

ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY ★ INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**CULTURAL MEMORY IN POST -1937-1938 DERSIM LAMENTS:
REFLECTIONS ON TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE**

M.A. THESIS

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Political Studies

May 2013

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İSTANBUL TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ ★ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

**1937-1938 SONRASI DERSİM AĞITLARINDA KÜLTÜREL BELLEK:
TRAVMA VE ŞİDDET YANSIMALARI**

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Dedem'e,

FOREWORD

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CULTURAL MEMORY IN POST-1937-1938 DERSIM LAMENTS: REFLECTIONS ON TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

SUMMARY

This study introduces Dersim *ağits* as a representation of collective memory of post-1937-1938 Dersim laments. How could collective memories of 1937-1938 take refuge in Dersimlis cultural tools? What can we learn from the *ağits* referring to this period? This study shows that there are pre-existing cultural tools (very closely related to their practices of Alevism) that Dersimlis used to keep Dersim 38 experience alive. Even though Dersim events are considered as a muted period, these events of 1937-1938 are not really silenced in the survivors' memories. Seemingly Dersimlis made use of *ağits* as a means of communication despite the repression and denial in public space. One can see that through laments survivors transmit the unspeakable stories and share them with listeners. One can decipher the traces of the violence and trauma that are otherwise impossible to articulate in collective memory formed via laments

A close reading of signs and symbols demonstrates that these means of cultural memory have similar tone, form and context and they act as archival sites of violence and trauma. *Ağits* function as a medium that keeps past alive in memory and prevent amnesia about violent past. The trauma is expressed very vividly through *ağits*. There seems to be a struggle of Dersimlis to tell their stories in details even if they are too painful and traumatic to remember.

Although the operation in Dersim is considered to be an event of collective silence, we can trace the signs of violence and trauma in a very explicit way in collective memory in post 1937-1938 laments. We can see that even if citizens may be exposed to violence at some phases of nation state formation, traumatized people like Dersimlis may find their own ways to cope with this event by expressing it in their own terms.

1937-1938 SONRASI DERSİM AĞITLARINDA KÜLTÜREL BELLEK: TRAVMA VE ŞİDDETİN YANSIMALARI

ÖZET

Bu tez çalışması 1937-1938 sonrası Dersim *ağıtlarını* toplumsal hafızanın yansıması olarak sunmaktadır. 1937-1938 dönemine ait toplumsal hafıza Dersimlilerin kültürel bellek araçlarında nasıl yer almaktadır? Bu döneme atıfta bulunan *ağıtlardan* neler öğrenmekteyiz? Bu çalışma gösteriyor ki Dersimliler bu döneme ait deneyimlerini önceden var olan (Alevi pratikleriyle yakından ilişkili) kültürel araçları yoluyla canlı tutmuşlardır. 1937-1938 olayları tabu ve konuşulamaz bir dönem olarak düşünülse de, bu dönem olayı yaşayanların belleğinde büyük çapta ses bulmaktadır. Görülüyor ki kamusal alandaki baskı ve inkara rağmen Dersimliler *ağıtları* bir iletişim aracı olarak kullanmışlardır. Olayların tanıklarının dillendirilmesi imkansız deneyimleri *ağıtlar* yoluyla anlatıp dinleyiciyle paylaştıkları görülebilmektedir. Normalde anlatılması imkansız travma ve şiddet deneyimlerinin izlerini *ağıtlarla* oluşturulan kültürel bellekte sürebiliriz.

Ağıtlardaki sembol ve anlamlara yakından baktığımızda, bu kültürel bellek araçlarının ortak biçim, ton ve bağlamda oluşturulduğunu ve toplumsal travma ve şiddetin arşivsel alanları gibi işlev gördüğünü anlayabiliriz. Bu bağlamda *ağıtlar* geçmişin belleğini canlı tutmada araç görevi görmekte ve geçmişte şahit olunan şiddetin unutulmasını da önlemektedirler. Travma *ağıtlarda* çok açık bir şekilde ifade edilmektedir. Her ne kadar deneyimleri hatırlanmayacak kadar acı ve travmatik olsa da Dersimliler bu deneyimleri *ağıtlar* vasıtasıyla detaylarıyla anlatmaktadırlar.

Dersim olayları toplumda dillendirilemeyen bir deneyim olarak düşünülse de, 1937-1938 sonrası kültürel bellekte şiddet ve travmanın izlerini açık seçik bir şekilde görebiliriz. Toplumlar ulus devlet inşasının belirli aşamalarında şiddete maruz kalsalar bile, Dersimliler gibi şiddete ve travmaya maruz kalmış kişiler, kendileri, bu durumla baş etme yolları bulmakta ve deneyimlerini kendi bildikleri yollarla anlatmaktadırlar.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Opening Pandora's Box

¹ “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” Milan Kundera

The Dersim operation of 1938 was for a long time a silenced experience of the early republican period. The Pandora's Box was opened by a member of parliament in a speech. The opposition party member Onur Öymen referred to the Dersim 38 operation, justifying the military operations in his speech on Dersim on 10th November 2009.²

The events of 1938 had been silenced in Turkish mainstream media and dominant political discourse until then. For many, this speech, for the first time in seventy years since 1938, made the events really visible, and caused great controversy. A great deal of papers, documents and books were published and documentaries about the Dersim events were prepared as well, as Turkish dailies covered different stories regarding the issue.³

Existing as a silenced phase in Turkish history, the Dersim 38 operation was on the agenda after a long time. Generally the trauma caused by ethnic, nationalist, or religious violence has been one of the central parts of memory studies, and memory studies have been strongly interested in stories of collective “victimization”. In line with the increasing interest in oral history, and memory studies, a great deal of literature has also been devoted to these types of

¹Milan Kundera, *The book of laughter and forgetting*, trans. Aaron Asher London, Faber and Faber, p. 4, 1996.

² Öymen responded to the government's claim that the opposition party was against the Kurdish initiative, because they wanted the mothers' tears to continue. He said, “Didn't mothers cry during the Independence War, the Sheikh Sait Rebellion, the Dersim Rebellion and in Cyprus? Did anybody say, ‘Don't let the mothers cry, let us stop fighting?’” He was harshly criticized for his words for legitimizing the 38 events. The Dersim events were covered in the mass media afterwards. 'CHP'li Öymen katliamı model olarak sundu', (Radikal, 2009) URL: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal.aspx?atype=radikaldetayv3&articleid=964004> accessed on 12 September 2012.

³ Following are some of the works about Dersim issue: Here are some of the books: Celâl Yıldız, *Dersim dile geldi: 1938'in çocukları konuştu*. Munzur Çem, *Tanıkların diliyle Dersim '38*. Cafer Solgun, *Dersim: yüzleşmezsek hiçbir şey geçmiş olmuyor*. Cemal Taş, *Dağların kayıp anahtarı: Dersim 1938 Anlatıları*. Hüseyin Aygün, *0.0.1938 : resmîyet ve hakikat*. These are the documentaries on the issue of Dersim 38: Çayan Demirel, *Dersim 38*. Özgür Fındık, *Kara Vagon* and *Qelema Sure*. Nezahat Gündoğan, *Dersim'in Kayıp Kızları*. Some newspaper articles: “Dersim'de 1937-1938'de ne oldu?” Radikal, 14.11.2009. “Dersim olaylarını Atatürk biliyor muydu?” Milliyet 21.11.2011. “Dersim katliamı Alevilerin içinde kanayan yara” Zaman, 6.12. 2009.

violence against particular groups in Turkey, especially during the nation formation process. To show that a large number of people were affected by nation formation policies, Levene (1998) holds that “when the Young Turks gained the upper hand in the region, the violent process of nation formation they launched came to engulf a mosaic of victims” (p. 394). Some of the most prominent examples of these events are the deportation of Armenians in 1915 and the mass deportation of Kurds from the eastern provinces in 1916 undertaken by the CUP (Üngör, 2008, p.27).

Considered as another example of the violent process of nation formation, there was a great interest in the Dersim 38 events, too. Yet the books and papers largely dealt with the survivor interviews and the official documents. All these efforts to shed a light on the issue proved to be fruitful. What is more, most of them mentioned the operation, or the survival memories, in order to offer alternative explanations of this unspeakable event.

The studies in this area seem to illuminate previously ignored facts, and details, and show that the experience of Dersim events somehow remains alive in Dersimlis’ memories. However, very few of them asked how and why these memories remained alive. Being a taboo in public space, Dersim experience seems to be vivid in survivors’ memories and to be transferred to the next generations, which is a detail missing in most of the studies. The basic concern in this study is to explore what is that made this secret transmitted to others, in spite of all the suppression and fear; and to provide an opportunity to make an initial attempt to deal with the issue from a fresh angle. Additionally what differentiates this study from previous oral history work on the Dersim events is that it shows how remembering and transmitting differs when it comes to laments. That said there are also similarities between what is explained in the interviews and in the laments. Most of the information given in that work overlaps with the information presented in the laments. Yet we can see that through the material of oral history, survivors share their experience only to some degree and mostly they seem to be reluctant to give more details and still express their fear of authority. In the laments, however; there is a more detailed explanation of the events referring to particular people and places and the laments are mostly message bearing. The survivors of these events seem to explain the events more freely in the laments. That is also a leading question in

this study: What is particular about laments that enables remembering and the transmission of these messages in such a way?

I argue that there are pre-existing cultural tools (very closely related to their practices of Alevism) that Dersimlis used to keep this experience alive. Even though Dersim events are considered as a period that has been silenced, these events are not really silenced in the survivors' memories. Some culture-specific means of transfer, such as musical forms of *ağıt* and *türkü*, function as helpful tools to cope with violence and trauma in general, which are actually integral to oral tradition in this region and are closely linked to their beliefs.

1.2.A Silenced 70-year-old Trauma

The Dersim region mostly consisting of Alevi population was a largely autonomous region during the Ottoman Empire. As most of the population in Dersim was Alevi, their cultural tools were not written but oral to a large extent. To that end, oral tradition served the basic function of transmitting the culture and the memory of Dersimlis. For example, music and poetry are interconnected and are also a part of the cultural rituals and religious prayers in Alevism. Therefore, Dersim *ağıts* can be regarded as good oral examples of the cultural tools of Alevism. In this study, *ağıts* as a form of lament are examined to discuss how they were used as media of communication by survivors. It can be maintained that such a communication is by no means accidental, rather we can say that the transfer via *ağıts* was an inevitable part of the pre-existing cultural tools of the Dersim community. In parallel with the principle of secrecy in Alevi belief, these cultural domains remain as the sole media for the transmission of Dersim experience of the community. Alevism is believed to express the injustices and victimizations they fall prey to in musical forms, such as *türkü*, or *ağıt*. That is why, contrary to popular belief, there has not been silence regarding the Dersim events in the Dersim community, and there is no amnesia on the part of this victimized population, which becomes clear when the *ağıts* referring to this particular period are examined. The Dersim 38 events are mainly reflected in *ağıts* rather than *deyiş* or *nefes*, though. Although there are *türkü*s that refer to the events, only *ağıts* will be analyzed in the scope of this study.

This study will introduce Dersim *ağits* as a representation of collective memory. How could collective memories of this silent 70-year-old trauma and violence take refuge in Dersimlis cultural tools? What can we learn from the *ağits* referring to the Dersim events? Seemingly Dersimlis made use of *ağits* as a means of communication, despite repression and denial in public space. I argue that through laments, survivors transmit the unspeakable stories and share them with listeners. One can decipher the traces of the violence and trauma that are otherwise impossible to articulate in collective memory, formed via laments. It is not easy to illuminate the secrets of this 70-year-old silence and to recognize the hidden symbols and messages, expressed in these stories incorporated into laments right away. The stories woven into the laments can be discovered by understanding the meanings attached to them. Since there are an abundant number of *ağits* about this experience, only the ones bearing explicit references to the cultural symbols, violence and trauma will be analyzed.

In order to assure a valid discussion, the matter should be addressed in cultural, theoretical and historical aspects. Therefore, before the analysis of data, the historical and theoretical context of nationalism and nation building, Alevism and certain of its features relevant to Dersim culture as well as *ağits* as forms of laments and their cultural significance for Dersimlis will be touched upon. To that end, theories of nationalism and their link to Turkish nationalism with regard to the early republican period, together with a brief historical background of the Dersim 38 events will be covered.

What is more, a detailed analysis of Alevi community and culture will be presented in order to understand the role of oral culture as a means of transmission. As well as this, the peculiarity of Dersim culture with respect to the use of *ağits* as a means of collective remembering will be discussed.

2. STATE AND NATIONALISM

2.1 Nationalism and Nationalist Theories

In this chapter, I will try to address the theoretical framework of the events, so as to provide an overview and explanation of the reasons for an operation in this region: in order to present a solid context for this issue, it is imperative to address very briefly some of the basic elements of nation-state theories, through which it will be possible to present the Dersim question and understand the main arguments regarding its outcomes. This will allow us to see the complete picture together with that of world politics and its affiliations with regards to local regimes. Instead of merely relying on the historical background of issues, having a wider perspective of theoretical data would be illuminating. Questions about 1937-1938 can be most appropriately answered by taking different perspectives into account. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire, a nation state the Turkish Republic was founded. This era witnessed the end of the age of empires and the formation of the nation states all around the world. This change brought together the notion of modern state, as well. Formation of the modern state, together with nation-building, are considered as the pillars of the modern world in the general sense (Smith, 2000, p.3). After the end of the age of empires, the modern state meant a promise of security, but it also created a monopoly of violence. Max Weber (1994) clearly indicates this contradiction and points out the discourse of legitimizing the use of state violence through his definition of the state. He argues that “the state is that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence, within a certain territory” (p. 310). In parallel with Weber’s argument, the world became a scene of a number of violent events committed by nation states in the twentieth century. This does not mean that the state formation is equally violent towards all the groups, though. For instance, the nation-state formation is a painful process especially for heterogeneous groups. That is why; the urge to homogenize distinct groups may result in

unfavorable experiences for those who do not share some of the characteristics peculiar to nation states. There are some other policies employed specifically towards certain groups to achieve nation-state hegemony. The causes of such cases are manifold and the violence perpetuated against minority groups may be in varying degrees and forms: assimilation, deportation and in extreme cases ethnic cleansing and genocide can be listed as the strategies for treating minorities.

Explaining nationalism, Anthony Giddens (1994), puts the emphasis on the link between state violence and nation-building. For Giddens, a state achieves control thanks to “a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries, its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of means of internal and external violence” (p.35). As we can see, the overall control over the legal, territorial and political institutions is presented as the key issue for state formation. In this respect, the need to sustain state control together with the need to hold power against ethnically, religiously and linguistically heterodox groups can be considered as a good reason for violence perpetrated against such groups.

There are other methods pointed out by different scholars. Ernest Renan, for instance, believes that history is a paramount technique for nation formation. He argues that "forgetting history or even getting history wrong is an essential factor in the formation of a nation" (as cited in Hobsbawn, 1996, p. 255). Forgetting history and creating a new history, together with a new nation state, paves the way for the formation of a nation. However, this creation may also mean exclusion of some historical events and details. A state may not be willing to remember what is left behind in some cases. Homogenization via different means is carried out to assure that sort of forgetting. To explain this need better, Gellner (1983) defines nationalism as “a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones” (p.1). In this definition the idea is that ethnic boundaries should not be in contradiction with the political ones. One should acknowledge that national homogeneity is not a natural and integral feature of nation states, but a feature desired by those with power. These aims are achieved by creating a shared past, language and culture, which in turn provides those in power with a transformation of “low” cultures into “high” state culture (Gellner, 1983, p.10), which is deemed to be the outstanding revolution of modernity.

The modern model foreseen by the state tries to carry low cultures into high culture. This transmission is another tool used to legitimize state control.

Besides Gellner, Hobsbawm also believes that the state may make use of several means to build a nation. He asserts that social engineering is applied by nation states for nation-building. Hobsbawm (1994) clearly states the link between nation and social engineering and explains that “all these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative” (p. 76). He states that to construct a nation-state nationalists invent nations, histories and traditions out of nationalism. According to this analysis, social engineering can be applied to many domains amongst them social, political and cultural spheres. All these changes and transformations are carried out in an organized fashion and the society is formed around the tenets defined by states. Accordingly Üngör (2009), points out a different aspect of state formation and nationalist policies: “Most importantly, the exercise of these policies was always unidirectional; the political elite coerced the population as it saw it. In the situations of frustration, crisis, or war coercion could easily gain violence. Nationalist regimes may endeavor to subject minorities to pressure to “become like the majority “in order to produce greater homogeneity” (p.10). According to this analysis, the process of homogenization was not always a smooth and unchallenging one and the state had its own ways of overcoming the difficulties caused by “the others”. The ultimate aim was to transform cultures and identities in a desired and planned way. The two parts were not equal in this regard; there was an authoritarian relationship between the state and the minorities. The coercive power relation ends in violence directed towards minorities.

In a similar vein, Hobsbawm (1994), acknowledges that nations are built from above: “Seen from below, the state increasingly defined the largest stage on which the crucial activities determining human lives as subjects and citizens were played out. Indeed, it increasingly defined as well as registered their civil existence (etat civil)” (p.76). According to this idea, the nation state strictly defined and imposed a specific history, culture, even religion, so as to create a new way of life and a new nation. As for citizens, they had to obey whatever life was designed for them and accept their existence as citizens of the state. In most cases, society was made to change and become a nation composed of shared features.

Hobsbawm regards transformation of society as an inevitable outcome of modernity. For him, as a result of the transformation in society old traditions may weaken and new ones may be necessary. This is what he means by his concept of “inventing traditions”. He presents this process as a “process of formalization and ritualization when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old traditions’ had been designed” (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.4). He also points out the reasons why this need occurs and believes that under conditions “when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated,” the new traditions are invented by the state (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.5). One should bear in mind that this process of inventing traditions does not always end in voluntary adaptation of the new traditions by the society. On the contrary, this process is created by the power holders and imposed to the society via nationalist methods. The new traditions may not be internalized by some minority groups. Being aware of this fact, power holders may see them as threats to state authority and may use violence as a means of attaining a homogenous nation state. That is to say, being different somehow meant being subject to change either voluntarily or involuntarily.

The leading question, however, is how states achieve this transformation. We can call this into question by referring to the theories of some of the prominent scholars. As stated previously, even if the ethnic and physical boundaries of a state do not necessarily match, they are somehow forced to match and there are various ways of doing this. According to Hobsbawm, history is one of the methods nation state makes use of, for instance. He clearly reveals his approach to the history writing of nation states by arguing that "nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past" (Hobsbawm, 1996, p.255). All in all, history is a crucial building brick of nation states and it may be manipulated, changed and even rewritten by the states so as to maintain and legitimize existing state discourse.

2.2 From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism

Now that we briefly mentioned some of the leading nation-state theories and their reference to homogenization and violence, we can move on to the Turkish state and its relevance to the above mentioned theories. The discourse of the Turkish state was no different from that of the other nation states. The basic concern was maintaining the modern nation state. Modernization and centralization were the main elements of the state discourse in the early years of republic, and the promise of the security of the Turkish nation was considered to be only possible through controlling uprisings and preventing future opposition.

To that end, of being a nation state, the early republic tried to construct a nationalist identity, and feared opposition and rebellion. Mardin (1973) explains this fear saying “the fear that Anatolia would be split on primordial group lines ran as a strong undercurrent among the architects of Kemalism trying to establish their own center, and it remained as a fundamental, although latent-issue of Kemalist policy to the end of one party rule in 1950” (p.177). The early republican authorities made sure that any sort of uprising would be punished severely; and appropriate legislation necessary for this was made ready without any obstacle. Yet it took a long time until these reforms of the new regime were established. Like other nation states, the Turkish Republic also targeted ethnicity and culture i.e. language, religion and traditions etc. The transformation was in progress for a while and was applied in various spheres.

Obviously it was not easy to break group ties which had been set long before; and it required firm social engineering to rebuild, and reform, the pre-existing social ties and identities. To understand the effort spared by the authorities so as to make certain changes, one should certainly consider ethnic groups and their interaction with the Young Turk regime. Jwaideh (2006) believes that “no proper discussion of Kurdish political history, or for that matter of the political history of any other Ottoman ethnic group, is possible without some mention of the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908. It had profound effects on the destinies of the peoples and the countries that composed the Ottoman Empire” (p.102). The effects of Young Turk regime were far reaching and continued to form the ethnic stance of the new regime of the Turkish Republic, as well.

The fundamental idea that nationalist policies were the sole resource for the maintenance of the regime was not abandoned in Young Turk legacy of the republic.

To that end, a lot of effort was made to incorporate those groups into the new nationalist picture. “During the same period, the new regime’s attitude toward the religious and primordial groups and group ties had almost settled. Thus, the period of a more militant secularism had started and accompanied the further process of social engineering. It was mainly ethnicity, and secondly language that constituted a ground for the basis of the new national identity” (Kadioglu, 1996, p.187). Üngör (2011) highlights the target of these policies as the eastern regions of the country. He states that “Young Turk regime subjected east Anatolia to nationalist policies. The process of nation formation was so violent in this region” (p.53). Civilizing the others that do not belong to the majority was the aim of the most of the state projects carried out then. Therefore, the claim of civilizing was used by the Turkish state, as well. Analyzing Turkish state discourse, Yegen touches upon this issue by pointing at the Kurdish minority and its relationship with the state. The approach of the state to the Kurdish question was addressed by modernist as well as civilizing discourses. Yegen argues that “the Turkish state considered the resistance of Kurds to the consolidation of state power as the resistance of pre-modernity, since, according to the logic of modernization and centralization, consolidation of state power was an issue of civilizing the country. For this reason, then, any opposition to the consolidation of state power was to become reconstituted as opposition to civilizing the country” (Yegen, 1999, p.563). This approach to the issue called upon the question of civilization or backwardness. It was argued that it was a matter of modernity rather than politics. The Kurdish question, for instance, was quite far from being a political one according to this discourse. There was only one central state and national order was a warrant for the maintenance of the nation state. That is why any opposition to the state order was met with harsh repression. This was very clear in the state’s view of ethnic minorities. For instance, “whenever the Kurdish question was mentioned in Turkish state discourse it was mentioned as an issue of political reaction, tribal resistance or regional backwardness, but never as an ethno-political question. In Turkish state discourse, the Kurdish resisters were not Kurds with an ethno-political cause, but simply Kurdish tribes, Kurdish bandits, Kurdish sheikhs -all the evils

of Turkey's pre-modern past” (Yegen, 1999, p.555). As one can acknowledge, the Kurdish issue is just an example which illustrates that the matter of “other” groups was not discussed in terms of ethnicity or political rights, but was constructed around the modernity debate. All the signs of the pre-republican era were deemed as uncivilized and attempts were made to erase them. The idea that minority groups required some sort of recognition was totally irrelevant within this discourse.

Yegen deepens the analysis of Turkish state discourse, and demonstrates the basic framework for the formation of Turkish republican discourse, by indicating the idea behind the homogenizing efforts. All in all, he emphasizes that “the formation of Turkish state discourse of the last two centuries signifies the trans-formation of a non-western, de-central, a-national and non-secular social formation (the Ottoman Empire) into a western, central, national and secular one (the Turkish Republic)” (Yegen, 1999, p.559).

The impact of the new regime was not only political but also cultural, social and historical in some cases. Historically speaking, the Ottoman Empire was a totally opposite predecessor to the Turkish Republic in terms of handling increasing nationalist trends. Yet it also could not resist the current of nationalism that was rising in the last period of the empire. “The Ottoman state was in tune with world trends where, one after the other, empires borrowed the weapons of enemy, the nationalists” (Deringil, 1998, p.67). As it can be seen, the change experienced by Turkish society was not only administrative and it required a more striking transformation than the Ottoman Empire made. To begin with, nationalism was the underlying ideology for the newly founded Turkish republic. Yet one should bare in mind that this was a continuity of the Young Turk regime. That is because, in a similar vein, the Young Turks “feared that these movements, if left unchecked, would lead sooner or later to demands for local autonomy, followed by foreign intervention and the usual loss of territory through secession or annexation” (Jwaideh, 2006, p.103). That is why, unlike the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic tried harder to maintain a unity between the political borders and cultural borders. Kohel (1953) clearly demonstrates this relationship and its link to the power of a nation state: “New nation states emerged on the idea of nationalism, a political concept holding that the borders of political units (state) and

cultural units (nation) should coincide and teaching that the power of a state depends on the degree to which its subjects respond to the ideal of the particular cultural identity that is thought to characterize the nation” (p. 231). In line with this argument, one can clearly see that the Turkish nation is also deemed to be powerful only if it has the cultural identity approved, and offered by, the Turkish state. The state defines itself within the limits of a national identity which meant a cultural, religious and social identity, as well.

However, the idea that political and cultural links should coincide brought about many problems for the Turkish Republic. That is to say, the newly founded nation state was created out of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious community, and thus had to come up with certain policies designed to unite all these elements and create loyal and civilized citizens. In this respect, reforms in education, the military and language etc. were considered as the unifying means of state building. These revolutionary changes were considered as the necessary tools for becoming a part of the “civilized west”. The existence of “others” was denied and they became invisible. Having said that, revolutionary changes and reforms were made in order to unify the different groups, and it would be inaccurate to assume that the state could easily apply new policies and laws. In some cases, the reality amongst the people was totally different and the real challenge was “overcoming the discrepancy between the nationalist ideal of congruence between political and cultural units and the reality on the ground. This spatial binding of the polity and culture –all as if they are instances of the same substance, the nation –marks the modern project of nationalism” (Jongerden, 2007, p.2). When there was a problem of congruence, the state tended to use its varying apparatuses to overcome it. The notion of nation was inalienable from that of modern project of nationalism. They went hand in hand and required a double-sided interaction to be maintained in a firm way.

At this point the question of violence, together with the modernization project, may be raised. The cause-effect relationship between these two variables is an interdependent one. The question of whether violence is generated by the state, or is elicited by the modernization project, is not always an easy one to answer. Jongerden has come up with a possible explanation in answering this question. He believes that “the modernization project, qua project of creative destruction, itself both indirectly elicits and directly generates violence. An important way in which violence is directly generated in the

creative destruction aspect of the modernization project is through the institution of the army. Violence is an intrinsic feature of modernity” (Jongerden, 2007, p.9). The founder of the Turkish Republic Ataturk underlies the inevitability of modernity and says that “civilization (i.e. modernization) is such a fire that it destroys those who ignore it” (Kasaba in Jongerden, 2007, p.8).

This idea that made modernization the center of state formation resulted in some sort of memory politics that aimed to create a nation which is culturally, socially and historically unified. That is because, “the trauma of ethnic, nationalist, or religious violence has been a basic concern, if not the central focus, of memory studies as stories of collective victimization” (Novak & Rodseth 2006, 3). In the context of the Turkish Republic, the opposition was met with harsh repression and a new form of national memory. To that end, one inevitable outcome of such politics could be said to be “an issue of the resistance of the past against the present, a purely social question “a social clash between past and present” (Yegen 2011, p. 69). Memory politics seems to be fairly relevant to nationalist project, as national seizure of the memory was a warrant for the maintenance of the state. Whereas there is silence on the state’s part, various struggles take place during remembering or forgetting, as far as the public memory is concerned. These processes are very closely connected to the power structure which generates the experience in question.

2.3 Question of Homogeneity and the Dersim Case

Now that the main features of modern state, together with the theory behind it, is explained, it seems to be much easier to clearly observe the relationship between the modern state and violence and introduce the Dersim case in this context. One can acknowledge that world history is full of examples of traumatic events that were caused by state violence. That is to say, the state and violence have not been very distinct concepts. Edkins (2003) eloquently presents this connection, as she asserts that “what has been forgotten-subjugated knowledge-like the memory of past traumas, returns to haunt the structures of power that instigated the violence in the first place” (p.59). Therefore, it is not a matter of struggle of memory between state and authorities, and the population at large, but something much more complex. It encompasses the nature of

violence and its perceived causes and effects. In this case, it is a struggle against the top-down coercive structure of the nation state.

To that end, one can observe that the attitude adopted by Turkish state was not much different from what the nationalist theories state. For instance regarding the Dersim operations, Yunus Nadi, the lead columnist in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, described the operation as “not a military operation, but the march of civilization” (*Cumhuriyet*, 18 July, 1937). The emphasis on modernity seems to be valid for the state actions done in the early years of republic.

What is more, the state wanted to make sure that all the uprisings could be handled in a similar way. As was clearly indicated in the official state documents: “When it became a matter of rebellion then it was necessary to ‘punish them and frighten the like-minded ones (kendileri tedib ve emsali terhib)’” (Deringil, 1998 p.42).

Once again the reason for this attitude seems to lie in the polity imposed by the state. “The singularist understandings of polity, language, and history that informed Kemalist nation-making dealt a heavy blow to its goal of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state” (Oran, 1988, p.175). The mainstream Turkish nationalist idea planned to establish a unified identity and ignored the fact that, the community in Dersim, which is a case in point, for instance, already had their own distinct identity with regard to linguistic and religious components. This distinct notion of self certainly coincided with the new project of the nationalist regime on both sides. The fact that pre-existing autonomous communities would cause many problems was overlooked by the policy makers. Apparently there were many possible ways of treating minorities among them were various nationalist policies used to increase homogeneity. Yet, the common denominator of the implementation of a vast array of social engineering methods was changing entire diverse ethnic groups into Turkish citizens. A modern and centralised state could only be built by means of civilizing the dissenting groups.

In a nutshell, one of the main arguments behind Turkish nationalism was based on modernization. The Turkish Republic apparently did not let any different ethnic or religious element become a part of the new state, without adopting the Turkish identity they defined. It seems that they could be integral parts of the new nation only if they

were assimilated into Turkishness. If they resisted the actions of the state, that meant they would hinder the modernization of the nation. No autonomous elements such as religious, ethnic or cultural features were tolerated in this new state of affairs. However, the Sunni-Muslim legacy of the Ottoman period was still a part of the dominant group identity and a means of state power consolidation. That is to say, it was not completely excluded as the other ethnic identities were. The nation included the Sunni identity as well. Certainly, Sunni Muslim practices were also under the control of the central state authority.

In the Dersim region, however, the problem of converting the existing multi-cultural, multiethnic society into one nation can be considered as the reason behind inconsistency. The fact that they did not belong to Sunni community was also a factor that contributed to the inconsistency. This Alevi identity is what could be regarded as one of the main reasons for lacking harmony with the state's partices, in that the belief system of this community also affected their lifestyle and societal relations.

“Within the Republic of Turkey, most of the aforementioned components of the national identity (like common culture and common language) did not seem to overlap with those of the large Alevi community, which could not be conceived as one homogenous group. Second, the Alevi group, mostly consisted of nomadic or newly settling tribes. As the Law on Settlement shows, the nomadic tribes were considered as insecure elements. Third, certain bonds, other than –or in addition to– the national one were present among the different Alevi communities. At least the religious-communal bonds were very much alive and valid for all of the Alevi communities.” (Kadioglu, 1996, p.187)

There was a cultural and ethnical border dating back to pre-republican era and it separated the new state from the population in Dersim. This border made the distinction between the state and Dersimlis even more vivid. Dersimlis had to abandon their old identity and contribute to the new regime, which attempted to pour the different ethnic groups into a melting pot.

All in all, one can conclude that different and resisting elements were not tolerated, and that holders of power in the early years of the republic tried to transmit one single identity and culture, in order to sustain the nation and found a strong state. As there has been a denial in Turkish historical and political discourse for a long time, Dersimlis could not react to this issue in the public domain. They were in a sense forced to

suppress their memory. Their cultural products, however, largely reveal their understanding of the issue. This does not seem to be a contradiction as survivors of events that we label as traumatic seem to have something to tell us. “Specifically they have something to tell us about how we organize ourselves with respect to power and political community” (Edkins, 2003, p.51). That is why, the Dersim question should be interpreted in this framework, taking all nation-state theories and historical circumstances into account. Needless to say, the issue is manifold, thus presenting it in a historical perspective, leaving out points specific to the community living there, would be insufficient for a firm understanding. To that end, each contributing factor such as the cultural, religious and social feature pertaining to the region will be analyzed in detail in other chapters.

3. WHAT HAPPENED IN DERSIM IN 1937-38?

3.1 Dersim in Early Republican Era

Even though the Dersim question, to a large extent, is analyzed within the framework of republican era, it may be beneficial to examine the region in the late Ottoman period, too. That is because the new regime inherited the rebellious reputation of Dersim from the Ottoman Empire, and Dersim was a region deemed to be a carrier of this legacy in the early years of the republic, as well.

Dersim had been a largely autonomous region during the rule of Ottoman Empire and there had been several military operations to the region especially in the late 1800s. Yet these attempts to control the region did not continue constantly; that is there were intervals between the state attempts to take the region under control. One reason for these military operations can be consider as the economic challenges Dersim caused to the state with regards to tax collection. However, the system in general did not work as efficiently as it was defined by the central authority. That's because the Ottoman Empire lacked an administrative structure required to meet some particular needs such as collecting taxes. McDowall (2005) explains this as follows:

“In the Ottoman territories the eighteenth century had been characterized by nominally subject but effectively independent local rulers. Some of these arose when centrally appointed governors arrogated to themselves independent powers. The problem was not confined to the further flung areas of the empire. All over Anatolia, let alone in Kurdistan, local derebeys (or ‘valley lords’), themselves theoretically holding military fiefs, turned their fiefdoms into hereditary holdings, failing to submit the requisite taxes to the capital.” (p. 38-40)

As we can see this problem was not only experienced in Dersim region and the former societal structure made tax collection difficult for the empire, thus it may be misleading to evaluate the tax collection as a problem peculiar to Dersim region.

Since failure to pay taxes was one of the problems associated with Dersimlis, they may have been regarded as a disobedient community with regards to some administrative duties to the empire. Another issue concerning the region was the claim that Dersimlis did not join the army and were ruled by tribe leaders. Yet according to Bruinessen, those claims regarding Dersim do not seem to be totally valid as “then there was little that could be taxed, as the district was desperately poor. Young men evaded military service when they could, but by 1935 a considerable proportion of them did in fact serve in the Turkish army” (Bruinessen, 1994, p. 142). As can be seen, the image of disobedience was inherited especially from the late Ottoman Empire administration to be carried on in the republic, given that lack of discipline and disobedience were suggested as the main justification for an operation in Dersim. This, however, was not entirely valid at all times for all of the population in Dersim.

To have a more sound understanding of all the possible reasons for a change in the attitude of the state concerning this region, one should take the broader historical and political background of the empire into account. The 19th century saw a set of reforms to better organize the communities within the empire, and assure a more comprehensive control over the periphery. That change had a big influence on the tribal structures that were dispersed, in particular, over the eastern regions. “The autonomous status of Kurdish tribes continued to be recognized by the Ottoman state until the mid-1800s. Administrative reforms in the first half of the nineteenth century aimed to destroy the autonomy of the ‘periphery’” (Yeğen, 1996, p. 218). Needless to say, this aim of the state of breaking the autonomous structure of tribes was not very welcome to the tribes, and the state came face to face with opposition from various tribal groups, and from time to time used various means to suppress them.

All in all, one can conclude that what made the autonomy of Dersim so problematic to the 19th century Ottoman Empire stems from the fact that although Dersim was autonomous for a long time during the rule of Ottoman Empire, the 19th century brought about a change in Ottoman administrative structure, and required a centralization of administrative tools, contrary to the previous centuries when the tribes were recognized by the state. In this regard, the assumption that Dersim meant rebellion since the Ottoman period does not seem to be some sort of overgeneralization. For instance,

Maddowall (2004) describes the image of Dersim as notoriously defiant and points out that “no fewer than 11 expeditions had tried to quell its inhabitants since 1876” (p. 207). Both the Ottoman Empire and the new regime considered autonomous Dersim as an everlasting problem that needed to be addressed. Kieser also states that “Dersim represented an ‘abscess’, an intolerable cultural enclave in the midst of the homogeneous fatherland” for the elites of the early Republic and he argues that “[i]n Dersim they were confronted with the ‘other’ ” (2003, p.192). He also refers to a well-known discourse that they defined Dersim as a “chronically ‘sick’ member which needed to be transformed by a radical ‘operation’ if not indeed amputated” (p.191). Because of various reasons such as several hostile actions, high taxation, and discrimination, the region remained on bad terms with the central authority for quite a long time until the military operation was carried out in the republican era, so as to discipline and suppress the uncivilized and disobedient community of Dersimlis. For the central authority, it was inaccessible not only because it was geographically a closed region, but also because Dersim was linguistically, religiously and culturally different from the central authority during the Ottoman Empire’s rule.

When the Turkish Republic was founded, this did not mean a change in their relationship with the central authority for Dersimlis though. The story of Dersim, as a region rebelling against the state, seems to go back to Ottoman times and undoubtedly the central authority in Ankara was aware of this legacy. The new regime also did not recognize their identity, as an ethnically and religiously different group and most of their religious practices were forbidden especially after the reforms targeting religious sphere. On the contrary, this new regime put emphasis on a national language, culture and religion and aimed at homogeneity, which made matters even worse for Dersim. This approach of the Republic was expressed by İnönü in a speech in parliament in 1925, when he said “nationality is our only instrument of adhesion. The other elements are not vested with any power in the face of the Turkish majority. It is our duty to render Turkish everybody in the Turkish homeland, no matter what. We will cut out and throw out the elements that oppose Turks and Turkism” (*Vakit*, 27 April 1925).

The republican engineering project assured unity in terms of language, religion and ethnicity that is why the groups that were not in line with this new framework were

either left out of the picture, or assimilated into the majority. That has to do a lot with Young Turk ideology and its legacy of social engineering in Turkish Republic. Üngör (2012) tries to explore the way how the policy of homogenization could be reconciled with the realities of diversity in the eastern provinces. He asserts that “the young Turks dismissed the reality of ethnic difference and promised harsh action against non-Turkish cultures, but again left the detailed planning of population policies in the eastern provinces to diligent Young Turk social engineers” (p.131). To that end, the whole community was redesigned so as to meet criteria of unity within the whole parts of the country. That is to say, state reforms brought together changes in cultural and social spheres of life among them lifestyle, religion, language and education. To that end, banning religious symbols, establishing boarding schools in the eastern parts of the country, settlement laws etc were amongst the changes. For instance, “the Kurdish language, Kurdish dress, Kurdish folklore, even the very word ‘Kurd’ were banned” as well as this “certain Kurdish districts (to be designated later) were to be depopulated completely, while in the other Kurdish districts the Kurdish element was to be diluted by the resettlement there of Turks (and possibly deportations of local Kurds). The deportees were to be resettled in Turkish districts, where they could be assimilated” (Bruinessen, 1994, p.146).

Obviously such big changes did not come with peaceful means all the time. The state officials used force to apply these new reforms and imposed violence in some cases, such as the Seyh Sait Rebellion, which ended in extensive military force, prison sentences and executions. Bruinessen (1994) explains the reasons for the rebellion as follows: “Secularizing measures (abolition of the caliphate, the office of shaikh al-islam, and the religious courts; all in 1924) caused much resentment in traditional Muslim circles. Kurdish nationalist intellectuals and army officers then joined forces with disaffected religious leaders, resulting in the first great Kurdish rebellion, led by Shaikh Said in 1925” (p.146).

All these may be an inevitable outcome of social engineering, that is because “whatever it’s ideological coloring, social engineering possessed a tremendous capacity for violence” (Weiner, 2008, p. 8). There is no doubt that the central authority in Ankara wanted to control all opposing forces. For Bruinessen (1994) “the new republican elite,

careful to preserve their hard-won victory, were obsessed with threats to territorial integrity and with imperialist ploys to sow division” (p.147).

According to general belief, all those rebellious groups had one feature in common: They did not support the new reforms and wanted to remain autonomous and keep their pre-republican rule in the periphery alive.

As Dersim was one of the fragile areas, a set of reports was prepared for the region, even ten years before the operation. The first one was prepared by Hamdi Bey, inspector of the civil service, on 2 February 1926 (Hallı, 1972, p. 375-76). As a result of these reports, an action plan was drawn up. Some of the senior state officials were asked for detailed reports. The majority of reports suggested an operation and presented the region, as a very urgent problem that needed to be cured immediately.

3.2 Disciplining Dersim: A land to Be Civilized

Dersim is a region that is located between neighboring regions of Sivas, Elazığ and Erzincan. It is surrounded by mountains and is a closed area geographically. Zaza and Kurmanji are the languages that are spoken by the mostly Alevi community of the region. The community had very limited interaction with the outside groups as it was not only geographically, but also, to a large extent, culturally a distinct region.

The military operation carried out in Dersim is a good case in point to illustrate the state’s fear of a threat, caused by geographically and socially distinct rural areas to the central authority. A military operation took place in Tunceli (formerly Dersim) in 1937-38, so as to assure state control over the region. The number of dead people is not known, but the total number is estimated to exceed thousands of civilians (Kieser 2011, p.1). There have been a vast number of books, articles and, documentaries and other publications devoted to this issue⁴. Yet the abundant of literature on the Dersim issue makes it hard to come up with a short and precise summary of the events. That is

⁴ Cafer Solgun, *Dersim: yüzleşmezsek hiçbir şey geçmiş olmuyor*. Cemal Taş, *Dağların kayıp anahtarı: Dersim 1938*. Fahri Hallı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Ayaklanmalar (1924-1938)*. İzzeddin Çalışlar, *Dersim Raporu*. Hüseyin Aygün, *Dersim 1938 ve zorunlu iskan: telgraflar, dilekçeler, mektuplar*. Şükrü Aslan, *Herkesin bildiği sır: Dersim: tarih, toplum, ekonomi, dil ve kültür*.

because some of the work concerning this subject seem to be partial and reflect one side of the story. That is to say, while some nationalist studies describe the events as a “rebellion” against the state authority⁵ others refer to them as “genocide” or “ethnocide”.⁶ The debate on the nature of the events, that is to say whether it is an ethnocide, or rebellion, are outside the scope of this study. Bruinessen (1994) and Kieser (2007) who are leading scholars of the literature about this period and the region provide the main arguments and details regarding the events. Besides them, other works cited include official documents and newspaper articles used as another source of reference.

In the first place, the Dersim operation is amongst the important event that require a deeper analysis as far as the early years of Republic are concerned. The events can be analyzed in three phases: the preparation phase, the operation phase and the settlement phase.

A series of reports and campaigns against Dersim were prepared between 1926 and 1937; and they all focused on modernity and nationalism, in their records, and depicted Dersim as a land of feudalism and banditry (Bruinessen 1994, p.6). Dersim was a deviant element of the new nationalist picture of the state. It was called an abscess that urgently needed to be operated by Hamdi Bey, who was an official who prepared a report on Dersim in 1926 (Solgun, 2010, p.18). All those reports and campaigns had one aspect in common: they all called for reform in the province of Dersim, and called Dersimlis “primitive” or “bandits”. The term abscess was not used solely by the Turkish government, but also by the extreme leftist and rightist ideologies that aimed at changing the societal structure (Kieser, 2005, p. 580).

One of the reports prepared by the state officials also calls for an urgent solution to the problem. In 1926, the governor of Diyarbakir Cemal Bey stated in his report that the key to addressing the Dersim question is to disarm villagers and send troops, and that the military operation should continue for some time. He also suggested that Turkish civil

⁵ Rıza Zelyurt, *Dersim isyanları ve Seyit Rıza*. Necmi Günel, *Dersim isyanı*. Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, *Derebeyi ve Dersim*. Suat Akgül, *Dersim isyanları ve Seyit Rıza*.

⁶ İsmail Beşikçi, *Tunceli Kanunu (1935) ve Dersim Jenosidi*.

servants should be sent there to so as to assure turkification of the people and arm them with Turkish discipline in the long run (Çalışlar, 2010, p. 234).

In 1930 Fevzi Çakmak also wrote a letter to the Prime Minister İnönü. in his letter he complained that originally Turkish Alevis spoke Kurdish, so there is a need to deport some of the leading figures, as well as Kurdish officials, to the west of Turkey and make the Turkish language spread to all of the region. He also points out some specific village names and suggests that an ariel attack to these villages would be helpful in destroy ing them (Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı, age, p. 351-352).

The reports generally pointed out assimilation as the key to overcoming this problem. Only Ali Cemal, who was Elazığ governor, had a more peaceful attitude towards the region, and reflected its fear of the central authority that had lasted for centuries in different periods for varying reasons. In his report he stated that “Dersimlis are afraid of being killed or deported” (Çem, 2009, p. 467).

What is more, İsmet İnönü was quoted in newspapers saying “only Turkish nationality can claim ethnic and racial rights. No other community has any of these rights” (*Milliyet*, 31 August 1930). This may be one of the examples of legitimizing the punishment of Dersimlis and calling it a rebellious group. The tribal chiefs were considered as the main threat to the existence of the modern homogenous social structure; and the fact that they did not welcome the new rules set by the republicans was deemed as a rebellious attitude.

As a result of all these reports and campaigns, the state officials and army decided to carry out a disciplinary plan for the region. Then they started with the preparations.

Following these developments the government took the case to parliament and the operation was discussed and accepted. The decision was filed under the title of confidential and some brochures were thrown from the helicopters that said you should obey the state authority, or the state will destroy you (Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı, age, p.391).

3.3 The Operation and Suppression: Tunceli

The preparation phase of the operation began long before the actual operation. In the first place to ensure homogeneity in terms of culture, language and in some cases religion, a law which made depopulation possible was enacted. This is the Law of Settlement of the date 21 June 1934. The effects of this law were far reaching for Dersimlis, as well. Bruinessen (1994) believes that “this is clearly more than just legal discrimination; the Law on Resettlement provides the legal framework for a policy of ethnocide. As a matter of fact this law was also a part of social engineering project which was at work particularly during the first years of republic” (p. 154). This law was a big step towards a homogenous Turkish state and achieving control over this region. The settlement law targeted dispersion of the non-Turkish population into the parts of country, where the majority was Turkish so that the ethnically different groups would be homogenized into Turkish identity. Bruinessen (1994) further explains some other details of the laws as follows:

“Article 11, for instance, precludes attempts by non-Turkish people to preserve their cultures by sticking together in ethnically homogeneous villages or trade guilds. ‘Those whose mother tongue is not Turkish will not be allowed to establish as a group new villages or wards, workers' or artisans' associations, nor will such persons be allowed to reserve an existing village, ward, enterprise or workshop for members of the same race.” (p.32)

Following this law, in 1935, a particular law called the “Tunceli law” passed in parliament without any opposition. Dersim was ruled by a military governor Abdullah Alpdogan and the province was redesigned as a separate province and renamed as Tunceli. The province was governed by the military in a state of emergency regime. A number of construction projects were carried out in the region to “bring civilization” to Dersim through the state. A new railway to Elazığ, more roads, schools and military stations and bridges were built in Dersim afterwards. Villages were disarmed and some were relocated. Most of people of Dersim were suspicious about the changes in the region. Some of the tribes and their members opposed the new military infrastructure and thus they were considered to be disloyal to the state. A military operation was launched at the beginning of May in 1937. The resistance of the people continued, despite the military operations, yet there was no collective solidarity between the tribes.

Seyid Rıza, a tribe leader and a religious figure, together with Ali Ser, an activist, were the leading figures of the opposition. Ali Ser, together with his wife, were killed by their own people. Seyid Rıza was executed in Elazığ with his son and a group of other tribe leaders. Atatürk sent his congratulations to the governors after the operation (Kieser, 2007, p.249-251). These new developments were presented by the press as positive outcomes of civilization. A columnist, Yunus Nadi, believes that “what the Republican regime has been doing in Tunceli is not a military operation, but the march of civilization” (Nadi, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 July 1937). There was an evident support for the operation in newspapers at that time. Below are some extracts from the newspaper articles published in 1937:

“The notorious revolts and the brigandage of Dersim are being buried in history by İnönü. This province, even the remotest piece of which has been surrounded, will be civilized” (*Cumhuriyet*, 16 June 1937)

"Finally civilization won in the hundred-year-old clash in Dersim that has taken place between civilization and backwardness. We all think that we know what Dersim means. However there are few of us who wholly know how much the word Dersim connotes backwardness and primitiveness.” (*Tan Gazetesi*, 15 June 1937)

The violent operation was resumed in 1938 with more dramatic military force. This time there was a more widespread military attack in the region. Celal Bayar claimed a more comprehensive operation in his speech in parliament on 29 June 1938. The attacks that began in June 1938 went on with severity, for a while, until they ended in September 1938.

A lot of civilians died in different ways. It is claimed that some women committed suicide to escape being raped by soldiers. Dersimi, who witnessed the operation and explained what happened back then in his book *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim* (Dersim in the history of Kurdistan) describes the events as follows:

“At the entrances of other caves, the military lit fires to cause those inside to suffocate. Those who tried to escape from the caves were finished off with bayonets. A large proportion of the women and girls of the Kureyshan and Bakhtiyar [two rebel tribes] threw themselves from high cliffs into the Munzur and Parchik ravines, in order not to fall into the Turks' hands. The men were shot on the spot, the women and children were locked into haysheds that were set fire too.” (Dersimi in Bruinessen, 1994, p. 144)

Not only tribal leaders and members but also women and children were killed during the operation. The operation lasted until the end of 1938, and “resulted in the annihilation of at least 10% of the population” (Kehl- Bodrogi as cited in White and Jongerden, 2003, p. 66), and “many more deported to the west of Turkey” (Leezenberg, as cited in White and Jongerden 2003, p.198). In this sense, while some of the exiled Dersimlis returned to their hometowns later on, some others continued to live in the western part of Turkey

After the operation, nearly 7000 Dersimlis were relocated to other parts of the country under the Law of Settlement; they could not come back since Dersim was announced to be a prohibited zone. Dersimlis that were deported were sent to western Anatolia and lived as single families amongst the Turkish majority, so as to be assimilated into Turkish culture. Besides this, a large number of girls, were sent to Turkish army officers’ families to be raised, and hence Turkified. The precise death toll is not known yet, but the figure is estimated to be over ten thousand (Hallı, 1972, p. 478). According to some recently presented documents such as Alpdoğan’s report, the number is approximately 13, 000 dead and 11, 000 relocated. (*Radikal*, 20 November 2009). Aygün (2009) agrees with this idea and claims that tens of thousands of people were killed and deported during the operation. (p.100) He also points out that the number may be much bigger than the estimated by presenting a multitude number of collective death documents that all show the date of deaths as “0/0/1938” (2011, p.37).

In 1947, after the end of the single party regime, the law of Tunceli was repealed and people who were relocated were allowed to return their hometowns (Bulut, 1991, p.283-309).

4. ALEVISM AND CULTURAL MEMORY

4.1 Alevis: A Closed Community

In this chapter, I will try to analyze the relationship between *ağits* (lament) - Dersimlis' cultural tools of remembering- and Alevi culture, because I argue that adopting the strong oral tradition in Alevism, Dersimlis knew how to tell their story in this specific form and also were aware of the way the story would be transmitted. That is to say, *ağits* are not the incidental means of communication of the memory, but inevitable outcome of the pre-existing cultural and social conditions present long before Dersim events. If one acknowledges this relationship, it may be easier to see how and why these memories remained alive by means of *ağits*. Although it was a taboo in public space, the Dersim experience was very well-known to local people, which is a detail that should not be missed in this context. The basic concern, though, is to explore the culturally specific factors that made such a secret to be transmitted to others, in spite of all the suppression and fear.

Considering the *ağits* and the message they bear, it becomes crystal clear that although the Dersim events remained as a muted period in public sphere for a long time, this painful experience is not really silenced in the survivors' aides to memory . That is to say, it is possible to observe the paradox of collective memory, which brings about a struggle of memory to forget painful events, and somehow necessitates that individuals remember this traumatic experience and keep it alive at the same time. This is a natural outcome of the cultural memory tradition, in this region, and is used as a defensive way to cope with violence and trauma.

One important reason for this close link between the society and culture is that Alevis were isolated and alone in relation to the majority. "Having been marginalized socially, politically, and geographically since the sixteenth century, Anatolian Alevis formed their own rules, and thus drew apart from the direction of the central authorities" (Erol, 2008,

p.109). Trying to have minimum access to the central authority, Alevis generated a highly closed community. Massicard defines this issue as a “preferential defense strategy.” This may be considered as a survival strategy for Alevis (Massicard, 2007, p.53). They not only marginalized themselves physically, but also kept their culture as a secret and had an in-group and shared culture. Dressler (2008) also finds the spectrum of self-identification within Alevism quite impressive. He points out that “while there is a broad consensus among Alevis that they are different from Sunnis, there is no agreement on the precise grounds of this difference” (p.117).

The central issue here suggests that *ağits* were used as medium of the communication by the survivors. They serve this transmission function for the people to remember the collective past within their society. Finnegan (1977) clearly points out the link between social context and oral literature. He believes that “oral literature is more flexible and more dependent on its social context. For this reason, no discussion of oral poetry can afford to concentrate on the text alone, but must take account of the nature of the audience, the context of performance, the personality of the poet-performer, and the details of the performance itself” (p. 29). Poetry itself and transmission of belief via poetry are two of the most essential parts of Alevi culture. That is why; Bozkurt (2006) regards poetry as an integral part of the most important ceremonies such as funerals and *cem* (p.45), which is a religious Alevi ceremony that is practiced generally in houses in the leadership of spiritual Alevi leaders called *dede* (elders), together with Alevi music pieces such as traditional songs and religious hymns (*deyiş* or *türkü*). For instance, the illiterate people of Alevi community who do not have any formal education created important pieces in folk literature. Actually there are very few written sources. “Oral tradition takes an important place in Alawi-Bektashi tradition. Alawi-Bektashi tradition mostly stands by oral tradition. Written sources are very rare in this tradition” (Mandel 2004, p.114). As literary works of the Alevi community are mostly oral, the best sources of reference are the ones that belong to *ozans* (Bozkurt, 2006, p.43). *Ozans* were the main carrier group in this cultural transmission. The problems and daily issues of the community are the main themes of their works. They were good observers of the social issues and tried to express them in their poems and generally opposed the central authority. That is why, thanks to their performances of *deyiş* (songs of mystical love),

nefes (religious hymns) or *türkü* (folk songs generally dealing with subjects surrounding daily life) the culture was transmitted intergenerationally.

Alevi literature is intertwined with the collective language of the society. Dressler (2003) points out this collectivity of transmission as follows: “Members of Alevi community learnt and transferred the knowledge mainly with their interaction with each other in generally collective gatherings. Since traditional Alevi culture is an oral culture, orally transmitted tales, songs, and poems were the very means by which it was remembered, interpreted and thus constantly redefined” (p.115). One can easily acknowledge that the representations in the collective memory of Alevis are produced, and reproduced, in these transmissions within their own community. The main elements of this (re) production partly stemmed from the sense of victimization and martyrdom on the part of Alevis. According to Mandel (2004) “a sense of victimization and martyrdom pervades the Alevi worldview. Subject to persecution and massacres throughout their history, Alevis revere and identify with ancestral martyrs. Twentieth-century massacres and oppression are conceptualized in mytho-historical terms, as part of the cultural logic of their understanding of history” (Mandel 2004, p.112). The social context greatly influences how individuals perceive the world and perform cultural works accordingly. They seem to find the most appropriate way of transferring, and sharing, in line with their societal structure.

4.2 Alevism and Collectivity

That unique culture and tradition should be examined in detail, so as to offer a sound interpretation of the events and practices. To do that we should define what “Alevi” or “Alevism” is. However, it is not easy to come up with a single definition regarding “Alevi” and “Alevism” in the first place. That is mainly because the community is not homogenous linguistically or ethnically. Even though the exact figure varies according to different sources, the approximate population of Alevis is said to be nearly 15 million. Alevis do not come from the same ethnicity and do not have the same language, though.

Bruinessen (1996) states that Alevi is a blanket term and Alevis differ much in their actual and ritual practices. He also explains the scope of difference in Alevi identity as follows:

“Linguistically four groups may be distinguished. In the eastern province of Kars there are communities speaking Azarbayjani Turkish and whose Alevism differs little from the 'orthodox' Twelver Shi`ism of modern Iran. The Arabic speaking Alevi communities of southern Turkey (especially Hatay and Adana) are the extension of Syria's `Alawi (Nusayri) community and have no historical ties with the other Alevi groups. Like the first group, their numbers are small and their role in Turkey has been negligible. The important Alevi groups are the Turkish and Kurdish speakers (the latter still to be divided into speakers of Kurdish proper and Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey of related Zaza); both appear to be the descendants of rebellious tribal groups that were religiously affiliated with the Safavids.” (p.3)

Although it is known that there are linguistically and ethnically differing Alevi groups, an important reason why we do not know the exact population of Alevis is that as a heterogeneous group, they have hidden their identities from the other majority groups, especially in the past. This fact made it almost impossible to come up with valid population data for this large community (Erol, 2009, p.166).

Kadioglu also points out the diversity within the community and argues that this very uniqueness of Alevi culture was one of the reasons why the homogenizing process could not prove fruitful for the Alevi community. She argues that “the problem of converting the existing multi-cultural, multiethnic society into one nation within the Republic of Turkey, most of the aforementioned components of the national identity (like common culture and common language) did not seem to overlap with those of the large Alevi community, which could not be conceived as one homogenous group. Certain bonds, other than –or in addition to– the national ones were present among the different Alevi communities” (Kadioglu, 1996, p.187). As one can see, two main elements of nation building namely ethnicity and language were not homogenous in Alevi community and hence this very feature of the community caused many problems to the central authority. Despite all these similarities and differences within the community due to heterogeneity with regard to religion, they formed a shared culture and way of living as far as transmission of oral poetry and collective memory are concerned.

Aside from the varying elements within the community, the similarities outweigh the differences; though. Olsson (1998) exemplifies this uniqueness of culture with some of the rules that have been followed for a long time. He believes that “the Alevi community was earlier a closed world with very limited interaction with the political and social centers of Ottoman society and later with the institutions of the Turkish Republic. For instance, marriage regulations were endogamous, not only normatively, and religious traditions were esoteric, and transmitted orally at secret rituals” (p.199).

Besides these, Alevis were closed in terms of not only social, but also spatial borders. They were ostracized by the surrounding community and had minimal interaction with the majority. For them, apparently, that was a weapon against hostility and violence. They tried to survive by means of limited connection and marginalization. As a result, their social and cultural customs were carried out within their own community. Not only religious rituals, but also marriage customs, legal issues and even economic relations were organized in their own social environment to protect their physical and cultural presence from the unfavorable acts of religious and political authorities.

Considering the points mentioned above and the old history of the Alevi community, one can say that the general definition of this community would be of a marginal and closed community, which is based on its own societal principles. Shankland & Cetin (2005) explains the reason for this as follows: “Partly this is undoubtedly because their unorthodox religious opinions led to them being viewed with suspicion, sometimes even persecution by the orthodox majority. Partly, though, it may be explained by the fact that their social organization is largely predicated upon organizing their own affairs as possible from centralized rule” (p.17). According to this analysis, Alevis generally did not intend to explain their culture or belief to the other people, because they were trying to prevent any further possible harm coming from the “other”.

This assumption may partly stem from the idea that Alevis have been the victims of prejudice and physical harm, from time to time, since the Ottoman period. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Alevis were in some periods persecuted and ostracized by the Sunni majority. In some cases, like the war waged by Selim, Alevi community was in a social and political conflict with Sunni Ottoman Empire. Mandel (2012) points out

an example of this prejudicial attitude by means of analyzing the terminology that is used to refer to Alevis.

“The pejorative sobriquet *kizilbaş* (redhead) derives from an implication that they were traitors, in league with the Iranian Safavi Empire and its founder, Shah Isma‘il, who established a similar form of Shi‘ism as the dominant religion of his realm; the terminology thus has its origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” (p.112). There are some other clues of victimization in some documents. Dressler (2013) explains that “in the Ottoman documents the *Qızılbaş* are usually referred to in a derogatory and apologetic language and are labeled as heretics or unbeliever”; however, he also indicates that this was not the case all the time and the attitude changed under different historical circumstances, for instance, “the Ottomans wanted to ensure the loyalty of the *Kızılbaş* -Alevis and other communities at the margins of the Islamic millet in a time when especially the eastern provinces with their various non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations became more of a political concern to them” (p.42). In brief we cannot generalize and say that there was an unjust and hostile attitude towards Alevis during all of the Ottoman period. Despite the difficulties faced by Alevis in certain periods of the rule of Ottoman Empire, it may be misleading to say that Alevis were always in good terms with the new Turkish state during the republican period. As most of the religious symbols and rituals, as well as the use of religious titles such as *dede*, *seyit* and *seyh*, were banned in 1925 after the enactment of law no. 677; Alevi belief was again a secret issue and had to be hidden from the outside. The prohibition included closure of *tarikats* and sect lodges as well as prohibition of all the religious rituals and ceremonies. The ban on the religious rituals was not a new situation for Alevis and they could maintain their rituals to some extent, though.

Kadioglu (1996) points out the difference with regards to Alevism and argues that “at least the religious-communal bonds were very much alive and valid for all of the Alevi communities” (p.187). Even if secularism in the early period of republic was militant to some extent, and banned a lot of practices, the project of social engineering did not go in line with the plan at all times and in all cases. That is to say, this did not mean Alevis would stop carrying out their rituals as they had done before, they carried on their rituals but secretly. Alevis remained closed and marginalized, which resulted in a socially and

culturally close-knit community to some extent, although it can also be said that “the secularization politics of early Turkish Republic affected the social ties of Alevism” (Dressler, 2008, p.114). One can easily acknowledge that there was not much difference in terms of their concern for religious rituals in this regard.

Now that we have briefly covered the historical context of the emergence of Alevi culture, we can move on to the ways by which the transmission is carried out. The first and foremost point in this regard is the principle of secrecy within the society. “The question of secrecy, it is out of the question to betray the secret. (sırrı ifşa etmek) knowledge pertaining to Alevism cannot be revealed to everybody. But the large scale immigration of the Alevi from the rural to the urban centers has initiated a process of transformation which also changed the ways in which Alevi look at this issue of secrecy” (Yaman, 2006, p. 89). This was, in a sense a survival strategy for Alevi and their culture. Based on the principle of secrecy, most of the Alevi rituals were carried out only in the group and were kept as a secret to be transferred to only to the group members. Their communal gatherings, and performances, also required a sort of collectivity and reflected a close relationship to everyday practices and this, in turn, resulted in a collectivity of cultural practices and performance. Aşık performance can be cited as an example of this collectivity. Dressler (2003) explains the reasons for the inevitability of such a closeness and collectivity in the context of *aşık* performance. He points out that “since the *aşık* tradition is mainly a rural tradition, the traditional audience is made up of peasants. Traditional places for performances were coffeehouses or private homes. The *aşık* performs in interaction with his audience, and we can describe this performance as a collective memorization of epic material, or as a collective reassurance of matters of cultural knowledge and practice. Of course, when discussing matters of "originality," one always has to take into account that oral traditions are often to some extent transferred by "composition in performance.” (p. 117). This collective, and secret, transmission strategy of Alevism would keep them away from the outside world i.e. the Sunni community, and help them maintain their cultural identity within a closed community. This in-group sharing of cultural tools also clearly indicates that culture includes diverse aspects of a community, so it is by no means individual. Since culture is collective, one can conclude that the behavior, rituals

and traditions that Alevis adopt are not solely individual, but are rather interpersonal and intergenerational. Olsson (1998) points out the way this interpersonal and intergenerational transmission is provided as follows: “The traditional identification of Alevi religious and social life was based on the oral transmission of knowledge including the esoteric religious teaching, which was handed down ritually from person to person. It was inherited from by means of oral tradition and transferred from master to disciple” (p. 200).

Some religious figures were also effective interpersonal and intergenerational carriers of the culture. *Dede*, for instance, is an important figure in this regard since *dede* is not just a religious figure but he is also a culture bearer according to Clarke (2004) “in Anatolian Alevi culture, the *ocak-dedes* are the primary culture bearers by virtue both of their charismatic lineage *asseyids* (descendants of the Twelve Imams) and as descendants of the traditional Central Asian *bakhshy-kam-ozans*. In the Alevi tradition, the *dede* is the inherited spiritual leader while the role of musician is assigned to a *zakir*, someone who shows musical and spiritual understanding. In actuality, the role of both “priest” and musician is often combined in the *dede*” (p. 2).

To add, Alevi culture has survived thanks to various means of oral musical forms for centuries, too. For instance, Erol (2009) states that being highly crucial means of communication and transmission, *deyiş* are the most crucial learning tools for the Alevi community as they teach one to listen to what is being said, to repeat it, reconstruct it and then link it to a common history (p. 103). The *ozans* and *dedes* had a mission of reflecting on and communicating the problematic and unfair events and practices in the society via musical forms. They were considered not only as musicians, but also as the leading figures of the community with regard to their contribution to both the culture and the collective memory of the group. Being one of the most crucial musical forms in Alevi culture, *türkü* can be another good example of such a cultural transmission. Both *dedes* and *ozans* also made use of *türkü* to convey their messages, and hence their messages were transmitted from generation to generation for a long time. In the Alevi community, words and melody that join together in *türkü* form are inalienable and they have a very crucial part in the cultural life of the community. One of the main themes in *türkü* is resistance, for instance. To that end, they express the emotions and experiences

of the people, which make them so permanent and valuable for the community. Bayrak (1996) argues that “the more widely the experience is shared, the more widespread the *türkü* becomes, for instance. It is clearly seen that even with no modern means of communication, *türkü* spread to a highly wide area and become known to so many people living in distant areas” (p.123). Sharing the same emotions and experiences people also shared *türkü* as a means of expression. The *türkü*s that deal with social and political issues are important sources of data in terms of historical information. One can track the historical signs of events affecting a particular community thanks to them. They serve the function of eye-witnessing to some extent. They are the tools of history writing as far as the ordinary people are concerned. That is to say, they function as alternative legal authorities when the legal ones fail to make just decisions in public eye (Bayrak, 1996, p. 128).

It is clear that the main themes of literary works-either poetry or *deyiş* and *türkü*- are mostly based on social events and their reflections. They have served the function of self expression for the community for ages. That self expression remained permanent, because all these cultural elements have been transferred from generation to generation.

4.3 Transmission via Oral Tradition

Having explained the structure and methods of cultural transmission in Alevism, we can touch upon its effect on the particular case of Dersimlis. Interestingly Dersim community shares all the mentioned features and can be a very good example of functioning of the cultural practices of Alevism.

Dersim region mostly consisting of an Alevi population was a homogeneous and closed culture, too. As most of the population was Alevi, their cultural tools were the ones used by Alevi community; namely, oral sources. To that end, oral tradition served the basic function of transferring the culture and the memory. Being victims of several discriminative and destructive attacks by the majority, Alevis had their own way of preserving their culture and identity and so did Dersimlis. That is why they formed their own cultural memory, thanks to these cultural tools. In this sense, one can argue that the *ağuts* (lament) generally talk to the community of Dersimlis. They are sung in Zazaki

language and composed in *türkü* form, which is also a powerful means of cultural communication for the community. In the Alevi *yol* (spiritual path), words and melody are intertwined and are also a part of cultural ceremonies and religious prayers. The melody and the words become meaningful only if they are unified. Laments, *deyiş* and *nefes* are sung as the integral elements of this culture during anniversaries, mourning, funerals, particularly during *cem* (Alevi ritual) and all the other ceremonies, which is indicative of the importance of this integrity of the melody and the words (Bayrak, 2002, p. 110). That is why; *ağıts* are perfect examples of this cultural tradition as Alevi rituals are mainly comprised of musical and poetical elements.

Another crucial point concerning *ağıts* is that they are also a part of history writing in Alevi culture. When looked at closely, one can recognize that there is continuity in the practices and traditions of Alevi community. Bal (2004) explains this continuity, taking the basic values and practices of Alevi culture into account: “Alevi literature is a vivid and dynamic literature which has survived thanks to melody-word integration, and it has been shaped by love of Ehlibeyt and practiced at *cem* ceremonies with words of wisdom by *mursid* and *aşiks*” (p.97). This continuity also brings about the replication of the same patterns again and again. To this end, it is connected to the past and illuminates the present, as well. Massicard (2007) observes this replication as follows: “Alevi possess a comprehensive repertoire of these kinds of tragedies. For example, Karbala events are remembered and commemorated so as to remind the community of the boundary between them and the other who is responsible for all the traumatic events that had happened. These events are reconstructed as if they are a part of collective Alevi history and the narratives provide a continuity and coherence within the community. These dual narratives divide the world into two spheres: “us and them” (p.107). This continuity and replication together constitute the very characteristics of Alevi culture, namely the collective identity of Alevi. The identity is certainly a unified and collective one.

The themes of Alevi songs and poems are mostly the social and historical events affecting the culture. In parallel with the principle of secrecy in Alevi belief, these cultural domains are the sole media for the transmission of the experiences of the community. This is also a common feature of the community, since Alevi tradition composes of themes mainly based on local issues and “representing the human relations

formed as an outcome of living conditions of the region in question” (Eyuboglu, 1991, p.85). All these features pertaining to Alevism led to a specific outcome in terms of cultural domain: a firm and continuing transmission of cultural elements. Melikoff refers to the result of this tradition via cultural agents, too. “Just like the shamans/ bakhsis/ kams in the old times, *dedes* were the carriers of a rich oral tradition, transmitted from generation to generation” (Melikoff in Yaman, 2006, p.158).

One can say that both the surrounding community and the Alevis themselves contributed to the marginalization of the group in terms of social, political and religious features. The conditions somehow forced them to be marginalized and that resulted in a lot of myths regarding Alevis and Dersimlis, in particular. One can easily observe that this community has a rich literature. That is why, it may be asserted that there is a silence in this community, but in fact there is no amnesia in this victimized population thanks to cultural memory. On the contrary, throughout history they have expressed the injustices and victimizations they fall prey to in poems, songs or laments. What is more, references to injustice and opposition were made in particular via folk literature, poems and *ağits* especially in the early Alevi literary works (Bayrak, 2002, p. 127). Yet they could not present their identities to outsiders and therefore Alevis have always remained as a reference to the other and prejudices that persisted for centuries. As can be seen, only oral works serve as the spokesperson of the Alevi tradition to express views and experiences, which were even unspeakable for a long time.

In particular, the oral works are very closely linked to the life experiences and traditions of the Alevi community. They seem to be highly useful means of communication within the community in that they are a sophisticated and critical tool used for communication and for sustaining the group.

In brief, social memory has played a crucial role in Alevi communities, which is an expected outcome of the societal organization in which they live. That is why being a member of the group remains as requisite in this community. Membership in the group starts when the individual is born and continues with interactions with *dede*, and with other members in the group (Bozkurt, 2003, p.63).

Dersim culture is also closely related to this type of social memory formation. This characteristic originates from their life style and belief to a great extent. As most of the people in this community were illiterate for a long time, oral transmission via their cultural forms seems to be the best way to keep these teachings alive, as it ensures the possibility of memorization. The Dersim events, together with the operation, afterwards became a part of Alevi's collective memory as one of the worst massacres that the Kızıldaş community has suffered (Bozkurt, 2006, p.76).

History writing in Alevism is a way of articulating memory and it finds expression within pre-existing cultural forms, which structure survivors' memory and the memory work of the succeeding generation. "History writing in Alevism presents history as an everlasting replication of the same pattern again and again. The pattern of victimization, and even that of martyrdom, is repeated again and again. The traumatic events that depict the physical death of group members tell of the same story repeatedly, and that is why they convey an explicit message of a continuous thread of the presence of the group. It is expected, that is, as the events are remembered, this excitement it will help maintain the solidarity in the community and help it form a group identity. Formation of identity discourse is both a discourse concerning the image of the self and the other. It is a way of defining your position according to the other" (Massicard, 2007, p.108). Keeping Dersim experience alive may be understood as the struggle of Dersimlis to give articulation to their memories. Most importantly, Dersimlis knew that the story would be transmitted to coming generations via this public mourning, as a response to the traumatic impact of the death and also were sure that the message would be conveyed only within their own community. All these repressed memories are particular to their social and cultural environment. Certainly they are not unexpected responses to such a trauma, and violence, and help them define their position according to the other.

In this regard, it may be beneficial to introduce Dersim *ağits*, as a representation of collective memory within a closed group. The detailed analysis of the *ağits* shows that Dersimlis made use of *ağits* as a means of communication despite the repression and denial. I argue that through *ağits* survivors transmit the unspeakable stories and share them with listeners. *Ağits* functioned as a mirror of the life experiences of these people. In this respect, the Dersim case can be considered as the endeavor of a group -forced to

have minimum interaction with the state- to preserve their collective identity rather than a political and national one. “It is an example of the instinct of a group to protect self identity against a brutal state fear dating back to at least 400 years” (Bozkurt, 2006, p.76). One can decipher the traces of the violence and trauma that are otherwise impossible to articulate in collective memory, formed via *ağits*. The stories woven into the *ağits* are discovered with the meaning attached to them.

To explore these issues, contrary to public idea of silencing or recently reopening the debate, *ağits* clearly tell us what has happened, to whom, and why. Obviously the study will show that although the events are too painful to be explained in public narratives and remain silent in public, the memory of the events finds refuge in Dersim *ağits*.

5. AĞITS AND DERSİM CULTURE

5.1 *Ağits* as a Part of Alevi Tradition

Depending mostly on oral culture, Alevis attached great importance to oral works in their cultural life. Due to various reasons mentioned in the previous chapter (fear of others, the question of secrecy, need to express their victimization), they produced and transferred a large number of poems *deyiş*, or *türkü* as well as. The scarcity of written sources leads one to track the oral sources, so as to have a valid understanding of the culture and traditions of this community. The value attached to oral poetry in this community “has often been framed in terms of ‘uncovering unknown stories’ or ‘giving voice to the unheard, the secret,’ making it, in effect, a form of exposé or evidence where no other is available” (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008, p.9). That is why the community revealed their inner selves, via their cultural forms and made hidden stories known to their members. When there was no witness to their tragedy, they used these means as their guides to illuminate their past.

In this respect, *ağits* are an inalienable part of Alevi culture. The function *ağits* serve is largely parallel with oral tradition of Alevi culture. They are one of the most popular works of community, together with other musical forms such as *türkü* or *deyiş*. Before we touch upon the importance of laments with regard to Alevi culture, it may be beneficial to define *ağits*, as a form of lament, so as to relate them to the culture and the social context in which they are created.

To begin with, Tolbert (1990) defines laments as a genre whose performance is closely related to the “inspiration of the moment” (p.80). This link to the moment is what is common to most of the oral poems, as well. In parallel with this approach, laments can also be considered as oral poems with melodies. They are composed to reveal some specific meanings following the event that is explained in them. Unlike literary poems, generally, there is no difference in moment they are created and performed. They are in

this regard more spontaneous than the literary poems. That means one can possibly catch the hints of the experience that is referred to in laments.

As for the issue of audience with regard to laments, they can be performed either individually or in a group. To that end, the listener is not an obligatory element of lament performance. According to Finnegan (1977), the performance does not have to be carried out in a group, namely; it can be a solitary one, as well. He, however, points out that even if in some cases there is no audience, delivering the laments to an audience is an essential element of oral poetry (p. 215). This means that it is not necessarily a solitary action for them, though. The experiences that are explained in laments can be about different time and events. Yet they are not based on happy moments. On the contrary, most of laments convey a sad message or nostalgia for a better past.

Even though *ağits*, like laments, in general are considered to include themes of death and mourning, there are other examples of *ağits* which contain other tragic events. Basically, *ağits* mention a kind of tragedy like death or other similar painful events (Başgöz, 2008, p.76). What is more, they can be coupled with crying in some cases. They are sung with a mournful melody and sound like a type of sorrowful weeping. All in all, considered as one of the ancient creations of Turkish literature, *ağits* are briefly defined as poems whose subject matters are death and separation. However in time, the mortality of the universe, the shortness of life, betrayal, unfaithfulness, the passing of youth, complaints of fate, situations, conditions and experiences such as separation, enlarged the meaning and content of laments (Elçin, 2001, p. 290).

Artun (2004) believes that “*ağits* serve certain crucial social and cultural functions and emergence of any other work of Turkish folk literature depends on *ağits*, which makes relationship between the *ağits* and traditions obvious” (p.159). *Ağits* are pointed out as one of the oldest forms of genres in folk literature in Anatolia and the most typical feature of these traditional laments is that they are performed in the framework of a “lamenting tradition,” which has been shaped according to the social and cultural structure of the society they are created in.

There are a vast number of examples both in oral and written forms, so *ağits* also function as sources of oral history. *Ağits per se* do not act as historical texts but some

historical moments may overlap in some *ağits*. That is because “in Anatolian *ağits* the only purpose is not crying and mourning but also story telling” (Çelik, 1994, p.87).

Ağits like other forms of laments are not forgotten, especially when they are about an unexpected death, the death of a young person or death of people who are important to the community. The community learns and internalizes the events that are experienced in them. That is because “mourning in Anatolian culture means expressing the sorrowful experience of death of a beloved one or an important person within the practices the framework permitted and structured by the society” (Çağlayan, 1997, p.87). Despite changes in different performances, they share more or less the same characteristics. Some of the recurring things mentioned in Anatolian *ağits* are the dead person’s family and their life after his/her death. As well as these, some essential and interesting points, such as the social status of that community, their traditions, thoughts, and human interactions become crystal-clear in laments. The main emotions expressed in the laments are violence, fear, anger, resistance as well as complaint and great agony (Kemal, 1996, p.31). This recurrent patterns and emotions as well as themes that are common to almost all laments actually make it easier for the community to transfer them orally to the others in the group and produce more laments, with the same pattern, and reproduce them in various places and times and eventually help *ağits* act as tracking sheets that belong to a social group and social memory. In a parallel vein, Halbwachs argues that the idea that individual memory is unconnected to social memory is unreasonable. That is because, being a member of a social group, having some sort of kinship, religious and class links make individuals to acquire, internalize and remember their memories (Halbwachs in Hamilton& Shopes, 2008, p.9). That is why one can observe that the way laments are performed, and created, is also a learned experience within the community. This is fairly observable in the common features *ağits* as a form laments share with regard to form and themes as well as stylistic ways peculiar to these types of oral works.

Now that we have made an introduction to the *ağits*, we may move on to the *ağits* and Alevi culture in particular. Considering general features of the *ağits*, one can expect Alevi *ağits* to share some common characteristics, as well. That may be a good explanation for the fact that “our memories are located within the mental and material

spaces of the group” (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008, p.37). Being an important part of folk culture in mental and material terms, Alevi *ağits* like other musical forms, such as *türkü* and *deyiş*, are also sung and transferred to other generations via mostly oral performances. For instance, Dressler eloquently exemplifies this community specific performance by referring to *âşık* performance. He states that “traditionally the âşık - performance was a public event, be it at the *cem* ceremony, at the teahouse or a private gathering. Aşıks traditionally used to travel throughout the countryside, performing their art and earning a living from donations” (Dressler, 2003, p.118). Since Alevi culture is also closely linked to *âşık* performance, looking at the issue with a societal and collective lens proves fruitful to understand that *ağit* performance is not only a ritual, but is also a part of everyday traditions. The fact that Alevis form a closed group in the communities they live is closely related to their need to perform the *ağits* with an audience, for instance. They tend to deliver *ağits* when there are listeners around.

On the other hand, there are very few scholarly works that deal with Alevi rituals and identity in a literary fashion. That is to say, these scarce works do not examine texts or works that directly relate to their rituals and daily life. Actually Alevi rituals reveal a great deal of information about the social and historical context, within which they are produced. The political references made in the songs or poems or *ağits* are generally message bearing. Some basic themes particularly reflect the period in which they are created and performed in many respects. Therefore, these works generally rest on representations that are produced and reproduced in written or oral sources and contribute to formation of collective memory for the community which they belong to.

All in all, one can easily see that the relevant data of Alevi *ağits* illuminate the social, political and cultural aura of the period and help us understand the hidden message transmitted via signs and metaphors that are created by a distinctive use of words in a deliberate way.

Besides, what is worth emphasizing is that the characteristics of oral works in Alevi culture and how they are articulated in their daily routines is a sign of importance of laments. They do not operate as ritualistic ceremonies in the community. On the contrary, they are incorporated into everyday life, as a part of their usual routines. The

structure of the community, and its customary needs, requires some sort of culturally specific form of transmission, as well. That is because when there were mostly illiterate people in the community, this oral transmission and production helped them a lot as far as ease of memorization is concerned. Funerals and *cems* have mostly been continued through those memorized works, which shows the way they have been kept alive to the present day. There is also a critical tone in most of the laments and it allows them to create a free play for them to express themselves better. All in all, the place, form and outcome concerning performance of oral works are closely related to various features of Alevi as a social group.

Although the creation of laments may be very closely related to the moment, its links are closely related to the past. There are some musical pieces that date back to very old times, which is a clear indicator of the central role of replication and continuity in Alevi culture. For example, Dressler underlines the role of *âşiks* with regard to continuity of the tradition. He states that “it is one of the primary functions of the *âşik* to pass on the Alevi's epic traditions and mystical knowledge by chanting poems. Without the *âşik* institution, many of the Alevi traditions would have been lost in the almost completely illiterate context of (proto-) Alevism. Since the *âşik* is not only a transmitter of poems but also the author of new poems, he has the creative power to reinterpret the tradition” (Dressler, 2003, p.117). Replication of the same patterns, again and again, is also a guide for the members of the group to understand and incorporate their identity. That may be considered as the main reason why Alevi rituals are comprised of musical and poetical performances.

That there are references to injustice and rebellion in the early oral works of Alevi community is another reason behind the continuity of tradition in *ağits*. That is mainly because the notion of opposition is accompanied with grief in laments. In these works, it is not only the melody but also the words that are shared. Therefore, this integrity of words and melody are indicative of how intertwined they are within the culture..

As a conclusion, Anatolian *ağit* is a form of lament which is performed throughout Anatolia, but it is especially incorporated in the tradition of Dersim, since *ağit* is an integral part of culture in that it functions as a form of social tool and a form of prayer.

The melodic form of *ağit* is closely related to the congruence of music and lyrics in other Dersim Alevi rituals. Therefore *ağit* tradition is particularly important to Dersim culture ,as crying is regarded as an essential part of rituals.

5.2 Laments: Memory Tools for Dersimlis

The *ağit* tradition in Dersim is no different from the general principles set down above. Being a largely Alevi community, Dersimlis created and performed the laments for exactly the same reasons. As both the region and its culture were closed, people in Dersim came up with their own ways of transferring and sharing experiences and emotions. To that end, *ağits* can be listed as one of the strongest means of communication for them. That is to say, the oral tradition in this region highly relies on *ağits* and other oral works.

Before moving on to the link between the *ağits* and memory in Dersim, it may be beneficial to briefly touch upon the tradition of *ağit* performance in Dersim. Mesut Özcan (2002) in his book about the *ağits* in Dersim introduces the book with some general information about the features of *ağits* delivered in Dersim. He states that *ağits* as form of lament are generally sung by women in Dersim yet men also sing *ağits* and perform them with *bağlama* (p.26). Accordingly, the traditional performing of *ağits* by women is a distinctive feature of the culture of the Dersim region. This can be considered as indicative of how oral culture functioned in public memory in this region since “local identities, which were passed down from generation to generation as a form of vernacular culture predominantly through oral means, examines how oral history, as an established form for actively making memories, both reflects and shapes collective or public memory” (Niamh, 2007, p.18). Yet almost all of the *ağits* are anonymous That is to say, the name of the singer is not mentioned in laments and it is even hard to know the original singer of the *ağits* today, namely; we either know the performer or the complier. Özcan (2002) explains that normally women gather and sing the *ağits* after a dead person and generally dead person’s family members are referred to in the laments. The issue of how family’s life changes after the death of a beloved family member is fairly recurrent, too. The *ağits* explain the event, heroism and killing or death explicitly referring to a specific time and place. As well as this, *ağits* are told in such a way that

they can be considered as stories told to the audience listening to the performer. They contain a lot of details about the person. For example, dead people's lives and even the community within which they live are clearly revealed in *ağits*, too (p. 16-26). The event that caused the death is also explained in a narrative way. It is not surprising that *ağits* are comprised of such distinctive details. That is because "oral history is at heart a deeply social practice connecting past and present and, at times, connecting narrative to action" (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008, p.9) It is not merely action or time that listeners confront in an *ağit* but also a social reality and message, in some cases. Accordingly Özcan (2002) states that no matter what the theme of the *ağits* is, there are a lot of references to holy places, holy people and religious elements in laments sung in the Dersim region (p.25). To this end, they share the common characteristics of Alevi Bektashi literature that has its origins in the 15th. century.

The love and respect for these holy religious elements is frequently highlighted in the *ağits*. In most of Dersimlis' *ağits*, those who are against Ehlîbeyt and who fight against them are cursed. Edkins (2003) believes this common use of language is a sign of some sort of acceptance and agreement, with regard to both the meanings and signs within a community. She emphasizes that "for language to work at a particular time and in a particular context, it is necessary for there to be a linguistic community that shares or is subject to something that will temporarily fix meanings. There has to be some provisional agreement, accepted ideology or central authority structure that will halt the fluidity of terms and make language meaningful" (p.55). That is why, it is not unusual that this characteristic is common to most of the other oral folkloristic elements in the region.

Now that we have mentioned the general features of the *ağits* in Dersim, it may be beneficial to examine how *ağits* are performed and continued in this region and what cultural, social or religious circumstances led to this need for *ağit* delivery. In the first place, the belief system in Dersim had some pagan elements and so nature was an inalienable part of their belief systems. For instance, there are *ağits* that refer to natural elements that create their own mythological stories, which have been transferred from generation to generation via oral delivery. These characteristics of Dersim culture made some people and places sacred, too. The religious practices were transferred via *dedes* or

seyyids and the means of transmission were oral works and public gatherings, i.e. *cem* rituals. What is more, these public gatherings or other collective actions such as *cem* rituals or funerals came to be part of socializing, too. Dersimlis somehow come across these events at some point in their life and apparently the events made them construct their social environment via such a kind of tradition.

Niamh (2007) points out the link between externally constructed traditions and individual remembrance by saying that “collected memory is always historical (or narratological) and is always the product of some program of being-reminded. However, and at whatever scale a collective is constituted, we have no collective capacity to share memories that are not in some way externally programmed for us” (p.16). For instance, thanks to these collective oral performances of cultural and religious acts by *dedes*, remembrance was assured, which meant that *ağits* would be kept alive for a long time and hence continuity was assured. Güntekin underlines this continuity of collective memory for a long period of Dersim history by separating two periods; namely; the period before 1938 and after 1938. He states that until 1938 the social structure was based on entirely oral culture and traditional network of the events that have been kept alive in the collective memory, for a long time besides folk literature, myths and ancestral traditions that were preserved but that totally changed after 1938 (Gültekin, 2004, 105). Although one can assume that this continuity may have been harmed by external interventions, the claim that there was a tradition of preserving oral works via transmission seems to be certain.

For Niamh (2007), in such orally-based societies “time was structured in a simple way and history was understood within the timespan covered by the memories of its living members” (p.18). To that end, if Dersimlis have difficulty completely linking two different periods of their community with regard to their culture and tradition, there may be some missing points in memories or oral works created by the members of a community, due to some external forces or factors, yet this does not mean that the continuity of memory proves totally invalid.

As we can see, the tradition of oral transmission made some events remain in public memory for a long time. In this respect, it can be considered as a tool of remembering

for the community. As Dersim community is largely rural, it depended on oral culture instead of written sources. “Since traditional Alevi culture is an oral culture, orally transmitted tales, songs, and poems were the very means by which it was remembered, interpreted and thus constantly redefined” (Dressler, 2003, p.115). As they had minimum connection with the central authority, Dersimlis made use of those oral tools of communication to protect their identity for a long time. As their religious belief, as well as fear of the central authority, made them a closed community, they developed their own ways of preserving their culture and belief.

This is ensured through some peculiarities of the form of *ağits*. The *ağits* referring to Dersim events share some common characteristics, for instance. In these *ağits* most of the references are more or less the same. They all convey a certain message and transmit the same emotion. According to Kemal (1996) *ağits* are like refugees; they get bigger and bigger and increase in number. They turn into social resistance as they are sung. The women that sang *ağits* in the past write the present’s history now (p.29). Regarding time, the elements transferred to younger generations cease to be limited to what is alive in the minds of their parents and neighbors. Older components are incorporated, giving culture a new historical perspective (Niamh, 2007, p.18). The culture is preserved and at the same time reproduced through these intergenerational transmissions. Therefore, the scope of such oral works is by no means limited to a particular time, but has cultural and historical affiliations.

Another common characteristic of *ağits* in the Dersim region is the style. The style of the *ağits* is very similar, as well. *Ağits* are formulated in more a story form than a poem as far as the way they express events is concerned. They all form a sort of collective judgment and message contentwise. In addition to that, they explain the events and refer to specific people, or places, and give details, too.

All in all, it is an expected outcome of their cultural and societal structure that Dersimlis mostly rely on oral works and express their experiences in musical forms, like *ağits*, *deyişs* or *türküs*. To that end, one can easily say that *ağits* give voice to sorrowful issues which still have a central place in their lives. They are one of the tools for Dersimlis to preserve their collective memory. By these means, they made it permanent in the

collective memory, as the performance of *ağits* and other oral works made it possible for them to produce and re-produce the experience, and thus remember an especially violent and traumatic past. This is evident in their societal structure, since “memories of violence and victimization often survive in unofficial or covert traditions, especially within local communities and families. Such traditions tend to be publicly invisible because they represent a form of historical knowledge produced and disseminated outside the historical guild” (Novak & Rodseth, 2006, p.4). In this sense, this can be regarded as a common dominator of the Alevi communities in other parts of the country as it provides one with the opportunity to look at traumatized culture and history of the community simultaneously. That is to say, from a sociocultural perspective, this is by no means a unique characteristic of Dersimlis. In a nutshell, the reason why *ağits* were so much used by Dersimlis stems from the fact that there was one pivotal theme that united them, sorrow and the need to express it.

The idea that assumes that all those characteristics came together accidentally overlooks the importance of collective memory and its tools. *Ağits* proved that silencing violence may not be completely achieved by hegemonic means. Even if there was an invisibility of the *ağits* in public sphere, they were kept alive within the cultural codes of the community. For instance, the assumption that violence witnessed in 1938 was repressed from the public memory of the people at that time seems to be invalid, when the sorrowful and painful messages in *ağits* created back then are examined. We can get hints of conflict of memory to remember or to forget in them. As *ağits* in general are sung about painful events, the ones describing these particular events of 1937-38 inevitably refer to traumatic events and explain them in a story form. Being tools of public mourning, the *ağits* are largely molded by social customs and are embedded in the culture in Dersim region. On the surface they may seem like just elements of folk literature; however, at the very root of the *ağits* have existed a large number of signs and references to past experiences of this community.

Since *ağits* bear relevance to the painful events and traumatic feelings experienced by Dersimlis at that time, looking at laments with such a fresh angle may contribute to relevant studies to a great extent, in order to take the debate a step further. The question of how Dersimlis could maintain their unique religious-cultural features, in spite of the

hegemonic pressure from the authorities lies in its connection to cultural trauma and collective memory. Novak & Rodseth (2006) believe that “to be cultural, a trauma must be vividly represented and communicated to a wide audience, including many who were not directly affected by the traumatic event” (p.10). In this sense, these memory tools can be deemed as reflections of everlasting public mourning, and marks of trauma, after loss or a painful event.

Although the issue of Dersim events has been a hotly debated issue recently, it was one of the taboo events of Turkish history for a long time. The best way to go beyond official hegemonic discourse seems to be exploring alternative sources, which means examining the public agenda of the events. Collectively remembering, for instance, can be one of the strategies to cope with such acts of masking like the Dersim events. In this sense, the means of remembering such as *ağits* can be regarded as memory tools to help Dersimlis express the experiences that cannot be spoken easily. In a similar vein, *ağits* seem to tell us about how they or other oral works are incorporated into culture of the community. If one can clearly observe the fact that the oral sources of culture in this region such as *türküs* and *deyişs* act like testimonials of the past events and emotions, it may become inevitable to regard *ağits* as reflections of painful or taboo-like events in the Dersim region. These experiences are brought into public memory, through these oral works and their collective performance as well as continuous transmission of them.

This kind of reading of *ağits* assumes that oral tradition in this region represents a different dimension of the events, and of their perception within the community. That is to say, *ağits* go beyond individual or group mourning and reach a collective level, where unspeakable experiences turn into vivid images in the minds of the community members. that is fairly likely when one considers that “every recollection, however personal it might be, even that of events of which we alone were the witnesses, even that of thoughts and sentiments that remain unexpressed, exist in relationship with a whole ensemble of notions which may others possess; with persons, places, dates, words, forms of language, that is to say, with the whole material and moral life of the societies of which we are part of or of which we have been part” (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008, p.36). *Ağits* do more than simply explaining the emotions and experiences of the people in this

community. They depict the way of understanding the past and present, the cultural codes of the community and their reflection of experience.

According to Edkins (2003), survivors of events that we now label as traumatic have something to tell us about how we organize ourselves with respect to power and political community (p.51). They signify the hidden messages of performers, and their environment, conveyed with regards to a specific sad experience. When these types of memory tools are examined, one can see that in the case of suppression, or violence, coming from a holder of power, survivors take up a brave role. That is to say, the political community may be unable to manipulate individual's memories to a large extent. Although we assume that these works are not totally factual, they can include some degree of fictional elements. The question is the function they serve. Why did Dersimlis need *ağits* as a part of their cultural repertoire? As a result, the best way to approach these works is to bear in mind that the basic aim here is not to judge them for stylistic or aesthetic features, but to use them as a source of reference to illuminate the way collective events are coded in the public memory of Dersimlis. I read *ağits* as guiding tools of Dersimlis' memory, because of the fact that "production of memory is a performative action, and inevitably practical" (Edkins, 2003, p.55). My analysis is focused on their struggle over meanings, signs and the reasons for telling their stories in a particular way. My main concern is closely related to the purpose of this particular story telling via *ağits*. The major assumption in this study is that *ağits* are told to a specific group and aim at a particular outcome as one of the main cultural tools of the people in this community.

6. A CRY FOR REMEMBERING 1937-38

6.1 Cultural Symbols in the Laments

Most of the *ağits* that are going to be analyzed in this chapter are taken from Mesut Özcan's books *Öyküleriyle Dersim Ağıtları I* and *Öyküleriyle Dersim Ağıtları II*. These two books include *ağit* texts that are collected during fieldwork and they include explanatory notes about the cultural specific elements and historical moments. Almost all of *ağits* referring to Dersim events are in Zazaki, a West Iranian language largely spoken in Dersim together with Kurmanci- the northern dialect of Kurdish.

Since there are a large number of *ağits* referring to the events, only some of the most prominent examples will be examined within the scope of this thesis. The *ağits* in this study are categorized according to cultural symbols, references to violence and representation of trauma with regards to remembering Dersim experience. That said these categories are not very distinct and they overlap at some points and include elements pertaining to other categories; however, in each group of Dersim *ağits* one of these elements seems to be more evident. What is more, examining *ağits* by dividing them into categories allows one to interpret data in a more structured way, thus emphasizing a different aspect of the data in each part.

The *ağits* listed in this part give hints of the cultural elements of Dersim community. Needless to say, to assure that the message conveyed in them is entirely understood "it is imperative to know the referrals given in the *ağits*, besides this, to grasp the deep meaning, one should become knowledgeable about the referents with regards to cultural symbols used in the laments" (Özdemir 1994, p.29). This analysis is obviously valid for Dersim *ağits* in that one can trace many cultural elements in *ağits*, which is a clear indicator of how they are embedded to the social setting in which they are created. The underlying sentiment of the *ağits* referring to Dersim events is grieving; therefore these painful events are re-experienced in the laments to a great extent. To ensure a better

understanding of the laments especially some characteristics such as references to people, places, audience and theme are of importance since circulation of these *ağits* would make it possible for them to give voice to the painful experiences shared by Dersimlis.

The theme, audience and other culture specific references will be mentioned in so as to examine the relationship between the performances of the *ağits* and construction of memory. That is to say, the main concern in this analysis is to reveal that the social context is highly effective with regards to the role and function of these *ağits*. We can understand cultural and social inclinations of these works and also have the opportunity to illuminate this historical period thanks to these *ağits*. The primary focus will be only on the lyrics not the musical patterns or instrumentation. However, the way the performance is delivered or the ways these *ağits* are made common cultural tools are worth underlining. That is because, the social context and traditional creation and performance of these *ağits* contributes highly to expression of interrelationship between the words and memories.

Below is the first example of *ağits* including cultural symbols to express the Dersim experience:

De mi mi va germê ammonê sevtimali zor keno	Oh the summer's heat is increasing
Ax de bira germ o , kemiz o	Oh brother summer's heat burns
Naso dosto sima ve hex kenê	For God's sake friends
Bêrê Pirdê Suri ser o	Come near the Kırmızı Bridge ⁷
Duman o, ne de miz o	Black smoke is everywhere
Qomo birayêne tarixi rê ke pers kenê	Oh brothers if you ask the date
Mi va:	I say:
“Taix otuz sekiz o”	“The year is 1938”
Hadisê birawonê mi weqaye Kerbela wo	My brothers's case is Kerbala's
Kes intiqamê birawonê nêcêno	There is no one to take revenge
Belkiya heqa nine rê	Perhaps God will send
Meyidi Saidi Zamani raurzno	Mahdi of the time witness
Naver bovver ra têde dewi vêsne	They burnt the all the villages
Weteix ip o , way qomo isiz o	Here is the black smoke everywhere .

⁷ It is the name of a bridge between Pülümür and Tunceli also it is the name of the village in the same place (Munzur, 2009 p.529).

This anonymous *ağıt* (Çem, 2009, p.529) represents a historical witness of the traumatic and violent events of 1937-38. There are references to the religious elements and a clear evidence of a cultural way of setting metaphors. By naming specific places in the region such as Kırmızı Bridge, landscapes of their hometown are described so as to express their longing for Dersim before the operation. As well as this, there is a reference to Kerbala event which is another tragic event in Alevi culture. The fact that they refer to Ehlibeyt and other dead ancestors shows that “in the extreme case, the living have “inherited” the suffering of people long dead-their distant ancestors, real or imagined-and seek retribution for acts committed by their enemies' own, long-dead forebears” (Novak, 2006, p.3) This reveals the continuity in terms of cultural symbols. They express their sorrow with pre-established traumatic experiences. To add, a mehdi (Messiah) is hoped to be sent by God to save them. This expression is also highly religious and hence cultural in a sense. They try to express that they are hopeless and only God can save them by sending the Mahdi.

Lament for Sey Qaji and Demenan is another *ağıt* including cultural symbols of Dersimlis to express their sad experience: It shows that performance of *ağıt* is like a prayer to them and is integral to their religious rituals:

*Sey Qaji Aşıra demeno Sero Vata*⁸

Koe Surr'o

Onder ver hegayi

Cenc u cayile Demenu keryd top

Makino feka fetelnayi

Tawura Momn Bey ostoyn ardi

Jele sero fişti kayi

(.....)

*Lament for Sey Qaji*⁹ and *Demenan*¹⁰

This is Koe Sur Mountain¹¹

With a huge field in front

All the kids and youngsters were collected

Shooting them all with heavy guns

Momn Bey's battalion brought their horses

They were scattered all over Jel mountain¹²

God did not accept Qemere Hemed Agha¹³'s prayer and worship

(.....)

As there was a rural culture in the Dersim region, a lot of landscape elements are included in this *ağıt*, too. One can see that landscape is very deeply rooted in their culture. To that end the geography of Dersim is a way of expression in *ağıts*. They want to convey the message better by naming familiar places and people that are very well-known to the community. A sacred place such as Jel Mountain, which is closely linked to their religious belief, is cited in this example to underscore how real and dramatic the experience was. Again there is a reference to God in this *ağıt*, as well. They long for security and justice and believe that only God can help them in this situation.

“Lament for Silke” can be considered to be a good example of a unity of religious and paganistic elements in the Dersim region: As mnemonic sites and practices these reveal the context in which the events took place.

⁸ Performer: Mehmet Coşkun, Compiled by :Mehmet Yıldırım

⁹ He is a well-known poet in Dersim He is famous for referring to the social and historical issues in his poems. (Akar, 1998, p.61)

¹⁰ Demenan is the name of a leading tribe in Dersim. They are said to resist military operations for seven years (Özcan, 2002, p.194)

¹¹ Que Sur is a mountain in Dersim (ibid.,p.194)

¹² A holy mountain in Dersim. Jel is Düzgün Baba's (a holy figure in Dersim) sister's name and the mountain is believed to be sacred. (ibid.,p.47)

¹³ Qemere Hemed Agha is the leader of Haydaran tribe. (ibid.,p.47)

Şilke¹⁴

Şilke pırsın dewe aşan,
Bışewıtı mala axan u paşan
Ferman derxistine
Fermana me qızılbaşan.
Şılke pırsın qewax u biye
Huseyn Efendi şehit buye
Tek lawiki wiy hewbiye
Ew ji berjer sirgun biye
Havine tav u tine
Ye ki birine Mezgire
Hale wan pır ji kotine,
Kulli hale meytene
Hela warin diyare Mezgire
Diyare Mezgire,
Diyare Mezgire şı u şivane
Dizgun Bawa runıştıye,
Başle kiriye bi Quaraney

Lament for Silke

Şilke¹⁵ is a village by the mill
May god curse these agas and pashas
They enacted a law
The law is against all Kızılbaş people
Silk is surrounded by poplar and willow
Huseyin effendi is martyred
He had only one son
They exiled him to the west
Summer haze is all around
The ones on Mazgirt road
Suffer from a bad fate
It is just like a funeral
Just come to Mazgirt
Mazgirt is so sorrowful with laments
Duzgun Baba is over there
He is beginning to read Koran

As we can see, like the other laments it starts with a description of the landscape. This is because; nature is regarded as holy in the Dersim culture. Their culture contains several paganistic elements such as respect for nature and holy places. One of the most prominent holy places in Dersim region is Düzgün Baba Mountain. “Düzgün Baba” is a holy figure in the Dersim culture. He is a mythological character in the Dersim belief system. Therefore, holy mountain Düzgün Baba is also sacred and it is believed to witness this agony of the people. Besides, this new order is believed to be against all Kızılbaş people. They have to live the destiny of Kızılbaş people, which is being suppressed and massacred. They mention the sense of past traumas and fear that the same will happen to the people of Dersim. Here a critical historic perspective is presented. What is more, the notion of martyrdom is another religious concept used in the laments. It indicates that the people who will die in these attacks are considered to be

¹⁴ Performer: Veli Yılmaz, Arranger: Seyfi Muxundi

¹⁵ Silke is a village in Mazgirt, Dersim. Its Turkish name is Akkavak (Özcan, 2008, p.56).

martyrs, which is another example of their religious understanding reflected upon their way of mourning. As their belief is a central element of their perspective of mourning, it is intertwined in laments.

There are further references to cultural elements in other examples:

*Hewa Sey Wuşen*¹⁶

Sey Wuşen vano:

“Ağlere koe Dersim dayve are

Ma berdime kerdime tum vılatı

Henke amey ma serde

Ma dayme are, berdime kerdime tum vılatı

Ifada ho zalimu ma seo vatıl

Vano: “Sey Rıza`yre vase

Roj kadiye

Mende deqa u satı”

De biye biye Welat bege mı biye Bey

Hefe mı yeno Bege mı Sey Wuşen`i

Haqe dina zonenı

Berde vere daragaciye

Sey Wişen wano: “Sey Rıza

Toro merdena ho ver mekuye

Ewo roza Des u Dı Imamuna

Yeki je ma

Kafuro dest seyid biye

*Lament for Seyyid Hüseyin*¹⁷

Sayyid Huseyin says

“They gathered all the aghas in Dersim

All the state officials and soldiers

Attacked us so hard that

No one was left behind

The verdict was given”

Then he says :“ Tell Sayyid Rıza

Days have gone by and hours fly by

Minutes are left behind”

Oh come my come back to homeland

I`m sad because Sayyid Huseyin is gone

Only God knows what happened in Dersim

The Beys are waiting to be put to death

Sayyid Huseyin says “Sayyid Rıza

Do not be sad that you will die

Today is the day of 12 imams

Like us they were also martyred

Because of unbelievers”

Seyyid Rıza is a religious and tribal leader in Dersim. He was also a leading figure in Dersim events. In the lament the events are explained in a story-telling style. It sounds like the narrator of the story tries to explain Sayyid Hüseyin`s sadness. As we see this is a minimalist text and it is styled like a story. Again in this ağıt here is a reference to the Kerbela events. The narrator reports Sayyid Hüseyin`s fear that they will become martyrs like in Kerbela. Just as Kerbala, 12 Imams are also very crucial to Alevi belief.

¹⁶ Performer: Silemano Qız, Compiled by : Mesut Özcan

¹⁷ Sayyid is an honorific title; it denotes males accepted as descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad through his grandsons. Sayyid Hüseyin is the leader of Şıxan clan (Özcan, op cit p.33).

For that reason, Dersim Alevis fast in the month of Muharram for 12 days in memory of Hussein's death at Karbala and the sufferings of the 12 Imams. This fast is called *yas*, which means “mourning” and the fast days end on the day of Ashura. On Ashura day only certain symbolic foods are eaten and nefes are recited. This is a situation that makes the community remember past tragedy and symbolizes all discrimination and persecution suffered by Alevis.

*Suvara Kirmanciye*¹⁸

Zerre aşiro ra uster a dismeniye
Biveso çera na dina bebextiye
Hefe non sola ciraniye
Ma ser rizay ustuna Asmene Khal
Ondere stara Herde Dewreşi
Hefe hefe roza Kirmanciye
Vile made den verday
Deste domane çewresiye
Vora sure vorena, vore kou ser
Verge xızani pine çigire ra u ser
Xo be xo rızine des u düyaro
Ondere paga khano ser
Ma ser rızınay ustuna Asmene Khali
Ondere stara Herde Dewreşi

*Lament for Kirmanciye*¹⁹

Hostility rose among clans
Let the cogwheel of this sad world burn
Alas! Utterances, fraternity, the right to salt and bread
Mainmast of the eternal sky
Ancient star of Dervish land
They demolished it upon us
Cry, cry, cry for Kirmanciye!
She became the mother who
Outlived her children , on their shoulders
She's the ancient star of Dervish land
Where every village moulders
Red snow falling down
On the older snow of the mountains
Predators waiting by the pathways
Embankments, and by walls coming down
Over the older ruins

¹⁸ Lyrics :Emirali Yağan English lyrics: Erik Hillestad

¹⁹ Ferhat Tunç “Dersim - Kirmanciye Laments” 2012.

Natural places are sacred as far as Dersim culture is concerned. This is why; they call Dersim as “Dervish Land”, which means a sacred land. There are a lot of metaphors constituted by elements of nature such as mountains, sky, star, land etc. These are integral parts of their rural life and help them express themselves in this particular way. All of these are considered holy places in line with their belief system. There was a tight social-religious network in Dersim due to being a closed community. To that end, in this *ağıt* “Kırmancıye” is presented as a mother, which signifies a sense of collectivity. “Kırmancıye” is the name given to the language spoken in Dersim by the people of Dersim. They call themselves “Kırmanc” in the region. In this *ağıt* the events are explicitly presented as violent and bloody. They make use of “red snow” metaphor to express the extent to which bloodshed was witnessed.

There is a continuous effort to reveal the sadness within the cultural forms familiar to the community. The above example clearly shows how the story of a particular case is transmitted by applying a large number of pre-existing cultural-religious forms.

There are some other examples which contain certain culture-specific elements of Dersim region. These *ağıts* basically require an understanding of ongoing historical process as they resist the course of the events. Some *ağıts* are used as medium of communication between not only victim’s family and neighbors but there is a sort of announcement to a wider world around them.

Seter'O (Lawuka Imam Hesen)²⁰

Moa bervenana dana coke zonüne horo
(Vana) “Dumané des u dı kowu mı bijero
Ewro tawurune hukmayt emır do yené
Imam Hesen’é mı kelepçe kerdo vero”
“Daye piyé mıra vaze altununé suru bimoro
Zalimu desta cigere to weşeni bijero”
“Bıko dewre Kırmanciye niyo piye to cile şa pacero
Werte des u dı hezvetune Kuresu ro şero,
Hefe Imam Hesen’e ho bijero wuyi”
“Dae ordi qumandaniye zalim bıvine
Kıle halay qumandaniye zalim bıvine
Ax leme Alaman’e mıra mı desto
Emır cıdo helayiya ho mı dıma rat kero
Pusula bijero pulera roniso
Cengune Imam Hesen’e tode helme va ho şer kero

Seter'O²¹ (The Song for Imam Hasan)

Mom is crying beating her knees
She says “May the twelve mountains kill me
Today the state soldiers came
Imam Hasan²² is arrested here he goes with soldiers”
Tell mum and dad to count the gold and jewelry and
Rescue my beloved from the cruel people safe and sound
“Oh my son, this is not the time of Kırmanciye
Dad cannot wear black and mourn
And walk around twelve Kureysan kin²³
He cannot take the revenge of Imam Hasan”
“Mummy, look at the Brutes’ army commander
See the Brutes’ regiment commander!
Oh dear, I got the German pistol in my hand
He ordered his soldiers and made them follow me
He got the binoculars and watched me at the top of the hill
“Let him see the battle with Imam Hasan”

The number 12 is used several times in above *ağıt*. The extent of the experience is described with a common referent of the group, which is again a reference to 12 Imams. Yet by saying “time of Kırmanciye”, the events of Kerbela are recited. That is because wearing black and mourning and suffering are repeated in between lines. There is a description of a battle, which can also be linked to Kerbela battle where Imam Hüseyin was martyred. The attack of the soliders is described as a “battle”. A well-known battle in Alevi belief is Battle of Kerbela. The battle took place in 680 in Kerbela between Sayyid Hüseyin and Yazid 1. In the battle Sayyid Hüseyin and his supporters were killed. In this *ağıt* this battle is recounted and used as a religious metaphor.

²⁰ Performer: Memed Çapan, Compiled by :Mesut Özcan

²¹ It is name of a neighborhood in Pülümür, Dersim (Özcan, 2002, p.43).

²² In Dersim kids are named after Ali and 12 Imams, therefore Imam Hasan is the name given to a person living in Seter neighborhood.

²³ Kureysan is one of the biggest tribes in Dersim (ibid, p.43).

*Hewa Mursa*²⁴

(...)

De wayi wayi wayi

Bıra lemin male wayi

Ma hazıru ra dūri

Dawa xo da be Koyé Sultan Babayi

Serra ke ma kerdime Mazgerdi

Qesasé tédine hata Tırki dayi

Lament for Mursa

(...)

Alas!

Oh my poor brother

Except for our people

May Sultan Baba Mountain curse them

May the curse continue from the day Turks Collected

us in Mazgirt

To the day revenge is taken

In this anonymous *ağit* another holy place “Sultan Baba” is referred. And it is believed that Sultan Baba Mountain curses the enemy. There is a sense of victimization and instead of calling for physical fight and revenge they try to address the issue within their religious-cultural framework which enables them to overcome the sorrowful experience.

De wayî way î Heqo, yamano

Care terk o, neq o

Ma rê qetil û ferman o.

Oh God what a terrible day

There is no escape from this injustice

It is a verdict of massacre against us

The perception of injustice is maintained further in above anonymous *ağit* (Çem, 2009, p.531). They believe that what they experience is injustice and they have nothing to do about it. The verdict is given by the state and they have to subordinate, which means their massacre. In these lines, the performer is talking to God and complaining about what happened and try to express the degree of pain they will suffer from. There is a sense of helplessness and loneliness and the only friend of people of Dersim is presented as God or other religious symbols.

²⁴“Ağitlarda Dersim 38”, *Dersimnews.com*, 2009, retrieved from: <http://dersimnews.com/dersim38/agitlarda-dersim-38.html> accessed on 22 February 2013.

De wayî wayî, way leminê wayî
way leminê wayî derdo wayî
verê Kertê mazgêrtê vêsayî de lemin derdo
Domonê Dêrsimtop kerdî
Destu payî giredayî lemin keko
Fide Xatune vana, “Laze mi tesan o
Cerenu vero cerenu ser o
Cisne Mewrani koçike wae laze mi nedano.”
(.....)
Eze vana, “ Keçe Fide ti meberbe
Ni cisne Mewrani
Kerbela de ki niya kerdo.”
(.....)

Oh my friends
Oh what a life!
In front of Mazgirt Gedik
They collected Dersim kids
Oh they tied their hands and feet
Fide Hatun says: “My son is thirsty
I beg them
The brutal soldiers would not give a drop of water
(.....)
I tell Fidan not to cry
These are sons of Mervan
They did the same thing in Kerbela
(.....)

In this *ağıt* (Çem, 2009, p. 535) a mother is sad because her son is thirsty and she complains that the cruel men won't give him a drop of water. These lines express a sense of victimhood that is similar to Kerbala again. That is because it is believed that people became martyrs and died of thirst. To depict the cruelty done to them, a well-known cultural pattern (death because of thirst in Kerbela) is used. This becomes even more obvious with the word Mervan, which is a pejorative word in Alevi context. It seems to be used for this purpose. Mervan is a political figure in Islam who is believed to commit a lot of massacre and injustice against Alevis with Yazid. Therefore, he is not favored by Alevis as he is believed to be the symbol of cruelty. The cruelty is presented as a continuity of a long history of Alevi victimhood.

*Ali Barut*²⁵

Duman bigiri xeriba feqira jine
İro pre min şehid biye bi qurşune
Dıyine min indi vay
Ez terim imame Kerbelayı
(.....)
İro pire min şehid biye
Bniya Mercimeg'e
Min dawa pire xa
Da Şahe Merdan
Bi dawa wiy icar ke
Ji me berjer war diwin Xarpit'e
Min ne zani kel bu kel
Berbi du te

*Lament for Ali Barut*²⁶

(.....)
Oh dear his poor wife
Today they will shot him to death
and martyr him
I will be a martyr
For the sake of Kerbala Imams
(.....)
Today my Pir was martyred
In the Mercimek village²⁷
Only God knows my agony
Ali will see my sorrow
They took all the men to Elazığ
We didn't know they would do more

In *Lament for Ali Barut* there is a combination of religious and cultural references. The victim Ali Barut is believed to become martyr and this is a battle against Ali and the Twelve Imams, and their adherents and sympathizers, in this case Dersim Kizilbash. The word “pir” which means “an elderly religious person” is used to explain the death of the man is tragic to the community. That is because religious knowledge is passed down orally by *pirs* who were responsible for the religious and social leadership of the community. Besides this, Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and the only legitimate successor to Muhammad, is seen as a divine judge and witness of their suffering.

In conclusion, there seems to be a message of continuity in the historical perspective presented in the *ağits* via predominantly incorporation of the older cultural elements. Halbwachs (1992) explains the reason for this as follows:

“The thoughts of all persons come together within [collective] frameworks, which assume that each has momentarily ceased to be himself. Each person soon returns into himself, introducing into his memory the ready-made reference points and demarcations brought from without. We connect our remembrances to

²⁵ Performer. Veli Yılmaz Compiled by :Seyfi Muxundi

²⁶ Ali Barut is from Lodek village in Mazgirt, Dersim. He is a member of Baba Mansur tribe. Ali Barut was taken to Elazığ after his village was surrounded by soldiers. He wanted to drink water on his way to Elazığ but was shot at the head by soldiers there. (Özcan, 2008, p.50)

²⁷ Mercimek is a village in Pertek, Dersim.

these reference points, without any sharing of substance or closer relationship occurring between them... Collective remembrances might be laid on individual remembrances, providing a handier and surer grip on them. First, however, individual remembrances must be present, lest memory function without content.” (p.40)

Not only instant memory but also old social memory seems to be unified in these laments. All the components are combined and thus passed down to in an intergenerational fashion. It is an indicative of the power of oral means in shaping and reflecting collective memory.

6.2 References to Violence in the *Ağits*

Another group of *ağits* referring to Dersim events can be classified as the ones referring to violence. The central message in this group of *ağits* is based on the violence imposed by the state. Like the previous examples, through the signs of religious or political characters, a message of continual pain or ruthlessness is conveyed. The way they signify the events explicitly represents a different dimension of the cultural memory in terms of expressing a painful experience. The underlying sentiment of the laments referring to Dersim events is grieving; therefore these painful events are re-experienced in the laments to a great extent. They seem to adopt lamenting as best express their pain and emotions since circulation of these laments would make it possible for them to give voice to the painful experiences shared by Dersimlis. Below is the first example of *ağits* which depict the violent experience:

Biye Biye

Kafirê Mervan yeno

Çadir sanê dormê Heniyê Pili

Kafirê Mervan yeno

Çadir sanê dormê Heniyê Pili

El u qomê Xeça vêsaiyîye top kerdo berdo Hopık

Ağır makine qurmiş kerda mîlet pêro jê

velg u vaşi qırr kerdo

qedeno goyn vejiya riyê asme

It all happened

The cruel Mervan is coming,

They set up the tents around Heniye Pil²⁸

The cruel Mervan is coming,

They set up the tents near Heniye Pil

They all gathered us from Xeçe to Hopık

They set up the heavy armor and killed us

Like leaves and grass

The blood had risen to the sky

²⁸ Heniye Pil is a place that is named after a fountain nearby.

This anonymous *ağıt*, no doubt, points out a tremendous degree of violence and pain. The sense of victimization through physical violence is very evident in the verses. The word “Mervan” is used a couple of times to describe the ruthlessness of the experience. The lines in this *ağıt* are haunted by the scenes of unimaginable horror. It seems that with all the details of the violence one can re-live the experience. The last line “The blood had risen to the sky” is particularly dramatic as it describes the bloody aspect of the violence.

*Phite Me*²⁹

Düri ra düri vengê tıfangu yeno,
 phitê mı nêweso, cızık nêcêno.
 meberve, phitê mı meberve,
 dısmen bervisê to hesneno.
 Dar u kemer dejiya mı ver veseno
 Qulva tariye de qe sodır nebena
 Meberbe, phite mı meberve
 Dısmen bervise to hesneno
 ax lemnê biye, biye de biye,
 phitê minê çewreşi rê -ge biye.
 zalımu pilê ma qır kerdê,
 qızê ma fiştê lona (qulva)tariye.
 vaji vaji, eve hêşiriye vaji,
 na tari de çına çılêka de qaji.
 veng ro phitê mı biriyo,
 oli inera ki meverdo aji

My Baby

Gunfires heard from a distance
 My baby is sick, won't suck
 Don't cry my baby, don't cry
 Let not the enemy hear your voice
 Mountains and rocks are hurt by the fire in my heart
 Morning doesn't come in the darkness of this rift
 Don't cry my baby, don't cry
 Let not the enemy hear your voice
 Ah it happened, happened
 It all happened to my newborn
 Brutes killed the adults
 Drove our children to the darkness of this rift
 I sing I sing about our servitude
 No lanterns in this dark passage
 My baby's voice is gone
 My God make them too have nothing to hold on to

This anonymous lament describes the story of a mother and her little baby trying to survive the operation. The people are hungry and they cannot feed their babies. They had to silence babies as the army soldiers may spot them. Women and children are all hungry.

This is a typical *ağıt* which describes the cruelty of the events. There are recurrent patterns of victimization and suffering. The timespan and referential contexts are generally Dersim events and the struggle of survivors of these events. Having said that they basically convey the message of struggle, we should be aware that *ağıts* convey further and deeper messages than simple depiction of their struggles.

²⁹ Ferhat Tunç “Dersim - Kirmanciye Laments” 2012

In the *ağıt* “*Phite Me*” the message states that people fall victim to helpless situation and the soldiers pay no mercy to them. This shows that the state is held responsible for this suffering and helplessness.

Seter’o Seter’o buko İsmayile mı Seter’o³⁰
 Nate ma kemero dote ma kemero
 İsmayilemi dest berze martini
 Panime hata ke ro madero bawo
 İsmayilemi dest berze martini
 Panime hata ke ro madero bawo
 Ordi amo nate çemi dote çemi
 Dame pero kısıme hefe kami
 Munzur dalxe dano sade goni
 Bıraem serva Dersim sero bawo
 Munzur dalxe dano sade goni
 Bıraem serva Dersim sero bawo

Oh here is Seter, my dear son Ismail
 We are surrounded by rocks everywhere
 Hold the gun Ismail
 Let’s fight to death
 Hold the gun Ismail
 Let’s fight to death
 Army is all around the river
 We are fighting and killing
 Munzur river runs blood red
 It is all for Dersim brother
 Munzur river runs blood red
 It is all for Dersim brother

This *ağıt* represents the struggle of memory to make violent experiences memorable. They are like eye witnesses of the event; therefore, there are also references to the historical background by recounting past traumas and describing the Dersim events as a fight against the enemy or more generally the “other” in this case. The extent of the violence is particularly expressed with the line “Munzur River runs blood red”.

Şahan Ağa
 Xozati persena cadé tomofili
 Heq adır be Avdila Pasay verdo
 Koto qeracé mordemo pili
 Şahan vano, qedré cané xo bizane
 Ma sero cerené qanuné kafiri
 (...)
 Xozati persena Qereğlan ra nato
 Qanuné Mistefa Kemali persena
 Çı çiyó de bervato.
 Pane pane Sahané mı pane.
 Eskeré Misté Kori amo ma qırkeno
 Mecal cı mede pane

*Lament for Şahan Ağa*³¹
 Hozat is near the mainroad
 May God curse Abdullah Pasa
 He attacked our leaders
 Şahan says take care of yourselves
 The fatihless law is over us
 (...)
 Hozat is close to Qereğlan³²
 As for the law of Mustafa Kemal
 What a terrible thing!
 Shoot Şahan shoot!
 Army of Mustafa Kemal is here to massacre us
 Do not let him attack you

³⁰ Performer: Mehmed Çapan, Compiled by: Mesut Özcan

³¹ He is son of Yusuf Agha, who is the leader of Bahtiyar tribe. He was killed in Dersim operation on 26 August 1937.

³² It is a neighborhood in Ovacık, Dersim (Özcan, 2002, p.80).

In these *ağits* generally time was constructed in a particular way and history was therefore structured in parallel with individuals' memories. The same idea is true for this specific *ağıt*. There are names of important people like Abdullah Pasa and Mustafa Kemal. These people are presented as the causes of their agony. Their laws and orders are demonstrated as tools of violence. There is anger towards the state and its officials. The violence is described as a massacre which is carried out by Mustafa Kemal and his soldiers. The community separates themselves from the state and what they experience is presented as a fight against the terrible new order.

*Dere Laçı*³³

Deré Laçı bivésó Yivisé mı gavano
Bıra pérode, na qewğa aşire niya
Merevé Kırmanc u zalmane Tırkano

*Lament for Laç Deresi*³⁴

Laç Brook and Yivisim valley
Fight brothers this is not an intertribal fight
It is a fight between Kırmancs and brutal Turks

Laç Deresi represents a traumatic place in *ağits* as it was a scene of great violence during the events. Although a fight is described in above lines, Dersim *ağits*, as sites of memory, both recall a painful event and sign of a fight against “the enemy”. This *ağıt* appears to state that it is a product of a victimization caused by Turks. The transmission of the trauma here can be seen to be a means of self-expression for survivors and this oral culture as a whole seemingly serves to reader reconnect with this past experience through these lines. The line “It is a fight between Kırmancs and brutal Turks” shows that meaning-making which separates “them” from “the brutal others” is a unique tool in the repertoire of victimization of Dersimlis.

³³ Performer: Silemano Qız Compiled by Mesut Özcan

³⁴ Laç Deresi is considered as the center of resistance because Demenan tribe managed to stay there for seven years without surrendering to the state officials. (ibid, p.103)

*Hesen Efendi Ağidi*³⁵
 Onder yena Mamekiye, raa makina tomofili
 Heq dina de bivésno, Zagoné Mistefa Kamili
 Ma saré xo darde we nédarde we,
 Koto zidé mordemo pili
 (...)

 Vano “Hesen Efendi hora yan de
 Na zalım mara az néverdano
 Vano “yema qırkerdené niya
 Bıra heto zu ra fermano

*Lament for Hesen Efendi*³⁶
 Here is Dersim road
 May God curse Mustafa Kemal’s rule
 Since the day first
 He has been against our leaders
 (...)

 I said Hasan Efendi watch out
 This cruel person will commit a genocide³⁷
 This is not a massacre
 It is a verdict of genocide

In this *ağit* there is a clear reference to the historical circumstances and particular political figures, too. This *ağitis* also is mournful and by having specificity of place and events it reveals that death is the only possibility that the people of Dersim will face. This is also a critical site of memory in that it calls on listener to keep memories alive by cursing the agent and cause of their suffering.

*Aliyé Soxariye*³⁸
 Bıra tı çınay re kuna merdena mı ver
 Na teyna qırkerdena çe ma niya
 Qırkerdena Kırmanciya
 Emir amo Anqara de testiq, imza biyo

*Lament for Aliyé Soxariye*³⁹
 (...)

 Why are you sad for my death?
 This is not a family’s death
 This is the massacre of Kırmanc land
 The official order comes from Ankara

In this *ağit* also there is a historical subtext which describes the *ağits* as a testimony of the violence experienced at that time. The unhappiness of the time is very evident and it acts like a subtle weapon of the victims and thus gives a message of weakness to the listener. This may be because of the fact that “the history of a trauma, in its belatedness,

³⁵ Performer: Hesene Sıxali Compiled by: Mesut Özcan

³⁶ He is the leader of Kunadlar clan, which is a part of Kureyşan tribe. He was told to go exile to Balişer but was killed with some other men on his way to Balişer.

³⁷ The word “genocide” is used as the most appropriate counterpart of “qırkerdené” which is the exact translation of the concept in Zazaki. It should be noted that although the word “genocide” was coined in 1943, by Raphael Lemkin in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, the exact date of creation of these laments is not known and hence using genocide in the translation does not seem to be anachronistic in this respect.

³⁸ Performer: Silemano Qız, Compiled by Mesut Özcan

³⁹ “Ağitlarda Dersim 38”, *Dersimnews.com*, 2009, retrieved from <http://dersimnews.com/dersim38/agitlarda-dersim-38.html> accessed on 22 February 2013.

can only take place through the listening of another” (Caruth., 1995, p.11). Maybe not being aware of this aspect of oral culture and memory Dersimlis successfully invoked and generated symbols of violence in their *ağits*.

Çuxure

Wayi wayi wayi Süli Ağayé mı wayi
De wayi wayi Hesen Ağayé mı wayi
Heqo taala bivésno çe zalım Celal Pasayi
(...)
Celal Bayari emir do
Ağır makina qurmıs kerde
Zalımı ver ra nay be mara
Qoluncuné ma de sibiyané makinu perrayi

Cukur Village ⁴⁰

Oh, poor Suleyman Aga
Oh dear Hasan Aga
May God curse Celal Pasa
(...)
Celal Bayar gave the order
The troops fired the heavy weapons
They shot us down
The bullets went through our bodies

This *ağit* also provides the reader with a grounded record of the events by presenting particular place and people. This is an example of specific violent events that are revealed through oral narrations. Memory, shared by a collective and cultural group, may be narrated and transmitted individually but listeners can understand what is experienced through this indirect communication.

Ya de dîna dîna, bira ver ra hêgayî,
Bira Mistî fermanê Dêsimî veto,
Do ra teresê Celal Bayarî,
Bira kardî da wertê Dêsimî ro,
Zalim onceno jê mal û gayî,
Axlerê koyê Dêsimî qir kerdî qedenayî,
Feqîrê ke verê dêsû de mendî,
Kerdî makîna hokmatî, vor de rusnayî

Alas! Below are the fields,
Mustafa Kemal enacted a decree
He gave the decree to Celal Bayar
He is also sharpening his knife for Dersim
He is cutting heads like animals
They slaughtered all the beys in Dersim
Those people who survived were put in cars
And they were sent exile by the state

This anonymous *ağit* (Çem, 2009, p.532) is a clear example of a cultural work that recounts the violence experienced in Dersim in that it describes the suffering and mourning after the deaths. All the violent details included into the *ağit* function as a testimony of trauma of time. That is to say, they narrate the experience to the audience

⁴⁰ Çukur is a village in Karakoç, Dersim. The tribal leaders with their families, women and kids of the whole village were killed in Mazgirt in 1938 (Özcan,2002,p.93).

and remain as the archived sites of memory. The lines that describe the severity of the pain hold meaning linking the words they bear and emotions they embody. Consequently they express the memories vividly.

As a conclusion, the *ağits* that include the references to violence bear the messages of both forgetting and remembering. They function to convey a redemptive and historical message to listeners through a complex web of cultural historical and political reference. What we can observe is both victimization and an oppositional memory that act as a critique of the violence imposed to Dersimlis between 1937 and 1938. They both lament and protest the events that resulted in a lot of painful events for the community. The subtext of the *ağits* that explicitly present violence in between lines and act as a call not to forget the sorrows they experienced.

6.3 References to Trauma in the Ağits

As we have discussed in previous chapters music and its forms are main potential transferring tools of cultural expression for Alevis in general. Musical forms ongoingly helped them convey their messages and transfer them to the others. *Ağits* in the same way connected common sentiments and hence bridged between individual and collective memories. These sorts of musical performances as acts of transfer obviously make collective remembering possible. One should bare in mind that once performed, these *ağits* are listened to and remembered and recorded in public memory which explains how they remained in cultural memory without being written down.

Ağits helped the community to form collective remembering and frame this way of remembering together with social and historical context. They are fairly significant in that they demonstrate how cultural memory is formed and preserved in this community as well as how unspeakable trauma is clearly revealed. That is why a critical evaluation of these *ağits* is crucial not to neglect the power of cultural tools in a community in terms of reflecting trauma, too. Below is the first example of vivid memory of the traumatic events.

This *ağit*, “Song for Hasan Efendi”, clearly reveals the traumatic reflection of the events on people. They describe the situation with dead bodies, cruelty and massacre. There is a depiction of violence done to a specific person, Hasan Effendi. Even if the narrator is not the agent of the violence in this *ağit*, the traumatic tone is very obvious. That may be

*Lawuka Hesên Efendi*⁴¹

(...)
Hesên Efendi’ye mi vano:
“Zalimo ma ewro dayme are
Kerdime zare boni
Keso xam made çino, wayi
Ma tede xal u werezayi
Ded u birazayi
Hesên Efendi vano
“dae ala ree tevera niyade
No çî mîzo, no çî dumano?
Ax no çî mîzo, no çî dumano?
Moe vana:” Hesên Efendi’ye mi
Ala be so diyare Hemam’e vesayi
Çem corde ano cendeg u lesu
Buko zere mî terseno
Na rae tersa mî ye ma kok u fermano
Ax ye mae ma na rae kok u fermano”
Hesên effendi vano:
“Dae ala ree so lewe Mudîr’i
Mudîr kewrae mawo, mara se vano”
Mae vana: Hesên Efendi Merde Tîrk’o
Merde Tîrk non u sole nezenono
Non u sola merde Tik zonû sero”
(...)
Moe vana: “Ey zalim
Sungi Hesên Efendi’ye mî mesane
Cano nazîko, daymîs nebena”
Damae Xeycan a çenae, bervena
Vana: “Ey kafîr vere piye mî
Juya vîrene mî sane”

Song for Hasan Efendi

(...)
Hasan effendi says :
The brutes collected us today
Gathered in a room
Nobody here is a stranger
We are all uncles and cousins
Hasan effendi says:
“Mum come out and see
What a chaos is this?
Oh, what a chaos?
His mom says: “My dear Hasan
Just get to the village of Hamam
Munzur River brings the dead bodies
Son, I’m afraid
This time we will all be completely massacred
Oh, this time it is a complete massacre”
Hasan effendi says :
“Mum go and talk to the manager
He’s our friend and let’s see what he says
His mum says “Hasan, he is Turkish
He doesn’t mercy us but pretends to do so
(...)
His mum says:” Hey brute man!
Do not stab Hasan effendi with your bayonet
He is so fragile cannot survive it!”
His daughter Ayse is crying
She says: “Oh cruel man
Before my dad kill me first “

⁴¹ Performer: Hesene Sîxali, Compiled by: Mesut Özcan

because “witnessing violence done to others and surviving can seem to be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself” (Edkins, 2003, p.4).

The scene described in this *ağıt* acts like mirror of the past to this community. Certain expressions such as concern about Turkish friend betraying them or description of chaos embody the symbols they bear in a fairly explicit way. In doing so, this *ağıt* is not filled with metaphors or other stylistic tools rather it is formed in a plain way with a simple language and hold a clear meaning. These features are likely to add the effort spared so as to make this trauma remembered by the community members. There are also a lot of details explaining the event and these make the listener relive the events and imagine the haunted scenes of violence and trauma.

In the following *ağıt* there is a clear reference to genocide on the part of the survivors:

*Merxo'y Verde*⁴²

(...)
Merxo'y verde mı va dı gavano
La lawo mı va Merxo'y verde mo va dı gavano
Pas vano: “Mı dilekça berda da mufetişi
Cave mı nedano wuyi”
Ax de wayi wayi lemine wayi
Na zalimo ewro ma qırr kerdime fiştimere vera tij
u wayi
(...)
Merxo'y verde mı va qerto dari
La lawo Merxo'y verde mı va qerto dari
Gule vana: “Bıberve ma bıbervime
Nazalim nafae cisne ma erzene dare wuyi”
Ax de wayi wayi lemine wayi
Na zalimo ewro ma qırr kerdime fiştimere vera tij
u wayi

*In front of Merho*⁴³

(...)
There are rocks in front of Merho Village
Oh here are rocks in front of Merho
Pasa⁴⁴ says: “I signed a petition to the inspector
The cruel man won't reply”
Oh my dear!
These cruel people killed us today
Let our bodies dry under the sun
(...)
There are old trees in front of Merho
Oh here are old trees in front of Merho
Gule⁴⁵ says: “Let's cry now
These cruel people will commit genocide
Oh dear, Alas!
These cruel people killed us today
Let our bodies dry under the sun

In this lament the narrator expresses the fear of genocide and tries to depict the traumatic experience to make remembering possible. The description of the events reveals an unimaginable horror. The soldiers are called “cruel” recurrently. They are fairly significant in that they demonstrate how cultural memory is formed and preserved in this community as well as how unspeakable trauma is clearly revealed. They

⁴² Performer: Anonymous Compiled by: Mesut Özcan

⁴³ It is a village near Çiçekli, Dersim. The Turkish name is Doluküp village.

⁴⁴ Paşa is one of the leaders of Suran tribe. He was killed in 1937. (Özcan 2002,p.58)

⁴⁵ Gule is Paşa's sister. (ibid)

repeatedly use the word “cruel” in their mother tongue. This perception of cruelty is, needless to say, accompanied by a tremendous fear, Still it is expressed in the *ağıt* very clearly. That is why a critical evaluation of these laments is crucial not to neglect the power of cultural tools in a community.

Ah vay vay vay

Aşiréne çevesayene nafa bére,
Tifong bierze zalimé kafire Qaji Pasayi
No zalım bive sebevé meyité sıma
Dardi we hirus u dı padisayi
Ora tepiya sire ard Qozo u Qoçkırıyo
Lemne lemne Qozon u Seyd Rızayi...
Aşirene çevesayene bi sebevé ma yé emseri
Téde Koyé Désim ra qırkerdi
Lemne lemne ağa u bavayi
(...)
Zalimé Uşené Avdilé Pasayi
Ne taye kerdi peskes
Mustafa kemale Pasay re rusnayı

*Ah vay vay vay*⁴⁶

All the tribes come together
Fire the guns towards Gazi Pasa
He is the cause of your death
He abolished the rule of 33 sultans
Then it was Qozan and Koçgiri’s turn
Alas! Now it’s Qozan and Seyit Rıza’s turn
The tribes caused this agony
We were all killed here in Dersim
Agas, pirs and seyits were all killed
(...)
Brutal Hüsyin Abdullah Pasa
He made our heads a present
Then send them to Mustafa Kemal Pasa

“Gazi Pasa” is another word used for Mustafa Kemal. It is expressed that after the Ottoman regime was replaced with new republic by Gazi Pasa, a lot of leaders together with the local people suffered a lot. Here Gazi Pasa is presented as the biggest center of focus and power in the early republican era. Obviously the unfavorable response to the new regime is not easily expressed in public domain still it is placed in this specific *ağıt*. Another particular reference to the authority is done via Abdullah Pasa, who is the chief state official in charge of administrative part of the operation in Dersim. Again he is defined as brutal person in this particular *ağıt*. Here the collective memory simultaneously bridge individual memory with embodied sentiment. That may be because “what has been forgotten-subjugated knowledges-like the memory of past traumas, returns to haunt the structures of power that instigated the violence in the first place” (Edkins, 2003, p 59). As we can see the traumatic experiences may lead to various reflections on the witnesses. What may be almost impossible to express in public may be directly pointed out in cultural tools of a community.

⁴⁶ “Ağıtlarda Dersim 38”, *Dersimnews.com*, 2009, retrived from: <http://dersimnews.com/dersim38/agitlarda-dersim-38.html> accessed on 22 February 2013.

Following is a way to express deep agony through a reference to “the other”:

Hewa Fındık Ağa⁴⁷
Ya de Tırko Tırko Tırko
Zalimo zındıqo
Ewro berdo esto dare
Bırayé ma Fındıqo

Lament For Fındık Ağa⁴⁸
Oh, Turks Turks
The brutal the faithless Turks
Today he was taken away and executed
He is my brother Fındık Ağa

Various struggles take place during expression of a trauma. In this *ağıt* the performer laments for his/her brother. Fındık Ağa, who is a prominent tribal leader is arrested and executed afterwards. In this *ağıt* it is stated that Turks caused this sorrow. They are held responsible for the death of him. It is clearly seen that by explicitly referring to Turks as the agent of this action, the boundary between them and “the other” is made even more clear-cut. While there is a struggle for expression of the pain, the other party is also described as brutal and faithless. Here there are two sides of the trauma: “us” and “them”. The story is based on a diatomic political message, as well. This is because “the telling of such stories, is always politically charged because social identities are at stake: who “we” are depends on who “they” are, and on the conduct of both sides at a moment of violent conflict” (Novak, 2006, p.3). The suffers of this trauma are oppressed while the others are oppressor as well as the cause of this particular violent conflict. Accordingly the collective memory is fragmented via comparison of memories of past and expression of spontaneous suffering

In the next *ağıt* there is an opposition against the possibility of assimilation and a demonstration of the aggression of the military operations:

⁴⁷ Performer: Silemano Qız, Compiled by: Mesut Özcan

⁴⁸ He is son of Kamer Ağa, who is the leader of Yusufhan tribe. Kamer Ağa surrenders to the army and wants his son to do the same thing. That’s why Fındık Ağa surrenders but gets executed in 1937 (Özcan, 2002, p.160).

Silo qiji

Ax bego bego bego
Ah beyim beyim beyim
Begê minê welati
Çik paniso bivêso
Begê mî qanunê hukmati
Onderê Kirmanciye dariya we
Nişto ro qanunê Cumureti

*Silo qiji*⁴⁹

Oh my dear Bey
Oh, my poor Bey
Alas! Bey of my land
May God set the law of state
On fire and burn it to ground
Kirmanciye is eradicated in this land
Now the republican law rules our land

This *ağit* reveals a great fear of end of a community and a culture. It is stated that “Kirmanciye” which is a word referring both to the language and to the culture in Dersim in general, will be eradicated completely. There is a description of chaos and violence to criticize the military strategy. The state and the new regime are held responsible for the possible end of their community. Opposing to conflict caused by authority is by no means an easy task for the sufferers of a trauma. Accordingly expressing the trauma caused by the state is also difficult to reflect to the outside world. Edkins (2003) believes that this is because “abuse by state, the fatherland, like abuse by father within a family, cannot be spoken in language” (p.5). Although this fear and pain is not expressed in the language, it is revealed in the *ağits* which is one of the main cultural tools and also ways of expression for Dersimlis.

The following *ağit* is another example of mnemonic sites of memory in that it reflects a symbolic way of life and how it is destroyed as a result of the events:

Çuxure

Ax ondera Çuxura lemin sono gavano
Celal Bayar amo, emso marê meymano
Non sola ma nêweno made xayin niadano
Vano; “zerrê mî terseno, mara az nêverdano“
Ax de wayi wayi ulu begê mî wayi
Jubun ra giredayme cinik u ciamerdi
Kerdime raye berdime verê Kertê Mazgerdi
Zalumu ardi verva ma axir makiney
qurmiskerdi
Ver ra naybe mara, koluncu de perrayi
Top qersunê zalumu cigerê ma poti
Vake; ”zalim rêw maranê, domanê ma vîşiyai

Lament For Çukur Village

Stiff hills lie beyond bloody village of Çuxure
Celal Bayar is our guest tonight
Giving us malicious looks, he rejects our salt and bread
I am afraid he will exterminate our breed
Ah mercy, mercy my gentleman!
They tied us, men and women together
Set us off and took us to the Mazgerd Passage
Heavy machine guns were installed right across from
us
The bullets dug through our chests and backs
Cannon balls of the tyrants tore our hearts out
She said, ”you tyrant, kill us soon,
Our children are scared to death.”

⁴⁹ “Ağitlarda Dersim 38”, *Dersimnews.com*, 2009, retrieved from <http://dersimnews.com/dersim38/agitlarda-dersim-38.html> accessed on 22 February 2013.

Cuxure is a village in Dersim. This *ağut* describes how people got afraid of being killed and mentions in a story form that Celal Bayar (the prime Minister of the time) went to village to visit them. They offered him food but he did not accept the food, which is a fictional narration. The reason why such a fiction is created is that hospitality is an important tradition in the region. It is believed that if you offer food to someone and your guest does not accept it, then it means he has hostile intentions. It is said that Celal Bayar gives them malicious looks. All these metaphors and symbols are very intrinsic to the culture in Dersim. In the *ağut* it is stated that the people beg for mercy yet they cannot escape being killed. The events are explained in a story form via symbols pertaining to the community. This can be considered as an indication of the fact that this way of remembering is not natural but socially constructed

All those culture specific ways of expression trauma seem to be socially produced. It also show how some details are remembered vividly and construct the interconnections of remembering and forgetting trauma.

The below *ağut* is different from the others in that it depicts the events in a more metaphoric way, which is not a common feature of the other *ağuts*:

*Govendia Milaketo*⁵⁰

Feleki dısmale sane ra
 Deste cencina ma gure
 Dire gami raver, game peyser
 La lao na sene govendia
 Haylemeo sin şivano
 La lao no sene veyveo
 Kam zano kam kame kamiyo
 Kam zerre kami de mekano
 Serre ena serre ser
 Şiya to bena dreg
 Sona resena kamiya xo
 Vae gunde vireni

*Dance of Jinnis*⁵¹

Govendia Milaketo (dance of Jinnis)
 Old fate came by greeted the boy
 Asked for his hand in an offer to dance
 Take a step, and come forth, then two steps back
 Cry, but keep smiling, be part of this trance
 With smiles and tears with joys and with fears
 Wedding vows given, and who knows who is who?
 Come here, my son come dance, my daughter
 Some will be joyful and some sad and blue
 Years come and go, circle around
 Shadows grow longer and hide what they find
 Cover laughter, cover our sorrows
 Scatter the ashes of homes left behind

⁵⁰ Lyrics :Emirali Yağan English lyrics: Erik Hillestad

⁵¹ Ferhat Tunç “Dersim - Kirmanciye Laments” 2012.

This *ağıt* depicts a chaotic and dark experience. Maybe this is another way of expressing trauma and it may also be a preferential defense strategy. There is a mysterious trauma which is hidden in between the lines. The idea behind metaphor of dance and especially the lines “Shadows grow longer and hide what they find” and “Cover laughter, cover our sorrows” show that this trauma is so severe that it can be kept secret and Dersimlis used merely their *ağıt* tradition as a weapon against these painful experience.

To sum up, there is an endeavor of a group to confront state fear in examples expressing trauma. They believe the events of 1937-38 to be a ruthless homogenization operation. It may stem from their understanding of history and sense of oppression and massacres. The words such as “brutal, cruel, cruelty, sorrow, agony, pain” etc. are frequently used in the laments. Even in some *ağıts* the events are named as massacre or genocide. This naming creates a particular way of interpreting of events and their impact on the community. Also references to injustice and opposition are dominant themes in the Dersimlis *ağıts* referring to this traumatic experience.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data reveals that some common patterns emerge, when individuals want to express their feelings and memories. One can observe that there are similar ways of formatting context for traumatic and violent experiences through culture specific symbols. The data ultimately shows that even though religious, historical or even everyday concepts seem to be distinct signs of meaning delivery, in the end they function as complementary factors for ease of collective remembering. This is indicative of the idea that oral narration or, specifically, communication is social.

What is more, the data reveals that it is not accidental to set longstanding metaphors and meanings outside social context. The central issue is to know how best to approach such data. Since a close reading of signs and symbols demonstrates that these means of cultural memory have similar tone, form and context. They actually act as archival sites of violence and trauma. *Ağits* function as a medium that keeps the past alive in memory and prevents amnesia about the violent past.

The scope of analysis was mainly framed by trying to determine the purpose of this particular story telling via *ağits*. The major assumption in this study seems to reveal that *ağits* are told specifically to the Dersim community and aim at a particular outcome of keeping the experience alive and sharing it with the people of Dersim. They knew that the story would be transmitted to coming generations via this form of public mourning, as a response to the traumatic impact of the collective and violent death, and also were sure that the message would be conveyed only within their own community.

As oral transmission of the experience by Dersimlis is a means of articulating memory, it finds expression within pre-existing cultural forms which structure survivors' memory and, via cultural transmission, it also structures the memory of the succeeding generation. Adopting the oral tradition of *ağits* as a weapon against suppression, and fear, may be understood as a collective attempt of Dersimlis to articulate their memories.

One can find a good number of hints of Dersim events in the *ağits*, since most of them include names of a lot of historical and political figures, as well as other details, such as time and place. Although *ağits* are considered as literary works, they are not completely fictional. On the contrary, these oral works act as a tracking sheet of the events with the details they present to the listeners.

These features of *ağits* prove that all these repressed memories are somehow inalienable from their social and cultural environment. To that end, the *ağits* referring to Dersim events are unlikely to be unexpected responses to such a trauma and violence.

The outcomes of this study can be summarized with three basic points. In the first place, we can understand that the Dersimlis made use of *ağits*, as a way of expressing meanings and signs concerning the Dersim 38 events. These *ağits* are apparently very closely linked to their pre-existing cultural metaphors, such as religious symbols or past traumas. Secondly, trauma is expressed very vividly through *ağits*. Even if the events may be unspeakable in the public sphere, all the emotions regarding this violent experience are expressed clearly. Last but not least, there seems to be a struggle of Dersimlis to tell their stories in details, even if they are too painful and traumatic to remember. They try to make their victimization known to others and hold some other party (such as state officials) responsible for their agony, thus drawing a clear-cut line between themselves and “the other” in the *ağits*

In brief, survivors of the Dersim 38 operation that now may be called “traumatic,” have something to tell us. Specifically the laments tell us about how they struggle to organize themselves with regard to power and dominant political discourse. To this end, I read the laments as a tool to consider whom the story of Dersim 38 is told to, and for what purpose it is told.

All in all, it is not surprising that Dersimlis chose *ağits* as forms of lamenting communicating this traumatic event. Being victims of the mainstream ideology once more, the people of this marginalized community made use of their available cultural tools. A broader perspective of nationalism, and nation building theories, together with emergence of a state, make it productive to understand the context of the events. That is because, the data seems to be even more meaningful after a thorough discussion of the

possible effects and causes of the violence imposed by the state. One can understand why state formation is a painful experience for Dersimlis. Although the operation in Dersim is considered to be an event of collective silence, we can trace the signs of the relationship between state violence and trauma in a very explicit way, in the collective memory of the Dersimlis. Once again considering this particular case, we can see that even if nation-state may impose violence to its citizens for the sake of homogeneity or any other reason, traumatized people like Dersimlis may find their own ways to cope with this event by expressing it in their own terms.

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