-Orozco and Robben (2000, p. 1) propose that "large-scale violence takes place in complex and over-determined socio-cultural contexts which intertwine psychic, social, political, economic and cultural dimensions." I remain drawn to this formulation because it resists locating trauma solely within individual psychology and instead situates it within broader relational, historical, and socio-political terrains (Çelik, 2015).

At the individual level, trauma is commonly understood as exposure to an event that overwhelms a person's capacity to cope or integrate experience (van der Kolk, 1987; Janoff-Bulman, 2015; Leys, 2000). Such exposure may disrupt the integration of memory, affect, and bodily experience, giving rise to symptoms such as dissociation, intrusive recollections, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and depression (Horowitz, 1999; Everly, Boyle and Lating, 1999). Beyond the individual, however, extreme violence can rupture social life itself. Krystal (1968) conceptualised this as "massive psychic trauma," proposing that such events have enduring effects observable at both individual and collective levels, a formulation that has been central to how transgenerational experiences of trauma have been theorised.

Research on genocidal violence and mass persecution demonstrated that trauma experienced by one generation could shape the lives of subsequent generations (Danieli, 1998; Starrs and Békés, 2025), insights initially gained from the clinical encounters of Rakoff, Sigal, and Epstein (1966) with children of Holocaust survivors who sought support for symptoms associated with trauma survivors in the 1960s. Although these early insights led to generalisations that trauma functioned as a substance afflicting descendants of survivors, they also contributed to the emergence and expansion of a field that continues to grapple with fundamental questions about the human condition (Danieli, 1998; Volkan et al., 2002; Sigal and Weinfeld, 1989). Later research challenged these assumptions, noting a lack of meaningful difference between offspring of those who had experienced the Holocaust and those who had not, and suggesting that symptoms associated with trauma in children of survivors were largely confined to clinical samples and not generalisable (van IJzendoorn et al., 2003; Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2008; Barel et al., 2010).

Since then, terminology has developed to address a range of historical collective experiences affecting populations, including cultural trauma, referring to experiences of the enslavement of Africans (Alexander et al., 2004; Eyerman, 2004), Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) (Leary, 2005, p. 125), historical trauma, referring to the experiences of Native peoples in America (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2000), and intergenerational or transgenerational transmission of trauma (Danieli, 1998; Kellermann, 2001). This evolution positioned trauma beyond its clinical usage to represent oppression, pain, and suffering inflicted on populations. As Madariaga (2002, p. 5) postulated, trauma has been "...transformed into a structural situation of permanent global violence where it is no longer possible to recognize the existence of specific events". Trauma, viewed in this way, comes to signify extreme, intense, and continuous stress arising from the vital threat of a permanent condition of being oppressed at the centre of collective life.

Through this conceptual shift, I was able to situate my inquiry into a psychosocial framework that locates the suffering at the intersection of psychological processes and social, historical, and political contexts (Hamber, 2015; Bracken, 2001) and, rather than reducing trauma to diagnosis, attend to how violence alters collective life, disrupting social networks, producing displacement and poverty, and reshaping intergroup relations, while also influencing individual affect, memory, and embodiment (Erikson, 1995; Eyerman, 2001; Hinton, 2002). From this standpoint, trauma is not a bounded event but an ongoing relational process unfolding across time and space. While the psychosocial approach enabled recognition of structural oppression and collective suffering, it also opened an epistemological inquiry into how such wounding continues to operate relationally long after the originating event.

Memory and Transmission beyond Narrative Discontinuity

In contexts of politically charged mass violence, perpetrators, bystanders, witnesses, and victims are often subjected to the same regimes of governmentality (Alexander, 2002), where accountability is absent and violence is inflicted in spaces that are neither legally regulated nor democratically accountable. Within such contexts, what has been described as a conspiracy of silence (Danieli, 1998) emerges not through conscious collusion, but as an adaptive response when terror is unwitnessed, unspeakable, or socially disbelieved (Auerhahn and Laub, 1998; Auerhahn and Peskin, 2003). Silence here is not always an absence, but as a relational resilience and survivorship shaped by fear, denial, and the lack of socially sanctioned language to name what has occurred.

Herman's (1992; 2015) observation that silence as the outcome of dissociation can become learned and reproducible across repeated exposure suggesting that silence itself may be transmitted as a protective repertoire rather than merely imitated behaviour. In contexts of ongoing threat, state denial, militarisation, assimilationist policy, and marginalisation, silence can function simultaneously as sanctuary and constraint. Laub's formulation captures this duality, describing silence as both "exile" and "home," defeat and refuge, an oath that binds the traumatised to what cannot be returned to or fully spoken (Laub, 1992).

Systemic psychotherapy, particularly through its turn to social constructionist approaches, attends to silence with attentiveness and curiosity, privileging what is unsaid or "as-yet unspoken" (Anderson and Goolishian, 1990; Anderson, 2005). This orientation could accommodate the silence of unspeakable collective wounding. However, despite the emergence of socially informed and social justice-oriented approaches (Krause, 2018; McCarthy and Minogue, 2019; Vermeire, 2022; Young and

Mooney, 2024), attention to silence within systemic practice often remains limited to curiosity about what is unsaid: pauses, hesitations, affective atmospheres, and narrative gaps. As a supervisor, I have frequently observed how such moments generate hesitation and attempts boundary formation for psychotherapists, reflecting the seismic relational risk involved in moving beyond the unsaid into what has been actively silenced.

Hirsch's (2008) concept of postmemory offered an important bridge for me, shifting my attention from clinical inheritance to the relational and social transmission of historical experience. Hirsch links individual and collective experience relationally in describing past memory as "...the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." This understanding is particularly salient in accounts of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, where memory is transmitted not only through narration, commemorative artefacts, and rituals, but also through silence, affect, bodily practices, and disrupted meaning-making (Hirsch, 2008). Memory and, to the same extent, trauma, in this sense, are not simply remembered but lived forward, shaping relational worlds across generations. Attending to memory and transmission brings us closer to understanding intergenerational experience, yet it still leaves open the question of how collective historical wounding remains active in the present.

Relational Woundscapes: Attending to Historical Harm as Relational Mattering

My engagement with theoretical frameworks of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, and to a similar extent postmemory, indicates that they have remained limited in their capacity to inform how systemic psychotherapists intervene when structural and situational oppression is present, as significant relational risks persist even within anti-oppressive frameworks. While anti-oppressive systemic thinkers offer important contributions, such as Krause's (2012; 2018) reframing of silence as a survival strategy rather than family dysfunction, and McCarthy and Minogue's (2019) refusal of therapeutic neutrality as a practice stance. These approaches are only marginally acknowledged in systemic praxis when articulating how therapists can work relationally with collective historical wounding as an active presence in therapeutic encounters.

For systemic psychotherapists, developing awareness of their entanglement with oppressive and violent histories is an ethical responsibility grounded in dialogical practice. A not-knowing stance cannot be conflated with withdrawal or neutrality; as Miranda Fricker (2007) argues through the concept of epistemic injustice, such positions risk reproducing power by disqualifying certain voices as knowers. Within a dialogical orientation, not-knowing instead demands sustained responsiveness to what becomes sayable, unsayable, resonant, or resisted within the relational field, attending to polyphony (Mikhail Bakhtin, 1981).

The limitations of existing frameworks become particularly evident when experiences of suffering are shaped not only by trauma but by moral injury: the relational and ethical wounds that arise when individuals and communities are exposed to, implicated in, or compelled to accommodate violations of deeply held moral values within oppressive systems (Griffin et al., 2019). From a dialogical perspective, moral injury is not located within isolated individuals but emerges in fractured relational exchanges, constrained moral agency, and silenced or disqualified voices (Shay, 2014; Molendijk, 2025).

In response to these conceptual and practice limitations across trauma theory, concepts of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, postmemory, and moral injury, I draw on Barad's (2003, p. 821) assertion that "matter is always already an ongoing historicity" to reflect on how we intra-act with violent histories, generational pain and suffering, and the witnessing of oppression, and how these might be addressed systemically from an anti-oppressive stance. I propose the concept of relational wounds. Relational wounds refer to historically constituted relational fields in which collective harm, silencing, and moral violation remain active and materially present in contemporary relations. They orient therapists toward sustaining dialogue where histories of violence, oppression, and moral violation intra-act in the present, inviting practices that privilege polyphony, ethical positioning, and relational accountability over explanatory closure. In this way, dialogical practice becomes not merely a method of conversation, but a moral stance that remains open to disruption, responsibility, and response-ability in the face of collective historical harm.

From this perspective, collective historical wounding, including moral injury arising from colonial violence, state oppression, institutional betrayal, or enforced silence, is not treated as contextual background but as constitutive mattering that intra-acts within the therapeutic system. Moral injury here is understood not as an individual moral failing or cognitive distortion, but as an emergent relational phenomenon produced within historical and institutional conditions that constrain ethical agency. Relational wounds therefore require systemic psychotherapists to develop skills of attending to, naming, and staying with their own entanglement in these histories, rather than defensively bracketing them off in the pursuit of clinical competency or safety.

As Barad (2003, p. 822) explains:

On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed sub-stance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming, not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity. Phenomena - the smallest material units (relational "atoms") - come to matter through this process of ongoing intra-activity. That is, matter refers to the materiality/materialization of phenomena, not to an inherent fixed property of abstract independently existing objects of Newtonian physics (the modernist realization of the Democritean dream of atoms and the void).

Barad's concept of "congealing agency" helps explain relational wounds. As the matter is not fixed but continually materialises through relational processes, historical wounding is also not a permeated state or cluster of symptoms but is continuously produced and reproduced through intra-actions among bodies, relationships, institutions, silences, denials, commemorations, landscapes, and historical narratives.

Engaging with this formulation supports a systemic practice that resists locating wounding within individuals, families, or generations as discrete sites of pathology. Instead, relational wounds orient therapists toward tracking how historical violence, moral violation, and silencing are enacted in interaction: in conversational patterns, bodily responses, institutional positioning, and moments of rupture, withdrawal, shame, loyalty conflict, or ethical paralysis within sessions. Moral injury becomes visible not only in narratives of harm, but in relational dilemmas around complicity, survival, betrayal, and responsibility that surface in therapeutic encounters.

Barad's reference to the "Democritean dream" is particularly relevant to the individualisation of trauma. Atomistic epistemologies divide phenomena into apparently discrete and independently existing units. Clinical frameworks may similarly separate the traumatised individual from the relational, political, institutional, and material conditions through which trauma has come to matter. Relational woundscapes resist this division. They ask therapists to examine the conceptual and clinical apparatuses through which "the individual," "the family," "the traumatic event," and "the symptom" are produced as bounded units, while histories, institutions, and landscapes are relegated to contextual background.

Within systemic psychotherapy, relational woundscapes extend existing skills beyond familiar tools such as simple genograms, which can inadvertently familiarise and psychologise historical violence, and beyond the Social GRACES or social location frameworks, which may remain descriptive if not accompanied by relational action. Working with relational woundscapes requires skills of situating talk historically, interrupting normalising silences, amplifying marginalised moral knowledges, and responding to power asymmetries and ethical tensions as they arise in real time within the therapeutic system. This includes recognising when seeking therapeutic safety through non-activism itself risks reproducing moral injury by aligning the therapist with institutional or dominant moral orders. This invites therapists to take relational risks by entering the woundscapes relationally and attending to how historical and moral wounding is enacted, resisted, negotiated, and at times reproduced in the here-and-now of relational life, including within the therapist–client relationship, complementing curiosity with accountable responsiveness to moral harm and its relational consequences.

Conclusion: Relational Woundscapes, Accountability, and Intra-Dependent Futures

I write this article as a migrant woman, a native of Dersim, ethnically Kurdish and Zaza, of Alevi faith from Turkey, and as a systemic psychotherapist. What I offer here is both a movement from Dersim to systemic psychotherapy and a return, an ongoing circular, axial internal journey. Dersim, now a non-existent geographical place, is where I locate the beginning of my history; yet it is also a companion that remains ever-present in the unfolding of my life and thinking. It continues to shape my epistemological curiosity, my ethical positioning, and my professional practice.

Alevilik, with its grounding in hak ve hakikat (right/divine and truth), offers an ontological, ethical, and epistemological condition of existence that emphasises inseparability, relationality, and intra-activity. Hak ve hakikat are not abstract theological principles but lived orientations that demand accountability for co-existence as practised in everyday life. This is a philosophical grounding of Alevi faith that refuses separation between knowing and being, belief and action, human and more-than-human worlds.

I intra-act with the residues of the Dersim Massacre (1937–38), with Dersim before that, and with Alevilik before its beginning as doctinated by Islam since the death of Khalip Ali but as a member of Gurûh-u Nâcî. In Alevi understandings, Gurûh-u Nâcî does not denote a doctrinally superior group but a lineage sustained through rızalık (mutual consent), justice, humility, and ethical living in accordance with hak ve hakikat. Membership is not claimed through identity or belief, but through relational practice. Crucially, this orientation resists assigning agency or superiority to the self over any other being, including human, animal, material, or elemental.

Agential realism provides me with a theoretical framework through which I can bring the esoteric faith I was born into dialogue with my professional home in systemic psychotherapy, without translating it into metaphor or reducing it to culture. I refer to Vicki Kirby's conceptualisation of "non-locatibility" of "agency" (1997, p. 113) in grounding my understanding that the massacre, the displacements, the silences, and the moral ruptures do not simply sit behind us as historical events. They intra-act with our lives in the present, shaping the conditions under which trauma, postmemory, and belonging become liveable, speakable, or foreclosed (Barad, 2003, 2007; Hirsch, 2008, 2012).

In proposing relational woundscapes, I speak of my search for a framework that is capable of holding the persistence of collective historical wounding without reducing it to an individual pathology, a treatable condition, family dysfunction, a transmissible substance that moves somewhat across generations, or a marker of individual and group identity. Relational woundscapes name historically constituted relational fields in which harm, silencing, moral violation, and moral injury remain materially active in contemporary relations. They allow me to describe how oppression is not only remembered but enacted and negotiated in the present, within institutional systems, everyday relational life, and therapeutic encounters. They also foreground the ethical stakes of these enactments: where responsibility is constrained, complicity demanded, or survival requires silence, moral injury emerges as a relational phenomenon rather than a private psychological deficit (Griffin et al., 2019; Shay, 2014; Molendijk, 2025).

Dersimi Alevi cosmology taught me that the human is not above the world but within it, relationally bound to land, water, animals, trees, and the materials that hold everyday life together. The philosophy of *can* (person in the sense of relational being) and unity is not abstract for me; it is an ethic of co-existence grounded in mutual implication. This ethic aligns with the onto-epistemological implications of agential realism: knowing and being are inseparable practices, and history, trauma, and oppression cannot be treated as objects "out there" to be studied, or as narratives "in here" to be interpreted but discursive and constitutive mattering.

Barad's agential realism, with its emphasis on dynamic and constitutive mattering, resonates deeply with the Alevi principle of *bir olmak* (oneness). Oneness does not mean the erasure of individuality, but a relational unity that can be understood as being-with rather than being-above. This resonates with the notion of performative agency as articulated by Judith Butler (2015), where agency and the subject are not identical entities, but subjects are constituted with agency through power. In a related move, as Karen Barad (2003; 2007) adopts and extends this formulation, agency is not a possession but an emergent doing, arising through intra-action.

Therefore, intra-actions are constraining but not deter-mining. That is, intra-activity is neither a matter of strict determinism nor unconstrained freedom. The future is radically open at every turn. This open sense of futurity does not depend on the clash or collision of cultural demands; rather, it is inherent in the nature of intra-activity—even when apparatuses are primarily reinforcing, agency is not foreclosed. Hence, the notion of intra-actions reformulates the traditional notion of causality and opens up a space, indeed a relatively large space, for material-discursive forms of agency.

Barad's (2003, p. 826) above postulation on agency indeed opens up space for the future making/mattering of agency. Here I refer to woundscapes that we will need to intra-act owing to technology rendering us to watch genocide live in Gaza since October 2023, systemic psychotherapist entangling with woundscapes through engaging with Ukrainian, Afghan, Syrian, Palestinian, Kurdish

refugees amongst others in Wales to our inescapable intra-actions with AI. As the ethical questioning of agency that is/will be assigned to AI is debated through governmentality, I move on with my relational ethics of Alevi faith to see all that is human, living, material, non-material, and material-discursive with agencies in the making and humans not above any of it but ethically accountable as the verses of Minstrel Daimi above spelled out, “I am a mirror of the universe”.

My engagement with Dersim has continually reminded me discursive mattering of violent histories and wounds not being mere passive background. Similarly, land, rivers, sacred sites, houses, and objects participate in what can be remembered, endured, and made. This is why I am drawn to “transmaterial worlding” as a way of naming how worlds are continuously made and remade through human and more-than-human entanglements (Simon and Salter, 2019; Simon and Salter, 2020). I find these considerations highly relevant to my systemic thinking, practice, and supervision, precisely because they refuse closure and determinism. They hold open the possibility that, even within enduring conditions of oppression and historical violence, relational life remains in motion. Returning to relational and ethical philosophies such as Alevilik, alongside dialogical systemic practice and agential realism, offers not a solution to historical harm but a way forward, inviting curiosity about local esoteric ways of relating to expand and situate our knowing for the future in the relational becoming.

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Author's Note on Use of AI Tools

As a non-native speaker of English, I used digital tools including ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot to support proofreading & language clarity. I also used Google Scholar, Gemini, and ChatGPT to assist with literature searches & the identification of relevant sources. The manuscript was written entirely by the author. Digital tools were used solely for language support & literature search assistance. All interpretations of the literature, theoretical arguments, conceptual developments, & the articulation of ideas are entirely my own. Responsibility for the content, analysis, & conclusions presented in this article rests solely with the author.

About the author

Dr Filiz Çelik is a systemic and family psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, consultant, researcher, and academic at Swansea University. She works within child and adolescent mental health services in Wales and has a strong interest in relational, dialogical, and anti-oppressive approaches to systemic practice. Originally from Turkey, she is a Kurdish-Zaza Alevi woman of Dersim and has lived in Wales for over two decades. Her research interests include transgenerational trauma, postmemory, moral injury, migration and identity, alongside the experiences of women accessing perinatal services and patients' experiences of healthcare more broadly.

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