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The Impact of Holistic Justice on the Long-Term Experiences and Wellbeing of Mass Human Rights Violation Survivors: Ethnographic and Interview Evidence From Kosova, Northern Ireland and Albania

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ABSTRACT

Research highlights the long-term collective effects of mass human rights violations (MHRVs) on survivors' wellbeing. This multi-method, multi-context paper combines the social identity approach (SIA), transitional and social justice theories and human rights-conceptualised wellbeing to propose a human rights understanding of trauma responses and experiences in the context of MHRVs. In Study 1, ethnographic research in four locations in Kosova, 5 years post war indicates that lack of perceived conflict-related and social justice is experienced as a key contributor to survivors' individual and collective wellbeing. In Study 2, 61 semi-structured interviews with MHRVs survivors from post-war Kosova, post-conflict Northern Ireland and post-dictatorship Albania two to three decades post conflict also show that such justice experiences inform wellbeing. These studies illustrate the importance of expanding the SIA to health and trauma theories by taking account of a human rights-conceptualised wellbeing as well as adopting a holistic analysis of justice perception.

1 | Introduction

A major challenge for post-conflict societal cohesion is the legacy of mass human rights violations (MHRVs), which are often collective, traumatic and multi-faceted in nature (Freeman 2022). Long-term consequences of MHRVs include psychological distress (Amodu, Richter, and Salami 2020; Blackmore et al. 2020; Mongelli, Georgakopoulos, and Pato 2020); transformed relationships within families, communities and states (Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021; Këllezi et al. 2022; Patel, Këllezi, and Williams 2014); intergroup animosity (Hewstone et al. 2014); and systemic inequalities (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 2014). Systemic inequality can further contribute to conflict (Østby 2013) and can persist across generations long after active conflict ends (Paradies 2016). Survivors can also remain preoccupied with different forms of justice acquisition, even decades after the initial violations. This can extend suffering and undermine recovery (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 2014; Këllezi et al. 2024). Despite a

growing body of evidence, a number of limitations remain within most current understandings of how justice processes in the aftermath of MHRVs impact wellbeing.

First, while there is a substantial body of research on the relationship between perceived post-conflict justice and wellbeing, varying forms of justice (e.g., apologies, forgiveness, acknowledgement), have often been considered in isolation. Thus, an integrated account of how these various forms of justice can together impact wellbeing is lacking. In this paper, we propose a multi-dimensional framework that combines conflict-related (i.e., transitional) justice and social justice to develop a more systematic understanding of justice processes in the context of MHRVs. Second, we argue that focusing solely on psychological predictors of wellbeing in the wake of MHRVs provides only a limited account of the impact of these events. We expand the examination of wellbeing in the context of MHRVs by exploring wellbeing processes using human rights frameworks. Third, in examining the justice-related needs prioritised by survivors following MHRVs, we recognise the collective and contextually determined nature of how people experience, respond to and develop strategies to cope with MHRVs. In doing so, we recognise that MHRVs are embedded in long-term historical and socio-political contexts, where survivors' experiences and reactions to such events are affected by complex collective intragroup and intergroup processes (see, e.g., Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021; Muldoon et al. 2021; Noor et al. 2017; Vollhardt 2020). In fact, psychological research on trauma, disaster management and response and collective victimisation all highlight the fundamentally collective social-political nature of traumatic events, including their myriad impacts, how and why they are experienced and how they are responded to (e.g., Drury et al. 2016; Muldoon et al. 2019; Vollhardt 2020). In short, we argue that MHRVs are often experienced in the context of group memberships (e.g., religious, ethnic, ideological), whereby group memberships can form the basis for the provision of meaning, support and coping resources (Jetten et al. 2017). For this reason, and as further elaborated below, the social identity approach (SIA; Reicher, Spears, and Haslam 2010), which draws upon both social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and self-categorisation theory (Turner et al. 1987), presents a useful basis for examining the intragroup and intergroup processes relevant to the collective experiences of and responses to MHRVs. We will engage with these three issues in turn.

1.1 | The SIA

The SIA posits that each person's social identity is derived from the groups to which they belong (e.g., ethnic, religious, gender and political identities). How we think, act, interact with others and perceive the world is influenced by these groups, especially if we identify strongly with them (e.g., experience a strong sense of belonging, commitment and fit). Identifying with a group also unlocks valuable psychological resources (e.g., social support) and processes explained by the 'social cure' model within the SIA to health (SIAH; e.g., Jetten et al. 2012; C. Haslam et al. 2018; Wakefield et al. 2019). These identity resources help group members cope better with stressors, such as collective disasters (e.g., Drury, Cocking, and Reicher 2009) and individual trauma (e.g., Muldoon et al. 2019).

However, group membership can be detrimental to health if the group in question is stigmatised within the wider society or if the nature of the group and its norms leads to a withdrawal of support or belonging from individual group members under certain conditions (a process known as the 'social curse' within the SIAH; Këllezi and Reicher 2012; Wakefield et al. 2019). In practice, social cure and social curse processes often co-exist. For example, being a target of violence and discrimination because of one's group memberships can undermine wellbeing but can also (and simultaneously so) lead to increased identification with those groups, which in turn can provide valuable resources that enhance wellbeing (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; S. A. Haslam and Reicher 2006), and facilitate coping (e.g., during immigration detention, Këllezi et al. 2019).

SIAH research has also been applied to MHRVs. For example, the benefits and harms derived from group memberships are positively associated with group identification, and group identification can increase due to experiencing MHRVs (Muldoon et al. 2021). Intragroup processes (e.g., group norms) affect the meanings survivors give to the conflict in positive and negative ways (Başoğlu et al. 1997; Këllezi and Reicher 2012). Intergroup (e.g., stigma) and intragroup processes (e.g., adherence to group norms and values) also affect survivors' abilities to seek and receive much-needed support (Këllezi and Reicher 2014; Shala et al. 2024); the extent to which survivors are likely to seek justice in the aftermath (Bar-Tal et al. 2009); the extent to which they trust their state/government (Këllezi et al. 2023; Shala et al. 2024); and whether they have access to basic human rights (e.g., education, Betancourt et al. 2013; reparations, Këllezi and Guxholli 2022; and war pensions or formal recognitions as victims of violence, Shala et al. 2024). Finally, threats to group status and reputation can lead to group-based attempts aimed at restoring a positive identity (Jetten et al. 2017).

Group processes also have implications for the success of reconciliation efforts (Schori-Eyal, Klar, and Ben-Ami 2017). For example, some studies show that intergroup forgiveness and apologies can promote reconciliation (e.g., McAlinden 2023), although evidence for how widespread this is remains limited (for reviews, see Gkinopoulos, Sagherian-Dickey, and Schaafsma 2022; Hornsey and Wohl 2017; Noor et al. 2017). Perceptions of victimhood enhance a sense of ingroup strength, cohesion, solidarity, pride and morality (Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021; Vollhardt and Nair 2018), which, when combined with the ability to impose a sense of collective meaning on the suffering that was experienced, can promote resilience and agency (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Frankl 1985; Këllezi et al. 2009; Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021). These processes may positively impact wellbeing. Research has also shown that public and shared acknowledgement of suffering can enhance wellbeing (Fontana and Rosenheck 1994; Hautamaki and Coleman 2001; Maercker and Muller 2004) and can benefit individual survivors and their communities (e.g., through increased reconciliation; Wessells 2009).

On the other hand, group processes can also impede reconciliation, promote revenge and facilitate future conflict (Klar 2016; Schori-Eyal, Klar, and Ben-Ami 2017; Vollhardt 2020). For example, collective victimhood has been positively associated with intergroup emotions such as anger (Jasini, Delvaux, and Mesquita 2017), support for military action (Schori-Eyal,

Halperin, and Bar-Tal 2014) and intergroup distancing (Green et al. 2017). These processes undermine wellbeing in various ways. For example, collective wellbeing may be undermined through the extent of intergenerational transmission of emotional pain and burden (e.g., Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021); increased anxiety about the future (Këllezi et al. 2024); and increased intragroup divisions (Këllezi and Reicher 2012; Këllezi et al. 2023).

While research on MHRVs (e.g., Vollhardt 2020) focused on collective processes enriches the SIAH (Jetten et al. 2017), current knowledge on the relationship between group processes and health/wellbeing focuses almost exclusively on forms of justice related to forgiveness or responses to apologies. Here, we expand the scope of this exploration and argue that justice processes relating to, among others, reparation, historical documentation, legal and political reforms and criminal justice can also affect health and wellbeing. In our analysis, we recognise that survivors have their own understandings of, and priorities regarding justice, both in relation to the specific conflict that led to the MHRVs experienced, but also in relation to broader issues of social equality and justice (McEvoy and McConnachie 2013; Robins 2017). This is captured in our subsequent conceptualisation of holistic justice.

1.2 | Holistic Justice

Our conceptualisation of holistic justice involves combining two complementary justice frameworks: transitional justice (TJ) and social justice (SJ). TJ refers to social, political, judicial and economic processes aimed at redressing the impact of MHRVs and preventing future conflict (Arthur 2009). These include criminal, historical, reparative, administrative and constitutional forms of justice (Teitel 2000). Many of these forms of justice are essential to establish peace, reconciliation and transformation in multiple MHRVs contexts, although the evidence regarding their impact on survivors is varied (Nagy 2008, 2022; Shaw et el. 2010; Teitel 2000). One key criticism is that TJ processes are often devised and implemented in a top-down manner that is informed by international norms (Nagy 2008; Shaw et al. 2010), thus ignoring and even undermining survivors' priorities and the unique social-political contexts where MHRVs have taken place (Shaw et al. 2010).

We also suggest that TJ does not always address SJ concerns appropriately. For instance, MHRVs can impact members of the same group differently, in part due to intersecting identities (e.g., being targets of sexual violence in a conflict based on ethnic identity; Këllezi and Reicher 2012, 2014). This can also lead to inequalities in experiences of post-violation justice. For example, while obvious violence in the context of an ethnic identity-based conflict may eventually lead to redress, the fact that sexual violence is culturally taboo and often concealed means that its occurrence is rarely even societally acknowledged (Shala et al. 2024).

SJ involves social structures and consists of distributive (fair allocation of burdens and benefits), procedural (fair procedures and norms governing society) and interactional (treating everyone with dignity and respect) justice (Jost and Kay 2010). Whilst TJ is concerned with MHRVs, SJ frameworks recognise the long-term impact of MHRVs and their link to a larger system of inequalities that exists before, during and after the event/s and can last for generations (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 2014; Këllezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021). In fact, MHRV contexts are affected by social inequalities that are best captured by SJ definitions.

Because of their complexity, TJ and SJ tend to be examined one at a time, thus again ignoring how the myriad forms of justice interact and affect perceptions of broader social and economic rights (which have important effects on survivors' wellbeing and can be key contributors to intergroup conflict or war; Robins 2017). We thus need to examine survivor-informed (bottom-up) collective justice processes more holistically whilst taking account of the broader social-political context to understand the long-term collective impact of and responses to MHRVs (McEvoy and McConnachie 2013). Social psychological analysis, using a qualitative approach and contextualist perspective is ideal for capturing survivor-informed complex collective justice processes more holistically across diverse contexts. McEvoy and McConnachie (2013) and Robins (2017) argue for the need to understand how survivors' voices are amplified or silenced, and how their agency can be supported or diminished in the attempt to pursue and achieve social-political goals through transitional justice. Zhao et al. (2023) contend that the justice system's legitimacy and effectiveness are closely linked to the survivors' experiences and that hearing survivors' intersectional voices is essential for building and delivering policy, politics and practices of justice within the broader structural context. Complimentary justice processes should also be incorporated into how the wellbeing of survivors is defined and understood.

1.3 | Human Rights Conceptualisation of Wellbeing

While the SIAH literature has extensively researched a range of wellbeing and mental dimensions (e.g., psychological wellbeing, satisfaction with life, anxiety, depression, stress, PTSD), there remains little focus on human rights-related dimensions of wellbeing (although there are some exceptions to this, e.g., education in Doyle, Easterbrook, and Harris 2023; access to health services in Këllezi, Wakefield, et al. 2021). A human rights approach involves including economic, social, cultural (United Nations 1966a), civil and political rights (United Nations 1966b) as vital constituents of wellbeing. This human rights approach to wellbeing incorporates some of the key features associated with psychological wellbeing (including achieving the best attainable health), and social identity relevant dimensions of wellbeing (e.g., discrimination, access to information), whilst also incorporating issues that are key to both SJ (e.g., addressing inequalities, disadvantages and fairness) and TJ (e.g., security, recognition, redressing the impact of past harm, preventing future conflict and ensuring the right to self-determination amongst members of oppressed groups). Core features of the human rights conceptualisation of wellbeing constitute important goals for MHRVs survivors and reflect their multiple needs for justice (Robins 2017). Thus, research investigating the collective impact and responses to MHRVs must pay attention to both holistic justice and, in

addition to studying more recognised forms of wellbeing, adopt and include human rights conceptualisations of wellbeing.

1.4 | The Present Study

There are a range of reasons why survivors may experience dissatisfaction with justice following MHRVs, and it is likely that this dissatisfaction will negatively impact survivors' wellbeing by undermining collective resources such as a sense of agency, efficacy and power whilst also prolonging the perceived threat of MHRVs (even years after the height of conflict). Thus, to better understand the complex contributors to justice and wellbeing-related processes in such contexts, we have drawn on social cure and curse research theorising from SIAH (Jetten et al. 2017), peace and conflict research (Vollhardt 2020) and transitional and social justice literatures (e.g., Jost and Kay 2010; McEvoy and McConnachie 2013; Robins 2017).

Our research places survivor-informed understandings of holistic justice at the centre of two interconnected studies across a range of MHRVs socio-political contexts: post-war Kosova,[1] post-conflict Northern Ireland and post-dictatorship Albania. Exploring such diverse contexts allows us to identify similarities and differences in survivors' experiences. To explore these multiple contexts, we also use multiple methods: exploratory observations of everyday life and in-depth discussions capturing participants' justice-related understandings. Each method was chosen due to being the best way to address the specific issues under investigation (as outlined below). A multiple method approach has the further advantage of enabling comparison of data generated via different methods (Campbell et al. 2020).

To be more specific, our first study uses an ethnographic approach to explore everyday life in Kosova 5 years after the war that took place there in 1998–1999. Ethnographic research allows for a naturalistic exploration of complex topics relating to how survivors make sense of and cope with their past experiences of MHRVs. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between survivors' perceptions of post-war (in)justice and their individual and collective wellbeing within their local context.

Although Study 1 has the advantage of being naturalistic, it is based in one context and captures relatively short-term experiences of justice (5 years after the war). Building on this, Study 2 involved an examination of survivors' experiences of (in)justice and wellbeing through semi-structured interviews in three MHRVs contexts and timepoints ranging from 19 to 26 years after the violations: (1) post-dictatorship Albania (the dictatorship between 1945 and 1992), where the conflict was intragroup; (2) post-war Kosova (the war between 1998 and 1999), where the conflict was intergroup; and (3) post-conflict Northern Ireland ('The Troubles', between 1968 and 1998), where the conflicting groups live in the same country and have made considerable efforts to gain and maintain peace. A fuller account of each of these contexts is provided in Supporting Information A. This study explores participants' social environments, their understandings and experiences of injustice and their experiences of wellbeing and distress. The interview methodology enables in-depth exploration of topics of interest while providing enough flexibility to allow participants to discuss unexpected processes and unanticipated experiences.

2 | Study 1: Observations and Analysis of Everyday Life After War

2.1 | Methodology

Study 1 was an ethnographic study aiming to explore the lived experiences of survivors of MHRVs and identify key contributors to survivor wellbeing. It was conducted in Kosova in 2004, 5 years after the war between Kosova Albanians and Serbs ended. Ethnography, with its focus on embedded observational techniques, enables in-depth and naturalistic exploration of factors which contribute to post-war social experiences, health and wellbeing, cultural practices and everyday life in this non-Western and understudied population (Hammersley and Atkinson 2002). The study was approved by the University of St Andrews Ethics Committee and aimed to explore: What are the key contributors to wellbeing after the war?

During this study, the researcher (first author) participated overtly in citizens' daily lives and resided in four primary communities, living with six families who invited her into their homes during May–July 2004. The locations were chosen due to their communities' diverse experiences of war, ranging from a large massacre (Krusha e Madhe) to less intense collective violations and harms (Gjinoc). The families with which the researcher resided served as gatekeepers and introduced the researcher to their friends/relatives within and outside their communities. Gatekeepers were instructed to only introduce people they knew to have no objections to talking about the war. This was done to safeguard participants' wellbeing. In reality, war was the most common topic of conversation in private and public spaces, and participants disclosed exceedingly difficult experiences within minutes of meeting the researcher. This was explained by community members on occasion as 'their being glad to talk about it, and the importance of not forgetting what had happened or it would repeat itself'.

Once connections were made within the communities, snowball techniques were used to recruit further local participants in each community. Often, once the gatekeeper introduced the researcher to the participants, the researcher was left alone with them and could decide on future meetings with the participants in their homes, work or during other everyday activities. The researcher also walked around the villages, where on some occasions members of the community introduced themselves to her. When the researcher introduced herself and her study, her accent identified her immediately as an Albanian from Albania, the place where many participants (nearly half of the displaced) were refugees. This was often the starting point of conversations and allowed a natural introduction between the two parties. On many occasions, the researcher was explicitly welcomed into the participants' homes. The Kanun (the Albanian traditional law, see Dukagjini and Gjecov 1989; Meçi 2002) refers to the importance of 'welcoming strangers who become friends when they come into one's home - miq'. This welcome was one of the most defining characteristics of the Kosova Albanian culture at the time of the study. Accessing participants

was thus straightforward, and the repeated invitations from the participants for the researcher to visit them again can be argued to reflect a sense of trust and willingness and ease of disclosure, thereby increasing confidence in the representativeness of the findings.

There were no pre-defined interview questions or schedules that is common in ethnographic studies (Hammersley and Atkinson 2002). The researcher (a White, female Albanian from Albania) observed, listened and asked clarifying questions (e.g., 'Can you tell me what is going on in this situation?' 'Why do you think you/they reacted like that?' 'Does this happen often?') about events, wherever possible avoiding leading questions. In certain situations (e.g., when an idea was generated after reflection or when a passing observation was voiced), it was not appropriate or possible to ask clarifying questions, therefore clarifying questions were asked of other members of the community (when there were no confidentiality issues that prevented this). Further details on study design, location and participants can be found in Supporting Information B. Further discussion of issues around trust, gatekeeping, researcher position and other ethnography-related challenges are discussed elsewhere in detail (Këllezi 2006; Këllezi et al. 2023). Participant details can be found in Table 1.

2.2 | Analytic Method

Over 400 photographs were collected during the fieldwork, as well as 200 pages of field notes compiled by the first author. Data were analysed using theoretically guided reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021), taking a contextualist approach (positioned between constructionism and essentialism), where both individual experience and meaning-making can be explored within and influenced by specific social context. This approach is therefore ideal for exploring collective processes and psychological phenomena whilst also embedding the analysis within the context of these complex and located social events. The analysis focussed on searching for key patterns in the rich and varied data relevant to the research topic, thus making a flexible thematic approach ideal (Braun and Clarke 2021). The analysis presented here involves the subset of data that focuses specifically on social processes, justice and wellbeing. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six steps including: (a) data familiarisation (textual data were re-read and photos reviewed repeatedly alongside text while making initial notes and reflections on field notes); (b) coding, using a combination of inductive (data led; bottom-up) coding (e.g., identifying collective justice as key contributor to wellbeing) and deductive (theory-led; top down) coding (e.g., social identity-informed collective understanding and experience of group-based justice seeking); (c) identification and initial sorting of themes using the codes; (d) reviewing suitable themes against the dataset, then further developing them so that they addressed the research question; (e) refining themes to determine key findings from each theme/subtheme (e.g., Theme 2 did not initially have subthemes, but subthemes were added following team feedback on thematic structure recognising that justice needs are not only complex but also differ between groups); and (f) choosing extracts/photos to illustrate each theme, as well as drawing on existing theory and research to support the analysis and write-up of the findings.

TABLE 1 | Details of each key case study in the ethnography.

Case study	Gender	Age	Education (years)	Type of experience
1	F	36	15	Refugee (faced death)
2	F	34	12	Lost family members[a]
3	M	~42	12	Lost family members
4	M	47	15	Lost family members
5	M	37	17	Soldier
6	M	40	12	Lost family members
7	F	49	12	Lost family members
8	M	~70	Unknown	Lost soldier son
9	F	~69	0	Lost soldier son
10	F	~70	0	Lost soldier son
11	F	75	0	Lost civilian son
12	F	65	0	Lost civilian son
13[b]	M	—	—	—
14	F	21	12	Lost family members
15	F	36	8	Lost family members
16[b]	F	—	—	—
17	M	48	16	Refugee
18[a]	F	—	—	—
19	F	37	12	Refugee
20[b]	M	—	—	—
21[b]	F	—	—	—
22	M	63	16	Soldier
23	F	51	12	Refugee

[a]Lost close family members including partner, parent, uncle/aunts, first cousins.
[b]Information kept anonymous to prevent identification of participants.

Ethnographic positionality was key when examining private and public life (Terry et al. 2017) and has been expanded upon extensively elsewhere (Këllezi 2023). However, it is important to note that conversations with participants suggested the researcher was perceived as an ingroup member (vs. outgroup member) due to her national identity and a psychologist (vs. lawyer), so participants' focus on justice concerns was unlikely to have been generated by the researcher's identity or the study's characteristics.

2.3 | Analysis

Following the steps outlined above, two key themes were developed. Theme 1 relates to how perceptions of collective (in)justice frame daily life and survivor wellbeing. Theme 2 relates to the complex and multi-faceted nature of war-related justice dissatisfaction, which is intertwined with perceived social justice. Where applicable, researcher observations, participant accounts and photographs are presented together to enrich and enhance the evidence, narrative and arguments.

FIGURE 1 | Calendar depicting families of the missing people.

FIGURE 2 | Photograph of a destroyed home in the Village of Gjinoc.

2.3.1 | Theme 1: Dissatisfaction With Justice Frames in Daily Life and Wellbeing

From the first days of the ethnography study, it became clear that participants' memories of the war were strongly linked to dissatisfaction with collective justice and a continued sense of perceived outgroup (Serbian) threat. Topics relating to perceived injustice were discussed daily in the news, represented in objects around offices and households (see Figure 1), and appeared frequently in conversation in public and private spaces, such as this conversation in a shop:

Extract 1:

> The Serbs are blocking the streets, and the UN is doing nothing. There is still discrimination against us [Kosova Albanians]. UNMIK [UN agency that has taken over the administration of Kosova] is allowing more than they should. Serbs have oppressed us for decades. That is why they will never be accepted. Why does UNMIK support them when they have always oppressed us? (…) It was not the Serbs from Beograd [Serbia's capital] who oppressed us but our neighbours. (…) Even little children don't want to see them, never. The Serbs did this before, these things keep repeating. (11.05.04)

This extract illustrates the collective preoccupation ('us') with how post-war justice was being (mis)managed (in this case, the UN's perceived tolerance of outgroup threats) and the very real concerns over risks of further threat that this inaction facilitates ('things keep repeating') for the ethnic group ('against us'). This perceived i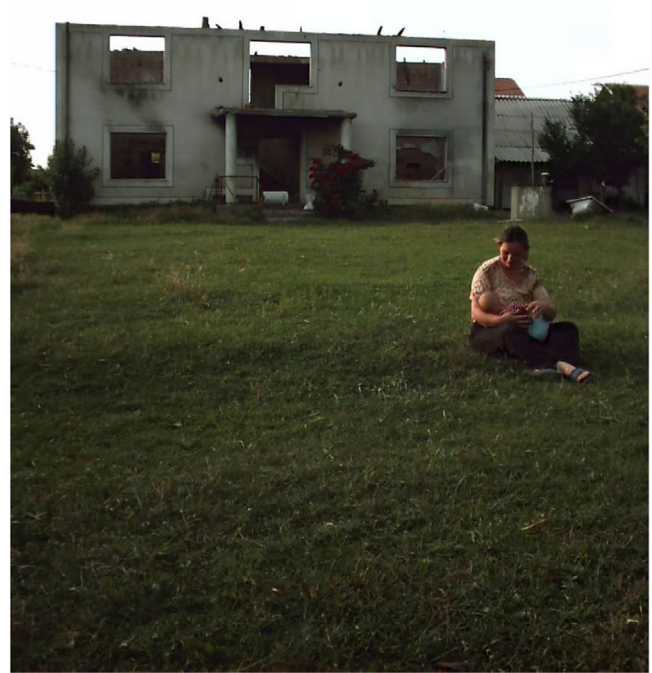njustice is experienced collectively, committed towards ingroup members (Kosova Albanians) by the outgroup (Serbs) and enabled and perpetuated by the international community ('allowing more than they should'). This account highlights an important threat to their collective wellbeing: a shared fear of violations towards their ethnic group repeating themselves while they lacked efficacy to prevent it, which sits within a context of shared collective rejection of the outgroup ('even little children'). The ethnic identities ('us' vs 'them') were being used to provide meaning to past and potential future threat and harm, suggesting the impact of war was continuous, and likely to even affect the next generation within the contexts of continued injustice.

More evidence of dissatisfaction with justice is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows an everyday object (a calendar) that depicted the plight of the families of people who remained missing due to the war.

The message conveyed by the production and collective use of the calendar to commemorate in such a visible, yet everyday way, was that every day of the year should be a reminder that justice (i.e., criminal or historical justice) remains denied and collective needs (family and community) remain unmet. As the title of the calendar ('The Missing: Families have the right to know') proclaimed, justice had yet to be achieved for the missing people and their families (here involving three generations depicted in the two photographs: the parents, wives and children of the missing men). Five years after the war, many of the 3000 abductees that were mostly men were still missing (Keough and Samuels 2004).

Features of the community's environment also signified their experiences and the continuing need for reparations. Figure 2 depicts one of the homes that were burned during and after

the war and were now uninhabitable. It illustrates one of the largest economic impacts of the war, as many homes were looted and burned (e.g., over 90% in the village of Krusha e Madhe).

The physical environment itself could therefore act as a prominent daily reminder of the harms committed during the war and the lack of justice obtained in its aftermath.

Together the data presented in Theme 1 reveal the ways in which dissatisfaction with justice (criminal, historical, reparative, administrative and constitutional) permeated the experiences of community members. This undermined wellbeing and reminded them of historic threats and future risks in post-war Kosova, such as fear and anxiety about future conflict, lack of support from those with power to serve justice, ongoing grief and uncertainty for missing and harmed family members and historic and present economic losses. As the extracts and examples in this theme illustrate, people in post-war contexts remained preoccupied with multiple forms of (in)justice perpetuating the harm experienced by them. This is addressed in Theme 2.

2.3.2 | Theme 2: Dissatisfaction With Justice is Constant and Complex

Theme 2 centres on the complexities of dissatisfaction with justice, revealing that perceptions of justice were multi-faceted (Subtheme 2.1) and could be experienced differently by different members of the same community (Subtheme 2.2).

2.4 | Subtheme 2.1: Perceptions of Justice are Multi-Faceted

During interactions, participants commonly expressed their dissatisfaction with justice-seeking and reparations following the harms they experienced. This perceived inability to achieve justice was made sense of in complex ways because it related to an inability to obtain multiple forms of justice across multiple domains (e.g., justice for personal harms, justice for their family and justice for their whole community and way of life). Below we draw upon a specific event to help depict the multiple forms of justice-related dissatisfaction. It took place at the Merdar border between Kosova and Serbia on the 29th of May 2004. Bodies of unidentified missing people from mass graves in Serbia were being brought back to Kosova. The field notes depict conversations between members of organisations focussed on seeking justice for missing people (often led by affected family members), which took place on the bus trip to the border and at the border itself.

Notes and Extracts 2:

> One of the fathers became very upset and had to be held back by the rest of the group. He explained, 'They (Serbian state) are torturing us. We do not know if they are dead and how they died. We need to know the cause of death for each one, and the Serbs don't tell us'. While waiting, I was also informed that the

young man who just passed me was the only survivor of a massacre of 74 people. He gave an interview to the Hague (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia) but was not called there to testify. There is a belief that the Hague does not give a platform to truthful testimonies. (…). One woman loudly accuses the politicians of not caring about their case. Inside the tents the group paid homage to the bodies, and some of the women started crying and remarking loudly 'You were kept in the land of the criminals. We have been in silence for five years. How long will we stay in silence?'. Another explained 'If you continue like this it will take 250 years to return all the bodies'. Another described their anger towards the media: 'Don't listen to the media because they don't care about our case'. I noticed that a cameraman from a news agency left before the bodies arrived.

Field notes from the Merdar border event illustrate the depth of emotion characterising families' collective dissatisfaction with multiple justice processes: first, the outgroup's silence about the fate of their loved ones ('the Serbs don't tell us'); second, lack of acknowledgement of their crimes; and third, the great harms associated with the unwillingness to return the bodies of their loved ones in a timely manner ('it will take 250 years to return all the bodies'). It also illustrates their sense of the unwillingness of representatives of the ingroup (media and government) to highlight their plight and fight for justice ('they don't care about our case'), which served to add further insult and exacerbated the frustrations with outgroup inaction and ongoing injustice. The reference to the ingroup not caring about 'our case' illustrates social divisions between those who occupy and represent the same targeted ethnic group.

The event thus illustrates the existence of multiple forms of justice quests (i.e., criminal, historical, administrative) and how these interacted to characterise the wider experience of injustice. This sense of injustice inevitably extended the historical harms by perpetuating them in the present, to the detriment of the survivors' wellbeing: effects that can be seen across multiple collective contexts (e.g., family, community, nation). The impact on survivors' wellbeing is illustrated through the distress associated with their inability to move on without knowing the fate of loved ones, feeling tortured by lack of knowledge (an emotion notably expressed in the present tense: '*They are torturing us*'), and on the impact of the financial and emotional burden to seek justice by attending such events. Two photographs that depict the collective nature of the event are shown in Figure 3.

The placard the family members were holding evidences their preoccupation with injustice, their collective need for justice and their commitment to justice-seeking. It reads in capital letters: 'OUR LOVED ONES ARE NOT MISSING THEY HAVE BEEN INTENTIONALLY KIDNAPPED FROM JUGOSLAV MILITARY AND POLICE'. Family members attended these events despite the significant financial costs (travel to the border, having to take a day off work) and emotional costs (facing the perpetrator group and witnessing the return of the bodies).

FIGURE 3 | Families and representatives of missing people organisations carry placards and flowers as they wait for the bodies to be brought across the Merdar (Serbia–Kosova) border.

2.5 | Subtheme 2.2: Perceptions of Justice May Differ Among Members of the Same Community

While Subtheme 2.1 illustrates the complexity of the shared experiences of communities of survivors (i.e., ethnic communities), characterised by their shared concerns and the many different forms of justice-seeking, Subtheme 2.2 explores how perceptions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with justice could vary within the same group. For instance, the consequences of war were often felt and expressed differently by different participants, with some enduring additional challenges due to systemic inequalities and intersecting identities, such as gender, as the organiser of a women's support group explained:

Extract 3:

> People are still suffering from the consequences of war as you can see, especially women. They feel unsupported. For them no-one is helping after everything was taken away or burned. Many women tell me they have many nightmares (…) The graveyards are a serious

issue; they are not kept well. International organisations are giving money for statues [of soldiers who died], but the women struggle to visit the graveyards [where the civilians killed in war are buried] where cows often go and destroy the new graves. They say 'Shame on you. People have died and you can't keep control of your cows. We don't know where to go and cry'. So first they need to fix the graveyards and then open a nursery and employ 10 women, those that are the poorest and least educated.

This participant highlighted the additional burdens and harms that women suffered due to them being custodians of the family, and thus having additional responsibilities as the wives/mothers/sisters of the missing/harmed. This injustice was attributed to disparity in economic support for graveyards, which prevented the women from mourning in dignity ('*cows often go and destroy the new graves*') but also through emphasising the need to provide employment for women. The account reflects the actual gender disparities in terms of education, employment and financial security that women faced within Kosova society (especially in rural areas; Shala et al. 2024). For example, most of the women encountered in Krusha e Madhe had lost their husbands in the war and were not formally employed. The poor state of their family graveyards (compared to the soldiers' graveyards, which were well-tended) highlighted their economic dependence on the State but also the State's lack of recognition of their loss. Indeed, this disparity was evident at the time when comparing the graveyards where civilians were buried with state-resourced graveyards where soldiers were buried as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

The disparity in respect and recognition was also evident when travelling on public transport. Field notes evidenced that bus and van drivers would switch off the radio every time we drove past soldiers' graveyards but not when we drove past civilians' graveyards. This indicates that not all those who died during the war were equally commemorated within Kosova society at the time. This perceived historical and present-day injustice deeply concerned the women, who 'don't know where to go and cry' due to the poor state of their families' graveyards. These examples illustrate why focusing on single justice processes risks leading to a limited understanding of the varied and complex needs affecting different groups within the same communities, and a misunderstanding of the processes, potentially leading to social divisions.

3 | Discussion

A key finding from Study 1 is that participants' perceptions of what constitutes post-war justice were complex and multifaceted, often taking different forms, and permeating the experiences of community members. These multi-faceted justice needs included conflict-related transitional justice processes such as: criminal (e.g., punishment of perpetrators); historical (e.g., finding out the fate of the loved ones, commemorating the loss of loved ones with dignity); reparative (e.g., rebuilding of homes); administrative (e.g., institutional reforms aiming to bring about justice, such as the way UNMIK operates); and

FIGURE 4 | Photographs of graveyards in Krusha e Madhe in 2004 where civilians who died in the war were buried.

FIGURE 5 | Photographs of the graveyards in 2004 where soldiers who died in the war were buried.

constitutional justice (e.g., lack of potential strategies aiming to prevent harm repeating itself in the future). The findings also illustrate how transitional justice, often interconnected with social justice, concerns relating to intersectional social identities (e.g., gender inequalities, employment opportunities, loss of housing, etc). This intersectionality adds to the complexity of justice concerns, which were experienced differently by different sections of the community.

Study 1 also illustrates the myriad ways in which dissatisfaction with justice in the context of the harms experienced during MHRVs contributed to wellbeing experiences in the present day. This included complex and often collective emotions related to anxiety about future conflict, intergroup threat, feeling tortured about not knowing the fate of missing family members, lack of ingroup support, economic disadvantage and disparity in recognition for losses. These experiences and emotions continued to colour everyday life for communities of survivors in Kosova. Dissatisfaction was felt at the ethnic level (as Kosova Albanians) and at the local community level (as Krusha e Madhe villagers), as well as through group memberships defined by specific shared experiences (e.g., missing family members). Analysis reveals the importance of group identity markers and identity expression (e.g., commemorative markers of injustice like calendars, images and banners of protest), as well as social identity-relevant places, such as local towns/villages (e.g., Krusha e Madhe), buildings (Gjinoc) and graveyards. Furthermore, the findings reflect the complex nature of wellbeing as it is related to concerns for past, present and future threat. Moreover, wellbeing was affected by both outgroup and ingroup members and at both the local level of the conflict and at the international level.

4 | Study 2: Cross-Cultural In-depth Interviews in Multiple Contexts of Historical MHRVs

While our ethnographic study allowed us to explore the relationship between justice concerns and wellbeing a few years after the war in this specific setting, we also sought to: (a) explore the longer term impact of MHRVs given that many justice processes can take decades to implement, (b) explore participants' understanding of justice processes and how they relate to wellbeing in more depth through interviews and (c) consider the role of post-conflict justice in diverse socio-political contexts in recognition of the historical and socio-political nature of MHRVs. We address these issues in Study 2. The aims of the study were to investigate survivors' experiences and understandings of post-MHRVs justice processes and their impact on wellbeing. The study addressed two research questions: What do survivors perceive to be the relationship between (in)justice and wellbeing following MHRVs? What forms of justice do survivors believe are needed to redress the impact of MHRVs? The study was approved by the Nottingham Trent University Ethics Committee.

4.1 | Methodology

Study 2 involved semi-structured interviews with survivors of MHRVs in Albania 25–26 years after the dictatorship ($n = 27$), in Kosova 19 years after the war ($n = 20$) and in Northern Ireland 21 years after The Troubles ($n = 14$, both sides of the conflict). Participants were recruited with the help of organisations working with survivors in each country and via the researchers' contacts.

TABLE 2 | Study 2 participant details.

Country	Participant characteristics	Details
Albania	Gender	17 males (63%), 10 females (37%)
	Age	M_{age} (63 years; 30–84 years)
	Recruitment strategy	1. Organisations working with survivors (e.g., Institute for the Study of the Consequences and Crimes of Communism) 2. Personal contacts 3. Snowballing
	Dates of interviews	August 2016–June 2017
	Interview length	M_{length} (86.9 min; 32–240 min)
	Dictatorship-relevant identity	27 (100%) first generation persecuted by dictatorship or descendants
Kosova	Gender	7 males (37%), 12 females (63%)
	Age	M_{age} (52.7 years; 37–74 years)
	Recruitment strategy	1. Organisations working with survivors (e.g., Kosova Centre for Victims of Torture) 2. Personal contacts 3. Snowballing
	Dates of interviews	March–December 2018
	Interview length War-relevant identity	M_{length} (57.2 min; 13–122 min) 19 (100%) Albanian
N. Ireland	Gender	10 males (71%), 4 females (29%)
	Age	M_{age} (61.6 years; 50–71 years)
	Recruitment strategy	1. Organisations working with survivors (e.g., WAVE) 2. Personal contacts 3. Snowballing
	Dates of interviews	October–November 2019
	Interview length Conflict-relevant identity	M_{length} (58.1 min; 24–128 min) 5 (36%) Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist 8 (57%) Catholic/Nationalist/Republican 1 (7%) did not specify

Interviews were conducted by three experienced White Albanian researchers (including the 4th and 1st author). Full details about study advertising, recruitment, interview schedule, participants and the researchers can be found in Table 2 and Supporting Information B.

Interviews started with general questions such as 'Tell me about yourself'; 'Tell me what you experienced at the time' and were followed by more specific questions about justice such as 'What should happen to ensure the suffering is addressed?' and life in the present such as 'How would you describe your life today?'

4.2 | Analytic Method

The analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) theoretically guided by the SIA (Tajfel and Turner 1985) and transitional justice frameworks (McEvoy and McConnachie 2013; Robins 2017). Like Study 1 (and for the same reasons), the analysis involved a theoretically informed (see. e.g., Bowe et al. 2019; Këllezi et al. 2021; Stevenson et al. 2019) contextualist approach. The analysis presented here focuses on

the subset of data relating to justice and wellbeing guided by the research questions. Similar to Study 1, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six steps. The only differences relate to the focus of the analysis on interview transcripts and notes taken before and after the interview as data (rather than notes, extracts and photographs as used in Study 1) and the use of only direct quotations taken from the transcripts as evidence. Like Study 1, the analysis used a combination of inductive (e.g., identifying similarities and differences across contexts) and deductive coding (e.g., social identity-informed collective understanding of and responses to justice) often known as hybrid (Fereday et al. 2006) or abductive coding (Thompson 2022).

4.3 | Analysis

Two main themes were developed. Theme 1 addresses the relationship between dissatisfaction with justice and poor wellbeing, where harm caused by MHRVs continued even decades after the events. Theme 2 outlines the different forms of justice important for survivors, including direct recognition of the effects of MHRVs (e.g., missing people, gender-based violence) and increased

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recognition of the development/maintenance of social injustices intricately linked to MHRVs (e.g., unequal economic power across the groups/sub-groups involved in the conflict). Both themes illustrate how participants drew on their social identities (e.g., family, persecuted group, ethnic group) to understand and define the impact of MHRVs and to argue for (and make sense of) justice.

4.3.1 | Theme 1: Without Justice, Suffering Continues

Dissatisfaction with justice and the pursuit of justice were key concerns across all contexts, even decades after the end of active conflict. Dissatisfaction with collective justice was seen as being essential for understanding and contextualising MHRVs, to the point that it had even become ingrained in the social identities of the survivors:

Extract 1:

> Well, The Troubles started when I was six, 1969, and I spent a lot of time with my grandmother who lived on the [road in ***], which was basically a nationalist area. (…) it was about 1970, and [they] just came down and put her out of her house because she was Protestant. They just wanted all Orange [Protestant] bastards out of the area. (…) Both sides of the community got it rough. Working class people on both sides got it rough, and I'm really sick, sore, and tired of it coming across the other way—that we got away with everything. (…) At the minute their big word is 'equality'. They've [other community] never tried to show equality to us. We've tried, and if they want equality, and they want people to respect them, stop playing the victim. Put their hands up in the air and say, look, we know you suffered as much as we did, because we're willing to say that to them. We already have. Loyalists [ingroup] have said they were sorry. (…) I still remember Bloody Friday.[2] I was only a kid then, playing football in the street, and the next minute the bombs going off all over the town. It was just bangs until you seen the news that night, and …(…) you seen them scraping people's bodies off the ground and putting them into plastic bags, arms and legs, and bits of torsos, but they were non-sectarian. (James, Northern Ireland)

As this interview illustrates, dissatisfaction with justice was fundamental to James' concerns ('I'm really sick, sore, and tired of it'). James' sense of self was defined by membership in one of the communities in the conflict, and his biography and understandings of the past were coloured by his witnessing of collective group-based violations: threats to safety (bombing placed by an outgroup organisation) and reprisal in the form of denial of housing (being evicted because of one's group membership). Crucially, the cohesiveness of the present-day society was also framed by the historic intergroup conflict: a collective frustration ('they never tried to show equality to us') and resentment caused by dissatisfaction with justice and a lack of recognition of mutual

harm, where members of the outgroup were perceived as not recognising or apologising for the role they were viewed as playing in causing the violations. This was accentuated by the perception that ingroup harm-doers have, in contrast, apologised. Unlike the Kosova and Albania contexts, in the Northern Ireland context, wrongdoing was felt on both sides, and dissatisfaction with justice could be mutual.

Echoing Extract 3 from Study 1, a further element of James's justice dissatisfaction was that experiences of harm and justice were intersectional. In this case, they were perceived as being especially prevalent for the more disempowered working-class communities within each of the wider religious/national groups ('Working class people on both sides got it rough'), and a tacit contrast was drawn with the (lesser) suffering and justice needs of more advantaged sections of each community—a point echoed in Extract 4 below. Dissatisfaction with justice was further evidenced in the next extract, which focuses on people who went missing during the Kosova war:

Extract 2:

> Only 1%, 2% have been punished. You can see, you can see the people they have taken. (…) And they make politics with bodies. They do not return the bodies. They must punish those paramilitaries (…) but they have no political will to return those they have taken, war victims, they have taken them to kill them, and they do not return them. And they let our mothers suffer (…) and their hearts are now broken. (Besim, Kosova)

Besim's account again framed the impact of MHRVs as collective—here made sense of in relation to ingroup families within the community ('our mothers'). Moreover, the effects were described as being felt in the present, even 20 years after the war ('hearts are *now* broken'). Besim's account highlights the lack of criminal justice (i.e., punishment of perpetrators collectively referred to as 'they'). It also highlights the perceived relationship between injustice (frustration at the outgroup's lack of will to address the harm by returning the bodies, a perceived unwillingness that communicates an active choice to avoid making reparations) and poor wellbeing (suffering and broken hearts). This was similar to James' earlier description of being 'sick, sore and tired'.

Another commonly held belief was that, for justice to be achieved, the whole of society (especially young people, regardless of their ingroup/outgroup membership) must be educated about historical MHRVs, to prevent future harm and to redress existing harm/injustices:

Extract 3:

> This [lack of education about the MHRVs] risks producing ignorance where the new generation does not know what happened. And this translates into repetition of mistakes and lack of respect for others, of the suffering of others. (…). People have other problems.

> The suffering of the politically persecuted is seen as secondary or even tertiary (…) And the persecuted see there is no escape [from apathy] so they focus on their big hatred towards everyone and self-isolation, no more hope (…) They have just reduced this to a monetary issue: Did you get the money? (Andi, Albania)

For Andi, lack of collective knowledge and education about historical MHRVs (i.e., historical injustice) could lead to parts of the wider social/national group (i.e., younger generations) not knowing about the past, which was experienced as jeopardising group future and safety ('repetition of mistakes') and the resultant undermining of societal cohesion. Ignorance was also perceived to lead to a lack of much-needed collective support and recognition ('respect for others, of the suffering of others') that could facilitate the achievement of justice (Këllezi et al. 2023). Andi further reflected on how past violations and lack of justice were contributing to survivors' poor societal status, even decades after the dictatorship. This could lead to exclusion from society (self-isolation) and participation in societal life (a type of social curse; Këllezi and Reicher 2012). For Andi, these societal divisions were borne out of lack of justice and fear/anxiety about the dictatorship repeating itself, but it was also connected to the ingroup survivors' low levels of collective agency and efficacy ('no hope', 'big hatred'), caused by lack of wider societal or governmental support. Finally, Andi bemoaned the nature of prevalent societal conversations about MHRVs, which tend to merely focus on whether the survivors had received economic compensation[3] (asking, e.g., 'Did you get the money?'). Andi argued that this focus ignored and undermined the importance of holistic justice and survivors' needs to help prevent future harm while feeling respected and safe.

The extracts in Theme 1, consistent with the ideas voiced by most of our participants, highlight the ongoing impact of MHRVs and how dissatisfaction with justice was associated with poor wellbeing and reduced collective efficacy (e.g., anxiety regarding the threat of future conflict and continuing social inequalities). In all three extracts, there was a strong reference to 'us' versus 'them' (Extracts 1 and 2) or 'they' (the politically persecuted) versus the rest (Extract 3) in depicting the impact of MHRVs and perceptions of (in)justice. The suffering, oppression and dissatisfaction were not voiced as personal (what happened to 'me') but as collective (what was done to 'us' by 'them'): *They* do not recognise *our* suffering (Extract 1); *they* let *our* mothers suffer (Extract 2); *they* have reduced *our* need for justice to a monetary issue (Extract 3). Thus, frustration with lack of justice undermined intergroup relations, reconciliation efforts, a sense of collective safety and stability and collective wellbeing. Theme 2 further explores this relationship between various MHRVs-related (in)justices, broader social (in)justice and collective wellbeing.

4.3.2 | Theme 2: Survivors' Holistic Justice Perceptions and Needs

Responses to even introductory questions at the start of the interviews ('Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?'; 'How do you remember life before war/dictatorship/The Troubles?')

revealed that not only were participants still preoccupied with the impact of MHRVs (as discussed in Theme 1) but also that they envisaged post-MHRVs justice holistically, that is, in a manner where multiple transitional and social justice concerns were intimately linked:

Extract 4:

> Interviewer: Ok. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself please?

> Liam: I was brought up in West Belfast in the [name of area] which would be a Republican/Nationalist area, which suffers from deprivation and other problems and stuff like that there, but which would have seen a lot of trouble throughout the conflict (…) the community here suffers from deprivation, (…) it still continues now even though you would deal with a lot of, the effects of the conflict and you'll see that they're in people's lives and family lives and stuff like that, so you would. (…) So, a lot of people still won't go into the city centre, they still won't leave their own area, they won't work outside their own area so there's still that throwback to The Troubles (…) you know the history of the conflict and how the Catholic population was treated as second class citizens (…) ghettos were being formed where there was low level of housing, overcrowding, unemployment, high crime rates (…) no investments, (…) large amount of Catholic areas still suffering from deprivation (…) you need to address historical imbalances that happened in the lead up to that [The Troubles] there because that explains why people are the way that they are and the way we have divided communities and stuff like that there. (Liam, Northern Ireland)

Although the interviewer's question was personal ('tell me a little bit about yourself'), Liam's response was framed collectively (e.g., he described his community) and focused on collective conceptualisations of (in)justice, past wrongdoings and present-day implications. As Liam explained, the long-term collective consequences of the MHRVs were still felt ('they're in people's lives and family lives'), even though the height of The Troubles was decades earlier. Echoing Extract 1, dissatisfaction with justice ('need to address historical imbalances') was amplified by socioeconomic deprivation that was perceived to exist at a group level ('Catholic population was treated as second class citizens'), and how this stoked intergroup distrust and divisions (e.g., people not going or working outside of their own geographical area). For Liam and other survivors, justice was a multi-faceted, located, intersectional and a collective experience (e.g., group-level deprivation, negative effects on family life, divided physical spaces, which create 'no-go' areas, etc.). Other types of injustice were highlighted in this Albanian account in relation to experiences of the dictatorship and their present-day impacts:

Extract 5:

> We thought we are safe from communism, but communism, as ideology and hatred, continues to this day for us. They can't imprison us anymore, or spy on us, but we are not allowed inside politics. We thought the time has arrived for everyone to be equal. For the cleverest, most able, to be recognised, but this is not happening. You can see what is happening. The persecuted group is facing the worst conditions. We are embarrassed about it because we are from noble backgrounds (…) we will not harm them even though they have harmed us. (Gert, Albania)

Gert's account also highlights how the collective harm continued and was interrelated with social justice experiences (e.g., 'we are not allowed in politics'). While group-level threats to freedom have reduced ('can't imprison us anymore'), other forms of threat and injustice persisted nearly three decades after the end of the dictatorship, and these fostered a lack of collective efficacy (e.g., inability to participate in politics, socioeconomic inequality, continuation of dictatorial ideology and threat and the continued disadvantages that the persecuted group face). This extract also highlights how group norms influenced survivors' responses to harm and justice (e.g., the norm of non-vengeance: 'we will not harm them'; Këllezi et al. 2024). The next extract from Kosova evidences another aspect of holistic justice, the survivors' anxiety about and preoccupation with preventing future harm:

Extract 6:

> If the criminals are not punished, the war will continue, the war has not ended. You must again organise, be prepared, not relax, think of whether we should organise and protect Kosova. You are transmitting to new generations the message that you must always be stressed and responsible for the fact that the crimes in Kosova will continue and are not finished. It is a very clear message, we have not overcome the stresses of war, all those horrible events, and they [Serbs] continue with criminal threats.[4] Why did the international community not react to those new threats to Kosova? Why can't it tell Serbia once and for all, 'You must recognise Kosova!' [referring to Serbia refusing to recognise Kosova as an independent state since its declaration in 2007] (Kreshnik, Kosova)

For Kreshnik and many other participants, visible punishment of perpetrators was also a necessary form of justice because it addressed past harm whilst also helped to prevent future harm and reduced the new generation's fear and anxiety. Without such accountability, the war would continue, as would the threat from the outgroup ('they continue with criminal threats'). These threats were experienced collectively by the survivors ('we'), which would be passed on to new generations (in this case ethnic Albanians), and thus would increase the likelihood of future intergroup violence and conflict. Dissatisfaction with justice was

also perceived as a continued source of anxiety ('You must again organise, be prepared, not relax') that undermined wellbeing ('we have not overcome the stresses of war, all those horrible events'). This participant also highlighted the importance of legal processes in the fight for justice (in this case, the state of Kosova being internationally recognised), as such reforms had the potential to prevent future harm and help survivors to make sense of and cope with their experiences.

Appreciation of the geo-political context in which a specific MHRV took place, as well as the different social groups involved (e.g., the perpetrator group, survivor group and the international community), is thus important for understanding survivors' justice-related concerns. While gaining independence was important in the Kosova context, Albanian dictatorship survivors emphasised the need for legal reforms like lustration (preventing those who orchestrated/executed dictatorial crimes from holding public office) and legislation preventing future dictatorships. In both cases (as well as the perceived social inequalities in the Northern Ireland context), survivors were perceived as lacking collective efficacy, which limited their ability to achieve justice, potentially leading to poor wellbeing and increased anxiety about the future.

For Kreshnik and many others, lack of recognition and documentation of the violations was perceived as harmful and as a way to purposefully produce and reproduce an inaccurate version of history that denied/erased the perpetrators' crimes. This extract also revealed the intergenerational impact of the injustice and the ways that the impact of injustice was transmitted through social groups diachronically as well as synchronically (i.e., new generations must prepare for potential war and need to protect themselves).

4.4 | Discussion

This study shows a number of important points. First, justice concerns were holistic and involved multiple dimensions of both TJ and SJ. Specifically, participants expressed collective and multi-faceted understandings and dissatisfaction with post-MHRVs justice across multiple contexts. These understandings (and dissatisfactions) involved multiple elements of both transitional and social justice and facets of justice-seeking of both types contributed to their overall experiences of injustice. Historical justice was a key focus, with participants discussing concerns about accurate reporting of and teaching about history (with an intragroup and intergroup focus in Albania, i.e., the teaching of future generations about the threats of dictatorship), and an intergroup focus in Kosova and Northern Ireland (i.e., attempting to discourage future threat from the outgroup). They were equally concerned with inequality. Participants also described their desires to promote honest collective reflections on the MHRVs, balanced media representation of the crimes, admission by and apologies from perpetrators and recognition of each group's role in the events. They also explained their needs with reference to administrative justice (lustration and reformed legal, judicial and executive powers), constitutionalism and social justice (equality, belief in the state and reduction of future intergroup threat), criminal justice (punishment of perpetrators) and ability to access these forms of justice. Building on Study 1, Study 2 provides

an in-depth analysis of extensive participant accounts regarding definitions and understandings of the holistic nature of justice as identified by the survivors themselves across three qualitatively different contexts and time periods (19–26 years after the end of active conflict/war/dictatorship). The findings across both studies indicate that justice needs remain a concern both in the short term and in the long term, lasting several decades after the end of active conflict/war/dictatorship.

Second, participants presented justice as a key contributor to their wellbeing. Dissatisfaction with these multiple diverse forms of justice was perceived as a threat to many aspects of collective life and collective wellbeing for various reasons: It served as a reminder and amplifier of the harm; it motivated continuing social divides; it was perceived to be linked to future threat and therefore increased anxiety about the future; and finally, it was a reminder of the survivors' lack of collective efficacy (due to them being unable to achieve these multiple forms of justice). For our participants, unless these justice needs were addressed (within their communities, nations and even the international arena), their individual and collective wellbeing would continue to be harmed because of persisting intergroup threat, distrust, divisions, inefficacy and inequalities. Thus, justice takes a central role in how survivors understand and experience the effects MHRVs and in how MHRVs define their collective wellbeing and increase anxieties about the future. These findings reflect the key findings from Study 1 by illustrating how perceived injustice affects wellbeing and recovery, again, even decades after the conflict.

Third, the findings evidenced the collective nature of survivors' experiences, understanding of and needs for justice and their relationships with experiences of survival, recovery, threat-reduction and wellbeing; for example, in the ways in which MHRVs are experienced and responded to over time by those persecuted in the Albanian dictatorship, Kosova Albanians affected by war and those affected by the Northern Irish Troubles. Perpetrators and survivors are referred to in collective terms: communists and non-communists in Albania; Albanians and Serbs in Kosova; Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. It was equally striking that, in every setting, the focus was on the collective nature of both violations and responses to those violations. This again highlights the importance of social identity processes, including the role of social identities in: (a) affecting how survivors experienced and appraised the violations (Başoğlu et al. 1997; Këllezi and Reicher 2012; Kellezi et al. 2009), (b) the collective nature of the support given or denied to survivors such as recognition of harm/suffering/responsibility (Këllezi et al. 2023; Mclocklin et al. 2024) and (c) a predominant feeling that the survivor group lacked the collective efficacy needed to bring about change (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Këllezi, Wakefield et al. 2021; Shala et al. 2024). Despite this continued and long-term perceived lack of collective efficacy at an intergroup level (e.g., lack of recognition of independence) and an intragroup level (e.g., lack of intragroup education), survivors were clear on what types of justice they wanted and how future harm could be prevented.

5 | General Discussion

This programme of research aimed to understand the complex relationship between justice, wellbeing and collective processes

in contexts of MHRVs. Study 1 aimed to explore, through the observation of everyday life, the key contributors to wellbeing in a post-war context 5 years after the end of the war. Study 2, informed by Study 1, aimed to investigate the relationship between (in)justice and wellbeing, paying attention to collective processes and survivors' own definition of justice needs in the longer term and across different contexts. Both studies confirm that satisfaction with justice is fundamental to survivors in different contexts and remains a key concern after the end of active conflict in the short and longer term. These justice concerns were holistic, including criminal (e.g., perpetrator punishment), reparatory (e.g., material and symbolic benefits to families and communities), administrative (e.g., lustration), constitutional (e.g., creating laws to prevent future injustices), historical (e.g., documenting truth) and social justice, which was mutual or reciprocal in some intergroup contexts (e.g., Northern Ireland, Study 2).

Both studies also confirmed that justice concerns were experienced as affecting the very nature and definition of group identities. That is, the experience of justice is framed by salient key identities, where responsibilities for achieving justice were attributed to both ingroup members (e.g., fellow community members; the government/state) and outgroup members (e.g., the perpetrators, the international community). Justice was also seen to be defined by and through intersecting social identities, including family and nation (seen in previous research: Këllezi, Guxholli et al. 2021; Këllezi et al. 2023). In some circumstances, justice perceptions were intensified by both gender (Studies 1 and 2), and/or social class identity issues (Study 2) as a result of the nature of the harms and the unequal responsibilities of post-harm justice-seeking, recovery and remembrance. Finally, both studies show that satisfaction with justice is of critical importance in the perceived relationships between group processes and wellbeing in post-conflict contexts.

The key difference between the two studies is the fact that Study 2, unlike Study 1 looks at justice concerns in very different settings. These vary along multiple dimensions including geography, conflict type and conflict dynamics and length of time post conflict. These lead to differences in specific local justice processes (Shaw et al. 2010) between settings. For instance, in Northern Ireland, there is recognition of efforts to promote intergroup justice processes that contrasts with the lack of perceived justice in Albania and Kosova. However, over and above these differences, it was striking that in every setting people took a holistic perspective, expressing concerns with multiple forms of justice, both transitional (criminal, historical, administrative, reparative and constitutional justice) and social.

5.1 | Theoretical Contributions

The in-depth ethnographic and interview data that comprise this programme of research make several key theoretical contributions. The first contribution relates to the insights provided to extend theoretical knowledge relating to collective wellbeing and trauma theories. Specifically, we show that *various justice processes are perceived as critical in predicting and understanding the impact of collective experiences of historical trauma such as MHRVs on wellbeing.* Our research supports the work of trauma

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researchers such as Herman (trauma and repair theory; 2023) and Afuape (2012) who also recognise the role of multiple forms of justice for recovery and survivor wellbeing in the context of individual recovery. However, our work adds an essential collective perspective due to us utilising the SIAH to help provide an extended understanding of collective responses to MHRVs. Using SIAH illustrates how these events are not only experienced through social identities but also that social identity-based processes such as inter- and intra-group justice concerns can influence the impact of MHRVs on wellbeing.

Most trauma theories, such as dual representation theory (Brewin, Dalgleish, and Joseph 1996), the cognitive model of PTSD (Ehlers and Clark 2000) and psychological wellbeing theories (such as the PERMA model, Seligman 2002; psychological wellbeing, Ryff and Keyes 1995) focus on individual responses even when they address collective processes such as appraisal, social support and positive relationships. As such, they do not account for the long-term collective impact of MHRVs, collective processes of meaning-making and coping or shared understandings of justice and justice-seeking. Our research suggests that to understand wellbeing and trauma in the context of such extreme experiences, we must account for and appreciate the nature of collective responses and complex holistic forms of justice desired and needed by survivors. The power to suffer, survive, resist and bring about change is enhanced by the strengths of the collective (seen, for instance, in the collective efforts of families campaigning for the return of missing community members). The SIAH (C. Haslam et al. 2018; Jetten et al. 2012), utilised in conjunction with theories of transitional and social justice, provides an insight into the nature of this resistance and resilience that helps communities continue to battle for justice as well as ways in which it enhances vulnerability. These frameworks also reveal why collective suffering (e.g., through the bonds of the family) is felt so acutely by fellow group members—even across generations.

The second contribution is the novel conceptualisation of wellbeing. Alongside this extended collective understanding of wellbeing in the context of trauma, this work also draws upon and *promotes a novel human rights conceptualisation of wellbeing in psychology*. This integrates individual wellbeing into social, cultural, economic, political and civil dimensions of life to provide a fuller multi-dimensional understanding of wellbeing in the wake of these complex socio-political phenomena. This conceptualisation is based on the United Nations principles (United Nations 1966a, 1996b) stating that human dignity, freedom, justice and peace in the world can only be achieved by creating the conditions whereby every human being can fully achieve social, cultural, economic, political and civil rights.

A third theoretical contribution of this research relates to the social cure and curse research highlighted above. Our findings show that conflict-related group identities are not only relevant during experiences of discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; S. A. Haslam and Reicher 2006) but also remain central to the impact of, understanding of and responses to MHRVs, even decades after active conflict. *Our work therefore makes several novel contributions to the social curse literature in terms of understanding the roles of meaning-making, agency and support.* Our work suggests that dissatisfaction with collective

justice can become a social curse as survivors: (a) remain preoccupied with the lack of justice and shared responsibilities to achieve it on behalf of the group, its past and present members who have suffered and those who may suffer in the future; (b) continue to appraise the impact of MHRVs as a negative and ongoing social threat for themselves and future generations; (c) have their collective agency undermined by a prolonged and persistent lack of justice; and (d) remain dissatisfied with the ingroup's lack of support in fighting for justice. It is possible that preoccupation with justice and experiences of future collective threat can contribute towards possible future conflict (Klar 2016; Vollhardt 2020) through its link with collective angst and the emotions that result from it (see Wohl and Branscombe 2008). However, the specific nature of the responses (e.g., revenge/retribution) will depend on ingroup norms about their acceptability (Këllezi et al. 2024) as well as collective resources and contextual barriers/facilitators. Our research also illustrates how social curse processes (e.g., dissatisfaction with intragroup support for justice) may act as barriers to curative social pathways (e.g., deriving collective resources like support and efficacy to help cope with the impact of MHRVs and social injustices). These intragroup consequences have been described as the second of a 'double insult' in intergroup trauma-related social curse research (Këllezi and Reicher 2014; Shala et al. 2024). In such circumstances, prevalence of perceived social injustices can undermine social cohesion, social support and intragroup trust at the community, ethnic and/or national level, and therefore constituting a second form of violence.

More generally, our work addresses some of the limitations of trauma and psychological wellbeing theories by accounting for collective identity processes of meaning-making, support and coping with MHRVs. This supports previous research (e.g., Këllezi and Reicher 2012; Muldoon et al. 2021) in showing that the social cure and curse processes situated within the theoretical framework of the SIAH can be applied to context of MHRVs. However, while this literature recognises the importance of transitional and social justice processes to health and wellbeing (e.g., Këllezi and Reicher 2012; Muldoon et al. 2021), it does not engage systematically with holistic forms of justice, which this study shows to be crucial for fully understanding intersectional experiences of human rights-informed wellbeing in contexts of MHRVs.

Given the relevance of social identities in justifying MHRVs, their impact and survivors' responses to them, future social cure/curse research (C. Haslam et al. 2018; Jetten et al. 2017) must be human rights-informed, paying attention to transitional as well as social justice needs where relevant and recognising that these concerns last for many generations. Such research, especially work conducted in the context of intergroup relations, peace and conflict and historical violations, must also aim to better understand how wellbeing is impacted by past, present and expected future social relations. Multi-dimensional approaches to understanding wellbeing should include existing measures of social and psychological wellbeing but also must begin to include recognition of other social, cultural, economic, civil and political contributors to wellbeing as we have illustrated in relation to multiple dimensions of transitional and social justice in the context of MHRVs. Researchers also need to understand wellbeing following MHRVs as being a multi-dimensional and

systemic concern, where the responsibility/power for change rest not only on ingroups/outgroups but also on national and international systems and institutions. Such institutions have the potential to bring about sustainable justice, improved social relations and recovery for those who have experienced collective trauma and MHRVs.

The fourth contribution of the present findings relates to its support and extension of research examining the complex experiences of collective and historical victimhood (Klar 2016; Schori-Eyal, Klar, and Ben-Ami 2017; Vollhardt 2020). In particular, *the holistic and context-specific nature of post-MHRVs justice needs— including what those needs are, and how they should be met—may provide insight into how and why the experiences of collective victimhood are so varied, including how they relate to (lack of) cohesion in conflict-affected societies* (Vollhardt et al. 2020). For instance, exclusive/competitive victimhood (as opposed to inclusive/universal victimhood) and an apparent unwillingness to move beyond past suffering (as seen in previous research such as Noor et al. 2012) may be indicative of unmet justice needs in a context of ongoing inequality, lack of protective legal frameworks, and/or lack of recognition of suffering (including the withholding of information on victims). These possibilities underline the potential value of incorporating holistic (i.e., transitional justice and social justice) frameworks and human rights conceptualisation of wellbeing into social psychological approaches to MHRV impacts and responses. Our work indicates that perceived lack of justice can, on the one hand, undermine ingroup resilience and agency (including negatively affecting the use of justice frameworks) and, on the other, can impede reconciliation and maintain anxiety about future conflict (Klar 2016; Voldhardt 2020). In fact, failure to address social justice issues can undermine social cohesion (Ndinga-Kanga, Van der Merwe, and Hartford 2020) as shown in our participants' descriptions of maintained divisions. The holistic focus on social and transitional justice could also be relevant for peace and conflict literatures, which recognise the value of social harmony (Galtung 1969) and social and structural justice more generally (Leshem and Halperin 2020).

The fifth contribution of this work is its extension of transitional justice (TJ) and social justice (SJ) frameworks (which apply a human rights approach to understand the impact of MHRVs; see, e.g., Teitel 2000, for TJ and Grant and Gibson 2013, for SJ) by showing that understandings of justice and justice-related priorities must combine TJ and SJ and must be holistic in nature. Supporting the work of TJ scholars (McEvoy and McConnachie 2013; Robins 2017), our research also shows the need for definitions of MHRVs-related justice to be informed by the survivors and to be context-specific. If not, justice processes cannot be meaningful and sustainable and are unlikely to be cognisant of local resources, priorities and needs, thus undermining their effectiveness.

Finally, the main contribution of this research is the proposal of a human rights understanding of traumatic experiences and responses in the context of MHRVs. This new approach involves five key features: (a) analysis of holistic justice (TJ and SJ) needs, (b) a human rights conceptualisation of wellbeing, (c) analysis of inter and intragroup identity processes, (d) recognition of the broader social-political context and (e) understandings of

survivors' justice and wellbeing priorities. Without this multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approach there is a risk to continue developing knowledge, practice and policy that does not address the multiple causes of harm and limits the development of effective solutions.

5.2 | Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Our research focused on rarely studied contexts in non-WEIRD societies (Kosova and Albania). This is very important given the excessive focus on WEIRD contexts when generating current knowledge on trauma experiences and group processes (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; Summerfield 1999). Future research would benefit greatly from expanding the context and paying attention to other forms of historical injustices such as coloniality, as well as to situations where active conflict is ongoing.

It is also important to consider that our results are determined by the timing of the studies. Our data were collected 5 years and then 19–26 years after the active/height of conflict/war/dictatorship. These timeframes shed light on differences observed soon after and a generation after the war/conflict/dictatorship. However, it is not unusual for justice processes to be implemented years or even decades after the end of active conflict (McAuliffe 2021; Porciuncula 2021). As a result, these two timeframes allowed us to examine processes being implemented soon after (within the first 5 years) and those that would require more time and more organic development based on the specific needs and context where MHRVs took place. Our research monitored and reflected on the primary justice processes in each context. Even in the most unstable context, Kosova, which is yet to be recognised as an independent nation by Serbia and other nations, there were no other indications of justice processes likely to take place in the near future. As a result, these timeframes illuminated, but were also limited by, survivor experiences, short term and longer term.

Our research is also based on qualitative methodologies. While quantitative methodologies would have enabled a testing of the relationships between collective processes, justice and wellbeing, the nature of these analytic techniques would make it difficult to capture holistic, context-dependent and complexly evolving justice needs and wellbeing experiences from participants' own perspectives. The findings from our multi-context and multi-methodological studies would however provide a good starting point to attempt to capture this complexity using quantitative methods.

We note that the combination of ethnographic and interview qualitative methodologies was beneficial in allowing survivors to express their needs more naturalistically (as part of their daily life during our ethnographic research) and in greater depth (through the semi-structured format of the interviews in Study 2). While ethnographic methodologies can be very complex to implement and require careful management of the relationships between the researcher and participant, the researcher's prior knowledge of the context (this was their 4th visit to post-war Kosova and their experience working in a refugee camp during the war) and speed of participant engagement indicates that trust was successfully established. The gatekeepers also facilitated

any cultural and contextual interpretations where appropriate. In fact, the gatekeepers worked with the researcher not only to understand potentially problematic situations but also helped to further frame the research aims and methodology. The focus on fewer participants during the ethnography study was complemented with a much larger sample during the interview study. The potential limits of the interview studies in focusing on participants' accounts of their experiences were in turn complemented by the observation of these experiences in everyday life during the ethnographic study. Future studies could expand further the engagement of participants with the experience of the issues under study and investigate other understudies context (e.g., coloniality, genocide and other forms of MHRVs).

6 | Conclusion

This research is interdisciplinary and uses insights from psychological theories including trauma and repair theory (Herman 2023), positive psychology (Seligman 2002), wellbeing psychology (Ryff and Keyes 1995), the SIA/SIAH (Jetten et al. 2012; Reicher, Spears, and Haslam 2010) and legal/social political theories including transitional justice (Teitel 2000) and social justice (Jost and Kay 2010). This study is also a multi-method investigation by lived-experience researchers that explores contributors to wellbeing in post-conflict contexts. Using mixed methods and comparing the findings across the studies allowed capturing of participants' own understandings, definitions and priorities for holistic justice whilst revealing the located and symbolic nature of their justice-seeking actions and experiences using ethnographic and interview approaches. In addition, by focussing on the short-term and long-term aftermath of conflict, as well as the inclusion of several generations of participants, the research provided a diachronic and synchronic examination of these important processes.

The findings of our research have several implications for practice and policy. First, they highlight the psychological importance of understanding justice priorities from the survivors' perspectives. Understanding and communicating these priorities enables a focussing of limited resources on the specific needs of the survivors. It should further enable an understanding of and engagement with local solutions to those needs and potentially an increase in local willingness to engage with change strategies (due to an increased sense of felt understanding; Livingstone 2023, or an increase in perceived meaningfulness of such strategies). Insights provided into the multi-faceted nature of holistic justice needs suggest that any MHRV-related justice strategies should pay attention to social justice needs as well as more obvious MHRV-related justice outcomes if we want to effectively support survivors and move towards future peace and reconciliation. Finally, the key actors involved in bringing about justice are also diverse, and multiple actor involvement is required in order to bring about change.

Exploring these processes in multiple contexts has afforded us an appreciation of the various forms and complexities of intergroup experiences, traumas and needs. In the Northern Ireland context, for example, our research illustrates the importance of working with multiple communities involved in conflict, as each side has diverse needs, histories and collective experiences. The Kosova context illustrates the importance of the role of the international community in providing justice as well as the ingroup's responsibility to deliver justice. The Albania context reflects the link between justice and democracy. All three contexts highlight the diversity of needs *within* sections of survivors' communities and the intergenerational impacts of MHRVs. These complex social and historical dynamics are essential elements of the collective experiences of harm that can potentially pave the way for greater understanding and communication, thereby promoting justice and eventual healing. Finally, taking a human rights approach to exploring and understanding the impact and responses to MHRVs, which incorporates holistic understandings of justice, human rights conceptualisations of wellbeing and appreciation of socio-political contexts and group processes can help contribute to bringing about changes that benefit individuals, families, communities, societies and even intergroup relations by enhancing understandings of survivors' experiences and elevating their voices.

Ethics Statement

Study 1 was approved by St Andrews University Ethics Committee, and Study 2 was approved by Nottingham Trent University Ethics Committee.

Consent

All participants in Study 1 provided either verbal or written consent to take part in the study. Participants in Study 2 provided written consent.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The supporting data are preserved in the NTU Data Archive. Due to the politically and ethically sensitive nature of the research, no interviewees consented to these data being shared. Additional details relating to other aspects of the data are available at https://doi.org/10.17631/rd-2021-0001-dsfu.

Endnotes

[1] The spelling Kosova, instead of Kosovo, will be used throughout to reflect the version used by the participants in the research.

[2] Bloody Friday refers to a specific event in Belfast in 1992, where 20 bombs placed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army exploded within a very

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short period of time killing nine people (including five civilians) and injuring 130 people.

[3] Compensation is given to those who have spent time in prison, and this has yet to be completed even at the time of writing this publication, in 2024, 33 years after the end of the dictatorship.

[4] Referring to demonstrations in Serbia against the independence of Kosova at the time of the interview. Tensions in Kosova continue to this day.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.