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Narrativity and Violence: Conceptual, Ethical and Methodological Challenges

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Sabine Andresen,
Christof Mandry,
Doris Reisinger (eds.)

NARRATIVITY AND VIOLENCE

Conceptual, Ethical and Methodological Challenges

[transcript] Culture & Theory

Doris Reisinger, Christof Mandry, Sabine Andresen (eds.)
Narrativity and Violence

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Doris Reisinger, Christof Mandry, Sabine Andresen (eds.)

Narrativity and Violence

Conceptual, Ethical and Methodological Challenges

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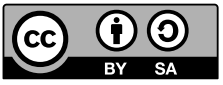

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Introduction

Doris Reisinger, Christof Mandry, Sabine Andresen

Under the title "Narrativity and Violence," this anthology unites the discussions and presentations from two international workshops held at Goethe University Frankfurt in late 2022. The collection reflects the interdisciplinary spirit and academic vigor that characterized these gatherings, bringing together scholars from diverse fields to explore the intricate relationship between narratives and the experience and study of violence.

The workshops, organized by the interdisciplinary research initiative on "Power and Abuse" at Goethe University Frankfurt, focused on the roles narratives play in understanding and addressing violence. This initiative spans various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, including education, history, theology, philosophy, and law. The central theme of these workshops was to delve into how narratives of violence—whether factual or fictional, oral or written—serve as crucial tools for acknowledgment, investigation, and redress of violent acts and power abuses.

Violence often exists in the shadows, with survivors sometimes hesitant to share their stories due to fear, shame, or mistrust. Narratives, however, provide a powerful medium through which these hidden experiences can be voiced and validated. The contributions show how different the forms of storytelling can be, but also the media in which stories are told. The process of narrating violence is not just a personal catharsis but also a social act that demands recognition and justice. The concept of witnessing becomes particularly significant in this context, underscoring the ethical responsibility of listeners to acknowledge and be-

lieve these narratives, thus fostering a supportive environment for truth and reconciliation.

The contributions in this anthology reflect the workshops' dual focus: the empirical and systematic research on narrativity's role in studying violence, and the literary, philosophical, and ethical dimensions of violence narratives. Researchers discussed the potential and limitations of narrative approaches, methodological implications, the ethical considerations involved, and the varied forms and functions of violence narratives. These discussions highlighted how narratives can bridge the gap between personal experiences and broader social and political contexts, challenging and potentially transforming societal perceptions and responses to violence.

We have arranged the contributions in an order that corresponds to the historical sequence of the reported experiences of violence or the media contexts of their articulation. However, the collection is introduced by two contributions that function as overtures: The first contribution by Steven Reich highlights that historical research itself brings narratives to light by extracting the voices of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders from the archives and placing them into a new, historically analytical narrative context. The second contribution, by Monika Bobbert, addresses the ethical dimension of research that inevitably must be considered when working with survivors of violence. Following these two pieces, the subsequent contributions engage with narratives of violence in various ways, each providing unique insights while also revealing overarching themes and challenges. These overarching issues will be briefly addressed at the end of this introduction.

In "Testifying against Jim Crow's Violence," Steven A. Reich examines the 1911 habeas corpus hearing in Anderson County, Texas, where six white men were indicted for the murder of six African Americans. The article focuses on the courageous testimony of Margaret Wilson, an African American woman and survivor of the atrocity. Born into slavery, Wilson testified against the mob that killed her husband, son, and brother, defying the pervasive Jim Crow justice system that typically shielded white perpetrators from accountability.

Reich highlights the rarity of such a legal proceeding in the South, where local authorities often concluded that African Americans killed by white mobs had died "at the hands of persons unknown." The case against the killers of the Slocum Massacre was notable because Texas authorities, for once, pursued justice: the county sheriff issued arrest warrants, newspapers published the names of the accused, and more than 200 people testified against them before a grand jury. However, despite the initial judicial vigor, the case ultimately faltered—defendants were granted bail, prosecutors lost interest, and the men went free, leaving the massacre largely forgotten.

Reich's work underscores the importance of rediscovering and preserving historical records of racial violence. He argues that these records, akin to the clinical consulting room described by Judith Herman in "Trauma and Recovery," serve as privileged spaces dedicated to memory, essential for understanding and acknowledging past atrocities. Through the examination of archival evidence, Reich aims to recover the buried history of events like the Slocum Massacre, offering a fuller account of the experiences of victims and survivors in the larger narrative of anti-Black racial violence in the United States.

In "Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research: Trauma Survivors Telling Their Stories for Research Purposes," Monika Bobbert delves into the complexities of conducting qualitative research with trauma survivors. She argues that while such research is crucial for understanding and preventing trauma, significant ethical challenges persist, primarily because the research often prioritizes scientific inquiry over the survivors' need to voice their suffering and seek justice.

Bobbert identifies various types of trauma, emphasizing those caused by human actions, and discusses how these traumatic events leave lasting psychological and physical scars. She highlights the need for ethical research practices that recognize and mitigate the unique vulnerabilities of trauma survivors, such as the risk of re-traumatization and the expectation of therapeutic benefits from participation. The article critiques existing ethical codes for being too general and calls for specific guidelines tailored to qualitative research with trauma survivors. Bobbert points out the inadequacy of current standards in

addressing the power dynamics between researchers and participants and stresses the importance of informed consent and transparency to avoid misunderstandings and potential harm.

One significant contribution is her discussion on the manifestation of PTSD symptoms, like intrusive memories and hyperarousal, and how these symptoms complicate the research process. Bobbert advocates for a trauma-informed approach that carefully considers these factors to prevent further psychological harm. Ultimately, Bobbert's work underscores the necessity of balancing scientific goals with the ethical obligation to protect and respect trauma survivors, proposing a nuanced framework that prioritizes their well-being throughout the research process.

In her article "Narratives of Violence Against Civilians in German-written Accounts of Austro-Hungarian Soldiers of World War One," Lisa Kirchner explores autobiographical accounts of two low-ranking German-speaking Austro-Hungarian soldiers during the First World War. The study focuses on their experiences and narratives of looting and executing civilians in Galicia during the early months of the war. Kirchner's research reveals that these soldiers' accounts were heavily influenced by the need to maintain a positive self-image. They used various narrative strategies to exonerate themselves from responsibility, often deindividualizing their involvement and attributing violent actions to a collective or anonymous actors. This narrative construction served as a coping mechanism, helping the soldiers make sense of their traumatic experiences while avoiding direct admission of guilt.

Kirchner also notes the socio-political context of the time, where suspicions and prejudices against ethnic minorities were prevalent. This environment influenced the soldiers' perceptions and narratives, further complicating their portrayals of violence. Despite acknowledging the violence, the soldiers' writings reflect a broader cultural reluctance to critically examine Austro-Hungarian military actions during the war. Overall, Kirchner's work highlights the complexity of wartime narratives and the ways in which soldiers rationalized their actions to mitigate personal responsibility. It underscores the importance of understanding these narratives within their historical and socio-political contexts

to fully grasp the soldiers' perspectives and the broader implications of their actions.

Victoria Lupascu's article, "Ink Painting and Woodblock Printing: Narrating Violence through the Brush Stroke," delves into the graphic narratives of abuse and violence in Asia, particularly focusing on the Sino-Japanese War, Japanese aggression in Korea, and various periods in 20th-century China. The chapter examines how graphic novels such as Keum Suk Gendry-Kim's "Grass" and Li Kunwu and P. Otie's "A Chinese Life" challenge existing political discourses by portraying personal encounters with war, abuse, and violence. Lupascu argues that the heavy ink styles used in these works allow the unspeakable aspects of prolonged violence to be vividly depicted, offering a multifaceted representation that words alone cannot achieve.

The chapter highlights how these artists refer to traditional Asian ink painting and woodblock printing techniques to create a narrative tension between the subject and its depiction. The black and white aesthetics of these graphic novels underscore the depth of violence and despair experienced by their subjects. By revisiting these traditional artistic modalities, the artists situate their works within the Korean and Chinese artistic canons while simultaneously making powerful political statements against the denial of historical atrocities, such as the use of comfort women by the Japanese army.

Drawing on trauma theory and visual studies, Lupascu suggests that the visual dimension of these graphic novels enables a form of witnessing that transcends textual narration, particularly when recounting traumatic events through the eyes of children. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of these visual narratives in inscribing the voices of women and children into historical periods that require continuous ethical, political, and philosophical interrogation.

Gábor Csikós' contribution "Judgement of God, Inadequate Adaptation, or Simply Menopause? Collectivization Traumas behind Psychiatric Diagnoses in Hungary (1959–1961)" explores the psychological impact of the final phase of agricultural collectivization in Hungary through an analysis of patient records from the Lipótmező psychiatric institute. The study investigates how peasants disclosed their traumatic

experiences during collectivization, which contradicted the propaganda narrative of successful agricultural modernization.

Csikós examines verbatim accounts of patients' experiences, revealing that psychotic and schizophrenic patients often linked the emergence of their symptoms to the collectivization process. Their narratives depict instances of physical violence, coercion, and loss of property during this period. Patients with depression expressed feelings of hopelessness, loss of meaning, and suicidal tendencies associated with the upheaval of their traditional rural lifestyles. The study also highlights the role of language in shaping psychiatric diagnoses, as doctors interpreted patients' narratives through the lens of their relationship with social reality. Ciskós' study also sensitizes us to the power of psychiatric diagnoses in politically totalitarian societies, such as those known from the GDR.

In her contribution "Traumatic Memory: Literary Style and the Dynamics of Reading Human Acts by Han Kang," Janet Handley analyzes Han Kang's novel Human Acts, which depicts the 1980 Gwangju uprising and its aftermath. Handley argues that the novel's literary style creates a unique dynamic that enables readers to witness the traumatic events and their lingering impact on the characters. The use of multiple perspectives and fragmented narratives reflects the disjointed nature of traumatic memory, drawing readers into the characters' experiences of violence and loss.

Handley discusses how the novel's structure, with its shifting timelines and perspectives, mirrors the process of remembering and forgetting that characterizes trauma. The novel's vivid descriptions and emotional depth create a visceral reading experience, compelling readers to confront the brutality of the events and their long-term consequences. By examining the interplay between narrative form and content, Handley illustrates how Han Kang's literary techniques effectively convey the complexities of trauma and its enduring effects on individuals and communities.

In her article "Language and Trauma: Representations of Narcissistic Abuse on a Survivor Podcast," Morana Lukač explores how narcissistic abuse is depicted through personal narratives shared on the Canada-

based Narcissist Apocalypse podcast. Narcissistic abuse, characterized by manipulative behaviors of individuals with narcissistic personality disorder traits, often goes unrecognized due to its covert nature and the lack of appropriate diagnostic classifications. Lukač analyzes 105 podcast episodes, focusing on the language and insider vocabulary used by survivors to articulate their experiences. Terms like "love bombing," "gaslighting," and "trauma bonding" emerge as crucial in understanding and communicating the manipulative tactics employed by narcissistic abusers.

The study employs a corpus-assisted discourse analysis to uncover patterns in the narratives, revealing that 90% of the stories involving romantic relationships with narcissists describe experiences of "love bombing," where the abuser initially overwhelms the victim with excessive attention and flattery. This initial idealization is often followed by phases of devaluation and discard, yet the abusive cycle can involve intermittent returns to love bombing, maintaining control over the victim.

Lukač emphasizes the importance of raising awareness about narcissistic abuse among mental health professionals and the general public arena. She argues that the shared language within survivor communities provides a powerful tool for victims to make sense of their experiences and find validation. The disproportionate number of female narrators and the different strategies used by narcissistic parents versus romantic partners are also noted, suggesting areas for further research into gender differences and childhood experiences of narcissistic abuse.

The final contribution by David Keller is titled "Translating Trauma: On the Narratives of Illness and Violence in Refugee Mental Health." It explores the role of personal narratives in documenting and treating trauma, particularly in the context of refugee mental health. The author discusses how personal illness and violence narratives undergo significant translations when transformed into medico-legal narratives for asylum applications or clinical reports. These translations involve multiple steps, leading to the composition of complex narratives about trauma, violence, and illness. The personal narrative is often the cor-

nerstone, but the patient's voice undergoes substantial transformations during this process.

Keller highlights the ethical considerations surrounding these translation practices, as they condition different effects and consequences, and the actors involved have varying levels of power, resources, and agency. He emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and sensitivity in trans- and intercultural healthcare settings, where patients face the demand of translating their own experiences. The author argues for an "ethics of translation" that recognizes the challenges of representing personal experiences and the need for collaborative translation practices involving clinicians, patients, and cultural mediators. This approach aims to prevent misunderstandings, empower patients, and ensure their informed decision-making.

This anthology showcases the importance of cross-disciplinary research in this field. The diverse perspectives and methodologies presented here demonstrate how different academic lenses can converge to offer a more comprehensive understanding of violence and its representation. By highlighting the interconnectedness of these approaches, the anthology not only documents current research but also lays the groundwork for future scholarly endeavors.

At the end of this introduction, we would like to highlight some themes that we believe run through many of the contributions.

First, it is noticeable that narratives are not simple objects of violence research that merely exist and are found and analyzed by researchers. Rather, the research process is often closely linked to the creation of these narratives, contributing to the forms they take and the mediums in which they are articulated. This is evident, for example, in historical research, which reconstructs violent events and experiences from traces and testimonies in archives and various source materials, placing them into a comprehensible narrative context. This is also true, albeit in a different way, for oral narratives recorded in clinics, asylum procedures, or documentation centers, where they are both enabled and shaped by pragmatic contexts. Researchers bear a significant responsibility by providing survivors with a space where their voices are heard and their testimonies received and reframed in a broader context. This eth-

ical dimension is clearly reflected in our contributions, encompassing research ethics and the ethics of translation.

Another connecting theme is the search for a language or, more generally, a means of expression that can make the unspeakable speakable. Narratives of survivors of wartimes, of harm and violence in childhood or of historical atrocities often reflect this search and the literary, aesthetic, and media paths they pursue. This presents a methodological challenge for research. The contributions demonstrate that narrative and linguistic analysis, art-historical classification, and literary and source-critical methods are employed conscientiously and with a critical awareness of their limitations. This challenge is also linked to the concept of "trauma," which pervades many contributions. The trauma that survivors carry due to their experiences, which makes it difficult for them to mentally cope with their experiences, is primarily a psychological category. In this regard, narration is perceived as a path to healing. However, trauma is also a literary category, utilizing a psychoanalytically inspired literary theory to generate insights. This intersection presents a challenge for interdisciplinary research, which certainly warrants further exploration.

Another overarching commonality is the experience that research encompassing the narration of violence and the academic engagement with these narratives, presents unique challenges to researchers not only as scholars but also as human beings. Regardless of their respective disciplines, the contributors faced similar methodological hurdles and emotional demands. The approaches of the various contributions underscore the necessity of balancing empathy with professional detachment, a common thread that connects researchers in the field of interpersonal violence. This delicate equilibrium fostered a unique atmosphere of collaborative effort and mutual understanding during the course of the workshop and the subsequent collaboration, revealing how the shared endeavor to comprehend and articulate the complexities of violence transcends academic boundaries, and deeply unites researchers in their dual roles as scientists and empathetic individuals.

Lastly, the contributions make it clear how deeply the conditions of violence and narratives of violence are influenced by factors such as gen-

der, age, ethnic, religious, and political affiliation or attribution, socioeconomic status, and so forth. While this insight is not surprising in itself, as conflict and violence often occur along these divisions, the investigations in this volume, when read sequentially, illustrate how intertwined these factors can be and highlight others that often seem less prominent. We see this as a confirmation of the value and productivity of the interdisciplinary and internationally comparative approach to researching narrativity in contexts of violence.

We thank all the contributors for their invaluable insights and Goethe University for providing a platform for these critical discussions. It is our hope that this collection will inspire further research and dialogue, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between narrativity and violence and ultimately fostering a more just and empathetic society.

Witnesses to Jim Crow's Violence

Steven A. Reich

On a cloudy and unseasonably warm and muggy late winter afternoon in 1911, hundreds of residents of Anderson County, Texas, packed the second-floor courtroom in the county seat of Palestine. They all gathered for the opening day of the *habeas corpus* hearing of six white men––held without bail since the previous August––indicted for the murder of six African Americans. Prosecutors called Margaret Wilson, an African American woman of about 50 years of age, as the state's star witness. Wilson had spent her entire life in rural southern Anderson County. Born into slavery, she raised thirteen children on an 80-acre farm, eighteen miles southeast of the county seat. She and her husband eventually purchased the place in 1902, making them among the many Black landowners in the freedom colony of Sandy Beulah. Six months earlier, the men she confronted in that court room had led a gang of white men who terrorized her community, shot up their homes, torched their farms, and forced them into exile. Now, without significant guarantees of her own personal safety, she returned to Anderson County and dared to defy Jim Crow by providing the testimony that could condemn these murderers to death row.

Wilson had likely never seen the inside of a courtroom; certainly, she had never been on the witness stand. Unfamiliar with the formality of the proceedings and the setting––a stately room with high vaulted ceilings, ornate trim, and tall narrow windows customary of the courthouse's imposing Second Empire style of architecture––there is little reason to think that she had any experience with what to expect once she took the witness stand. But she did know that the stakes were high.

One thing was for certain: Margaret Wilson entered that courtroom determined to bear witness against mob violence.

District attorney Earle Adams, Jr., approached the witness stand and asked her to tell the court where she was on the morning of July 30, 1910.

> "I was at home," she replied.
> *Did you witness anyone killed that morning?*
> "There was somebody killed on that Saturday; it was Geffy [her nineteen-year-old son] and Dick Wilson [her husband] and brother Ben Dancy."
> *Did you see who killed them?*
> "Mr. Isom Garner killed them."
> *Did Mr. Garner kill all of them?*
> "I don't know whether he killed all three of them, he might have shot them all, but I know he shot Geffy because I was looking at him, and he was not doing anything but sitting down when Mr. Isom Garner shot him. There was two more men with Mr. Garner when he shot them, but I didn't know the other two; one was a tall man and the other one was a little low one."
> *Do you see those men in the court room today?*
> "I see them in the Court room; there they are," pointing them out. "That man that spit was one of them; he was the one that shot my brother Ben. That little one there shot Dick. Those were the three, Mr. Garner and those other two."

Under the pressure of cross-examination, Margaret Wilson held firm to her account.

> "I knew Mr. Garner at that time, but I didn't know the others; I was so scared that I didn't know them. There wasn't any conversation; they just walked up there and went to shooting. … they shot as long as they had anything to shoot, I reckon; they shot about twenty-five or thirty times".[1]

---

1 Margaret Wilson testimony, *Ex Parte, State of Texas v. Jim Sperger et al, Consolidated* No. 5000-a, Third Judicial District Court of Texas, In Vacation, Palestine, Texas, March 1911, transcript (hereafter trial transcript), 60–65, Box 1993/088-

Figure 1: Margaret Wilson, undated family photograph.

Courtesy of Jonathan Wayne Wilson.

More than four decades before Moses Wright identified Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam as the killers of Emmett Till in open court in Sumner, Mississippi, Margaret Wilson and sixteen other survivors of the atrocity at Sandy Beulah––including two other young mothers left widowed by the violence––summoned the courage to relive their trauma and defy

122, File no. 1237, Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, centralized court case files, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

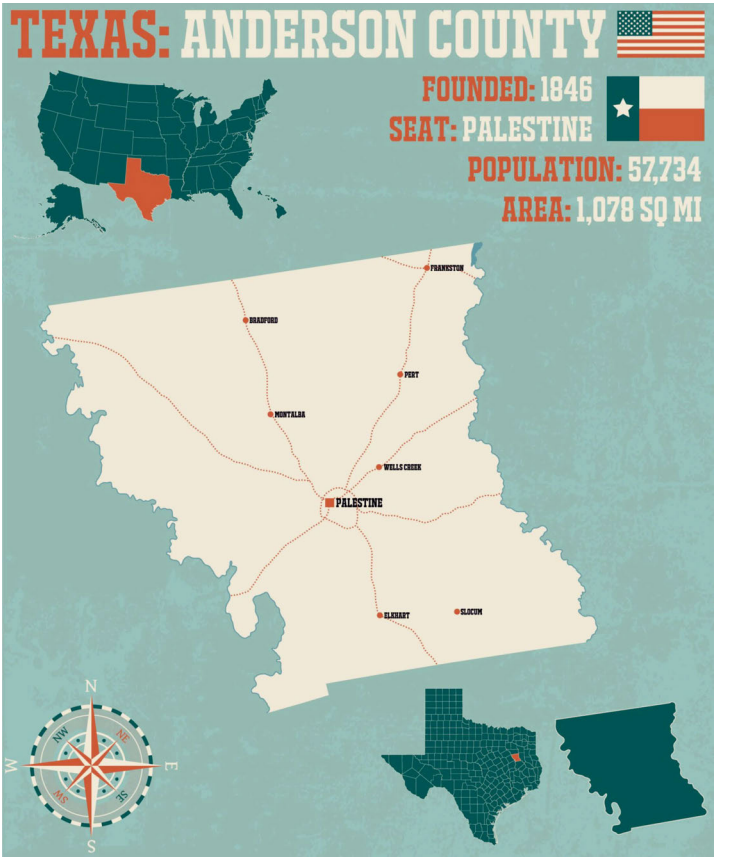
death threats to see that justice might be done. Convinced that their testimony showed clear evidence of "cold-blooded murder," Judge Gardner denied bail to five of the six defendants. In 1911, in this far corner of the Jim Crow South, it appeared, for a moment at least, that men who killed in the name of white supremacy might be held to account (Gardner n.d., 120).

Wilson's appearance in court was certainly incongruent with expectations of Jim Crow justice. In nearly all cases in which white vigilantes killed African Americans, local officials concluded their investigations by declaring that the victims had died "at the hands of persons unknown." In doing so they repeated one of the most common refrains in southern history, one that read less as a statement of fact than as an admission that the criminal justice system had no commitment to holding the people responsible for mob violence accountable. Most southern whites, of course, knew who the killers were. Thousands of southern communities kept open secrets but seldom left a documentary record of the crimes of mobs.

All of which makes Margaret Wilson's testimony and the circumstances that produced it highly unusual. In this case, Texas authorities refused to protect the identities of the killers. The county sheriff issued warrants for their arrest. Newspapers published their names. Texas Rangers interrogated them. More than 200 people testified against them before a grand jury, which returned six indictments for first-degree murder against eight men. The local judge denied them bail. Prosecutors sought the testimony of Black women to condemn them. The members of Wilson's family certainly did not die at the hands of persons unknown.

Justice did not prevail in 1911. The court of criminal appeals awarded the defendants bail. Prosecutors lost interest. Public outrage subsided. The defendants went free. Memory of Margaret Wilson's testimony waned. The identities of the killers and their accomplices over the years faded, eventually becoming, like those of other southern vigilantes, persons unknown.

Map 1: Anderson County Locator Map



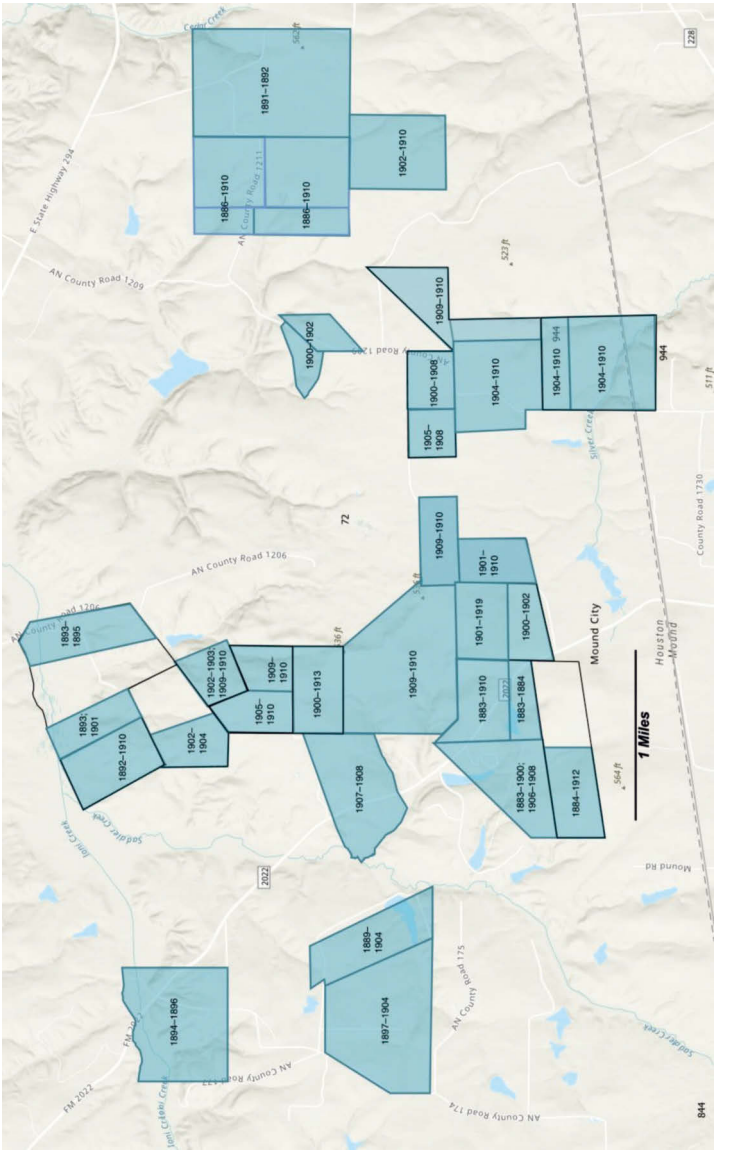
The massacre at Sandy Beulah occurred about 4 miles to the southeast of the little village of Slocum in the southeastern region of the county. Copyright Christian Mueller-clausnitzer Dreamstime.com, https://www.dreamstime.com/malachy96_info

The story of what has become known as the Slocum Massacre has been lost to history as well. No historian has made more than a passing reference to it (Bills 2014). Little evidence, it seems, has survived on

which to base a sustained analysis. Lurid coverage in the white press sensationalized the violence, reporting unsubstantiated rumors as fact. Once the violence subsided, the press offered only limited coverage of the criminal proceedings. Because the Department of Justice refused to intervene, federal records document little. Locals have long maintained that a fire at the courthouse in 1913 destroyed all court records connected with the criminal case as well as the deed records that would have documented evidence of African American landownership.

Memory of it thus survived only as the subject of whispers and conjecture. Most local whites claimed that the violence never happened or that stories of it were exaggerated and sensationalized. Blacks, of course, told a different story. The descendants of Jack Hollie, one of the founding patriarchs of Sandy Beulah, have done the most to keep the memory of the massacre alive within their family and to share it with journalists who would listen. In 2015, they convinced the Texas Historical Commission to erect a historical marker acknowledging the massacre. The white chairman of the Anderson County Historical Commission denounced the decision because he did not believe that a record of what happened could ever be substantiated. "We didn't have no facts or anything other than what newspapers" reported at the time, he told a journalist for *Texas Observer* in 2019. "And I don't copy anything that the newspapers say" (Barajas 2019). The Hollie family applauded the historical marker but believed that it only acknowledged a sanitized version of the story. They have now focused their efforts on discovering the unmarked graves of the victims. Without the bodies though, the Hollie family fears that it will never be possible to set the record straight.

Map 2: Black landownership in Sandy Beulah, 1883–1919.



The date ranges in each colored tract indicates the duration of Black landownership on each tract. Copyright Steven A. Reich

Despite the heroic efforts of the Hollie family to uncover the truth of the fate of their ancestors, the atrocity at Sandy Beulah has remained Anderson County's unspeakable secret. As Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman argued in her now classic book Trauma and Recovery, "the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman 1992, 1). And that dialectic, I would contend, frames historical understanding not only of the atrocity at Sandy Beulah, but the larger history of anti-Black racial violence in the United States. Even if knowledge of atrocity occasionally intrudes into the public sphere, its impact has not yet been socially and politically transformative or restorative. It even invites determined backlash. "Denial, repression, and dissociation," Herman reminds us, remain powerful forces that "operate on a social as well as an individual level" (Herman 1997, 1–2). Because the Hollie family's vernacular history of the massacre succeeds better at documenting intergenerational loss than at providing a record of exactly what happened, people in power (such as the chairman of the county historical commission) find it easy to dismiss its credibility (Williams 2012; Martinez 2018; Burnham 2022; Crabtree 2023). Traumatized societies then, like traumatized people, have been cut off from knowledge of their past. Recovering from psychological trauma, whether at the individual or social level, Herman contends, "begins with rediscovering history" (Herman 1997, 2).

Fortunately, evidence––hiding in plain sight and never before examined by historians––survives, allowing for such a rediscovery of history.

Records of the criminal proceedings, it turns out, were never housed in the Anderson County courthouse. When the district judge denied the defendants bail in 1911, defense attorneys filed an appeal. The case files were thus transferred to the appellate court where they have been filed and stored in the Texas State Archives ever since. Those records contain the full transcript of the ten-day bail hearing. Sworn testimony from fifty-four witnesses, Black and white, offers a window onto the perpetrators, victims, and survivors of the massacre. Even if the white people of Anderson County kept the crimes of their forefathers quiet for more than a hundred years, their ancestors spoke on record about what happened. And their words have remained preserved in the archives. The

testimony of Black witnesses––such as that of Margaret Wilson––are preserved as well, allowing the historian to recover her courageous act of bearing witness that nearly condemned six white men to the hangman's noose in 1911.[2]

The archive, then, is like the clinical consulting room, which Herman characterizes as a "privileged space dedicated to memory," where survivors "gain the freedom to know and tell their stories," increasing the likelihood of public disclosure of past abuses and atrocities, which "perpetrators are determined to prevent." The discovery of such rare evidence––in which survivors bore witness to racial atrocity––is for the historian akin to the moment when the clinical psychologist hears a patient suddenly become conscious of repressed ideas, feeling, and memories. In this paper, I propose to listen to the witness testimony in this archival evidence perhaps not unlike the psychologist might listen to a patient in the consulting room. To push this analogy, the historian, like the clinical psychologist, is duty bound to bear witness, whether in the confines of the consulting room or the stacks of the archives. "Moral neutrality," Herman reminds us, "in the conflict between victim and perpetrator is not an option. Like all bystanders, therapists––[and by extension in my analogy, historians]––are sometimes forced to take sides" (Herman 1997, 246, 247). The recovery of these witnesses' testimony, and

2 Other evidence survives as well. As the *Houston* Post reported at the time, a fireproof vault protected Anderson County's records from the 1913 courthouse fire, leaving a rich lode of local sources to be mined. Most importantly, these records allows us to reconstruct the patterns of Black landownership in Sandy Beulah and to identify with considerable precision, which residents owned which parcels of land. See "Anderson County Courthouse Burns," *Houston Post*, 7 January 1913. The principal actors in the drama also left traces of their lives in these records. They bought and sold property, paid taxes, started businesses, petitioned county administrators, borrowed money, sued their neighbors, probated estates, married loved ones, divorced their spouses, committed crimes, testified in court, signed affidavits, and spoke to federal census takers. Local and regional newspapers documented their comings and goings. This evidence permits us to recreate the world of Sandy Beulah, the people who made it their home, and the actions they took to defend it.

acknowledging the suffering and the loss that they endured, will help to unearth the buried history necessary for a traumatized community such as Anderson County to recover in the aftermath of atrocity, even after 100 years.

The Massacre

The carnage at Sandy Beulah began when a white farmer tried to settle a vendetta against a Black landowner by spreading rumors of an impending Black uprising. Convinced that a thousand armed Blacks lurked in the nearby thickets, white farmers mobilized a preemptive attack. Within hours of the first gunshots, hundreds of heavily armed white men from near and far descended upon the scene. White vigilantes scoured the woods in pursuit of Blacks. White sentries guarded crossroads and interrogated travelers before letting them pass. Watchmen shepherded white women and children to safety where they kept them hunkered down for hours in schoolhouses, churches, and barns. White families that remained together converted their cabins into fortresses and stood ready to shoot any Black person they saw.

More than 36 hours passed before authorities put an end to the killing. When they did, they found plenty of evidence of a white massacre. None of a Black uprising. Investigators found the dead bodies of Black men, many of them teenagers, riddled with buckshot scattered along the roads. "We won't find some of the bodies," lamented the county sheriff, "until the buzzards reveal their location" (*Dallas Morning News* 1910). Officials eventually confirmed eight deaths, identifying another six who sustained severe injuries, the majority of whom were teenagers or very young men. Deputies made a thorough search of Black homes and farms and discovered just nine single-barreled shotguns, their "muzzles choked with spider webs" (Freeman 1910). This war of extermination, as the local sheriff characterized it, erased all evidence of Black settlement and prosperity. Forty years later, just a single Black family resided in that section of Anderson County. It was as if African Americans had never lived there.

The savagery of the wanton killings shocked even the sensibilities of white southern segregationists and their seemingly endless capacity to tolerate brutality against African Americans. Editors in the white press, merchants at the county board of trade, and local authorities denounced the massacre as an outrage perpetrated by a roguish mob of cowards against harmless Blacks (*The Caucasian* 1910; *Houston Chronicle* 1910; *Beaumont Enterprise* 1910; *Houston Post* 1910; *Montgomery Advertiser* 1910; *Palestine Daily Herald* 1910). In doing so, they expressed sentiments consistent with those advocated by an emergent cadre of middle-class, white, southern legal reformers who advanced an anti-lynching agenda rooted in the rule of law. Mob violence, they maintained, violated due process, threatened legally constituted authority, and promoted the anarchy of the mob over the order of law enforcement. Extra-legal violence, they asserted, jeopardized economic growth, business investment, and white immigration. To extinguish the mob spirit, due process reformers advocated expedited trials followed by swift executions (Pfeifer 2014, 835–36; Jean 2005).

The massacre of Black landowners at Sandy Beulah tested the resolve of these antilynching reformers. Perpetrators of mob violence usually had little to fear from district attorneys who seldom summoned the courage to investigate. The public denunciation of the massacre at Sandy Beulah and the chorus of calls for the mob leaders to answer to the law, created a political opening to prosecute the killers. Local due process reformers seized upon the moment, hoping to use the case to turn the legal tide against mob violence. Although the national Black press applauded what it called the brave talk of prosecution coming out of the county courthouse, Black editors expressed skepticism that a Texas criminal court could deliver anything other than a sham trial. Anderson County would only save its good name, they argued, if the court convicted and hanged those guilty of the atrocities (*St. Paul Appeal*, 1910).

The burden of converting that brave talk into a fair trial fell to Benjamin H. Gardner, the local district judge. Few white southern jurists seemed better equipped to do so. Like other due process reformers of the day, Gardner had long disavowed mob violence without denouncing Jim

Crow. In 1909 he declared that he would never "tolerate mobs and mob violence," warned that he would not hesitate to impanel grand juries to investigate mob violence, and vowed, if evidence was sufficient, to deny bail to defendants in such cases (*Palestine Daily Herald* 1909). The massacre at Sandy Beulah forced Gardner to act upon his convictions. When criminal investigators discovered no evidence that Blacks had plotted an insurrection against their white neighbors, authorities had little choice but to arrest the white men they suspected of murder. Gardner empaneled a grand jury that delivered indictments against seven men within two weeks and held them in jail without bail. It remained to be seen whether Judge Gardner's court would enforce the rules of criminal procedure against white defendants in the same way that it did when it condemned Black suspects to death row. More importantly, would Gardner's court serve as a public forum capable of providing victims the space to speak their truth and have their suffering formally acknowledged?

Black Survivors: Witnesses to Atrocity

If Palestine's so-called leading white citizens were willing to condemn the perpetrators of the atrocity at Sandy Beulah as "unworthy white men," few white people seemed eager to testify against their neighbors. Reporters observed that the prosecution faced growing difficulty in securing witnesses to testify against the defendants, placing the entire case in jeopardy. Because of the trepidation of so many white witnesses, prosecutors had to rely on the testimony of Black survivors. Their willingness to testify on the public record about unspeakable acts left invaluable traces in the historical record that enable us to take measure of the lives transformed by vigilante violence. Courtroom testimony of Black witnesses provides rare evidence that enables historians to perform the essential work of integrating the experiences of victims' family lives into the scholarship of mob violence. New scholarship on racial atrocity has begun to counter the emphasis on the acts of perpetrators by recovering the experiences of victims and witnesses of violence. The kind of courtroom testimony left by the Black witnesses

of Sandy Beulah provides the critical voices needed to develop a more African American–centered history of racial violence that captures the full humanity of the victims and survivors (Williams 2014; 2018; 2023; Hill 2016; Martinez 2018; Crabtree 2023).

Furthermore, this kind of evidence underwrites the veracity of the vernacular history of racial violence. Witnesses and survivors who testified on public record provide the essential details that affirm the truth hitherto confined to the memories and stories passed along within families and local communities. It allows for a careful accounting of extralegal violence that has remained unavailable to the wider public and enables the expertise of professional historians to collaborate with community historians to read the historical evidence in concert with family lore to compose a narrative capable of setting the record straight about what happened. It would provide descendants with the history that they have long struggled to discover and tell (Burnham 2022, xv; Tilove 2018).

Survivor testimony such as we find in the *habeas corpus* hearing is so valuable because it is so rare. And thus we must approach the source with the care of a clinical therapist. As Judith Herman explains, survivors "often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility," which serves the interest of perpetrators who are determined to cast doubt on the stories of survivors (Herman 1997, 1). And no more was this the case than for the rare Black witness called to testify against white men in a Jim Crow criminal court. Consider the context in which Margaret Wilson took the witness stand. She had just listened to her 80-year-old mother retract statements that she had given to the grand jury, claiming now that her cataracts prevented her from making a positive identification of the defendants. Her own nephew, fifteeen-year-old Charley Wilson, had become flustered upon cross-examination and misidentified the men he claimed shot his teenage cousin. She knew that the defense would attempt to pester her. Prosecutors warned her that the defense would badger Black witnesses, hoping to expose tensions and conflicts among them, even to the point of suggesting that Margaret Wilson's own brother-in-law had stirred up the trouble with their white neighbors and hence was responsible for the carnage.

But as historian Jan Gross suggests in his remarkable study that pieces together the eyewitness accounts of the Poles who murdered their Jewish neighbors in the town of Jedwabne during World War II, it is essential that we accept as fact the testimony of survivors "until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary." If we read this evidence with the cautious skepticism that we normally bring to historical evidence, we inadvertently challenge its credibility and create a narrative that comforts the perpetrator. The transcript of the bail hearing offers a rare chance to listen to what Gross calls "lonely voices reaching us from the abyss" (Gross 2001, 139–140).

If we follow Gross's advice and accept as true Black testimonies about atrocities committed by their white neighbors until they are proven false, then the bail hearing transcript becomes powerful evidence to counter what historian Monica Muñoz Martinez calls the corrupt archive of racial terror. As she argues, official histories of the United States sanctioned by historical commissions, state boards of education, popular media, and politicians suppress the nation's history of extralegal violence, trauma, and loss. Instead, they substitute a celebratory history of progress and national achievement that disavows the crimes perpetrated by the state and the vigilantes who acted with state sanction. The few surviving records that document the lives of the victims of racial atrocity often criminalize them as rapists, bandits, or insurrectionists who deserved their fate. The corrupt archive, we might say, comforts perpetrators and substantiates their version of history (Martinez 2018, 1–29).

Such a corrupt archive has made it difficult to set the record straight about the atrocity at Sandy Beulah. In the aftermath of the massacre, accounts in the press––even as most reporters denounced the white killers and exposed the false rumors that circulated––never challenged the claim that Blacks had plotted an insurrection in a series of secret meetings in a little schoolhouse in the woods. The defense seized upon that narrative to argue that their clients acted in self-defense against a community of Blacks that had become so "insolent, insulting, and mean to the white people" that they were all convinced that the Blacks "in-

tended to rise and do devilment".[3] Although historians would certainly be skeptical of such a version of events, it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain exactly how and why without the testimony of survivors and witnesses. Therein lies the threat witnesses pose to the perpetrator's narrative both at the time of trial and in the corrupt archive.

Throughout the *habeas corpus* hearing Black witnesses held firm in their determination to counter the perpetrator's narrative. Pressed by the defense to admit that her father knew of an insurrectionist plot by Blacks and had warned white farmers of the impending danger that they posed to white farmers, sixteen-year-old Eva McDonald testified that she never heard her father say as much. She refused to give any credence to the defense's claim that her Black neighbors threatened to kill her father and forced him to abandon his farm for betraying their plot. Asked if he knew about an insurrectionist plot, Jake Dupre likewise rebuffed the defense's version of events. The 25-year-old unmarried son of Black landowners testified "that if I had known that there was any plan up to kill out the white folks, I would tell it. If I knew it, I would tell you; I would tell you nothing but the truth." The only meetings that Blacks in Sandy Beulah held during the summer of 1910, he continued, were about raising money to build a new church and a Sunday school. Dupre shared his harrowing tale of escape with the court, which left little doubt that it was white people, not his Black neighbors, who were on a violent offensive. "I left home because I heard that they [white people] were coming to kill me." Before the assailants arrived, he and his teenage brother Ross had fled their farmstead without the protection of arms and journeyed three miles through thickets and creek bottoms, avoiding the main road, until they reached the sanctuary of their grandmother's in Cherokee County.[4]

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3 Appellant's Brief, File no. 1237, *Ex Parte Jim Spurger et al. v, The State of Texas*, Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, Box 1993/088-122, centralized court case files, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

4 Eva [Mc]Donald, trial transcript, 179–180; and Jake Dupre, trial transcript, 179–180.

Black witnesses provided essential details of the crimes that their white neighbors committed on July 29 and 30. Fifteen-year-old Charley Wilson detailed how whites ambushed him and his cousins Lusk Hollie and Cleve Larkin at dawn as they were walking to feed their stock. He survived only because he had the presence of mind to play dead. Charley's teenage cousin, Justice, identified several of the more than forty white men who attacked his father's farm, stormed into their house, and opened fire on 25-year-old Sam Baker who had taken refuge in a side bedroom. His mother, Margaret Wilson, explained what happened when they entered the house:

> They searched all of the house, and they found Sam Baker in the little room. Mr. Sperger found him, and when he found him, he said "here he is, boys" and then he shot… There were several in there, Mr. Reid and Mr. Bridges; there was a whole lot them in there, but I couldn't tell you how many shots were fired, for there were so many in there and it looked to me like they shot as long as there was anything in the guns… I was so scared, I didn't keep any count of them.

Ermie Burley testified that about dozen men invaded her family farm, guns drawn, while she sheltered her children in their cabin. On the stand she explained the scene as she watched Jim Sperger shoot her unarmed husband at point blank range:

> They called [Will, my husband] out and said that they weren't going to do anything to him—Mr. Jim Sperger called him out—and said that he wasn't going to kill him, but he didn't go when he first called him, but I don't know exactly how many times they called him—two or three times, though. There wasn't anybody that called him besides Mr. Jim Sperger that I heard. And when [Will] went out, he went out on the gallery, and when he go out there they asked him what he knew [about the Black uprising], and [Will] said that he didn't know anything and then they shot him… There were three shots fired at that time and Mr. Sperger fired them… I was so scared then… I did not help bury my husband, and never did see him after he was killed.

Asked why he no longer lived at Sandy Beulah, Joe Barnett, one of the oldest landowners of the colony, testified that "I thought it was best to go away, and further I received several notes ordering me to go."[5]

The story, then, that emerges from survivor testimony is starkly at odds from that in the corrupt archive. We learn of a farming community that kept to itself; some of its leading men belonged to a Masonic lodge located some miles north of their colony; people of the community met frequently over the summer of 1910 in a school house to raise money to build a new church; no "old time negro" turned on their neighbors and friends and informed white farmers of an insurrectionist plot; and most importantly, white men by the score interrogated, beat, and intimidated Black boys, forcing them to reveal the location of neighbors hiding from the fury of the mob; gangs of whites stormed into the houses of black farmers, waylaid men and boys at point blank range, and shot Black males, young and old, in front of their mothers, wives, and children, forcing people to flee for their lives; those who survived and returned sold their property under threat of death, left, and never returned. And we learn exactly which white defendant killed each of the Black victims. This new archive not only contradicts the corrupt archive, it affirms family stories about the massacre that had been passed from one generation to the next. Maxine Session, whose father was an infant at the time of the massacre, grew up hearing tales of what her elders called Bad Saturday:

> People had come in from the fields and were resting in the noon hour, and somebody came through and said, 'You've got to get out of here; white people have gone crazy; they're killing everybody black that they can see, so you've got to go' (Tilove 2018).

The testimony that African Americans shared on the witness stand in March 1911 provide essential details, particulars, and specifics to the sto-

5 Charley Wilson testimony, trial transcript, 198–202; Justice Wilson testimony, trial transcript, 65–67; Margaret Wilson testimony, trial transcript, 60–61; Ermie Burley testimony, trial transcript, 175–177; and Joe Barnet testimony, trial transcript, 172–175.

ries that Session and other descendants heard as children in exile from Sandy Beulah.

White Witnesses: Bystanders to Atrocity

If Black witnesses showed remarkable courage in testifying on public record against white men in a Jim Crow court, few white witnesses mustered the courage to challenge the racial hierarchies of east Texas. White witnesses, even the twenty-five who agreed to testify for the state, could not be moved to share the burden of the victim's pain. Of the hundreds of white men who descended upon the Sandy Beulah community at the height of the violence, the overwhelming majority of them witnessed the killings but did not pull the triggers that killed the victims. They were bystanders to atrocity. Those who witness traumatic events, Herman explains, find themselves "caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator." They cannot remain morally neutral and are thus forced to take sides. Bystanders, Herman continues, find it "tempting to take the side of the perpetrator," who asks nothing more than of the bystander than do nothing. Victims, on the other hand, ask bystanders to "share the burden of pain." Victims demand "action, engagement, and remembering" (Herman 1997, 7–8).

White witnesses for the State all walked a fine line as they spoke on record in open court. If they refused to offer testimony that corroborated the defense's theory of the case, neither did they want to come off as hostile to the defendants or as race traitors. As one witness (who was not alone in doing so), testified about his sympathies during the violence, "I was strictly on the side of the white folks".[6] White witnesses who testified for the State, even if they claimed to have had no prior knowledge of a Black uprising before the killing began, often spoke at great length, particularly on cross-examination, about rumors of secret meetings among Blacks, of the change in demeanor among Blacks throughout the summer, and of the Black landowners' reputation for impudence. Many of

6 Testimony of M. F. Bridges, 217.

the witnesses claimed that they heard of rumors of an uprising but refused to clarify with any specificity of when they first heard about them (before the violence began or after the violence started). As one witness testified, "I never got to the bottom of any of these rumors"[7]. As Judge Gardner wrote in his memoirs, several white witnesses made statements to him in private that would have been valuable to the state's case, but when they took the witness stand, they shaded their testimony for the defendants. When asked to remember, they preferred to forget and in so doing betrayed the victims and offered comfort to the perpetrators (Gardner n.d.).

Just as Jan Gross maintains that everyone in Jedwabne knows what happened to their Jewish neighbors in 1941, so did everyone in southern Anderson County know what happened to the Black farmers of Sandy Beulah. Some white witnesses were intimidated and threatened; most simply lacked moral courage. Whatever the case, the perpetrators succeeded in convincing the bystanders to do nothing. Such equivocation on the witness stand offers direct evidence of what civil rights attorney Sherilyn Iffil has called the conspiracies of silence that have long concealed the identities of the perpetrators of racial atrocities, minimized the magnitude of Black loss, erased the memory of these crimes, and assured that disturbing histories of racial violence would not threaten the long-dominant American national narrative of democratic exceptionalism (Iffil 2018). These intentional acts of forgetting on the witness stand has left a deep legacy of distrust among African Americans so accustomed to whites, even those who profess to be allies, who, at a critical moment, lose the courage to bear witness.

Implications

Today we find ourselves in the midst of a moment of public reckoning with America's history of racial atrocities in a new struggle of memory against forgetting. Across the country, new public spaces have emerged

7 Testimony of H. C. Sory, 202.

that acknowledge the unspeakable: the removal of monuments to the Confederacy; the founding of the Equal Justice Initiative Museum in Montgomery, Alabama; the reframing of historical sites such as Whitney Plantation in Louisiana; the founding of Universities Studying Slavery; the declaration of Juneteenth as a national holiday; and the opening of the Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive by the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project. But the moment has sparked an intense backlash. The allies of the perpetrator's narrative are alive and well. State laws banning the teaching of critical race theory, inherently divisive subjects, and "woke-ism"––whatever that means––are little more than modern-day refusals to bear witness to the crimes narrated before us in public forums. This remarkable moment of public reckoning thus risks becoming what Judge Gardner's court was for the survivors of the Sandy Beulah massacre.

Today, descendants of the survivors have made a public push to have the public recognize and acknowledge the history of the massacre. The struggle for recognition has not been easy. White people in Anderson County, even those who eventually supported the erection of a historical marker, still refuse to bear witness, much as their white ancestors who testified for the prosecution more than one hundred years ago. "The citizens . . . [today] had absolutely nothing to do with what happened over a hundred years ago", insisted the county's historical commissioner. "This is a nice quiet community with a wonderful school system. It would be shame to mark them as a racist community from now until the end of time. Slocum has not buried their head in the sand and forgotten––they have moved forward and progressed." The county commissioner largely agreed. "It's a sad situation," he remarked, "but I feel like we're all past it and other ones carry the burden on their shoulders. Their ancestors dealt with it years and years ago, but some of them don't let it go." Or as one white woman admitted, "I don't deny the fact that it happened… [I]f it were my family and the roles were reversed, I would be upset too. But just bringing it all back up again is not going to change anything" (Tilove 2018).

Wishing to move on is little more than acknowledgment without reckoning. And without reckoning there is no path open to restitution,

reconciliation, and repair. As Bryan Stevenson, director of the Equal Justice Initiative, emphasizes, "Truth and reconciliation have always been sequential. You can't get to reconciliation … until you've got to the truth, and we've not done a very good job of telling the truth." Such work, however, remains dangerous. As Herman writes, those who "stand with the victim" –– whether the psychologist with a patient in the consulting room or the historian working in the archives –– "will inevitably have to face the perpetrator's unmasked fury" (Fortek 2017; Herman 1997, 247). But it is work from which we must not shy. For it allows us to recover the stories of survivors such as Margaret Wilson, a woman who once converted a Jim Crow criminal court into a space in which she demanded to be heard and believed. It is time that we hear her again. Her words may not locate the bodies, but if we listen and bear witness, we will unearth the truth that has been buried for more than one hundred years.

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Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

Trauma Survivors Telling Their Stories for Research Purposes

Monika Bobbert

1 Introduction

Qualitative research with trauma survivors appears to be beneficial for those affected and forward-looking for effective prevention in the context of socio-political processes of recognising and coming to terms with trauma.[1] However, ethical deficits in the implementation of research projects remain (Radhika and Manual, 2018). This is due to research primarily not serving the goal of giving trauma survivors a voice and recognising their suffering, but rather interviewing them to address a wide range of scientific questions. Considering conflicting goals, the focus of the following paper lies within central questions of research ethics, based on the special opportunities and difficulties of trauma survivors who tell their stories (cf. more extensive Bobbert, 2024).

Psychological, sexual, criminal and terrorist violence, traumatic losses, threatening illnesses, accidents, natural and technical disasters, war, imprisonment, uprooting, fleeing or displacement are sudden or prolonged threatening, extremely frightening and hopeless events or assaults that often lead to psychological trauma, i.e. a wound. Traumatic

1 I would like to thank Julie Kirchberg and Johannes Müther, Diepholz, and Julia van der Linde, Münster, for their valuable comments. I would also like to thank Günther Seidler, Heidelberg, for his initial insights into the experiences of traumatised people.

events or stages of life often leave lifelong psychological and physical traces and are accompanied by varying degrees of impairment of quality and organisation of life.

1.1. Man-made trauma

Trauma research distinguishes between accidental and man-made traumatic events because different effects occur. The scope of this article will lie primarily on the infliction of trauma for which people are responsible. Thereby, it focuses predominantly on man-made causes of trauma. The emphasis is on traumatisation in Western industrialised countries in the post-war period that was imposed on people in family, institutional or state structures.

1.2. Concerns of trauma survivors

Traumas that have happened need to be recognised. However, those affected must not be reduced to being victims. This is why today – as in the following – we often speak of survivors instead of victims. Through telling their stories, the victims can regain their subjectivity, because the unspeakable is conveyed to the world of others, because a connection to others can be re-established through speaking out. But the survivors also want to tell stories for others because they are seeking justice (Emcke, 2022, 98).

1.3. Specific vulnerability

Trauma survivors are more or less alienated from their lives and hurt in body and soul as a result of the injustice they have suffered. It depends largely on the outsiders whether they can settle back into a "normal" understanding of life and world despite the injury they have suffered.

1.4. Trauma survivors as the subject of qualitative research

In addition to hearings, round tables, commissioned expert reports and other forms of listening to and recording injustices that have occurred, research projects with trauma survivors are increasingly being carried out. In most cases, this is qualitative research conducted by the social sciences, medicine (especially psychosomatic and psychiatry), history or law (especially criminology). Victims of interpersonal violence are questioned about their experiences or asked to tell their stories in order to gain new insights: How could the abuse happen, what are the consequences for trauma survivors, what factors and structures need to be changed so that the injustice will not be repeated?

1.5. Additional protection for trauma survivors in qualitative research

When people whose trust in the world has been shattered, whose vulnerability is accompanied by inner isolation and a loss of cognitive security, start to regain trust in others by telling them what has been done to them, all members of a society that has enabled such a civilisational rupture must ensure that they do not inflict any additional burdens on trauma survivors. Research must also fulfil this task.

2. Ethical reflection in the face of irresolvable conflicts of interest in research

2.1. Codes of ethics for research involving human subjects

In medicine, research involving human subjects has been regulated under professional law since 1963 by the Helsinki Declaration (World Medical Association, 2013) and, in Germany, because of the thalidomide scandal in 1964, in the revised Medical Products Act. In addition, most other countries in the world have legal regulations on medical research involving humans. Psychology, educational sciences and sub-disciplines such

as oral history can now also refer to ethical codes and committees (cf. critical on the quality of ethics committees Scherzinger and Bobbert, 2017).

However, codes of ethics for research in social sciences and history, which are adopted by professional societies, are usually quite general. Ethical indication of problems and reflections specifically oriented towards qualitative research with traumatised people are still a desideratum.

2.2. Specific codes of ethics for research with trauma survivors

In more recent studies on sexualised violence against minors and adults, more specific ethical recommendations have been developed, such as the 2015 Bonn Declaration of Ethics for Research on Sexual Violence in Educational Contexts (Poelchau et al., 2015). This declaration raises awareness of the particularities and challenges of research into sexualised violence against children and young people and recommends a procedure for disclosing and uncovering abuse. For the National Research Programme "Care and Coercion" of the Swiss National Science Foundation, the author of this article analysed the specific ethical issues and requirements in relation to the submitted projects. After a legal revision, minimal ethical requirements were submitted to all applicants for signature (Bobbert, 2018).

Overall, it can be observed that in the field of qualitative research with traumatised people, there are specific ethical problems that need to be addressed sensitively and in a solution-oriented manner.

2.3. Ethical reflection on research activities

Ethics as a theory of reflection that strives for generalisable ethical judgements must be distinguished from the moral convictions of individuals or the de facto moral consensus of a professional group, which can be for example reflected in a professional code of conduct (Bobbert, 2012). Ethics operates with general ethical norms that are relevant to research – first and foremost the right to protection of life and health

and the right to self-determination, which requires further specific differentiation depending on research question and study design. Although certain trade-offs between the protection of the test person and the potential benefits of research in the Declaration of Helsinki are certainly questionable, the critical interpretation and context-related continuation of its norms in medical ethics over the past 50 years has led to elaborate ethical problem issues and prioritisation. In this article, these will be made fertile for the field of research with trauma survivors.

3. Re-traumatisation as a risk and burden

Research can pose special burdens and risks on trauma survivors who have been injured by other people. These result specifically from the experience of violence and the associated traumatisation (Maercker, 2019). The risk of re-traumatisation is discussed in the following, as trauma-informed research should integrate existing findings into its research design and the treatment of interviewees (Anderson et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2019).

3.1. Manifestions of post-traumatic stress disorder

Studies on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reveal four clusters of symptoms: Intrusion, avoidance, negative cognitions and moods, and hyperarousal (cf. for the following Admundson, Stapleton et al., 2004; Naifeh et al., 2008; American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 268–274; American Psychiatric Association, 2018, pp. 369–373).

3.1.1. Symptom cluster intrusion

While a person is experiencing a traumatising situation, too many different stimuli intrude that cannot be processed by the central nervous system. Therefore, unlike usual, the stimuli are not stored in the explicit memory, but remain in the implicit memory as incoherent, fragmentary perceptions (Ehlers et al., 2000; Ehlers, 2002). PTSD is accompanied by intrusions: these intrusions contain sensory impressions of the trauma

such as visual, acoustic or physical sensations and emotional reactions (Ehlers et al., 2004). They usually occur completely unexpectedly and are therefore experienced as uncontrollable. The memories are intrusive and very intense as "here-and-now". They result in a feeling of current threat, as the sensory memories of the trauma are experienced without the individual realising that they arise from a past event (Ehlers et al., 2000; Ehlers, 2002).

3.1.2. Symptom cluster avoidance

The avoidance symptom cluster involves avoiding feelings, thoughts, situations, people or places associated with the trauma. This often also applies to conversations about the traumatic event. The traumatic event may seem to have erased or is only remembered very vaguely. For the traumatised person, avoidance has a protective function that is intended to help prevent further threatening experiences. However, avoiding confrontations with the traumatic experience perpetuates the PTSD symptoms, as information is not processed correctly and therefore cannot be correctly integrated into the memory structure (Riggs et al., 2006).

3.1.3. Symptom cluster negative cognitions and moods

The symptom cluster of negative cognitions and moods includes persistent and distorted cognitions and emotions such as blaming oneself or others, feeling alienated from others and having little interest in activities. The emotional state of traumatised people can vary greatly from person to person and sometimes changes frequently. Many of those traumatised no longer feel any intense emotions. This "flattening" is referred to as emotional numbness. However, it is also possible, that only intense negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, guilt and shame prevail.

3.1.4. Symptom cluster hyperarousal

Anyone who has been through a traumatic situation may live in a constant state of increased alert, as if the danger still exists (Rabellino et al., 2015). This is because the sympathetic nervous system strengthens the organism in threatening situations and other stressful situations, e. g. by increasing muscle tone in the extremities or increasing the heart

rate for a fight and flight response. At the same time, the activity of systems that are less important right now, such as sexuality and digestion, is reduced (Wagner, 2015). Thus, the symptom cluster hyperarousal includes difficulties falling asleep and staying asleep, increased irritability and outbursts of anger as well as concentration difficulties. People with PTSD also report hypervigilance with heightened perception (increased vigilance) and increased nervousness.

3.1.5. Special characteristics of memory in PTSD

The four symptom clusters above are related to specific memory impairments in PTSD. Firstly, it should be noted that trauma survivors without PTSD are not affected by these specific memory impairments (Kleim et al., 2008; Moore et al. 2007). In people with PTSD, on the other hand, traumatic experiences can unintentionally "jump" back into the memory if they are reminded of them by certain cues (key stimuli). One can speak of re-traumatisation if the memories establish a connection between a current event and an initial trauma. It is the memory that consciously or unconsciously establishes relationships between the present and the past.

A particular characteristic of people with PTSD is an overgeneralised memory (Williams et al., 2007), which means that even when consciously and deliberately recalling non-traumatic memory content, only general memories can be recalled, but not specific ones. This makes it difficult or impossible for the person affected to visualise positive or resource-oriented autobiographical memories (Kleim et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2007).

Studies also show that in people with PTSD, trauma-associated content is closely linked to non-trauma-associated autobiographical content. This is particularly the case when the memories touch on specific emotional aspects such as personal involvement. So-called reference points are then formed (Berntsen, 2009), which lead to the unintentional, involuntary retrieval of non-trauma-associated memories triggering trauma-associated content and possibly leading to changes in affects (Böttche et al., 2014).

Thus, people with PTSD find it difficult or almost impossible to control traumatic memories. They also suffer from the difficulty of recalling these memories in a targeted and deliberate manner and verbalising them coherently (Bremner, 1999; Brewin, 2001, 2007; van der Kolk, 2003). The individual memory particles of a trauma are either not linked at all or only dysfunctionally linked, which prevents coherent intentional recall (Engelhard et al., 2008; Engelhard at el., 2003; Halligan et al., 2003). There is evidence that fragmentation/disorganisation is strongest with extremely threatening traumatic content, so-called hot spots (Ehlers et al., 2000).

The psychotraumatological phenomena described should not confuse our view of the "paradox of witnessing" (Emcke, 2022, p. 79): How can someone who has suffered the terrible event be able to give an uninvolved description? Someone who has been devalued and abused remains "ashamed". Talking about one's own abuse means making the humiliation "public" and possibly reliving the devaluation of the self. On the other hand, telling the story can lead out of isolation and forced intimacy with the perpetrators. Lost subjectivity can be regained by listening to and being recognised.

3.2. Prevalence of trauma and PTSD

In everyday language, many psychological stresses or difficult events are considered traumatising. In the current classification system DSM-5, the psychiatric statistical manual, trauma is defined as confrontation with actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence (American Psychiatric Association 2013).

PTSD is the most common mental illness following the experience of trauma. According to studies from various countries, more than half of the general population have experienced trauma in their lifetime (Schock, 2016, p. 11). However, not everyone who has experienced trauma develops PTSD, but between 2 and 20 per cent, depending on the country and study. Women are more frequently affected by PTSD than men. In addition, the likelihood of suffering from PTSD depends on the type of violence: People who experience a man-made trauma have a

higher risk than those who are victims of a natural disaster or accident, for example. The highest risk of PTSD is after physical or sexual assault; regarding rape, the risk is around 50 per cent. One group particularly at risk of PTSD is refugees – especially victims of war and torture (Schock, 2017, p. 12).

Other risk factors for developing PTSD or suffering from it for a long time are young age, existing mental disorders such as anxiety disorders, depressive disorders or disorders of social behaviour. However, negative social factors that characterise the time after a trauma, e. g. an unstable family, lack of social recognition as a victim and the lack of recognition of the suffering experienced are also factors that make PTSD more likely.

PTSD consists of psychological, physical and interpersonal impairments. Chronic trauma-reactive symptoms often vary in intensity and extent. There is also a vulnerability to a renewed increase in symptoms in the event of new stress. For people who have experienced violence, re-traumatisation, i.e. the recurrence of intensification of PTSD symptoms, is a known risk.

4. Ethical standards in research with trauma survivors

Research with trauma survivors, who are often particularly vulnerable due to their previous history, is characterised by three ethically relevant peculiarities:

- Trauma survivors usually have profound previous experiences of powerlessness, third party control and instrumentalisation.
- When trauma survivors talk about their experiences, they often expect that this will help them in the sense of "therapy" and that they will receive recognition and justice.
- Trauma survivors are at risk of further stress and harm.

In research with trauma survivors, these particularities must lead to corresponding ethical differentiations of the recognised research ethics standards and to concrete recommendations for their consideration.

But how can research adequately record and describe traumatisation without pathologising the victims and perpetuating their woundedness? How can it be methodically ensured that, on the one hand, the victims are not belittled by questioning their credibility and, on the other hand, that other sources and interpretations can be used? What must be guaranteed in the case of research so that people who have been victims of violence do not remain isolated and damaged because they feel misunderstood, because they again experience powerlessness instead of self-determination, because they again feel instrumentalised by others or because they are retraumatised – without having suspected it themselves?

In the following, the ethical norms of informed consent and non-harm in combination with the proportionality of benefits and risks established in medical research are used and applied to the treatment of trauma survivors by researchers and to the question of aftercare.

4.1. Informed consent

Informed consent is recognised worldwide – above all through the Helsinki Declaration on research involving human subjects in medicine. This ethical standard – with the prerequisites of informed and voluntary consent – is also largely guaranteed by national legal regulations. Although informed consent is also cited in all ethical recommendations for research in the social sciences and history and is emphasised as a core norm by the Oral History Association (2018, p. 5), for example, there is far more to consider in research with trauma survivors than existing codices suggest.

Firstly, the concept of informed consent as it is outlined in medical ethics: The defining elements of informed consent are "information" and "understanding" (Faden et al., 1986). Comprehensive information should be related to the individual situation and ensure "sufficient understanding" with regard to opportunities and risks (Bobbert et al., 2014).

In the context of research with trauma survivors, this means: the asymmetry of knowledge and of role that exists between researchers as experts and laypersons should not be exploited, but rather minimised wherever possible. A high level of transparency with regard to

the planned procedure, an adequate understanding of the research question and the aim of the study, possible risks and impairments of the participants, and any benefits for the study participants themselves or only for others can be achieved by using language that is understandable to laypersons.

4.1.1. The distinction between research and other forms of interaction

Even if it goes without saying for the researchers, the differences between research and therapy, between standardised approach and communication geared towards an individual person must be clearly emphasised in any form of research with trauma survivors: Research follows a different objective than the goals of therapy, recognition, compensation reparation, etc., which are significant for trauma survivors. Research aims to gain knowledge about the extent of the event, about the framework conditions and relevant causal factors and interprets the events retrospectively or determines findings relevant for the future, for example for effective prevention. The primary aim of research – unlike court proceedings or a social reappraisal process – is not to attribute responsibility and determine and ascribe blame.

4.1.2. Counteracting the "therapeutic misunderstanding" known from clinical research

In addition, misunderstandings regarding individual benefits should be avoided by making the interests and expectations of both sides explicit. Medical research on humans is familiar with the so-called "therapeutic misunderstanding", which consists of patients expecting healing from a research measure. Firstly, it must be made clear, that all benefit is potential. Secondly it is relevant, whether the potential benefit might be helpful for the patient, for a certain group of patients or only for future patients. In the latter case, it is therefore advisable to formulate in the patient information: "You yourself are unlikely to derive any individual benefit from participating in the study." The purpose of the study is to develop a treatment for future patients.

4.1.3. Preliminary communication about expectations of potential benefits from participation

Trauma survivors are likely to have different expectations, ranging from therapy to recognition to justice. Researchers should clearly communicate their research interest and the potential benefits to participants (Scheidt et al., 2015) in order to counteract inflated individual expectations of their potential narrators. A recommended best practice, which did not relate to research but to hearings, aimed to align expectations, can be found in the questionnaires that Kavemann et al. (2019, 121–135) developed for trauma survivors who had registered for hearings of the Independent Commission. By listing the goals of the round table hearings, and by proposing goals of narrators, which could be answered in the affirmative or negative, potential narrators became clearer about what to expect. In research, for example, a similar questionnaire could help to ensure that the potentially differing expectations of those who wish to share their experiences are at least not ignored due to a lack of information.

4.1.4. Recruitment of participants with a special focus on self-determination and voluntariness

Another central element of informed consent is the condition of voluntariness: Since traumatised people are affected by previous experiences of powerlessness, third party control and instrumentalisation, special precautions must be taken to ensure that these experiences are not repeated by a research project.

The way in which participants should be recruited should therefore also be discussed from an ethical perspective. Researchers would like to recruit as many participants as possible in as short a time as possible and at a low organisational and financial cost. Since victims of violence are often stigmatised or feel shame themselves and because they have the right to choose between processing and suppressing their trauma, ways of identification and recruitment must be chosen in which those affected can control themselves whether and to what extent they reveal something of their life story. It may therefore be necessary to accept several stages of recruitment and numerous "opt-out" cases in order to en-

sure voluntariness. The research group led by psychologist Patricia Lannen, for example, developed a contact procedure involving two letters and then a telephone call before obtaining informed consent in order to prevent those close to the person being contacted from becoming aware of a previous orphanage stay and to enable the person concerned to have a voice in the contact process (Lannen et al., 2021, pp. 10–6).

The location, the people involved, the type and manner of the interview, the duration of the interview, the type of travelling and forms of compensation for expenses should be discussed at an early stage, as some trauma survivors may already have difficulties in this regard. Where the interview takes place – at home or in a formalised context that potential study participants may want to get to know beforehand – can be relevant.

4.1.5 Confidentiality of personal data and information

The confidential treatment of particularly sensitive personal data and compliance with the legal requirements of data protection and data security regarding data collection, storage, accessibility and destruction is self-evident for legal and ethical reasons. In addition, the rules of anonymisation must be observed when publishing research data.

For trauma survivors, who feel devalued and stigmatised by violence and abuse and paradoxically often feel shame, the confidential treatment and well-considered anonymisation of the narrative must not only be reliably guaranteed for the interpretation and publication process, but it also contributes to transparency and trust if the researchers explain the recording, encryption and storage process of the collected data in comprehensible manner.

4.1.6. Transparency and respect for freedom in the conduct of discussions and interviews

Overall, informed consent should not only refer to consent to participation. To comply with the norm in the course of research, it is important to always create transparency. Psychologist Angelika Treibel, who conducts research in criminology, expressed this in her recommendations for conducting victimological interviews in 2016: "The aspect of trans-

parency does not only refer to objectives and procedures that occur at the beginning of the interview. For example, it is helpful to explain things that you do as an interviewer, e.g. to explain why and for what purpose notes are taken, to comment on looking at the wristwatch. Questions and thoughts that arise for the interviewer during the course of the interview, as well as interruptions, can and should be made transparent. Being informed about processes means more transparency for the interviewees and less of a feeling of being at the mercy of others." (Treibel, 2016, p. 162, own translation).

It is also important that the researcher convincingly communicates to the interviewee that they can always decline the researcher's interventions and end their participation at any time without suffering any disadvantage. However, this presupposes that the interviewee is aware of the possible stresses and risks of the study, e. g. acute stress reactions or retraumatisation symptoms, and has learned to take care of him/herself.

4.1.7. Structures to safeguard informed consent: preliminary training and ombudsperson

The relevant aspects of the distinction between research and therapy and the knowledge of research methods and settings do not constitute general knowledge. Structured information on the prior education of potential study participants could create prior knowledge that "empowers" trauma survivors to reflect on the question of study participation and ask the individually relevant questions (Bobbert, 2019, pp. 160–161, 179–180). In this context, trauma-specific information could be provided on how those affected can take care of themselves (Liedl et al., 2018).

It would also strengthen potential study participants if they had access to an independent second opinion when it comes to making an informed decision on a study enquiry. The establishment of an independent ombudsperson for trial subjects, which provides scientifically competent assistance in reviewing the study documents handed out and discussing the advantages and disadvantages, in particular the burdens and risks, would therefore be a structural form of empowerment for trauma survivors. The basic equipment of such an ombudsperson´s office would

have to be financed by public funds. Under certain circumstances, voluntary work by researchers would be possible.

4.1.8. Dealing with study results

For reasons of transparency and self-determination, it must also be explained in advance whether and, if so, how the participants can inform themselves about the results of the study. In this regard, it must be explained to them that their story will be interpreted by outsiders without them generally being able to influence this – unless participatory research methods (Wansing, Schäfers and Köbsell, 2022) or certain forms of oral history are used. Werner Fuchs drew attention to the problem of research results that are "alienating" or objectifying for the interviewees as early as 1981 in the early German reference work on oral history by Niethammer: "Life paths and experiences of members of social groups who are not the intended recipients of the academic publication are recorded. This production of knowledge is not an expression of a need for information on the part of the people being analysed, a need for these groups to understand themselves in terms of possible solutions to their life problems." (Fuchs, 1980, p. 335, own translation). In addition, many researchers in oral history, including Ronald J. Grele "do not want to refrain from checking sources, providing evidence and carefully weighing up individual testimonies" (Grele, 1980, p. 146, own translation). For methodological reasons as well as for reasons of research freedom, the handling of the results must be clarified and communicated in advance with regard to the interviewees.

4.2. Ethical norm of non-harm with acceptance of only minor risks in connection with an expected research benefit

The ethical norm of non-harm, or the requirement that no fundamental individual rights, above all the right to life and health and the right to self-determination, may be harmed, represents the second central norm of research ethics. However, in view of the risks and burdens associated with research, this norm is in tension with the potential benefit of research. In this respect, the norm of non-harm is "modulated" by the

corresponding risk-benefit assessment. However, the risk of burden or harm must be proportionate to the anticipated benefit of the research (as a potential therapeutic benefit for the subject, as a benefit for a specific group of affected persons or only as a future benefit). A study may only be conducted if the research design, based on the research question and methodology, indicates that a benefit, i.e. a relevant research result, can be expected that is in an acceptable proportion to the risks to the subject.

4.2.1. Suboptimal research designs as a compromise

In many cases in research with trauma survivors, unless it is therapy research, no definite individual benefit can be promised, although a study may happen to address one aspect of the diverse needs or motives of the respective interviewee. For this reason, most qualitative studies with trauma survivors represent "research for the benefit of others" (Bobbert 2012, pp. 727–723). Without the personal benefit of those who agree to be interviewed, the potential risks and damage must be minimised. This requires an anticipation of possible burdens and risks based on psychological and psychiatric expertise and the conception of a trauma-sensitive research design. This may also require compromises between optimal qualitative methodology and protective measures for the research participants.

4.2.2. Safety precautions in the face of serious risks or persistent harm

In medical research involving human subjects, no serious risks or lasting harm may be accepted. In this regard the Helsinki Declaration states: "Physicians may not be involved in a research study involving human subjects unless they are confident that the risks have been adequately assessed and can be satisfactorily managed" (World Medical Association, 2013, no 18). In addition: "Some groups and individuals are particularly vulnerable and may have an increased likelihood of being wronged or of incurring additional harm. All vulnerable groups and individuals should receive specifically considered protection" (World Medical Association, 2013, no 19).

With regard to the risk of re-traumatisation, recognition and classification problems are already emerging due to the fact that the psychological diagnostic systems (ICD-10 and DSM-5) do not include the term re-traumatisation as a separate disorder, but only as an already diagnosed or newly diagnosed PTSD that is narrowly defined (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Schmidt et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is almost impossible to reliably prevent the recurrence of trauma-related symptoms or re-traumatisation in trauma survivors, as the triggering stimuli cannot be identified in advance.

However, because the most serious consequences of study-related re-traumatisation can be suicidal tendencies or an actual suicide, but also other long-lasting stressful symptoms, it must be ensured in any case that trial participants can be referred to professional support and therapy facilities – without incurring any costs.

Regardless of the difficulties of prediction mentioned above, precautionary measures must be included in a study. The Declaration of Helsinki formulates this as follows: "All medical research involving human subjects must be preceded by careful assessment of predictable risks and burdens to the individuals and groups involved in the research in comparison with foreseeable benefits to them and to other individuals or groups affected by the condition under investigation" (World Medical Association, 2013, no 17).

4.2.3. Preliminary planning: risk reduction through screening and inclusion and exclusion criteria

For research with trauma survivors, risk-relevant information could be collected for the first time before including a person in a qualitative study, for example: Is the trauma survivor still suffering from trauma-related stress? How much time has passed since the experience to be described? What are the subject's motives: Does he or she want to tell the story out of inner distress? Particularly those who are recounting their traumatic experiences for the first time, or those for whom the trauma experience is still very recent, may show strong stress reactions due to the study that they themselves would not have expected. Those

who have not yet had any professional support may have less effective coping strategies.

Secondly, as in medical research, inclusion and exclusion criteria can be defined to protect subjects with health benefits. For example, trauma survivors with severe depressive phases or acute suicidal tendencies are heavily burdened or at risk. Researchers should not only be familiar with the symptoms of obvious and hidden depression and have learnt to inquire about possible suicidal thoughts. They could also use a psychological checklist in advance to at least recognise if there are signs of the most serious consequences of re-traumatisation, such as self-harm or suicide. Although suicide can hardly be predicted (Forkmann et al., 2016, p11), psychological screening tools and checklists can be used to identify suicidal thoughts, wishes or actions as well as the level of tension and stress experienced (Forkmann et al., 2016, pp. 37–61). Furthermore, a short psychological test to determine the stress level, which would be routinely presented at the beginning, would be conceivable under certain circumstances to protect the subject from the interview in the event of a high stress level. This is because a German review suggests that new stressful life events are more likely to influence the symptoms of PTSD than simply recounting or recalling a traumatic event (Schock, 2016, pp. 72–76).

Of course, the task of explaining the danger of those interested in the study and wanting to assess them in advance is not always easy to convey. Trauma survivors sometimes refuse to be reduced to a victim role or to be regarded as particularly vulnerable and emphasise their right to self-determination. If researchers wanted to avoid inclusion and exclusion criteria for this reason, structured communication with the trauma survivors interested in the interview would at least be necessary to clarify what support or help would be helpful in the event of distress.

4.2.4. In the process: enquiring behaviour with a view to autonomy and self-protection

In qualitative research designs, semi-structured interviews can be conducted, or follow-up questions can be asked for various purposes. However, in order to give the trauma survivors as much self-control as possible when telling their stories, open research designs should be chosen

in which the subject determines what they say and how they say it. It should also be anticipated from the outset in the study design that some subjects will not be able to provide a structured narrative.

If an interviewee suffers or has suffered from PTSD, different symptoms may occur unexpectedly.[2] In addition, memory may be blocked, distorted or unstructured and sometimes experiences or memories are not accessible or only accessible in a very generalised way. For an interview in a research context, this means that the narrative is imprecise, and the interviewer tends to ask for more precise details in order to be able to understand the situation described.

However, even if a narrative that is perhaps less productive for the study or obvious discrepancies normally motivate follow-up questions, there should be as little or only tentative interventions as possible. A maximally open method should be preferable out of respect for and to protect the interviewees.

Where and when questions are asked should not only be regulated in the interview guidelines but should also be carefully considered by the researchers during the interview for reasons of caution. Well-intentioned questions that are interested in clarification or that signalise doubts are interventions that pave or obstruct certain paths for the narrator. Whether certain events are dealt with in detail should depend less on the interviewer's questions than on the narrators themselves. It may be that traumatising events cannot be expressed. Jean Améry (2002) and Carolin Emcke (2022, pp 90–92) describe how "the first stroke" destroys trust in the world and is therefore particularly difficult to tell.

The researchers should also be always prepared and competent to address the interviewee about signs of stress and strain and to interrupt or terminate the interview if necessary. Specific termination criteria can also be defined in advance.

In the case of a more structured interview method, setting stop rules for interview questions can be a viable approach but requires the trauma

2 However, those people who have suffered a trauma without developing post-traumatic stress disorder are not subject to the aforementioned difficulties in the narrative, but there are certainly also people with fluid transitions.

survivor to have good self-awareness and self-care skills. To not overstress trauma survivors, the duration of the interview should be clearly limited and should generally not exceed 1.5 hours, as concentration and thus self-control and protective mechanisms will then diminish. Small breaks in between should be offered to allow self-perception and relaxation.

4.2.5. Sharing tasks during the interview

Ideally two people were responsible for the interview with shared tasks: One person conducts the interview, and another person with a therapeutic or supervisory background looks after the subject's well-being on the one hand and observes the interviewer on the other to intervene if necessary or to be available as a contact person after the interview. Such a division of roles is advisable in two respects: Firstly, two conflicting interests, namely the research interest and the ethical task of non-harming and caring for the trial participants, can be reliably recognised. Secondly, the question of aftercare can be specifically offered or coordinated for both the trauma survivor and the researcher.

4.3. Appreciation, transparency and mindfulness as attitudes of researchers

Respect, appreciation and transparency are required from researchers when dealing with trauma survivors. Although these attitudes are rarely mentioned in codes of ethics and are rarely operationalised, they can be conveyed and implemented through specific knowledge, interview guidelines and communication training.

If researchers want to support those who expose themselves to their research project, it is important to at least not reinforce social abandonment or exclusion from society (Stauffer, 2015). The perpetrators are responsible for the injustice and the resulting loss of belonging to society for the victims. But many other people who did not listen, did not believe or met the victims with disinterest or aggression contribute to the continued isolation of trauma survivors. Trauma experts Andreas Maercker and Mareike Augsburg also emphasise that the opportunities for

disclosure and the social recognition experienced are of particular importance: "A lack of appreciation can contribute to the continued consequences of trauma, as studies and clinical experience have shown in various groups of traumatised people." (Maercker and Augsburger, 2019, p. 40, own translation).

4.3.1. Ethos of questioning to avoid further humiliation

Therefore, the relationship or the way of interaction between the interviewee and the researcher is of particular relevance in research with trauma survivors, in contrast to other research on human subjects.

The reason and motives why trauma survivors tell their stories or decide to take part in a qualitative study may be very different (Emcke, 2022, p. 97). They may tell their stories out of anger at the perpetrators who went unpunished or escaped, out of distress because the burden of their experiences cannot be carried alone, out of fear of the story being repeated or out of concern for their descendants, out of aversion to the lies in their own family or out of a longing for justice. But telling and listening, talking to each other can be an attempt at a counter-strategy through which the survivors try to reassure themselves of their subjectivity.

Ideally, the interviewer makes him/herself available to a trauma survivor as a partner who listens in a focussed and attentive manner. They try to express appreciation towards the participant and recognise their suffering. Angelika Treibel writes in her recommendations for conducting victimological interviews in criminology: "An appreciative attitude should not be a specific feature of conducting a victim interview. However, it is particularly helpful and important in the context of victim interviews, as it will hardly be possible to engage in constructive communication if the attitude of the interviewer towards the victim is not characterised by respect and acceptance." (Treibel, 2016, p. 161, own translation).

4.3.2. Knowledge of the tendency towards epistemic injustice

Appreciation and respect should go hand in hand with the knowledge of possible epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2023; Jackson, 2018; Lo, 2023;

Kavemann et al., 2022; Haslbeck, 2020; Künzel, 2005) and the competence to recognise trauma-related allusions, inconsistencies and distortions (Rosenthal, 2021; Emcke, 2022, pp. 30–45) and be considered accordingly when conducting a semi-structured interview, for example, or the subsequent interpretation (van der Linde, 2024). If, on the other hand, the testimonies of trauma survivors were only perceived in their function as evidence (in the sense of a legally verifiable truth) or as an insufficient source of knowledge, the ethical dimension of telling and listening would be disregarded and the interviewees would be instrumentalised as a source of knowledge and possibly even discredited.

4.3.3. Training and research standardisation as professional prerequisites for researchers

A perception of the participant´s well-being during the interview does not come naturally but requires training. Since mechanisms of self-protection such as defence, distancing, wanting to explain and even unjustified accusations of guilt often occur as spontaneous reactions, self-awareness training is required in order to appropriately record reports from trauma survivors.

Appreciation, transparency, and recognition must be practiced. Person-centred interviewing according to Carl Rogers, for example, offers good foundations and forms of training. Overall, structured further training for interviewers, which emphasises the practice of these attitudes, should definitely be a standard part of research with traumatised people – especially for those disciplines that are not familiar with professional forms of face-to-face interviewing.

Research protocols and interview guidelines, which are intended to ensure a standardised procedure, could include assistance with regard to protection and appreciation. For example, a leaflet could be created for the interviewer with typical symptoms of strong stress reaction or re-traumatisation, or formulations of appreciation and the reaction to shared experiences of suffering could be considered in advance and recorded in a written form.

4.3.4. Potential "benefit" for study participants

The narrative of trauma survivors in interviews, with the associated risks and burdens, must be accompanied by an ethos of questioning, listening and understanding. This is because, on the one hand, this approachability is a prerequisite for ensuring that trauma survivors are not inflicted with even more suffering through disrespect or instrumentalisation for other people's purpose, and on the other hand, it can also represent a "benefit" for the subject.

It is desirable that the researchers succeed in perceiving the narrators in their double role, i.e. as the people they once were before they were pushed out of the world, and as the people they were made into through the experience of extreme disenfranchisement and violence. The philosopher Jill Stauffer emphasises the importance of intersubjective processes in the reappropriation and reassurance of one's own biography: The narratives of those affected are also shaped by listening to third parties, their interest and resonance. If what they report is not supported, the narratives become questionable for those affected themselves.

4.4. Follow-up: provision of protective structures and support in the event of stressful consequences

4.4.1. Dealing with incidental findings

A separate ethical question in medical research on humans is how to deal with so-called incidental findings: Should the incidental finding of a dangerous aneurysm for example, be reported in a study using an imaging procedure? But incidental findings can also occur in interviews with trauma survivors:

In the event that trauma survivors are suspected of suffering from a mental disorder, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, which has far gone untreated, this should be articulated and the person concerned should at least be shown a concrete treatment option – outside the institutional research context. The risk of extremely negative consequences such as re-traumatisation and suicide should also be discussed. It is true that diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses,

unlike somatic illnesses, are less self-evident due to negative connotations. Nevertheless, researchers should be trained to carefully address secondary findings or suspected diagnoses in such a way that those affected do not feel patronised or pressured into treatment.

4.4.2. Professional support for study-related negative consequences

It is in the nature of the symptoms that trauma survivors may not face negative consequences just until they have completed a research interview, i.e. with a time delay. Not knowing your own boundaries or going beyond them and being caught up by one's own feelings later is also a phenomenon that many people are familiar with.

Qualitative research with trauma survivors requires that contact points are named that can be consulted promptly if psychological stress occurs after participation. Professional aftercare must not result in any costs for the participants. (Analogous to the insurance for subjects required by the German Drug and Devices Act, one could also consider insurance for injuries occurring to participants.)

Information about the forms of professional support for psychological problems in the follow-up should be provided at the beginning of the study.

In addition, it is also possible to set up a reporting centre to which study participants can complain. Similar to a reporting centre in institutions, such an office could also serve to improve qualitative study designs with regard to the respect and protection of trauma survivors in the future.

5. Well-being of researchers in the face of risk of secondary traumatisation

Even though researchers should treat interview participants with consideration, respect and recognition, they must also maintain a certain professional distance. Prior training is certainly required for all researchers who are not familiar with clinical psychology, in order to

recognise transference phenomena and not to identify too strongly with the trauma survivors.

5.1. Phenomenon of secondary traumatisation

Furthermore, researchers themselves are still little considered as well as the danger of being "secondarily" or "indirectly" traumatised (Gebrande, 2021). On the one hand, when they get in contact with trauma survivors, they become witnesses in a society in which there can be no innocence of ignorance. On the other hand, this moral witnessing – a main motive or merely a side effect of their research – must not mask the risks and burdens that can accompany this area of research.

The phenomenon of secondary traumatisation is known from psychotherapy and social work (Maercker, 2019; McCann, 1990), but must be transferred to the specific context of research, which is not per se flanked by professional self-awareness and supervision processes. In addition, the current state of research in this area needs to be analysed in more detail: It is currently still a matter of debate whether there is a risk of "transmission" or whether secondarily traumatised persons have themselves been victims of violence. New studies need to be awaited here, because depending on the results, different pre- and aftercare measures may be necessary for the researchers themselves.

5.2. Phenomenon of guilt among the "unharmed"

In addition, the listeners or researchers may develop feelings of guilt due to their helplessness towards the affected subjects, because they react helplessly and inappropriately in the face of the subject's difficulties. It must therefore also be clarified in more detail how researchers from the social sciences and humanities who have not already acquired skills in dealing with clinical disorders through their psychological or socio-educational careers can prepare themselves appropriately and how they can still take care of themselves afterwards (Christman et al., 2018). Professional supervision should always be available free of charge.

5.3. Communicating mutual expectations and opportunities

Overall, whether they like it or not, researchers are also witnesses who face difficulties in listening to and adequately absorbing the stories of trauma survivors. Their trust in other people and their world view will also change. In many cases, trauma survivors also legitimately hope for recognition and sympathy in a research setting. However, the interviewers cannot offer any form of support beyond the study. In an article on the trauma-sensitive design of interviews with migrants, social worker Sina Motzek-Öz argues that a "communication and negotiation process" with regard to the interview procedure and dealing with expectations protects both the interviewees and the researchers (Motzek-Öz, 2019).

5.4 Trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive training courses

Interviewers who are not therapeutically trained should receive training on trauma phenomena, practise trauma-sensitive attitudes as well as self-observation and self-care. Self-reflection-related skills may be foreign to the researchers, and therefore resistance is to be expected in such training courses. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that encounters with trauma survivors require special skills.

6. Outlook

At the moment, it is not ensured that researchers consistently reflect on their research with trauma survivors from an ethical perspective. The standards and distinctions presented do not claim to be exhaustive, but still need to be further developed for this area. An overview of the ethical issues was presented with numerous aspects to be considered and possible implementations, which of course depend heavily on the respective research design.

It is clear that more research is needed to clarify how trauma survivors experience a research project. The sociologist Barbara Kavemann, who made the feedback from interviewees part of a sociological study

with trauma survivors, is enlightening for German-speaking countries and for research relating to more recent reconciliation processes (Kavemann, 2019, pp. 136–149). In the English-speaking world, there have been studies on the reactions and consequences of research with trauma survivors for some time (Weare et al., 2022; Kirkner et al., 2019; Massey et al., 2013).

It is also evident that there is a need for trauma-informed research in which researchers from disciplines as diverse as history, social sciences, medicine and law acquire knowledge about traumatisation, think about and shape the research process with regard to voluntariness, disclosure and non-harm, and acquire skills in conducting interviews in a person-centred, appreciative and injury-sensitive manner. In the event of harm, they must also have professional support structures in place or have appropriate cooperation arrangements, through which the interviewees can be supported.

Up to now, qualitative research has mainly focussed on the victims who have been harmed, but rarely on those who, as eyewitnesses or bystanders, could tell of the justice that has occurred. From the point of research ethics alone, research settings that would expose fewer risks and burdens should be used, i.e. less vulnerable people should be included first if possible. Interviewing those indirectly involved or bystanders also represents a research desideratum in another respect – the processing of injustice experienced and future prevention.

Research with traumatised people must necessarily be flanked by a society in which the actual perpetrators, organisations, political decision-makers and state structures are held accountable. The injustice suffered must be recognised, needs-based support must be provided and the disadvantages suffered by those affected by the violence must be compensated for as far as possible (Kavemann et al., 2022). If victims are willing to talk about their experiences, there must be a willingness in society to listen and an appropriate response. Sexual, psychological and spiritual violence is not a misfortune, not a stroke of fate, but an injustice for which partly also people in the social environment and state institutions are responsible.

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"… and one must be silent about all these misdeeds."

Narratives of violence against civilians in German-written accounts of Austro-Hungarian soldiers of World War One

Lisa Kirchner

Introduction

The investigation of the active perpetration of violence, or, in a narrower sense, of war crimes and atrocities against civilians by the Austro-Hungaring army during the First World War has long been a research gap. While the atrocities of the German army against Belgian and French civilians on the Western Front have been extensively scrutinized (Horne and Kramer 2001), only a comparatively limited number of publications exists so far on the *kaiserliche und königliche Armee* (k.u.k. army) and its theaters of war in Eastern, Southeastern, and Southern Europe (e. g. Holzer 2014; Leidinger et al. 2014). Similarly, studies that specifically focus on a perspective 'from below' and how low-ranking soldiers dealt with their experiences in this context remain rare (Hämmerle 2023; Hämmerle 2020).

Considering that, this article conducts an analysis of two exemplary autobiographical accounts of low-ranking, German-speaking k.u.k. soldiers as they depict looting and executions of civilians. It is focused on the first months of the First World War and its mobile warfare in Galicia, an area that formerly was part of the Habsburg empire and is located in

present-day Poland and Ukraine. The study highlights the subjective narratives that inform the soldiers' recapitulation of violence against civilians. It will be shown that the soldiers' writing about violence against the local Galician population is strongly shaped by narratives that function as a strategy of exoneration as well as a means to construct a positive, or at the very least, a tolerable self-image. Given that acts of violence against one's own civilian population were not sanctioned as a war crime in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 (Pöhlmann 2016, 127), which, along with the Geneva Conventions, constituted the commonly acknowledged law of war during World War One, this paper refers to 'violence against civilians' rather than 'war crimes'.

Autobiographical writing can be defined as the retrospective interpretation of one's own life (Depkat 2003). Experiencing wars in particular can evoke or intensify the need to write about oneself in order to make some sense out of those chaotic events (Hämmerle 2023; Reimann 2004). At the same time, however, witnesses of the First World War were faced with the difficulty of putting their experiences into words, as there were hardly any sufficient linguistic expressions and adequate patterns of explanation available in public discourse (Hämmerle 2020; Hutečka 2019). The analysis of narratives that soldiers choose to express themselves seems all the more important.

A narrative can be understood as a meaningful interpretation that serves as a framework to organize and render events comprehensible. By establishing causal connections, coherence is created. Narratives thus generate a subjectively significant sense of the world and the self (Nünning 2013). In this context, selectivity is a fundamental element of narratives. As Jung, Reymann and Sutterlüty (2019, 15) have stated, "the meaning of narratives is only fully configured against the background of what is excluded."[1] Research has shown that active fighting and killing on the battlefields of the First World War represented a taboo in civil societies and were therefore likely to be excluded in personal narrations (Hutečka 2019; Reimann, 2004). It can be assumed that the same applies a fortiori

1 Own translation.

to the perpetration of violence against civilians. Consequently, particular attention will be directed to what is omitted in the soldiers' narratives.

The sources to be discussed were written by two k.u.k. soldiers who were in their early twenties at the outbreak of the war in July 1914. Gottlieb Pomberger was born in Upper Austria in 1892 and lived until 1979. His parents were farmers, he worked as a municipal secretary after the First World War. He was conscripted into the military in 1913 and did seven months of military service before the outbreak of the war. In early August 1914 he was stationed as part of the 3rd *Tiroler Landesschützen* Regiment in Galicia, where he was captured by Russian troops in mid-December. He remained in captivity in Russia until June 1918. The typewritten manuscript of his autobiographical war memories is archived in the *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* (Collection of Biographical Records) at the University of Vienna. Parts of his account were published in the collection's series "*damit es nicht verloren geht…*" (Eigner and Müller 2017; Hämmerle 2012; Leidinger and Moritz 2008).

Franz Arneitz (also Franc Arnejc according to Slovenian spelling) was born in Carinthia in 1893, where he died in 1973. His parents were farmers, and he also became one after the war. His family belonged to the ethnic group of Carinthian Slovenes, Franz Arneitz himself was bilingual. He was drafted into the k.u.k. Infantry Regiment No. 7 in August and stationed in Galicia in late October 1914, where he remained until he was transferred to the South-Western Front against Italy after being wounded in September 1915. The German-language, handwritten manuscript of his autobiographical war memories is in the private possession of his descendants, who kindly made it available to me for my research. The German version of his account was published in 2016, a Slovenian translation in Carinthia in 1970 (Arneitz 2016; Arnejc 1970). This paper refers to the handwritten manuscript.

It is not possible to precisely date the period of origin of Arneitz' and Pomberger's manuscripts. With regard to the socio-political context, however, it can be said that they were most likely composed in a period in which a critical approach to the k.u.k. army and its actions of violence during World War One was scarce in Austria, as will be shown in the following chapter. Before doing so, I will first examine the historical

context of Austro-Hungarian warfare at the Eastern Front, and in particular the war against local civilians. Then I will turn to a more detailed analysis of the corresponding text passages, which is methodologically based on Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. In doing so, I focus on the analysis of how actors or groups of actors as well as their actions are represented. As a result, three central narrative strategies will be illustrated and the ambiguous framework within which the soldiers acted will be reconstructed.

1. Austro-Hungarian warfare and its cultural remembrance in Austria after 1918

Even before the war began, Austro-Hungarian state and military authorities fostered a certain suspicion towards ethnic minorities, suspecting them of disloyalty and collaboration with other states. This sentiment was particularly pronounced in Galicia, a multi-ethnic region situated on the border with Russia. Mistrust was directed above all against Ruthenian and Jewish population groups. The outbreak of the war further intensified prevailing fears of espionage and the feeling of an omnipresent threat (Haid 2014; Leidinger et al. 2014, 56–58). This was accompanied by anti-Slavic and anti-Semitic prejudices, rooted in xenophobic and culturally pejorative discourses prevalent in German speaking parts of the empire (Dornik 2014).

After initial successes of the k.u.k. army on the Eastern Front, the situation soon shifted towards late August 1914. On September 2, the Russian army captured Lviv, the capital of Galicia. The hasty retreat of the Austro-Hungarian side was chaotic. Several troops were scattered and disoriented, while the soldiers were overstrained from long-distance marches (Rauchensteiner 2013, 248–249). Recent scholarship has pointed out correlations between mobile warfare and escalations of violence against civilians (Überegger 2018). While the Eastern Front was in general characterized by rapidly shifting frontlines (Bachinger and Dornik 2013; Groß 2006), the tendency for an escalation of violence appears to be particularly pronounced during the first months of the war.

During their retreat, Austro-Hungarian forces intentionally set supply depots on fire to prevent their utilization by the enemy (Rauchensteiner 2013, 249). Oswald Überegger (2008, 260) refers to this approach as a strategy of scorched earth that was widely pursued by all war parties. The evacuation of areas was coupled with extensive destruction of both military and civilian infrastructure. This policy of destruction not only constituted a potential disadvantage for the advancing enemy but, first and foremost, inflicted profound hardships on the civilian population. The material damage as well as the deprivation of essential resources proved to be devastating for the Galician population, especially in a long-term perspective.

The k.u.k. army launched a renewed advance towards eastern Galicia in October 1914 which ultimately proved short-lived. Within a few weeks, the army was compelled to retreat again. In the manner of the scorched earth policy, Austro-Hungarian troops once more burned and destroyed several villages (Rauchensteiner 2013, 254–258). The military's rigorous course of action was in particular directed against Ruthenians and Jews who were often considered as 'russophile' in general. The blame for military setbacks and defeats could be easily sought in supposed spies and traitors. The k.u.k. army 'evacuated' or deported ever wider parts of the population, imprisoned civilians, took hostages from among them, looted and burned their villages, and executed them (e. g. Leidinger et al. 2014, 80–86; Schuster 2004, 123–128). Such actions ostensibly pursued military objectives, yet they represented a deterrent warning and punitive measure targeting the supposedly pro-Russian population (Rauchensteiner 2013, 271–276). Similarly, public executions were not entirely uncommon in the Eastern theatre of war. The k.u.k. army deliberately carried them out in prominent locations like market squares or streets, often summoning local inhabitants to watch. The display of corpses which were often left hanging for days served as a deterrent and threatening reminder for civilians not to engage with the enemy (Holzer 2014, 20).

There are no exact numbers how many civilians fell victim to the actions of the military in Galicia during the First World War. Hannes Leidinger (2014, 85) assumes at least 620 civilian casualties in Galicia in 1914

and 1915, Manfried Rauchensteiner (2013, 276) reports 5000 death sentences issued in Galicia and Bukovina, although not all of them were carried out. Galicia was not the only theater of war where Austro-Hungarian forces perpetrated violence against civilians. In other regions such as the Balkans or northern Italy, the k.u.k. army waged war against the local population until the armistice in November 1918 as well.

After 1918, the government of the Republic of Austria that was led by the Social Democratic party tried to critically deal with the legacy of the First World War. However, this short period was characterized by party-political intentions and class conflicts. Its efforts rather aimed at an indictment of the 'old elites' than at an investigation of war crimes that had been committed (Leidinger 2018). This phase was neither long-lasting nor did it have any resounding success. In the second half of the 1920s, the so-called '*Offiziershistoriographie*' predominantly took hold of the public Austrian remembrance of the First World War, that is a perception of the war which was dominated by former officers and representatives of the now defunct Habsburg monarchy. This was accompanied by a conservative restoration of the political power in the First Republic and a remilitarization of society. The '*Offiziershistoriographie*' was motivated by historical politics and instrumentalized the interpretation of the First World War for militaristic purposes (Haring 2015, 211; Überegger 2012, 355–356).

Central motifs of this distorting interpretation of history were the glorification of the war and the heroization of the role of the k.u.k. army. Its military members were portrayed along the ideals of military masculinity as brave, dauntless, resilient and honorable. A romanticized frontline community was constructed that erased various contrasts within the military, such as ethnicity/language, class and/or political affiliation or hierarchies between officers and enlisted men (Hämmerle 2022, 537–539; Haring 2015, 211–213). Of course, this was an extremely selective memory of the First World War, which not only ignored the many differences within the army, but also the actual nature of warfare: the carnage on the battlefields, the countless wounded and maimed soldiers, their psychological traumatization and the millions of deaths on all frontlines found no place in these narratives. Similarly, illegitimate

forms of violence that might have tarnished the reputation of the k.u.k. army were disregarded – for example the various forms of violence perpetrated against civilians in Galicia and elsewhere.

The hegemonic Austrian culture of remembrance in the interwar period was thus shaped by the glorification of the war and a simultaneous ignorance of its violence. These patterns of interpretation of the First World War retained their power well into the second half of the 20th century. It was not until the end of the 1960s that the general perception and public assessment of the First World War in Austria started to change slowly (Überegger 2012: 359–363). Up until then, the voices of 'common' enlisted soldiers such as Gottlieb Pomberger and Franz Arneitz received little attention in public discourse. However, an actual debate on atrocities during World War One only started to unfold in Austria in the 1990s (Überegger 2008, 243–244). Hence, I will pay attention in the following analysis of the two exemplary accounts whether and how those aspects of wartime violence are addressed and portrayed that the public discourse of remembrance has ignored for most parts of the 20th century – in particular the active perpetration of violence against civilians by the k.u.k. army. The next chapters examine how the two authors portray the main groups of actors – themselves, their comrades, their superiors and the civilian population – and their respective actions.

2. "… to avoid death by starvation" – Gottlieb Pomberger's war account

During late August 1914, Gottlieb Pomberger was deployed to the Eastern Front. On August 26, he passed through Lviv, where, according to his records, his troops lost contact with their supply train. After being defeated in combat by the Russian army in the next days, his troops were forced to retreat from the advancing enemy. For the period from August 31 to September 6, he describes several lootings of Galician villages and the theft of food from fields until his troops were eventually reunited with their supply train. In the following weeks, his troops retreated far to the west. Amid this tense atmosphere, Pomberger reports that he saw

four executed people hanging from the trees of the town of Wieliczka in late November 1914. According to the statement of his officers, they were captured Russian spies.

What is striking about Pomberger's account is that he uses the first-person singular ('I') only once when describing incidents of looting and theft as well as the execution in Wieliczka. Instead, he predominantly utilizes the first-person plural ('we') and it can only be guessed that he was involved in the lootings. The instance where he employs the first-person singular describes active, yet relatively innocuous actions, such as going to a farm and noticing two pigs. He reverts to using the first-person plural in describing the subsequent killing of one of the animals (Pomberger n. d., 19). Consequently, Pomberger's narrative significantly obscures himself as an individual actor, rendering him largely invisible.

Regarding quantity, k.u.k. soldiers are the most prominent actors in the text passages analyzed here. Pomberger almost consistently adopts the collectivizing terms 'we' and 'us' to characterize them and hardly applies generalizing or indeterminate labels such as 'some' or 'one' ('*man*' in German). One passage reads, "We were now in a hurry to plunder the store because of extreme hunger [. . .]"[2] (Pomberger n. d., 18). Through his choice of language, he accentuates the joint agency and unity exhibited by the group. At the same time, however, it also enables him to mask the individual accountability of single group members for concrete acts of violence. Again, Pomberger avoids providing any precise indication of his own involvement in the incidents of looting. Nevertheless, he portrays the k.u.k. soldiers as active agents, exerting substantial influence on their environment. He does not choose euphemistic vocabulary, but employs verbs such as 'steal', 'plunder' and 'kill animals' to candidly depict the soldiers' actions. For instance, he states, "We unprofessionally stabbed the harmless animal with the bayonets, cut off pieces of meat and ate it blood-warm in its raw state" (Pomberger n. d., 19). Furthermore, he rarely uses passive verb constructions.

2 All quotations from the source material were translated from German to English.

However, he employs other strategies to passivate the group of k.u.k. soldiers at pivotal narrative moments. This is accomplished, firstly, by pointing out that their deeds were approved by their superiors. His account reads, "[…] now came the order or permission from the company commander to go looting in order to avoid death by starvation" (Pomberger n. d., 19). This happens after they had already raided a store. Now, however, they had official permission or orders to plunder the entire village. Secondly, as already indicated in the quotation, Pomberger (n. d., 20) repeatedly refers to the soldiers' own emergency situation: "We suffered from overexertion and hunger to such an extent that many began to cry, among them often the strongest men". Regarding to his account, they seem to have few options other than plundering and stealing. Significantly, the character of the verbs he uses ('suffer from hunger', 'cry') also changes; they are more introspective or semiotic and no longer offer material influence on the external world. Pomberger does not try to conceal the fact that his comrades and probably also he himself looted and stole food. He portrays the soldiers' actions as active, just as he does not hide their violent aspects. This might potentially imply a certain consciousness of injustice of the author. Nonetheless, the overarching narrative passivates and exonerates the soldiers, casting them as victims of external circumstances that forced them to loot. Their emergency situation excuses them, as does the absolution they receive by their superiors.

K.u.k. officers appear in Pomberger's account as a powerful, impersonal, distanced group. They are characterized only by their military functions and titles. In the context of the lootings, he attributes to them one material action: "On September 3, our captain managed to procure a sack of rice in a […] farming village" (Pomberger n. d., 20). The author's choice of words is markedly abstract and generalizing. Consequently, the specific nature of the act of 'procuring' remains unclear, encompassing a range of possibilities. The term can include anything from shopping or trading up to requisitioning[3] or looting. Otherwise,

3 According to contemporary understanding, requisitions were not an injustice. According to Austro-Hungarian law, requisitions within the monarchy's terri-

Pomberger solely ascribes semiotic actions of informing, granting permissions, and commanding soldiers to the group of k.u.k. officers. As a result, they come across as a very influential group, capable of exerting a great deal of impact and power solely through their speech acts.

Pomberger mentions the civilian population of Galicia three times in the text passages concerning looting, noting that they had already fled their homes. He represents them as a vague, indeterminate group, appearing either in terms of their act of fleeing and leaving their belongings behind, or as the passive recipients of the actions of others, particularly the Austro-Hungarian military. Their actions have no material effect on other actors. The only individual figure who briefly appears is a Jewish merchant: "In this village one could not find anyone except a Jewish grocer" (Pomberger n. d., 18). The soldiers then looted his store, which Pomberger describes in detail; however, we learn nothing more about the merchant. He, too, is only at the receiving end of the soldiers' actions, devoid of any agency or further elaboration. His superficial depiction is limited to his religion and his profession as a grocer. In any case, Pomberger repeatedly underlines that the civilian population mainly is absent. It can be argued that this narrative is supposed to diminish the perceived gravity of the lootings; implicitly, it suggests that depriving absent people of their food and livestock is less severe than facing one's victims while pillaging their belongings.

Lastly, the account includes the group of the four persons executed in Wieliczka. Pomberger does not describe the actual execution, but only that he perceived their remains. According to his depiction, the dead were dressed in k.u.k. uniforms. As previously mentioned, k.u.k. officers state they were alleged Russian spies who had put on the uniforms as a means of disguise. Yet further information regarding their identities as well as a more precise background of their conviction and execution lacks. They may have been Galician civilians accused of espionage, or Russian soldiers who managed to acquire k.u.k. uniforms, or even

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tory were allowed if they were militarily necessary and financially compensated (Reichsgesetzblatt 1912/99 (31. December 1912), "Gesetz betreffend die Kriegsleistungen", §22.)

Austro-Hungarian soldiers who were punished for an incident. Whether they were indeed collaborating with the military opponent or whether the accusation of espionage was just a mere allegation without actual evidence (as in many other cases) has to remain unresolved.

3. "… and one must be silent about all these misdeeds" – Franz Arneitz' war account

In late October 1914, Franz Arneitz arrived as a fresh recruit on the Eastern Front in Nowe Misto. He recounts how his troops forcibly evacuated a village situated in close vicinity to the advancing frontline and executed all remaining inhabitants who had not left the village until the evacuation deadline on November 4. The following day, the rearguard of the retreating Austro-Hungarian troops burned down the village. It is not possible to determine the exact location of the village which he calls Čindra Nuowa; it is likely to have been near to Nowe Misto. He describes the inhabitants of the village as "mostly Ruthenians mixed with Poles and Jews" (Arneitz n. d., 9). During both the advance and the retreat of his troops, he also mentions two instances of 'requisitions' of animals.

Arneitz depicts himself as an individualized actor in the first-person singular several times in the text passages analyzed here. Far more often, however, the predominant narrative strategy rather obscures his individual agency. This is achieved by using indefinite pronouns like 'one' or the outright omission of his person in many places (i. e. by passive verb constructions). Consequently, the extent of his direct participation in the depicted events remains uncertain to varying degrees. For instance, while it is evident that he was a firsthand witness to the executions at Čindra Nuowa, he does not address whether he was actively involved in them. Instead, Arneitz primarily presents himself as reacting to the prevailing violence in his surroundings. He focuses on his perceptions and observations of 'seeing' and 'witnessing' how the inhabitants of the village are massacred. In addition, he conveys his emotions, which are mainly reactions of pity, pain or anger. His account reads, "I was an eyewitness how a patrol brought three young girls in front of the major

[…] I felt so heavy-hearted when I saw them being hanged innocently" (Arneitz n. d., 10). Thereby, he constructs his self-representation as an external observer who documents the unfolding events in his notes but refrains from any active participation in acts of wartime violence. He responds to the violence on an emotional level but has little influence on his environment, thus rendering his actions powerless and harmless.

In contrast to Pomberger, Arneitz adopts a distinct narrative approach when describing violent acts of the group of k.u.k. soldiers in the relevant passages. He hardly uses the first-person plural; instead, he employs functionalizing denominations of the acting persons as a 'patrol'. This choice of words establishes an atmosphere of anonymity and distance, thereby obscuring the identities of the people involved. In part, however, he also adds the pronoun 'our' when referring to these patrols, indicating a certain level of identification with the group of actors. He attributes comparatively innocuous actions to the patrols, such as roaming the village or rounding up civilians. For instance, he states, "The twelve hours have passed and our patrols roam the village and wherever they come across a civilian he is arrested as a spy […]" (Arneitz n. d., 10). As soon as Arneitz proceeds to describe the violent acts of arresting, hanging, and beating civilians to death, he shifts to indeterminate terms such as 'one' or 'a few men'. In this way, he creates even more anonymity and a sense of detachment: "One dragged these three girls like calves to the nearest tree and pulled them up" (Arneitz n. d., 10). He endeavors to distance himself from these actors, dissociating his own person from their violent acts.

Most often, however, the backgrounding of the k.u.k. soldiers as actors predominates in the relevant text passages. They are grammatically erased from the sentences by passive constructions or cryptic formulations. For instance, one passage reads, "[…] anyone who is found in the village does not escape death" (Arneitz n. d., 11). Although Arneitz describes what is done to the civilian population, he avoids specifying who did it to them in pivotal passages. Grammatically, the violence seems to manifest itself autonomously, dissociated from any concrete actor. Similar observations can be made regarding the two reports of 'requisitions': "The pig was simply taken away from a farmer" (Arneitz n. d., 8). Addi-

tionally, his choice of words plays down and naturalizes the incidents. By describing the 'requisitions' with verbs such as 'taken away' and 'removed', the act of appropriating animals that may have been vital to the survival of the affected farmers is trivialized. However, we cannot be sure whether the affected farmers received a payment slip as compensation; Arneitz at least mentions none.

In his notes, he solely focuses on the soldiers' material actions and not on their semiotic speech acts or emotive reactions. These mainly revolve around interactions with the civilian population and their possessions. His portrayal thus depicts the soldiers as quite powerful, their actions exert profound impact on their environment. At the same time, we learn nothing about the soldiers' inner motivations or their state of mind. Notably, he passivates the soldiers only in relation to the actions of k.u.k. officers, thereby drawing a clear distinction between them and their superiors. In particular, he accuses the officers of disproportionate treatment of enlisted soldiers. The passivations relate not only to orders that officers issue, but also to penalties they can impose on soldiers.

Similar to Pomberger, Arneitz depicts the k.u.k. officers as a functionalized, generalized and impersonal group of actors. They emerge as authoritative, active figures who exude a sense of distance and wield considerable power, primarily employing commands rather than engaging in interactions. In addition, Arneitz ascribes them a few emotive reactions, seeking to characterize them as particularly cold and brutal. For instance, he describes a major's callous reaction and his corresponding order, stating: "They [the aforementioned three young women, L. K.] begged the major on their knees to release them, but he remained unmoved and said, 'Remove that rabble, I have already given my order'" (Arneitz n. d., 10). In another instance, he highlights the unsubstantiated arguments on which the orders of the officers were based:

> "A patrol also brought a farmer with his son, about eighteen years old, whom an officer accused of signaling, but which was only made up, the farmer, as I saw for myself, had a lamp hanging in his room, and this officer saw this light and [sent, L. K.] some men [to get, L. K.] this farmer" (Arneitz n. d., 11).

Subsequently, the soldiers beat the farmer and his son to death. On the one hand, Arneitz condemns the brutality and arbitrariness of the officers by those statements. On the other hand, he also aims to emphasize that although the soldiers carried out the executions, it was the officers who issued the orders and thus bore the responsibility for them. To support his argument, he points out that the soldiers themselves were threatened with negative consequences if they failed to follow the orders from above:

> "But what is happening to this population is blatant injustice, and one must be silent about all these misdeeds. The officers are obsessed and very brutal with us, too, one is tied up for little things for two hours" (Arneitz n. d., 12).

Throughout his recollection of the war, he repeatedly characterizes the officers as cold, strict and cruel toward their own soldiers. Indeed, an enormous power imbalance between officers and enlisted men existed within the k.u.k. army which often resulted in violent treatment of the latter (Hämmerle 2022, 524–525). After the withdrawal from Čindra Nuowa, for example, Arneitz describes how an officer shot a young soldier who had collapsed on the side of the road and was unable to continue marching despite repeated commands to do so. He also addresses his own experiences of the officers' violent arbitrariness several times in his account. Thus, a shift of responsibility for the massacre of the villagers takes place in his narrative. The soldiers merely serve as the reluctant, yet obedient henchmen executing the orders given to them by their superiors. They appear to have no choice, since they can also become victims of the violence emanating from the officers.

In another contrast to Pomberger, Arneitz does not bypass those affected by the violence – the civilian population – but repeatedly foregrounds them and their suffering in the regarding passages. While he mostly portrays them as a generalized, unspecific group, he also strives for a more precise identification of individual representatives within this collective. Due to the limited availability of personal information, such identification primarily relies on superficial, selective categorizations

such as age and gender. It is conceivable that he deliberately focuses on the three young women previously mentioned as individual victims of the massacre in order to illustrate how wretched and defenseless the civilian population of Čindra Nuowa was in his perspective. Compared to other actors in his account, Arneitz (n. d.: 10) also uses the most evaluative terms when referring to the civilian population, aiming to evoke a sense of compassion: "Everyone cries, whether man or woman, child or elderly, these poor people are driven out of their dwellings […]". The scope of their actions is limited to themselves, as they possess no influence over other actors. Undeniably, Arneitz expresses empathy and pity for the Galician population, coupled with a strong sense of injustice for the deeds committed. At the same time, however, the emphasized image of the population as innocent, poor victims also serves as an additional narrative device for Arneitz to emphasize the cruelty of the officers whom he holds accountable for their misery.

4. Strategies, functions and limits of soldiers' narratives of violence

First of all, it should be emphasized that in contrast to the prevailing public discourse of remembrance that was dominant in Austria for large parts of the 20th century, both authors reported about violence against civilians at all. Furthermore, both express a certain empathy for the affected population and a sense of injustice. Possible reasons can be identified in their biographies that could have at least partially affected the relative openness of their writing. Both Franz Arneitz and Gottlieb Pomberger did not volunteer for the military or for the war but did so reluctantly. Their memoirs do not reveal any enthusiasm for the war. Pomberger's account also covers his first year as a recruit before the war, which he remembers very negatively and describes as a "slave life" (Pomberger n. d., 2–3). He especially criticizes the harassment by officers and older soldiers, as well as the arbitrary decisions of superiors. These experiences overshadowed his war deployment and helped to shape a palpable aversion towards the army and the war in general.

Arneitz' account reveals his Roman Catholic faith, which he repeatedly emphasizes in his depictions of everyday contacts with the local population. Furthermore, it is conceivable that his own experiences as a member of the Carinthian Slovenes played a significant role in shaping his perception of the war. He does not explicitly mention any personal experiences of discrimination as a Carinthian Slovene within the ranks of the k.u.k. army in his notes. Yet research has highlighted prejudicial or discriminatory treatment of various non-German language groups, among them also Slovenian-speaking soldiers, within the Austro-Hungarian military. This could engender feelings of frustration and alienation among the soldiers concerned (Stergar 2011; for Czech soldiers see e. g. Hutečka 2019). Also after 1918, Carinthian Slovenes repeatedly experienced discrimination in Austria (Wakounig 2020). Possibly, Arneitz' religious views and encounters with discrimination influenced his perception of the war and the military apparatus.

Both authors concealed neither violence against civilians nor the k.u.k. army's active use of it; they did, however, remain silent about the extent of their own involvement. In doing so, they resorted less to officious patterns of justification such as the common accusation of espionage, but rather utilized narratives that seem to be typical for enlisted soldiers. Joanna Bourke (1999, 225–241) has developed five categories of strategies how soldiers justified killing in wartime, mainly focused on statements of Northern American soldiers of the Second World War and the Vietnam War. Based on her distinction, three central narrative strategies can be identified which Pomberger and Arneitz deployed in their accounts to varying degrees.

First, both authors use various linguistic strategies of deindividualization. They primarily aim at concealing the involvement of the author's own person and instead relegating violent agency to a collective 'we', attributing it to other, anonymous actors, or even creating the illusion of violence taking place on its own. This recourse to passivation and anonymization is supposed to dismiss the question of individual responsibility. Deindividualization is not exclusively a retrospective, purely linguistic scheme; research has indicated that group cohesion plays an important role in the practice of violence, and that the "diffusion

of responsibility" (Kühne 2004, 34) among a collective can profoundly underpin dynamics of violence (Überegger 2022, 423–424). Likewise, it has been shown that combatants did indeed experience the violence of the battlefield as a distanced, depersonalized phenomenon due to modern weapon technologies and industrialized warfare (Latzel 2004, 329). However, that argument proves to be invalid for the discussed forms of violence against civilians since they did not rely on long-distance weapons.

Second, acts of violence are justified as a necessity essential for survival. This applies in particular to the descriptions of looting and requisitions, which are presented as inevitable and indispensable. Bourke (1999, 226–227) has noted that this pattern of legitimation is especially deployed in situations in which the threat to one's own existence was particularly concrete. Indeed, hunger was one of the main concerns which often preoccupied soldiers' minds and is very present in their ego documents (Hutečka 2019, 66–70). Accordingly, at least the desperation that Pomberger describes when his troops retreated from the Russian army without supplies may be understandable.

The third narrative, which appears to be very common among enlisted soldiers, refers to commands from above. Soldiers justify their actions by asserting adherence to directives of a figure of authority, thus shifting the ultimate culpability to a higher power. Arneitz explicitly explains soldierly obedience despite a sense of injustice by pointing out that k.u.k. soldiers faced maltreatment by officers if they disobeyed. Indeed, the treatment of recruits and soldiers by the Austro-Hungarian military were characterized by drill, humiliation, and the constant threat or actual use of corporal punishment. The punitive measure of *Anbinden* ('typing up'), which is often recalled and condemned in soldiers' ego documents, was still common practice from 1914 to 1918. It was sometimes used quite excessively by officers to discipline and subdue soldiers (Hämmerle 2022, 435–442; Hutečka 2019, 162–165). In both Arneitz' and Pomberger's accounts, memories of mistreatment by some officers reverberate, profoundly shaping their perspective of their own position as inferior and powerless soldiers within a hierarchical, rigid military system.

These three narratives appear in different forms and combinations in the two analyzed war accounts. As Bourke (1999, 225) summarizes, they unfold a rationalizing effect by basing violence on ordered, rational causes. The authors' wartime experiences, which probably were difficult and complex to understand, were compressed into structured, coherent and comprehensible patterns. This does not necessarily have to be a willful act of concealment or denial. For one thing, the examined sources are ego documents in which the writers not only constructed their selves but also represented themselves to others. In both instances, it can be assumed that the authors primarily envisaged an audience that encompassed at the very least their own immediate family, possibly also a broader social environment. Consequently, it was in their interest to project a favorable self-image. Apparently, it was important to them not to omit difficult, possibly traumatic war experiences, but to integrate them into their own life stories. From this perspective, the scrutinized narratives can also be understood as a coping mechanism to deal with traumatic memories and feelings of guilt. The narratives helped them to make sense of the events and their own role in them. Morally, they appear to be on the 'right side': They assume only the role of an uninvolved observer or an anonymous part of a group in their stories, bereft of agency to stop the unfolding events, yet they feel deeply sorry for the perpetrated atrocities.

In addition, Thomas Kühne (2004, 43) and Klaus Latzel (2004, 329) have pointed out that such narratives are not just constructed in retrospective, but rather emerge within a pre-existing framework where the soldier's status as a suffering victim is already entrenched as a cognitive filter. With that filter in mind, soldiers entered the military or the war. This stance helped them to cope with their everyday lives in war and to make sense of potentially incongruous experiences. The perspective of one's own experience of suffering superseded the aspect of actively inflicting harm on others. This does indeed apply to Arneitz and Pomberger and their accounts: Both went to war grudgingly, which they considered pointless. Their experiences of harassment and possibly also of discrimination in the army only confirmed their perception all the more.

The narratives in question, however, also serve to reduce complexity. The authors' actions, respectively those of their group of comrades, are simplified into a few, intelligible explanations that justify or excuse their own role. Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that orders and coercion cannot singularly explain the multifaceted nature and extensive scope of violence against civilians between 1914 and 1918. Their efficacy should not be overestimated (Horne and Smith, 2009, 105–106; Überegger 2022, 428–430). Oswald Überegger (2022; 2018) has developed a differentiated set of factors that could, depending on the situation, foster violence. Especially during mobile warfare respectively the rapid advance of one army and the hasty escape of its opponent, specific dynamics of violence can arise, which can be aroused (among others) by group dynamics, group-specific cognitive and moral frameworks, perceptions of space, hunt-like situations or extreme emotional states. These aspects may have presented enormous challenges in terms of comprehension, explication, and integration into the self-images of the authors.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the afflictions endured by soldiers cannot serve as an absolution for violent actions on their side. Of course, individual enlisted soldiers bore no responsibility for the war of the k.u.k. army against the civilian population of Galicia, including the "scorched earth" policy, in its entirety. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize their agency within this framework. Like mosaic pieces of a bigger picture, they represented a constitutive component of wartime violence. It is precisely this aspect, that soldiers, despite everything, were still actors in this war and not just victims of external circumstances, that the analyzed narratives fail to capture. As John Horne put it, "even when they were pinned down under shellfire, these men weren't simply or always victims. Many […] at least sometimes had some options in how they responded" (Horne and Smith 2009, 108). In contrast to the civilian victims of the k.u.k. army who indeed had little to no options, Austro-Hungarian soldiers retained a certain measure of agency, small as it may have been at times. The narratives embedded within the analyzed ego documents reversed this very aspect; the active perpetration of violence thus became a story of the author's own victimhood.

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Ink Painting and Woodblock Printing

Narrating Violence through the Brush Stroke

Victoria Lupascu

1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on graphic narratives of abuse and violence in Asia, notably those depicting the Sino-Japanese war and Japanese aggression in Korea from late 1930s to the end of the 1940s[1] and during particular periods during the twentieth century in the People's Republic of China. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim's graphic novel, *Grass*, and Li Kunwu and P. Otie's *A Chinese Life* draw their own and other's encounters with war, abuse and violence starting from an early age and challenge the existing political discourses around the events they recount in and from South Korea and China. In analyzing the aesthetic means that render violence into both the subject and the object of these works, I argue that their black and white, heavy ink styles create the narrative dimension that allows the unspeakable to take shape on paper. Words alone are not sufficient to encompass the immensity of prolonged war and violence, but the aesthetic change in storytelling brought about by graphic novels allows for a multifaceted depiction of abuse and violent exploitation of children, women and the poor.

1 I am using the term Korea here as a signifier for the geographical location, as the split into North and South Korea happened in 1948. The fact that the graphic novel I am focusing on comes out of what today is South Korea should not create too much confusion.

Drawing on a long tradition of ink painting in Asia, Gendry-Kim, Li Kunwu and P. Ôtie revisit the wood block printing and ink-wash modalities not only to situate their works inside the Korean or Chinese artistic canon, but to create an internal tension between the subject and its representation. In *Grass* and *A Chinese Life*, the artists' choice of very dark scenery emerging from thick brush strokes suggests the heavy violence suffusing the air, the unbearable despair of hunger and cold and the seemingly interminable states of emergency. The graphic novels superimpose traditional types of strokes and leave the visually heavier pages without any text in a political move to demonstrate the truthfulness of their testimonies. This became an imperative as the Chinese, Korean and Japanese states have actively denied past acts such as the use of comfort women for the Japanese army all over Asia or the atrocities happening during the twentieth century in China.

Inspired by Dominick LaCapra's and Cathy Caruth's studies in trauma theory, as well as Hillary Chute's and Diana Taylor's intellectual work in visual studies and representations of war and violence in graphic novels, I return to Kelly Oliver's proposal of witnessing beyond recognition. In other words, I argue that the visual enables the textual in offering a narrativity dimension words alone don't possess, especially when trauma is recounted by children. The graphic novel performs the act of witnessing, and while it cannot recognize itself as the subject of violence, it affirms the past and becomes an act of testimony against political denial.

Lastly, the two graphic novels here allow us to explore the relationship between the visual and the textual but refuse the aestheticization of violence: the implicit scope is legibility through canonic lenses to inscribe the children and women's voices into a historic period that still needs to be ethically, politically and philosophically interrogated.

2 The violent historical context

The Maoist period (1949–1976) in China is often portrayed as a time of intense transformation punctuated by violence (Wemheuer 2019). How-

ever, it is important to mention that before Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China and became its leader, national and international turmoil ravaged the territory of present-day China. The two World Wars notwithstanding, China went through the fall of the last dynasty (namely, the Qing dynasty,1636 to 1911), a period of domination by war lords, a republican period from 1912 to 1949 dominated by foreign invasion, division of Chinese territory between foreign countries, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931 to 1945) and the Civil War between Nationalists and Communists (1927–1937 and 1945–1949). Other notable events before the end of the Qing dynasty worth mentioning are the Second Opium War, the First Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion that shook the entire region and disrupted in various ways agricultural cycles, regeneration cycles and society all-together (Dikötter 2008). This enumeration suggests that violence and abuse in a conflict-ridden context were on a continuum for the better part of a century in what today we call the People's Republic of China. The founding of the PRC represented the nominal end of conflicts, the disappearance of immediate foreign threats and the chance of finding one's identity and position in a much calmer society for the most part. Contrary to these political promises of peace and prosperity, the historical context did not lose its violent nature.

While the wars ended in 1949, recovery in and through the Maoist period was not a serene process, nor violence free. Mao Zedong's doctrine and vision for the newly formed state was heavily influenced by the USSR and his own determination for the state to be able to provide food for everyone, education and basic health services. His intentions and successful implementation of some of these policies and programs have been widely recognized and praised—one example that comes to mind is the high esteem and influence Mao's 'health care for all' initiative had at the 1978 World Health Organization Conference at Alma Ata (in the then Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic) (Kadetz and Stanley-Baker 2022). Despite considerable advances, many nation-wide movements inadvertently brought about destruction and suffering. The two widely known examples are the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution (Wemheuer 2019). The former (1958 -1962) was an all-encompassing campaign following the second five-year plan of the PRC to transform

the country from an agrarian economy to a communist society through the formation of people's communes, increased grain yields, rural industrialization and thought reformation towards a whole-hearted embrace of the Maoist doctrine. The political persecution campaigns resulted in officials under- or overreporting grain yields and industrial advances and the construction of parallel discourses around the economy in order to escape imprisonment or other types of retaliation. At the same time, agricultural collectivization, the communal kitchens with little at-home cooking, poorly designed infrastructure and political struggle sessions for those who opposed such measures created an atmosphere suffused with fear, poverty, hunger and confusion in heavy contrast to the original intention set by the CCP[2], namely to better people's daily life.

The end of the Great Leap Forward and the Great Chinese Famine it engendered with casualties ranging from 15 to 55 million people have been officially attributed to natural disasters and Mao's opposition (Songlin 2021). A similar rhetoric appears when talking about the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) whose goal was to remove any political opposition and consolidate power for those already in charge. One of the most important aspects in this period was the co-optation of children as political agents into the movement. In other words, children and adolescents, as Red Guards, were given the power to denounce their parents or neighbors, or anyone else for that matter, as people's enemies, or Party's enemies (Yang 2017). They were taken seriously, and parents were killed, oppressed, tortured or deported as a result of such denouncing. A famous example is the well-known director Chen Kaige, who directed *Farewell My Concubine* and *Yellow Earth* among many other masterful films, who at 14 years old denounced his father for creating subversive art. The father was heavily persecuted thereafter. This type of behavior and its repercussions in such a context become the subject and the object of the graphic narrative analyzed in this chapter, *A Chinese Life*.

The war between the people on the Korean Peninsula and Japan had been a longstanding geopolitical issue, starting as early as the 16th

2 CCP is the abbreviation for the Chinese Communist Party.

century. However, Japan officially announced the annexation of Korea in 1910 after prolonged conflicts (Jo 2023). The peninsula was considered part of the Empire of Japan until 1945 and during this time Korean language and culture were heavily fought against and violently suppressed. In this context, subjects such as settler colonialism and genocide are not out of place. For this reason and the Empire's actions in Asia, the Empire of Japan was tried in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also named the Tokyo Trial or the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal after the end of the Second World War (Cohen and Totani 2018). Another subject receiving international attention as part of the Trial revolved around the comfort women. Young women, some from Korea, China, Taiwan and many other occupied territories were forced into sexual slavery in comfort stations all over Asia. While a form of domination through violence and part of the prolonged war in Asia, and despite multiple trials and public outrage over more than half a century, Japan refused to formally apologize and/or compensate survivors and their relatives (Nishino, Kim, Onozawa 2018). The South Korean Government also did not do its utmost for the survivors and their families (Carranza Ko 2023). The lack of such an apology implying the denial of history has fueled various cultural and political moves to construct and sustain testimony that would survive the survivors and provide historical documents to oppose official history. This is one of the goals for the graphic narrative *Grass* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim.

The historical background positions the two graphic narratives, *A Chinese Life* and *Grass*, in the context they are representing. This chapter does not compare the two directly in political terms, it analyzes them together for their aesthetic attempt at writing and showing the unspeakable. Both follow long periods of time, covering multiple decades and underscoring traumatic events that not only impacted the authors and their families, but society and the world at large. For *A Chinese Life*, its three volumes start in 1949 and end in the 2000s, while *Grass* starts in 1934 and ends around 1996. They share artistic techniques through which they can rework previous experiences and produce counter-narratives as retrospective reconfigurations of existing knowledge. It is here that the graphic narratives show their epistemological enabling of narrativ-

ity, understood as a re-working of previous patterns and elements with a communicative function in mind. *A Chinese Life* and *Grass* articulate available signs of violence through traditional aesthetic means to better anchor them in history.

3 Wood block printing and ink painting

The authors of *A Chinese Life* and *Grass*, Li Kunwu, Philippe Ôtié and Keum Suk Gendry-Kim use wood block printing techniques, ink painting and ink wash, as well as caricature at times as their preferred illustration modes.

Ink brush painting is a type of Chinese brush painting using the same black ink common in calligraphy (Jullien 2009). It started in the Tang dynasty, that is around 7th century CE, and it is not interested in realistic depictions or techniques, but in catching the "spirit" of a subject. It heavily emphasizes the brushwork, the turns and twists that come out of the artists hand that will convey the subject's essence. This type of painting, in both China and Korea, was closely connected to calligraphy and poetry, and, moreover, in Hu Zhiying's theorization, was a "pluralistic continuation of multiple historical traditions" (Hu 2003). Notably, this type of painting, at its origins and throughout history, has privileged the affective aspect: the scenes were at best loose adaptations of scenery or people's figures, as the main goal was to evoke certain feelings, to spark philosophical conversations about humans' place in the world and their relationship with nature, the latter's beauty etc. At the same time, due to the type of paper and ink, strokes could not be changed, or covered over or erased. On one hand, this suggests the difficulty of mastering such an art form and, on the other hand, it implies affective singularity.

In A *Chinese Life*, Ôtie and Li interlace ink painting techniques with woodblock printing relying on an equally long Chinese tradition that started around the 3rd century CE (Allen 2010). This artistic method comprises a few steps each: an image is first carved into a block of wood and then covered with ink so that the image will show in print, in a relief

printing sequence. Intense and laborious, this technique has been used over the centuries for both textile and paper printing but has been abandoned in the modern and contemporary eras as it could not compete with mass printing. However, the act of carving into wood a specific image brings up the issue of temporality, permanence and materiality before the printing even takes place. The famous Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) emphasizes such characteristics when encouraging and supporting the New Woodcut Movement (Lin and Tsai 2014), springing it into action in the 1920s in China and persuading his peers to use this type of printing as the best way to represent society. The dark woodcuts have condensed compositions and, traditionally, focus on the suffering inflicted by social and political struggles, by war or famine.

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th in China, there was no shortage of artistic societies who favored this type of art and, who in their frenzy, instrumentalized it through their practices. Despite this tendency, however, the Wooden Bell Woodcut Research Society articulated, as shown by Tang Xiaobing, two salient features of the woodcut movement, namely "a commitment to represent the underrepresented, and a conviction in the exhortative power of a distinctly democratic artistic medium." (Tang 2015, 139). Furthermore, Hu Yichuan, in his work entitled *To the Front*, contends that his motivation was "not to offer an indexical reference, as photographic documents were intended to do, but instead to establish an interpretative frame for an overwhelming crisis. (. . . .) for this, woodcut printing offers clarity and an unambivalent take on the situation" (cited in Tang 2015, 120). In doing so, the woodcut printing movement conceives of a visual language that recognizes the prevalent structures of visibility and visual representation and positions itself away from oil painting. The class-based implications notwithstanding, woodcut printing offers the form through which we can read the period from the 1920s to the 1940s (cited in Tang 2015, 120) — in other words, its formalism co-producing a historical discourse alongside literary journals where these images would be published.

The use of such a technique, or a style resembling woodcut/woodblock printing, in graphic novels refines, I contend, the aesthetic pat-

terns that allow traumatic narratives to be recognized as such in contemporary culture; it also revives a narrative dimension that contextualizes daily life as a traumatic continuum, not as a collection of exceptional events. Lastly, in assuming the freedom of artistic collage, overlaying and braiding different aesthetic and political positions, these graphic novels become "initiators of discursive practices" (Bacchi and Bonham 2014) that enrich the extant context.

4 A Chinese Life

Set to illustrate engagement with historical events throughout the 20th century, the graphic novel *A Chinese Life* positions itself in the minor register of the personal. Starting with the title, the indefinite article "a" cancels any claims to universalization[3] by following one character, their family and their individual and collective response to sweeping violence. The presence of the adjective "Chinese", on the contrary, classifies the noun it precedes and localizes violence in a particular geography. The tension between the indefinite article and the specific adjective, while suggesting one, isolated way of many of engaging with life, it also creates enough epistemological ambiguity to allow the graphic novel's content to dialectically define this "life" and the adjective "Chinese". The content visualizes displacement, famine and violence, all of which become perspectives through which life can be understood and interpreted.

3 The graphic narrative was first written in French and the same use of the article is present there.

Figure 1: A Chinese Life, p.52

Li, K. and Ôtié Philippe (2012) *A Chinese life*. London: SelfMadeHero, 52

In Figure 1 we see a family who suffers through the Great Chinese Famine during the Great Leap Forward. The protagonist's family went from the city to the countryside as they believed there could have been more food there and reconnected with the side of the family who remained in the village. They bring a small present, what appears to be a

small cake or piece of tofu and are distressed to have to split the small cake into countless pieces so that everyone can have a taste. While the graphic narrative follows what Scot McCloud theorized as sequential art (McCloud 1994), the panels are unequal and their difference in size and mise-en-page underscores the amount of focus and time needed to engage with each of them. The middle panel, larger in size, clarifies the context: everyone flocked around the table to get a piece of food; their faces are slightly contorted while looking at it. Grandma assures everyone their turn will come, but the panel's dark atmosphere and the visual mechanics contrasting people's bodies, especially their faces, and the pieces of food they are waiting for show the beginning of a long famine. The alteration of scale in the unbalanced ration between the crowding of bodies around the table taking up most of the space in the panel and the pieces of food barely visible, implies the gravity of the situation. The tension between the visual and the textual starts to form as Grandma tells everyone they will receive an equal part. One panel over, the alternation of focus between the giving and the receiving hands, the change in positions signal the almost complete disconnection between text and image. Grandma's advice is to chew really well and not to swallow too quickly after someone receives one piece of food. The advice falls short very fast when we notice that a piece needed to be distributed to five hands. There is no text in this last panel as the image stands out on itself. The reader has already been taught how to read the image and the narrativity becomes a clear function of the reader (Pier and Garcia Landa 2008).

Following Michael Chaney's theorization of graphic narratives in *Reading Lessons in Seeing*, "rather than illustrating things, the images and the composition **are** the thinking" (Chaney 2018). On this page, Grandma's echoing the egalitarian thinking proposed by the government and the logic behind the communes and her stating that "everyone will have their turn" and "everyone will receive an equal part" falls short and enhances famine's violence on those who have believed they will receive this or any other small, equal piece if they wait for their turn. This page sequentially strengthens narrativity as it visually reconfigures the official discourse and forms a type of visual pedagogy. The reader is

shown how slogans become violent, their impact on bodies and the despair they create, through simple elements organized in a type of black and white composition where the focus and the scale, not to mention the changes in point of view, define the growing intensity in the panels. Neither the countryside, nor the urban areas had access to more food, but they both engaged in a mutual suspicion of the other.

Figure 2: A Chinese Life, p. 75.

Li, K. and Ôtié Philippe (2012) *A Chinese life*. London: SelfMadeHero, 75

Figure 3: A Chinese Life, p. 76.

Li, K. and Ôtié Philippe (2012) *A Chinese life*. London: SelfMade-Hero, 76

In Figure 2, the panel's diegetic composition, drawing on the tension between image and text, further illustrates the progression of famine. In the first panel we see people gathered in a communal space, one of them reading the slogan on the wall, "We take care of each other, we love each other. . ." The images, in a cinematic move, will zoom in to show us how one of the main characters' brothers has come from the countryside to the city to look for food, doing the reverse trip we have seen in Figure 1. Liuba is very tense, unrecognizable and does not answer his sister's

questions. On the contrary, he starts threatening that he will bite and devour everyone around. The face, the long fingers with pointy nails, as well as the panel's atmosphere indicate madness, which is dietetically confirmed on the next page. Liuba is mad because of hunger. He and his family had to eat their sheep and the dog and started to threaten his neighbors. His hunger is so intense he claims, "I will eat the entire Earth and the Sky too!" and bursts into a loud laughter. The violence on this page comes not only from Liuba's madness, but also from the fact that his brother-in-law does not believe hunger was a reason for madness. In the corner panel on the left side, the brother-in-law claims he is disappointed in Liuba going mad because he had to eat his own dog. The dismissal at the bottom of the page grows even larger as the brother-in-law mentions that "the situation is so dramatic that one cannot take pity on a dog". The human-non-human relations notwithstanding, the irony brewing on this page is palpable and implies the dissolution of all connections, all sense and logic. Lastly, the panels on this page suggest that the Great Famine was indeed catastrophic, (a few degrees more severe than the adjective "dramatic" used by the brother-in-law) and transformed social and political relations, not just isolated, individual lives.

The visual-textual relationship proposes depictions of famine in a visually pedagogic way that builds the irony, the tension and the expectations in a progressive, constant manner. The woodblock printing style not only contributes to the panels' aesthetic formation, but functions as a means of legitimizing the existence of violence, of famine and the dissolution of human relations, while, through the idea of woodblocks' existence, materializes testimonies. Also, this graphic narrative takes what Hillary Chute argued for a step further. Chute claims that "the complex visualizing [this graphic novel] undertakes suggests that we need to rethink the dominant tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility that have tended to characterize trauma theory" (Chute 2016). *A Chinese Life* rethinks visuality as a form of rethinking history, as a way of expressing the affective charge of what words fail to describe. The woodblock printing and the ink painting styles facilitate this endeavor from their position as canonical aesthetic means of capturing fleeting encounters, emotions and invisible details. The innovation Li and Ôtie

bring to the table stems from their goal of making the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution aesthetically legible to Chinese art, Chinese culture, and, hence, to suggest that the dominant historical discourse is one part of a flow of interpretations and renditions of events.

Given the violence and extreme turn of events in short periods of time, personal memory can fail to recount entire sequences of events, especially when the perpetrators where children. Set during the Cultural Revolution, the panels refer to a specific policy that granted children, adolescents and young adults the right to denounce everyone as a Party enemy. Taking advantage of slogans' ambiguity, vocabulary obscureness, hunger, and interpersonal tensions, the local authorities asked children to turn in everyone they considered suspicious. In the first set, the right-hand side page takes rumors and gossip as its object and shows how children enabled each other in their denouncing, chasing and struggling against their elders, or, more precisely, what seem to be their teachers. What is even more dramatic appears at the bottom of the second page where the child who denounced the teachers tries to recount the series of events, but fails and admits "what followed. . . , what followed it's erased from my memory". As we will see with the graphic novel *Grass*, these three sequential panels play with time and space, past, present and everything in between, in order to "feel out the contours of cultural responses and social reactions to trauma, rather than define or delineate trauma itself", as Davies D. proposes (Davies 2019). The violence is all-encompassing to the degree that memory cannot hold it. Differently put, the blank spaces occupy a diffuse and unstable cultural ground, or in Sarah Ahmed's words "saturated with affect and personal tensions" (Ahmed 2014). Lastly, but just as importantly, the interplay between present and past, memory and forgetting we see in the last panels on the right openly acknowledges the relationship between trauma and memory, relativizes the testimonial nature of visual remembering and its accuracy while stating its importance on this diffuse ground. Once more, the contours of cultural responses take precedence over iron-clad, yet, elusive, definitions.

Figure 4: A Chinese Life, p. 143.

Li, K. and Ôtié Philippe (2012) *A Chinese life*. London: SelfMadeHero, 143

Figure 5: A Chinese Life, p. 159.

Li, K. and Ôtié Philippe (2012) *A Chinese life*. London: SelfMadeHero, 159

When contrasted with the left-hand side page, the last four panels in figure 5 subtly perform a change in narrative registers. On the left and to the bottom of the right side, there is a cinematic view of each scene from an omniscient type of narrator. However, in the last three panels, the point of view changes, and the reader sees the child's confusion and shock. The text "what followed. . . what followed it's erased from my memory" describes the confusion and the shock, while it underscores the change in perspective to a first-person narrator. Additionally, it is not just the memory of events whose mechanics become unclear, but the subject himself disappears with little traces to be seen. The small dots in the very last panel indicate a dissipation of the self, of an ontological loss due to extreme violence. The metalepsis offers a perspective on what is remembered and what remains untold, creating a metanarration that attempts to bring together the narrator and the author's past and the present. Because events got "erased from memory", the metaleptic jump indicating the narrator's disappearance becomes a reaction without object, a diffuse affective state situated in co-dependency with an actual, yet traumatic past.

5 Grass

At its beginnings, this narrative was designed as a semi-fictionalized thinking on social classes and gender disparity during the Second World War in Korea. Gendry-Kim's interviewing Li Ok-sun, an elderly Korean woman who lived through the war and its aftermath changed the plan (Lee and Hodapp 2022). The book became an intricate, non-fictional account of the Japanese occupation, comfort women, poverty, struggles and human relations.

In the graphic narrative, the very first thing we learn about Li Ok-sun is that her family was living in abject poverty and her parents sold her to a noodle shop in the nearest city. Ok-sun's most intense desire was to go to school, and she was ready to do hard labor for it. Her parents knew of this desire, and they used it to convince Ok-sun to leave without any fuss. The money they got for her helped alleviate poverty in order to

offer a better future to their son. Ok-sun did not know she was leaving the village forever and the two pages in figure 6 and 7 represent not only a metalepsis visible at the textual level but also a manipulation of time and space on the page.

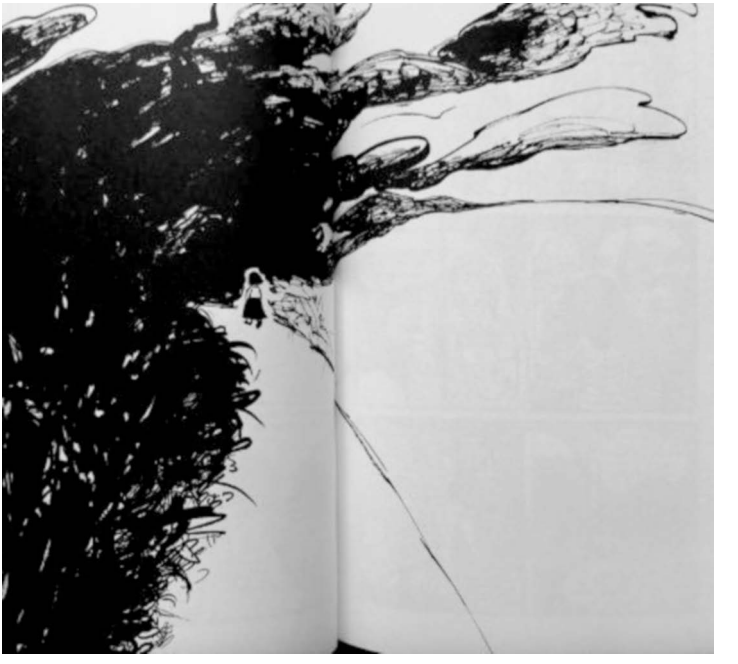
Figure 6: Grass, p. 80–1, 134

Gendry-Kim, K. S. (2019) *Grass*. First ed. Québec: Drawn & Quarterly, 80–1, 134

While the landscape might represent a memory, something from the past, the words come from the present time, "I shouldn't have said yes", a realization possible through temporal distance between the represented moment on the page and the author's present time. Ok-sun makes herself responsible and creates a retro-active possibility of refusing her departure from the village, assuming her parents would have gone back on

their decision (Juhila, Raitakari, Hall 2016). There is no sure way to know, and her imagined agency raises questions of guilt, shame and retroactive, fictional agency in the aftermath of traumatic events.

Figure 7: Grass, p. 80–1, 135



Gendry-Kim, K. S. (2019) *Grass*. First ed. Québec: Drawn & Quarterly, 80–1, 135

The landscape on the right side is devoid of any human presence and it is only the text that functions like a cinematic voice-over that indicates any relation between humans and the environment. Upon a closer look, the shapes in the background can stand in for the huts in Ok-sun's village, in which case the perspective is given by Ok-sun throwing a last look behind, her body facing forward, and her head turned back. The page

to the right shows Ok-sun heading into a dark cloud, her body diminished by the barely shaped darkness. This page does not host any text but maintains the silence as it depicts Ok-sun heading into the unknown. Also, it questions the potentiality of agency, but it does not negate it, maintaining the illusion, through the contrast between the negative and the positive space on the page. The aesthetic theory at the basis of ink brush painting described the negative space as the location from which the viewer (or the reader in this case) can imagine the necessary elements of and contextualize what is happening in the positive space (Da-Wei 2012). The emphasis falls on the viewer and their affective engagement with the negative space, the painting becoming a hermeneutic tool of larger philosophical and political questions. The negative space in the right side can be populated with the drawing on the left, but it can also suggest Ok-sun's state of mind. Moreover, given the violence and hardship she faced after she was sold out of the village, the negative space can be interpreted as a more peaceful, less traumatic memory. In both cases, the ink brush painting style in this spread allows for a reconfiguration of personal memory while restating past events and negotiates narrativity (as a function of the reader and as a retrospective reconfiguration of available signs) without words.

Additionally, the two spreads[4], with no panels, gutter or even speech bubbles depart from the conventions of graphic narratives and metaphorically show a winter landscape. This does not sequentially follow the previous pages and leaves the audience wondering about its signification. The spread to the right, where little Ok-sun is heading towards a dark cloud implying her future struggles, points to the temporal and spatial manipulation happening on the page that gives the two spreads a strong testimonial dimension. The ink brush painting underscores the affective encounter between Ok-sun and her new life and performs an important task: just like some cinema verité techniques, these four pages, with this specific aesthetic style, tell us from the very beginning how the narrative will unfold and warn us about

4 A spread, in graphic novels and comics, represents an image drawn on two pages.

any possibility of hope for the better. Thus, the emphasis falls on the "*how*", the mechanics and the memories of surviving, all essential in the reclamation of survivors' voices (Shearer-Cremean and Winkelmann 2005).

Figure 8: Grass, p. 162–3

Gendry-Kim, K. S. (2019) *Grass*, Montréal, Québec: Drawn & Quarterly, 162–3

Ok-sun's life in the next village was not easy and she is kidnapped. Her life was not ideal in the noodle-shop, and she was not sent to school either. Her next station is also unbearable and very violent and does not heed her pleads of going to school. She is abducted by two Japanese soldiers in plain clothes and taken far away into China to serve the Japanese army's needs. There is a moment of visual, diegetic recognition between the young and the old Ok-sun in Figure 8 and it continues in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Grass, p. 164–5

Gendry-Kim, K. S. (2019) *Grass*, Montréal, Québec: Drawn & Quarterly, 164–5

This juxtaposition represents an important moment of presence. In other words, Lynne Huffer's ethical question of "how can the other reappear at the site of her inscriptional effacement?" (Huffer 2001) is rerouted through the brush stroke and into a corroboration of past and present. Hence, this graphic narrative, as well as *A Chinese Life* demonstrate what Hillary Chute calls "an expanded idiom of witness/ing, a manner of testifying that sets a visual language in motion with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form" (Chute 2016, 3). Ok-sun remembers her abduction and she testifies to it through the brush stroke against political and historical effacement. The comfort women issue is highly contested in Asia and the survivors' voices have been silenced with every occasion. The graphic narrative inserts an older-looking representation of Ok-sun back into the narrative at the moment of her abduction to make her the witness to her own story, challenging thus legal theories of wit-

nessing and violence against women. Her voice, textual or visual, performs dynamic metalepsis to create and re-create the self from her very complex, woman survivor position.

Conceptually, the visual language remains closely connected to the written, since ink brush painting and calligraphy share their practice, tools, skills and even ethos. The kidnapping followed by an empty landscape on the following page can be interpreted as effacement, but, from this aesthetic perspective, insinuates the recording of the event into nature firstly, and into the audience's perception while reading the graphic narrative. The "writing as painting" and "self-writing into the landscape" constituting, hence, a few ways of testifying and witnessing mediated through a traditional aesthetic.

Figure 10: Grass, p. 190–1

Gendry-Kim, K. S. (2019) *Grass*, Montréal, Québec: Drawn & Quarterly, 190–1

It is not only Ok-sun who was kidnapped, but many more girls. Before being brought into the comfort station each one of them, from different backgrounds, countries, and, importantly, using different languages and dialects, was flown into different other locations, blind

folded or kept in freight containers on trains, all in order to dislocate them and make it even harder for any of the girls to escape. Nonetheless, they try to run away and it is not the very cold weather, their disorientation, the hunger or the tiredness, but the fact that at the barbed fence around the station they find a dead body that prevents them from even trying to make it past it. The reality of death appears very clear in front of their eyes, and despite the horrors of the comfort station, the fear of death keeps them inside.

The left side tells us "We had no choice but to work until we dropped dead. There was no way out." Thus, the three girls go back to their barracks and their return, under a starry sky fulfills multiple functions. Firstly, the graphic narrative equates their captivity with being in the world, from where, other than death, there is no other way out. Life as they knew it was synonym with violence, abuse and rape whose destructive power encompassed everything the same way the sky covered everything on the right side in Figure 10. The visual composition in both pages plays with proportions and scale and depicts the girls diminutively in comparison to the surrounding environment. Secondly, the return challenges critiques regarding the girls own agency. At this point in the narrative, as opposed to the pages where Ok-sun was sold out of her village, agency can't even be retrospectively imagined. Here, the graphic narrative frames violence and sexual slavery as a naturalized historical fact that needs to be engaged with as such.

6 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want to reiterate the importance of visual pedagogy via woodblock printing and ink brush painting these graphic narratives propose for building a multifaceted depiction of abuse and violent exploitation of women and children. The geographical location, while culturally important, cannot become an exceptionalizing element that ends the conversation on such topics and continues to efface survivor's voices denying them the possibility of healing. Moreover, *A Chinese Life* and *Grass*, reject theories of unspeakability and invisibility

in an important political move, as these categories can and have been politicized and used for denying eyewitness accounts, testimonies and demands for reparations and apologies. Lastly, the two graphic narratives' use of traditional artistic techniques makes testimonies legible to the Chinese and Korean artistic canon and inscribe children and women's voices into historical periods that still need to be interrogated.

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Judgement of God, Inadequate Adaptation, or Simply Menopause?

Collectivization Traumas behind Psychiatric Diagnoses in Hungary (1959–1961)[1]

Gábor Csikós

1. Research question and sources

People are not consistently rational, but they frequently resort to rationalization – attempting to make sense of their own and others' life events by constructing coherent narratives. The Soviet-style collectivization of agriculture in Eastern Europe challenged the creation of such coherence. With the elimination of smallholding agriculture and the shift to large-scale farming, it fundamentally altered the social fabric of rural communities. This transformation led to the deprivation of many peasants, who were either stripped of their land and became employees of cooperatives or abandoned agriculture altogether, ultimately dismantling traditional rural life.[2] The often violent methods employed during the collectivization induced trauma, which, in turn, triggered a crisis of meaning. (Kaminer/Eagle, 2010, 60–79) How could peasants disclose their experiences during collectivization when propaganda propagated the narrative of successful agricultural modernization?

1 The research was supported by the MTA BTK Lendület Ten Generations Research Group.

2 For a comprehensive understanding of collectivization, please refer to: Bauerkämper/Iordachi 2014; Radu/Budeancă 2016.

The remarkable speed of de-peasantization became a subject of contemporary sociological literature as well. In both Hungary and Romania, even medical research has examined the psychological aftermath of this radical social transformation (Juhász 1973, Spielman 1984, 150–151). However, despite these efforts, the individual-level impact still represents relatively uncharted territory, necessitating further exploration. In my study, I intend to investigate the psychological impact of the final phase of collectivization (1959–1961) in Hungary by analyzing patient records from Lipótmező. Lipótmező holds a unique position as Hungary's oldest and largest psychiatric institute (Kovai 2015), and its patient records often provide verbatim accounts of patients' experiences, along with narratives from family members and interpretive insights from medical professionals. These texts enable the identification of recurring themes in the narratives of patients belonging to the same disease group. The primary focus is on examining how each narrative addresses the traumas experienced during the Hungarian collectivization period in the early 1960s.

It is crucial for trauma survivors to express their experiences, and it is equally important for healthcare professionals to comprehend their stories. Rather than merely containing knowledge, the patients' narratives themselves are a source of knowledge. However, both the formulation of their messages and doctors' perceptions are influenced by social conditions. As a result, each life story reveals an interplay between narratives and psychiatry, highlighting the significant role of the social context. The former dimension assumes particular significance due to the fact that the information available to medical practitioners for formulating psychiatric diagnoses predominantly relies on linguistic cues. Simultaneously, the latter aspect holds weight as psychiatric illnesses are among the most socially shaped conditions, and there is consensus that mental illness requires contextualization within the social environment.[3] I begin by introducing the theory and propaganda underpinning

3 This perspective was articulated by contemporary psychiatrists as well, such as István Benedek in his 1956 paper: "what makes the schizophrenic mentally ill can only be evaluated in its social relation." p. 171.

collectivization as the prevailing layer of social reality. Subsequently, I will delve into the tangible social manifestations of collectivization, intricately tied to the firsthand experiences of the individuals involved.

2. Theory and (social) practice of collectivization

In Hungary, after 1948, the communist modernization agenda promoted strategies of industrialization and urbanization, with the kolkhoz, or collective farm, playing a pivotal role in both processes. The primary goal of collectivization was to enhance large-scale agriculture for a more efficient food supply, thereby reducing the need for labor. This freed up a substantial workforce, approximately a quarter of a million Hungarians, to support factory production in preparation for a potential Third World War. Furthermore, modernization aimed to bridge the urban-rural divide, encompassing technical advancements and cultural elements such as radio, cinema, books, and newspapers. This cultural effort also contributed to achieving the communist utopia, involving the elimination of private ownership and human exploitation. The Soviet-style modernization initiative primarily impacted rural life, embodying this vision. (Petrescu 2016)

The 1956 revolution briefly halted collectivization, but János Kádár's government, despite its promises, resumed collectivization campaigns in December 1958, coercing traditional farmers into producer cooperatives in less than three years. The rapid pace of this process astounded contemporaries. On the surface, the official policy of collectivization remained continuous with the pre-1956 period, as both promoted Leninist principles of voluntarism and gradualism. These principles emphasized the belief that peasants should willingly engage with cooperatives, avoiding any form of coercion, and that the progression towards socialist development must adhere to specific socio-developmental stages. The party-state, holding a monopoly of authority, adeptly projected the observance of Leninist principles, occasionally acknowledging individual instances of excess. The awareness that the doctrine of voluntarism didn't always translate into practice was well understood by prominent

statesmen too, but it was never communicated in public. As a result of the influence of taboo mechanisms, Hungarian historiography has conventionally focused on contextualizing physical violence primarily as a coercive tool in the pre-1956 period. (Ö. Kovács 2012, 57–59)

The peasantry's experiences were often documented by external observers, primarily journalists from democratic countries. They followed three distinct approaches: firstly, by disseminating the personal narratives of the affected victims (a particularly prevalent phenomenon among the citizens of the GDR, not only among Hungarians[4]); secondly, by encapsulating the experiences of foreign observers within the socialist state (Somogyvári, 2023); and thirdly, by critically analyzing and dissecting content from the party-state press or other relevant literary sources.

The latter is illustrated through an account penned by Erzsébet Galgóczi (1930–1989), which was published in the official literary journal Élet és Irodalom (Life and Literature). Galgóczi (1959) vividly described coercive episodes during the ongoing collectivization of her homeland. She recounted how certain farmers were ushered to the Red Star Hotel in Győr, where they were confined until they acquiesced to join the cooperative. This drastic measure left the villagers with the impression that these influential farmers had been detained against their will, prompting others to join the cooperative in solidarity. Additional pressure tactics included unpaid leave for factory workers to influence their parents to join the cooperative. Local leaders also lobbied Budapest universities to withhold a degree from a young man whose father resisted joining. (Galgóczi considered this article so significant that it served as the pri-

4 The Compulsory Collectivization of Independent Farms in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany. Federal Ministry for All-German Affairs, Germany (West), 1960. For example: „The agitators came day by day worked on us for hours, until we were tired out and worn-down and finally signed the application. Wives cried and begged their husbands and said: do sign now, we want to have peace again. They had threatened the farmers that they would double the number of agitators, drive loudspeaker trucks right in front of the farmhouses, cut off the electricity and brick up the chimneys." Doc. No. 24.

mary inspiration for her 1980 novel, "Another Love," seamlessly intertwining elements of fiction with her autobiography.)

However, it's essential to note that all these events were framed within the context of rumors. Thus, they were not narratives about the events themselves but rather reflections of the fears haunting the local peasantry, stemming from the practices of the early fifties. This narrative technique was employed to align with the expectations of the censorship and to convey the perceived atrocities. In the realm of Hungarian criticism, Galgóczi's work has been regarded as an exemplar of "cool objectivity" and "resolute optimism". (Lázár 1966) The presentation of rumors, in this context, served as a tribute to Leninist voluntarism. (Bognár 1974)

Nevertheless, the foreign press has taken a more critical stance, deconstructing these writings. Internationally, public opinion often viewed the rumor framework as a "red tail" to appease censorship, a perspective shared by the anonymous author of the Catholic Review[5] in Rome and the editors of Radio Free Europe, who even went on to publish a partial translation of Galgóczi's article.[6] The Swedish journal, Södermharns Tidning, interpreted Galgóczi's sociography as compelling evidence of a "brutal campaign" intrinsically rooted in the ideology of the regime, highlighting the longstanding perception that communists consistently regarded the peasantry as potential enemies.[7]

The use of the rumor framework became a valuable strategy in later publications. Nearly two decades after Galgóczi's sociography, Simon Serfőző skillfully portrayed prevailing fears as baseless rumors during

5 Dr. D. R (1959): Kommunista roham a magyar parasztság ellen [Communist assault against the Hungarian peasantry], *Katolikus Szemle*. 11:2 138–141.

6 "New Tactics in Latest Hungarian Collectivization Drive a Review of Hungarian Collectivization", 27 May 1959. HU OSA 300-8-3-3328; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest. pp. 13–16.

7 Söderhamns Tidning 1960–04-25: Kollektivisering till varje pris mottot för röd jordbrukspolitk. [Collectivization at any cost is the motto for red agricultural policy]. p. 4.

the 1959 collectivization in his hometown. (Serfőző 1978) Writers who did not conform to these censorship expectations, as illustrated by György Konrád's case, had their work barred from publication. In his novel, 'The Loser,' he offered an unusually candid examination of the violence inherent in the 1959 collectivization.

> In 1959 a truck drove into my yard, and the people on it were all professors. I put my hands behind my back, to make sure there wouldn't be any trouble. They stuck a red pencil up my nose and made me sign the application for membership. Those professors were sure sold on the cooperative. (Konrád 1982, 26)

Such a portrayal of violence did not necessarily persist in subsequent memoirs of former farmers. Even in the years preceding the regime change in 1989—more than three decades after the events—there remained a lingering sorrow over the loss of family estates and livestock in these memoirs. However, the accounts were notably laconic and reserved. (Bíró/Für 2013)

The level of openness akin to Konrád's novel was primarily evident in the anonymous complaint letters of the era. In February 1960, approximately one-fifth of the letters received by the official daily newspaper, Népszabadság—amounting to around 600 letters—addressed the injustices endured during the collectivization. (Kovács 2016) One elderly individual listed the methods of collectivization as follows: tax assessments, contemptuous spitting directed at the elder members who were physically strained by labor. Those who remained unconvinced by these means were summoned to the town council, where they were coerced into signing through a combination of insults, physical intimidation, and the menacing display of firearms. (Csikós et al 2023, 99–103)

In Konrád's novel, the character Sam's ability to recount his experiences stems from his marginalized status within society. With nothing left to lose, his land seized, and his residence confined to a mental institution, he finds the liberty to speak his truth. Despite attempts by psychologists to stifle his voice, he persists in sharing his anguish during every group therapy session. As Konrád concludes: "*the discussions usually*

begin with the pros and cons of small homesteads and end with a trip to the treatment room." (Konrád 1982, 26) Consequently, his complaints were pathologized and addressed using psychiatric methods.

3. Narrativity and psychiatric diagnosis

The main distinction between Western and Pavlovian-inspired Soviet psychiatry lies in the latter's greater emphasis on studying environmental factors, particularly in the context of language. (Leuenberger 2007; Marks/Savelli 2015) In the long 1950s, Hungarian psychiatry, influenced by both Pavlovian and biomedical approaches, categorized illnesses based on their origins, creating a distinction between endogenous pathologies (depression, schizophrenia, or psychosis) rooted in internal biology and exogenous disorders (chronic alcoholism) influenced by external factors but grounded in internal disposition. Despite the focus on biological mechanisms, the diagnostic process heavily relied on linguistic formulation. Pavlov believed that words could have as much impact on the brain as external physical stimuli (Hárdi 1958). The influence of words manifests in a dual nature: on one hand, they create a certain distance from reality, while on the other, "it is words that have made us human." (Went 1956, 17)

In the first Hungarian post-1945 psychiatric textbook, Gyula Nyírő outlined three sources for gathering information about a patient's mental state (physical examination, standardized tests, and interviews), and advocated for the inclusion of other forms of documentation, including photographs of family members. Among these methods, Nyírő firmly believed that the patient's history played the most critical role in the diagnostic process. In his own words, "*a well-documented anamnesis often forms the cornerstone of a diagnosis*." (Nyírő 1962, 261) To establish an accurate diagnosis, the doctor must build trust with the patient, as addressed in contemporary psychiatry literature. The examinations were recommended to be planned meticulously yet conducted in a friendly manner, with detailed shorthand recording, except in cases where patients were inherently distrustful. The patient's narrative,

while valuable, was advised to be approached cautiously. (Nyírő 1962, 261–300) Discussions ideally covered a wide range of topics, including social and financial circumstances, familial and friendship dynamics, and romantic relationships. Patient interaction was characterized by the paramount importance of "openness and honesty". Crucially, the narrative itself, its presentation (Tokay 1956, 165, 167), and the identity of the speaker were integral components shaping the diagnostic process.[8]

However, it is worth noting that language played a significant role in both propaganda and psychiatric diagnosis, as it served as a means to convey an individual's relationship to social reality. For instance, the concept of collectivization was presented as a manifestation of Leninist ideals. Speech, in this context, served as tangible evidence of one's commitment to communist ideology. An instructional publication from the early 1950s directed at propagandists underscored the importance of engaging their audience in detailed conversations to ensure their comprehension of the ideological content. (Garkusenko 1951, 48) However, the relationship between diagnosis and political factors does not automatically reduce the discourse to a simple dichotomy of resistance versus repression. Psychiatric care is not only a system of power dynamics but also a unique blend of discipline and assistance. (Rose 2019, 15) Case studies have sought to grapple with these complicated relationships in both Hungarian and East German contexts (Kovai 2014; Le Bonhomme 2021)

When patients begin to share their life stories, an uneven struggle for narrative control ensues between the patient and the doctor. Both parties seek to explain what has led the patient to their current situation. Patients aim to convey their truth, while the doctor's role is to assess the individual's health. Since medical personnel are responsible for creating documentation, their interpretation carries greater weight. (Antić 2017; Schöhl/Volker 2019)

8 This influence on diagnosis is also exemplified in the Yugoslavian context, where neurosis was largely associated with urban settings, consequently leading to a tendency to ascribe psychotic pathologies to individuals with rural backgrounds. (Karge, 2021, pp. 107–118).

And what if there were breakdowns in communication? The case of a forty-three-year-old daughter of a farmer who was under guardianship illustrates this. Her behavior was purportedly influenced by changes in the compulsory delivery system. Up until that point, she had been described as a "good-natured, helping with everything" person. However, when her mother took grain to the village hall, a shift occurred; she reportedly began to strike her mother, believing that everything taken there was being stolen, causing her to refrain from work. In December 1951, during her institutional stay, her initial diagnosis of "idiocy" was augmented by the presence of "delusions of theft." Her investigation faced limitations due to her condition as it was "impossible to establish psychic contact with a deaf-mute patient who cannot read or write. When introduced into the examination room, she remained calm and serene in her chair, her expression blank and unresponsive, following gestures as indicated, and cooperating with the physical examination." After a month, attempts were made to re-establish communication. However, the exploration of her 'delusions of theft' proved challenging due to her 'idiocy' and remaining non-verbal.[9]

In this extreme case, a question arises: who genuinely perceived the state policy as theft? As the hospital records do not reveal the patients' word, we only know the relatives' interpretations. It's more plausible that, in the post-World War II era, the villages experienced heightened fear and insecurity due to the pressures of collectivization.[10] In this context, the woman's altered behavior could be logically attributed to these factors. Her relatives likely framed her ordeal within a narrative that was likely shared within the village community. However, various other factors could have contributed to the behavorial changes of the mentally handicapped relative.

9 OPNI/0161-006942 505. Institutional stay: 1951. 2nd December – 1952. 16th January.

10 Between 1948 and 1956, 400,000 Hungarian farmers were sentenced on charges of "endangering the public food supply," See: Csikós/Horváth/Ö. Kovács 2023: 61–63.

In the forthcoming analysis, I will delve into the life narratives of individuals with peasant background. These individuals underwent traumatic experiences, including physical violence and land seizures, during the period of collectivization. These events ultimately took a toll on their psychological well-being, prompting either themselves or their relatives to seek treatment in a mental hospital. Within this exploration, I will categorize the patients into three illness groups, as outlined in contemporary literature. Rather than focusing on a singular life story, as I have previously done in another study (Csikós 2020), my aim here is to identify shared elements within these narratives and to identify different explanatory models.

4. Sample

The sample size for this study may seem modest, consisting of 13 individuals from the years 1957 to 1966, with two exceptions between 1959 and 1961. However, it's important to contextualize this seemingly limited sample. Despite its prominent status (it became the National Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology in the early 1950s), Lipótmező primarily admitted patients from the Budapest area, with only the most critical cases coming from more distant regions.

Sample Psychiatric Diagnoses in Hungary 1957 to 1966

case No	gender	age at admission	diagnosis	institutional stay and archival number	reflections on their speech
1	man	61	psychosis	24th Dec 1958–23rd Febr 1959 OPNI/0161-007286.1	speaking out loud, gesticulating

2	man	55	psy-chosis	29th Aug 1959–26th Nov 1959 OPNI/0161-007278	loquacious, excited
3	woman	45		30th Jan 1960–7th Febr 1960 OPNI/0161-007753	
4	woman	63	schizo-phrenia	25th Aug 1960–24th Oct 1960 OPNI/0161-007754	
5	man	48		11th Nov 1957–23rd Dec 1957 OPNI/0161-007278	slurred, dis-oriented, answers a question only after the third or fourth question
6	man	40		24th Mar 1959–8th Jun 1959 OPNI/0161-007286/1	
7	woman	39		10th Nov 1959–4th Jan 1960	
			depres-sion	1st Mar 1961–14th Mar 1961 OPNI/0161-007752	
8	woman	28		12th Dec 1960–6th Jan 1961 OPNI/0161-007752	inhibited, anxious, barely audible
9	man	46		10th July 1966–10th Aug 1966 OPNI/0161-005400	

10	man	75	(chronic) alcoholism	30th March–13th Apr 1960 OPNI/0161-004350	Talks a lot, narrative is incomplete, does not distinguish between important and irrelevant parts
11	man	53		25th December 1958–7th January 1959 OPNI/ 0161–007286/1	Speaks confused
12	man	41		17th Nov 1961–1st Dec 1961 OPNI/0161 – 007737	
13	man	43		27th Nov 1961–7th Dec 1961 OPNI/0161–007737	

Reality plays an important role in psychiatric diagnosis for Nyírő categorized syndromes based on the patient's relationship with reality. He suggests that depression can be understood through an individual's attitudes toward reality, while schizophrenia and psychosis are characterized as disturbances in the comprehension of reality itself. In the cases of both depression and schizophrenia, he acknowledges the potential role of psychotrauma as a pathogenic factor. However, he argues that the development of these disorders depends on pre-existing biological predispositions. (Nyírő 1962, 593)

The discourse surrounding the third group of disorders discussed here, alcoholism in the 1950s, underwent a notable transformation. In cases related to party discipline, a shift is observable, where alcoholism, once treated as an individual disciplinary issue, began to be framed as a

health concern (Koltai 2018). However, remnants of moral judgment associated with education persisted within the psychiatric perspective of that era. Alcoholism remained one of the most heavily stigmatized illnesses, as highlighted in Nyírő's book, which documented neglect and rudeness as central behavioral symptoms linked to 'character degeneration' (Nyírő 1962, 431–434). In psychiatry, there was a choreography of intervention: the patient was expected to acknowledge the harmful effects of alcohol and willingly commit to medical treatment. This approach also drew from Pavlovian reflexology (aversive conditioning), where drugs induced nausea as a response to alcohol consumption.

5. Trauma narratives

5.1 Psychotic and schizophrenic trauma narratives

The emergence of symptoms is typically linked by psychotic patients (as well as their relatives) to the collectivization. The unreserved tone found in anonymous letters finds an echo in the account of a man[11] who was hospitalized due to a suicide attempt. In his perspective,

> he resists joining the collective because he believes it would leave him with nothing. In our village, there are about 30 people who are escaping the collective. Everyone is running from it like they're fleeing from something terrible. […] On January 12th, I was brutally assaulted for refusing to join the collective. The police subjected me to three days of relentless beating until I yielded and signed up. They gave me a severe thrashing. My back was covered in bruises from the truncheon.

These events are recounted in the medical records in a purely factual manner, with collectivization being presented as a word-by-word, autoanamnestic communication. The loss of contact with reality becomes

11 Case 2.

more apparent through the narration of the symptoms. The patient described his symptoms as 'nervous collapses and moments of blacking out'.

Two women reported experiencing hallucinations. One of their own words was recorded in her patient file as follows:

> something bright descended from the sky. Since then, she has claimed to have conversations with her father, who speaks to her from the heavens. He recently said, 'I'm waiting for you, my daughter, although you still have 4 or 5 years to live, but you are already very withered.' She also claimed to have spoken to the Virgin Mary and the Lord God.

She further reported hearing various sounds, such as cannon thunder and gunfire. While she did express concerns about the collectivization, it was only in the medical interpretation that her deteriorating condition was explicitly linked to her "*difficulties in contributing to the community's prosperity*".[12] Another patient described her experiences as follows:

> At night, a figure in black or white attire appears to them. Initially, I didn't see it, but I felt its presence. The next time, I saw the figure, short and shrouded in light, passing through the doorway. Even up close, I couldn't identify the figure clearly, describing it as some sort of witch-like form. My son has seen this figure four times in total and has slept peacefully for several nights",

but not she. Three explanations have been offered for these symptoms. The doctors attributed them to biological causes, with their explanation centering on menopause. The husband, on the other hand, believed that the onset of the symptoms coincided with the collectivization. Meanwhile, the wife presented a third explanation: that she had fallen "*under the influence of devils and witches … due to her abandonment of God.*"[13]

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12 Case 4.

13 Case 3.

These explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as they can all be integrated into a comprehensive model. Research conducted in regions outside of Europe has demonstrated that specific cultural traditions often externalize anxieties induced by high levels of stress, causing internal anxiety to manifest as encounters with malevolent spirits. Notably, such sightings tend to coincide with periods of mass violence (Igreja et al. 2010), and the constant presence of agitators tormenting the peasants day and night is not far removed from the persistent apparitions that haunt them. While the medical perspective predominantly adopts a biological interpretation, the husband emphasized identifying external causes, whereas the wife attributed her experiences to her inner psychological state. The psychiatrist interpreted the woman's experience as a hysterical reaction of a "primitive, superstitious female patient living in a rural environment," invalidating her viewpoint and other interpretations as purely biological. (Herman 2015, 7–8)

In the account of a seemingly "quiet" man, he described being profoundly "shocked" when the local agricultural cooperative attempted to seize his vineyard. Much like the narratives of the two women, religious themes are prevalent here as well:

> God, the Government, or the Party can do what it wants to me. They punish the guilty... I can't tell you what I stole... I committed adultery... If innocent people are being strung up, why shouldn't I be strung up, guilty as I am. ... It was God's will that you came here. It could be punishment. It could be coercion.

In his patient file, a dominant theme emerges where doctors made efforts to distinguish between his perceptions grounded in reality and those rooted in delusion. Terms such as referring to his doctor as an "angel of death" or harboring unfounded fears of the doctor's wife engaging in a sexual relationship with him were considered instances of misinterpretation. However, the patient's concerns regarding his social status received validation from the medical staff as well. This was further

confirmed by a note highlighting his anxieties, stating, "He talked about where he was going to live. There is a realistic background to this."[14]

Frequently, it's not the alteration in speech but rather shifts in behavior that the surrounding environment interprets as the onset of psychosis. In one case, this becomes quite paradoxical, as it involves a man, otherwise a beneficiary of the communist regime, whose transformation in behavior was characterized by his sudden alignment with communist ideology. The family, originally of servant origin, had been granted a small estate during the 1945 land redistribution, which they, contrary to the general trend, had successfully developed into a prosperous farm. The man's previous demeanor was described by his son as "hard-working, honest, family-oriented, eager to learn, interested, abstemious … with a circle of friends." His altered behavior was marked by "a heightened interest in worldly affairs, a newfound enthusiasm for travel," and increasing mobility since September. During this time, he even took it upon himself to organize a collective farm, something he wouldn't have considered previously." During psychiatric assessments, "he ardently affirmed his communist allegiance, denouncing priests and aristocrats." While this may seem like an attempt to pathologize behavior that was expected of communists, the family sought psychiatric assistance due to domestic conflicts and the man's nocturnal wanderings.[15] This presents an atypical pathology, with no religious content evident (unlike other schizophrenic patients) and no indications of possessions being lost. Nevertheless, the pressures of collectivization and the resultant reversal of status (from being an agitated landowner to an agitator) underscore the immense stresses experienced during this period.

Another case, marked by its atypical nature and multiple diagnoses, concerns a man[16] whose primary symptoms included "*stomach complaints and unexplained anxiety*." This was the second occurrence of such symptoms, with the first episode taking place in 1945 upon his

14 Case 5.

15 Case 1.

16 Case 6.

return from a prisoner of war camp. On both occasions, he expressed deep apprehension about people, death, and illness. Unlike previous cases, he refrained from discussing collectivization; it was the doctor who introduced it as a potential contributing factor: "*When asked about his involvement with the local cooperative, he mentioned it might have played a role and that his symptoms began around that time*", while reiterating his neurotic complaints. The absence of hallucinations, the omission of circumstances surrounding collectivization (implying a perceived taboo), suggests that this man was more likely experiencing neurotic or depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the subset of schizophrenia related to his case, known as somatophrenia, also exhibits characteristics, such as a tendency to imagine or exaggerate bodily ailments, commonly found in milder pathologies.

A young woman[17] sought treatment due to insomnia. However, only after extended questioning did she reveal a deeper concern that had been troubling her – questioning the existence of God. She described episodes when she perceived someone as God but then reverted to seeing them as an ordinary person. Abruptly, she exclaimed,

> I'm already searching for the day when our cooperative will become a proper one – so far, no issues, but I'm frightened because everyone seems to be eager to quarrel and steal. So many things trouble me.

Her initial diagnosis was schizophrenia, though she had previously visited the institute in December 1960, at which time she was diagnosed with depression. Her case offers a valuable opportunity to compare the narratives of illness associated with different pathologies.

17 Case 7.

5.2 Depressive trauma narratives

Before this woman[18] was admitted to the psychiatric ward following a suicide attempt, she received diagnoses of depression and psychosis. She shared that she had been "forced" into joining the cooperative. When summoned to a council meeting, she began to fear being forcibly taken away. The mere sight of a policeman terrified her. She struggled to work, suffered from headaches, dizziness, and insomnia, with her condition steadily deteriorating. Two weeks prior, she had begun speaking about her husband and son being taken away, and she feared execution. In her own words, her distressed state was attributed to being "forcibly" admitted to the cooperative in the spring. She had heard rumors circulating in the village about villagers being rounded up and taken away. What is noteworthy here is the medical interpretation: the violent nature of her suicide attempt was documented, and a biological approach took precedence in her diagnosis. Her family's medical history, including her brother's neurological treatment and her mother's post-war heart problems, played a significant role. What might be perceived as the psychotic element in her narrative? Notably, there were no religious hallucinations, only overwhelming, paralyzing fear. It's plausible that this fear of death was regarded as irrational behavior. If collectivization were truly voluntary, in accordance with Leninist principles, it could indeed be seen as a loss of contact with reality. But if not…

Four months after giving birth, a mother[19] attempted to resume work. However, she quickly found herself overwhelmed and unable to work for extended periods.

> Thoughts about their future started to consume her. Her older child was struggling in school, adding to her worries. How would she manage to care for the little one? What would she feed him when her milk ran low? What was she supposed to do after cook-

18 Case 7.

19 Case 8.

> ing? She felt an overwhelming sense of having tasks to complete but no clear direction.

She mentioned experiencing something similar before, in October 1956, though she didn't explicitly refer to the revolution. Although she didn't mention it, the medical assessment suggested that exhaustion from childbirth and "external circumstances" may have contributed to her physical decline. The husband's statement in January, where he mentioned their joining the collective farm, hints at collectivization possibly being a causative factor, a notion acknowledged by the patient herself.

The lasting repercussions of the traumas endured during collectivization become evident through the account of a man[20] grappling with a range of distressing symptoms: "sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and an overwhelming sense of isolation." He unfolds the narrative of his family, which was branded as "kulaks" during the early 1950s, leading to exorbitant tax burdens causing them every-day struggles. In 1962, he joined the cooperative. Notably, within his concise medical history, he, akin to other individuals recounting their struggles with depression, draws a parallel between his current state and past traumatic episodes: a strikingly similar bout of affliction in 1945 that persisted for a harrowing six months.

5.3 Alcoholics' trauma narratives

Compared to previous psychiatric disorders, the history of alcoholism exhibits a remarkable continuity, with no single event being attributed to its onset. For instance, a 75-year-old farmer[21], who had seen his small plot of land taken, expressed, "I've always drunk; you can't live without it." Another individual, who had previously considered his alcohol consumption as moderate and failed to recognize its harmfulness, found himself indulging in heavy drinking following collectivization. In his

20 Case 9.

21 Case 10.

inebriated state, he engaged in conflicts with his wife and coworkers.[22] Similarly, the wife of a 53-year-old farmer acknowledged her husband's long-standing drinking habit, noting that "*he has always been a drinker, but when he doesn't drink, he is a very good and hard-working man*." Between 1951 and 1953, he worked as a sharecropper and endured the loss of his land, which drove him to excessive alcohol consumption, reaching up to 3 or 4 liters a day. This led to confusion and various symptoms, especially at night, such as hallucinations of dogs and cats. In 1953, he decided to quit the cooperative due to the cloudiness in his mind and extreme nervousness, but his recent admission was prompted by an incident where he threatened his family with a knife while intoxicated.[23]

A farmer[24], who resisted collectivization pressures, arrived at the institute drunken, accompanied by his wife. He exhibited delirium and tremors. After a few days of treatment, he clarified that his nervousness stemmed from an incident a month prior when he was kicked by a horse, resulting in three broken ribs. He also mentioned an incident with compressed air in 1942, acknowledging that, given his nervous system, he should abstain from wine. However, he denied the harmfulness of alcoholism. His wife's narrative emphasized family matters, including the death of her mother-in-law and the illness of her father-in-law, who suffered a stroke, contributing to her husband's nervousness. She recounted his rude behavior upon returning home from market days, his trembling hands, and overall physical agitation when intoxicated.

Psychology, as a professional perspective, was a rarity at the institute until the late 1960s when psychologists were introduced, gaining professional autonomy by the end of the decade. In contrast to the man's emphasis on physical accidents and the woman's focus on family conflicts, the psychologist considered the process of collectivization as a significant factor. According to their assessment, the man's drinking was rooted in the "fear of losing his land", which caused nervousness,

22 Case 13.

23 Case 11.

24 Case 13.

even though "he understood the futility of such anxiety". The psychologist's opinion carried a strong value judgment, noting that the man failed to grasp the evolution of their times, holding a "deep attachment to the past". In the previously mentioned case[25], the psychological assessment also framed the alcoholic patient's experiences within the context of modernity versus backwardness. They described the patient as a "child of simple peasant parents, accustomed to independence, struggling to accept the shift away from individual land ownership towards community-based reality".

6. Conclusions

Collectivization signifies the definitive transition from the traditional peasant farming system to the emergence of socialist large-scale agriculture. In my study, I delved into this societal transformation at an individual level within the context of psychiatry, an arena inherently attuned to changes, particularly those in people's behavior. Doctors, relatives, and patients all endeavored to elucidate the symptoms. Language serves as a tool for constructing reality, whether it's in propaganda or in the narratives of psychiatric patients describing their conditions. In the cases presented, a dual interpretation unfolded: patients sought to clarify their experiences by sharing their narratives, yet these accounts also formed the foundation for a professional comprehension, as doctors drew conclusions regarding their mental state and diagnosis from these narratives.

There's a pivotal moment in the lives of individuals affected by schizophrenia or depression, which marks the onset of their illness from a medical perspective. This shift in behavior is noticed by their surroundings, and it often corresponds with some form of physical, mental or spiritual experience for the patient. An exception to this pattern is the narratives of alcoholic patients, where a clear starting point is not evident. This might suggest that alcoholism was not considered a fully-

25 Case 12.

accepted psychiatric illness. The moralizing tone of textbooks of that era supports this interpretation. It's also important to note that from the perspective of the patients, psychiatric intervention added to the weight of their existing problems, often accompanied by a deep sense of shame.

In the quest to understand a patient's condition, various narratives come into play. Specialists often adopt a biological standpoint. However, some also delve into the patient's life history, particularly addressing the transformation in lifestyle associated with collectivization. While they interpreted these disorders as symptoms of individual maladaptation, they appeared to be more open-minded than the psychologist in Konrád's novel. But still, the accounts of violence during this period are consistently framed within quotation marks, reminiscent of contemporary literary techniques that place them within the context of hearsay.

Narratives from individuals experiencing depression tend to be relatively coherent. Their central theme often revolves around not comprehending the drastic changes happening around them, aligning with prevalent stress theories that suggest an inability to adapt to the rapidly evolving external world. An illustrative case is when a psychiatrist introduces the notion of enervation as a pathogenic factor, linking the depressive patient's struggle to adapt to the pace of modernity. This approach aligns with Nyírő's psychiatric perspective, which understands depressive syndromes as problematic attitudes toward reality.

In contrast, narratives from individuals with schizophrenia or psychosis are less coherent and often introduce supernatural elements, such as religious themes. Mentioning God in these narratives may serve to counteract experiences of violence, seek meaning in their condition, or reflect doomsday feelings linked to the cessation of traditional farming practices. However, these explanations also subject these victims to another circle of stigmatization: being religious was often perceived as primitive and superstitious.

Notably, these experiences often reveal taboo stories, openly acknowledging the violence endured during collectivization. This openness is unusual, as the public sphere in the party-state context typically allowed discussions of violence only when immediately framed as a rumor. These narrative elements likely played a significant role in the

construction of diagnoses such as psychosis and schizophrenia, although it's crucial to consider that not all information was preserved in the documentation. The patients' struggle to convey their truth was met with limited success. Although healthcare practitioners inadvertently reinforced other aspects of anti-peasant practices, such as being persecuted as kulaks, the violence they endured was never validated. Therefore, it can be argued that while survivors could communicate the broader message about rural transformation, they struggled to articulate the full extent of their personal experiences.

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Traumatic Memory

Literary Style and the Dynamics of Reading *Human Acts* by Han Kang

Janet Handley

Based upon the Gwangju Uprising, South Korea 1980, *Human Acts* by Han Kang ([2014] translated by Deborah Smith 2016) details the brutal massacre of civilians by the military and its legacy in the decades to follow. The fate of children and adolescents in the face of political violence is a central theme in the novel. Whilst the Uprising itself was subdued within a period of ten days, accounts of what happened continued to be repressed: witnesses to events, those involved in the Uprising and people who tried to commemorate the dead, were persecuted, imprisoned, and tortured by the State. The novel therefore addresses a deeply traumatic history that has been silenced for many years. As Professor of Korean Literature, Ji-Eun Lee, asks: "What is left to tell when a tragedy so massive that it does not allow easy reconstruction to begin with, is then buried for over 30 years? What narrative strategies make it possible to build 'memory' in such circumstances?" (Lee 2022, 361). With these questions in mind, I turn to the opening chapters, *The Boy. 1980* and *The Boy's Friend. 1980*, where two 15-year-old middle-school students become both witness and victim to the massacre. Occupying spaces between the living and the dead, they take the reader into challenging territory. I then examine the closing chapter, *The Writer. 2013*, in which Han writes herself into the novel. Here, she explains to the reader her personal childhood connection to the story. I ask: How is the child's experience of violence conveyed to the reader in these three chapters? How does the

author (and translator) overcome the narrative challenges? What can this tell us about the processes involved in reading fiction about political violence?

Paying attention to the distinctive narrative strategies that Han employs, I place my findings in conversation with responses from lay readers. Interview data collected from volunteer readers through established book-club networks[1] broadens the readership base and documents a more nuanced literary response. This allows me to explore what Hanna Meretoja in *The Ethics of Storytelling* refers to as the transformative potential of literature, and what Ann Rigney in her work on cultural memory refers to as "aesthetic agency". Meretoja states that literary and historical narratives invite us to "imagine other possible ways of living, feeling and thinking" (Meretoja 2017, 91), which then feed back into the ways we understand ourselves in the world: "Engaging with the dark moments of history can develop our narrative imagination in ethically valuable ways that might teach us something about ourselves that we might not otherwise be able to see" (Meretoja 2017, 302). She argues that literature has the potential to reshape not only our understanding of ourselves in relation to our past and present, but also to our future, to who we could be. Rigney emphasizes how fiction (and other art forms) can provide an "'experiential' mode of access to historical events" (Rigney 2019, 368). She argues that "Writers, film directors and visual artists have historically played – and continue to play – a vital role in creating a public awareness of what is 'off the record' … Studying what happens in the intimacy of reading and viewing is as crucial to analysis as larger-scale social and cultural developments" (Rigney 2021, 12). Using *Human Acts* as a case study, I seek to demonstrate how Han's use of literary devices establish connections between reader, author, translator, and text.

1 This is part of my PhD project: "*Sharpening the Moral Imagination*": *Political Violence and the Ethics of Reading*. I carry out my own scholarly analysis of three novels studied, but also interview lay readers for their responses. So far, I have conducted seven interviews on *Human Acts* with a total of fourteen participants either individually or in small groups.

1 Context

The Gwangju Uprising took place from the 18th – 27th May 1980. Park Chung-hee, the military dictator had been assassinated, and his protégé general Chun Doo-hwan took power: his nickname was "The Butcher". Martial law reigned, universities closed, and political activities and press freedom were stifled. On the 18th May, in the southern city of Gwangju, a peaceful student protest against the imposition of martial law was met with unprecedented violence by the authorities who sent in paratroopers. When citizens expressed their outrage and joined the demonstrations, soldiers responded with even more force – this involved killings, arrests, torture, and sexual assault. The number of civilian deaths is disputed, and ranges from 200 to 2000; many bodies "disappeared" and remain unaccounted for. However, the violence and torture inflicted on people by the military are not in any doubt. The most recent government enquiry committee (2018) into the uprising declared: "It was a massive murder and massacre of civilians" [2]. To date, four official government enquires have been carried out by the military, generating a lot of frustration and mistrust: "Who first gave the order to fire at unarmed citizens and when and why still remains unanswered"[3]. Han describes the lasting impact of this in the final chapter of the novel:

> I read an interview with someone who had been tortured; they described the after-effects as 'similar to those experienced by victims of radioactive poisoning'. Radioactive matter lingers for decades in muscle and bone, causing chromosomes to mutate. Cells turn cancerous, life attacks itself. Even if the victim dies, even if their body is cremated, leaving nothing but the charred remains of bone, that substance cannot be obliterated. (215)

2 http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180207000309

3 https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/08/356_235532.html. Whilst I reference media sources to underline the public discourse around the topic, it is also fully covered in academic texts such as Lee et al. 2022.

Whilst the above quote references the individual body, Han uses it more widely to underline that trauma permeates beyond the lives of those killed, tortured, survivors, and immediate family; it is an attack on society. Referencing a brutal government crackdown in Seoul 2009, she writes: "*But that's Gwangju* . . . The radioactive spread is ongoing" (216); it eats away at the social body.

Public government apologies have been made for the brutality inflicted, yet no-one has been held responsible for the events that happened and new crimes are still coming to light. Conflicting narratives surrounding the event continue to circulate. The military dictator Chun Doo-hwan who presided over the Gwangju massacre died in November 2021 at the age of 90. He had been imprisoned for life in 1996 on charges of treason and murder related to his leadership and potentially faced the death penalty. However, he was pardoned the year afterwards in 1997. He was never charged with issuing the orders to the army for the acts they carried out in Gwangju, and he continued to be vocal: "The Gwangju incident was kind of a riot with people carrying guns. Therefore, we had no choice but to have martial law troops put them down," an unapologetic Chun said in a 2003 interview"[4]. The Hankyoreh reported the consequences of this in 2018:

> The failure to punish the crimes has also resulted in ongoing attempts to misrepresent the significance of the May 18 Democracy Uprising. In memoirs published in Apr. 2017, Chun Doo-hwan claimed there had been "no deliberate and indiscriminate acts of killing and injury by the Republic of Korea Army against civilians in Gwangju." All of this stems from the failure to thoroughly address the historical legacy[5].

4 https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211123-south-korea-s-ex-dictator-chun-the-butcher-of-gwangju

5 https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/844912.html

Furthermore, the daughter of the assassinated dictator, Park Chunghee, became president in 2013. Impeached in 2017 on charges of corruption and "abuse of power", it was found that:

> Park's minister of culture was indicted for maintaining a McCarthyite blacklist of nearly 10,000 artists, actors, and writers considered hostile to the president. Books had been blacklisted, severely limiting their distribution. Among them: Han's *Human Acts*[6].

Thus, the "failure to punish the crimes" can be seen in the memory politics often carried out by political elites, who avoid anything that discredits the state.

Within this context, *Human Acts* contributes to the cultural memory of the Gwangju Uprising. It was first published in Korean in 2014 under the title *The Boy Approaches*[7] and won the Korean Manhae Literary Award in the same year. Faced with the challenges of the extremely sensitive nature of the material, Han was most concerned about the novel's reception in her native Korea. However, she notes:

> contrary to my expectations, almost all media outlets (with the exception of those that are especially right wing) gave the book a generous amount of coverage. The response from readers, too, was 'we want to remember Gwangju at this point in time, we don't want it to be erased'[8].

In 2016 it was translated into English by Deborah Smith. *Human Acts* topped bestseller lists at home and abroad. It was shortlisted for numerous prizes and received the prestigious Italian Malaparte Literary Prize in 2017. The translation into Italian was based upon the novel's

6 https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/when-time-stopped-forever/

7 https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-han-kang/

8 Ibid.

English version. *Human Acts* continues to be widely read: to date it has been translated into twenty-two languages worldwide[9].

2 Trauma, memory, and fragmented narrative: a focus upon three chapters

The novel is introduced by the translator Deborah Smith. Conscious that readers of the translation may not know the events of the Gwangju Uprising, the *Introduction* provides both historical and cultural context but also reflects upon the writing/translation process. Smith states that Han's style is to focus upon "the experiences of her characters, rather than presenting a dry historical account" (Smith 2016, 3) of events. With regards to her role, Smith emphasizes that "'faithfulness' in translation primarily concerns the effect on the reader rather than being an issue of syntax". Her further references to Han's anxiety that "the translation maintain the moral ambivalence of the original, and avoid sensationalizing the sorrow and shame which her home town was made to bear" (Smith 2016, 4), all point to a strong dynamic that has the reader at its core. The attention to the responsibility and care invested in the sharing of this story by both author and translator, implicates the reader in the process. The ethical commitment to bear witness is pronounced.

The novel is then divided into seven narratives which piece together the same story from different perspectives. Each chapter defines a role and is dated by year (*The Boy. 1980; The Boy's Friend. 1980; The Editor. 1985; The Prisoner. 1990; The Factory Girl. 2002; The Boy's Mother. 2010; The Writer. 2013*). The character in Chapter 1 is Dong-ho. In the following chapters he becomes an absent character, who unknowingly holds together a community of people. In turn, they explore their attachment to him in the narratives that follow. Time appears to move chronologically from 1980 to 2013, yet it is more complex than that. In the *Introduction*, Smith points out: "the past, like the bodies of the dead, hasn't stayed buried. Repressed trauma irrupts in the form of memory" (4), as the characters recall what

9 https://han-kang.net/Books-All

Han refers to as "the scattered shards of Dong-ho's final hours"[10]. The reader must piece these together in the wider context of each narrative. The opening chapters are set in "real time" in the Uprising. The narratives that follow focus upon survivors in different time frames: *The Editor* of a commemorative play becomes subject to violent interrogation by state censors; *The Prisoner* is pressed to re-experience his torture for a professor's research; *The Factory Girl*, tortured for being unionized, struggles to record her experiences; *The Boy's Mother* documents her grief; Han closes the novel in *The Writer. 2013* by presenting her own childhood connection to events. The titles of the chapters seem impersonal, but readers soon recognize them as characters from Chapter 1 as they recount their attachment to Dong-ho. This connects the stories whilst adding further context. It also attests to the "radioactive spread" that Han references as the narratives fluctuate between present and past, steadily marking time from 1980 to 2013.

Chapter 1: The Boy. 1980

Dong-ho, 15-years-old, is looking for his friend in what is a temporary morgue. Unable to find him he stays on to help, cataloguing those identified and helping relatives looking for loved ones. This may seem a big task for a 15-year-old boy, but the rest of the team are not much older: Eunsook is in her final year at high school and still wearing school uniform, Seon-ju, a factory worker is 20, and Jin-su is in his first year at university. The narrative documents the sheer scale of what is happening through the juxtaposition of time adverbials and numbers of bodies: "This morning", "Yesterday evening", "At first", "Just for today", "how many dead? Thirty . . . in a row next to the twenty-eight . . . twenty-six of the eighty-three coffins" (8), "So many new bodies were arriving . . . the corpses had their feet jammed up against the wall" (19). As the bodies literally pile up, they are moved from the "corridor of the complaints department in the Provincial Office" (13) where they were originally brought, to the municipal gymnasium. The abrupt reallocation of public facilities from their

10 https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-han-kang/

original purpose into improvised morgues, not only captures the sudden enormity of the situation but mirrors the lives of the young civilian population as they quickly adapt from roles of school children, university students, and factory girls to assume roles of responsibility amid the chaos.

Dong-ho overhears the memorial service in the nearby square: speeches, the singing of the national anthem and wailing sobs. He fights off the memory of his concerned elder brother's words: *Listen to me if you know what's good for you: come back home, right this minute*, as he returns to work. The description is striking and forensic in detail.

> You step into the gym hall, fighting down the wave of nausea that hits you with the stench … there are differing degrees of horror, the worse being the corpse in the very furthest corner. Every time you pull back the cloth for someone who has come to find a daughter or younger sister, the sheer rate of decomposition stuns you. Stab wounds slash down from her forehead to her left eye, her cheekbone to her jaw, her left breast to her armpit, gaping gashes where the raw flesh shows through. The right side of her skull has completely caved in, seemingly the work of a club, and the meat of her brain is visible. (11/12)

Verbs such as "fighting", "hits", "stuns", "slash", and "caved" constitute an assault on the senses of sight and smell; they convey impact whilst the language remains clear, detailed, and precise. A paragraph later, as Dong-ho replaces the candles, the style is warm, intimate, poetic:

> Your fingers clutching the still-warm candle stub, you bend down. Fighting the putrid stink, you look deeper into the heart of the new flame. Its translucent edges flicker in constant motion, supposedly burning up the smell of death that hangs like a pall in the room. There's something bewitching about the bright orange glow at its heart, its heat evident to the eye. Narrowing your gaze even further, you centre in on the tiny blue-tinged core that clasps the wick, its trembling shape recalling that of a heart, or perhaps an apple seed. (12)

Here, many of the verbs are in present progressive: "clutching", "fighting", "burning", "bewitching", "narrowing", "trembling" – which hold the reader in the moment. Attention is given again to smell – "putrid stink"; "smell of death" – and vision – "you look"; "your gaze"; "centre in" – but this time there is warmth, light, colour, and tenderness: "still-warm"; "heart … flame"; "bright orange glow"; "heat"; "blue-tinged"; "a heart". The contrast in content and imagery mirrors the care taken by a fifteen-year-old boy in the face of such brutality; Smith states in the *Introduction*, it is "a reminder of the human acts of which we are all capable, the brutal and the tender, the base and the sublime" (5). As the scene ends, surrounded by death, it is the question of the soul that haunts the young Dong-ho: "When a living person looks at a dead person, mightn't the person's soul also be there by its body's side, looking down at its own face?" (13). Layers of seeing are once more emphasized, yet he concludes at this point: "There are no souls here. There are only silenced corpses, and that horrific putrid stink" (13). Attention is given to sensory language: smell, sight, and sound dominate the narrative.

The unusual use of second person address narrated in present tense, is a distinctive feature. Han explains:

> The second-person 'you' is a single person addressed by an 'I' who is themselves different from a third-person narrator. Through this calling out, 'you' comes into being in the time and space which 'I' inhabits. Though the fifteen-year-old boy Dong-ho could not make it through May 1980, continued invocation can make him appear here, breaking the surface of the darkness and permeating the present[11].

Han's term "inhabit" points to the reader being situated in the text, spatially attuned to location/place. Her reference to "invocation" suggests an extraordinary illusion: it resurrects Dong-ho into a living space that the reader can share. This links to what Rigney says about "aesthetic agency". She states: "the very materiality of the medium is used to slow perception

11 Ibid.

and engage our attention, a process that is central to aesthetic experience and … to the *making memorable* of these events" (2021: 16). This is reflected in reader responses. The unusual narrative perspective is often the first comment made about the book. Many find this disconcerting initially, but emphasize how it embeds them into the story:

> I had to get used to it, get my head round it, it was part of the discombobulation … I assumed "you" addressed me … it is not me is it? – but it's so direct – you really sit up and take notice. (Louise)

> it is as if Han is writing to "you" personally, drawing you into the story, making you an accomplice as narrator …I started to question myself. What is my place in this story? Am I outside this story? Am I inside this story? (Olga)

> it's very disorientating … you're not looking at it from a position of authority or as an adult understanding things, you're with this small person who hasn't got a clue either what's going on … I was in the same position. (Sally)

To be situated within such a disturbing scene from the outset, Phil recounts how: "you did feel like him – you were trying to orientate yourself, trying to find out what's going on, make your own sense of what's happening". These comments reveal that both an intimate connection and a sense of distance is established between reader and character simultaneously:

> That's [Han's] genius … She doesn't use the boy's words and she doesn't put her adult words in … [she] says 'you'. (Julie)

> It's quite jarring, but a good way to do it … it's an interesting way to bridge that gap between adults reading it and the perspective of a child … you are very in his story but still reminded that he's a child, so you're not him. (Lucy)

Through this technique, Han effectively blurs the boundaries between character/reader, child/adult. Reader and character inhabit a space and move together through the narrative.

The descriptions are incredibly visual. We observe Han's attention to eyes: "you stare at the … responsibility stiffening his shoulders"; "you turn your gaze" (43); "your eyes start open at the vivid horror of those images" (48); "if only your eyesight were worse" (49). These layers of seeing enable Han to capture the personal, individual story without losing the scale of what is happening: "The woman in the school uniform wiped the face of a young man whose throat had been sliced open by a bayonet, his red uvula poking out" (15); "many of them hadn't been dead long and still looked uncannily alive: Eun-sook would be trying to stuff a jumble of spilled, opaque intestines back inside a gaping stomach when she'd have to stop what she was doing and run out of the auditorium to throw up" (21). Such vivid descriptions are challenging:

> I found it hard going at times just because it was so detailed and so unafraid to look away. (Will)
>
> I flinched all the way through. (Louise)
>
> it was horrifically shocking, the violence, all the way through I thought I'd done with being shocked and then managed to get shocked again. (Sally)

At the same time, readers comment: "It reads beautifully" (Sharon); "a beautiful book" (Sally); "I really enjoyed it … the poetic bit … not an easier read [but] the description of it softens it" (Laura). Reader responses here suggest that the style helps to process the horror, that there is pleasure derived from the language despite the harrowing content. Rigney's references to Rita Felski's work on 'enchantment' are relevant here: "the role of the arts in the remaking of memory, including memories of violence and distress, derives from their power to enchant; specifically, to capture our attention through mastery of a given medium" (Rigney 2021, 15). Han is brutal and direct in her descriptions, but the experiences of

these young characters, the bravery and humanity in the care they display, the haunting lyricism despite the horrific content, carries the readers through these incredible difficult scenes.

Rumours that the army will return leads to fear, waning crowds, and a question Dong-ho does not feel is wise to voice: "*Will all those who stay behind today really all be killed?*" (30). These are interwoven with Dong-ho's personal memories of the "other world" when he was a care-free schoolboy. He recalls his school days, friendship with Jeong-dae and his sister, massaging his father's back, the natural, peaceful death of his grandmother years ago, before returning to recent events: out to buy practice papers for his upcoming exams from the bookshop by the school, he witnesses the brutality of soldiers against ordinary civilians and significantly the death of his friend: "you were close enough to see the bullet slam into his side" (32). Hiding with older men, Dong-ho is restrained from rushing out to retrieve his friend as snipers shoot dead anyone who tries. Conversations are documented. His mother and brother plead with him to go home, "Good grief, all these corpses, aren't you scared?". He replies: "The soldiers are the scary ones . . . what's frightening about the dead? . . . What reason do they have to kill me? . . . I'm just lending a hand with a couple of things that's all" (31). He promises his mother to be home for dinner. Further discussions take place amongst the workers: "But why would the soldiers bother coming here?"; "According to them, even the wounded lying in hospital beds are a "mob" . . . does it seem likely they'll just turn a blind eye to all these corpses, to the families watching over them?" (43). Rigney highlights that dialogue is "crucial" to convey the experience of characters as "'shown' – and hence witnessed by the reader – rather than 'told' by a narrator" (Rigney 2021, 16). This locates the reader alongside the characters in assessing the situation as it develops.

A sense of foreboding permeates the text. Haunted by guilt at his inability to help his friend, the chapter closes. Dong-ho leads an old man to identify his granddaughter: "You don't permit yourself the relief of closing your eyes as you peel back the cloth . . . You press your lips together so hard the blood shows through, clench your teeth". The challenges readers express concerning subject matter align with Dong-ho's

situation; if a young boy can take on the responsibility to face this, so can the reader. The gaze is redirected once more: "You look into his eyes, which are flinching from the sight laid out in front of them as though this is the most appalling thing in all this world" (49). The overt attention to the multi-layered act of "looking", the zooming in and out of the gaze, the move from past to present, the sensory language, all operate to hold reader and character in a shared space. Rigney argues that: "aesthetically crafted works help to shift, or at least temporarily suspend, the imagined boundary between 'us' and the 'other'" (Rigney 2021, 15). Han enables the child's experience of traumatic violence to transcend boundaries between character and reader, child and adult, through the stylistic devices she employs.

Chapter 2: The Boy's Friend. 1980

Chapter 1 is filled with dead bodies, but we are still in the land of the living. In Chapter 2 we are firmly in the land of the dead. Dong-ho does not find his friend Jeong-dae's body, but the reader does. Narrated in first person, present tense, the chapter begins:

> Our bodies are piled on top of each other in the shape of a cross. The body of a man I don't know has been thrown across my stomach at a ninety-degree angle, face up, and on top of him a boy, older than me, tall enough that the crook of his knees press down onto my bare feet … when they threw a straw sack over the body of the man at the very top, the tower of bodies was transformed into the corpse of some enormous, fantastical beast, its dozens of legs splayed out beneath it. (51/52)

Positioned with corpses, the narrative continues in precise, physical description. Readers point out:

> you can't not picture them, it's like a police description … it's almost mathematical about the shape of the body. (Jill)

> it means you don't forget it – it's so impactful because it is forensic … I read it more slowly. (Louise)

The use of 'our' expands the story of this one individual to encompass the many. Beautiful descriptions of nature sit beside the natural decomposition that begins to take place: "putrefaction setting in. Clouds of gadflies and mayflies alighted on those places that were clagged with dried black blood" (54); "our bodies had started to give off a horrific stench" (57). Each time a truck arrives at the "thicket" out of town, Jeong-dae recounts the delivery of "the latest batch of bodies". This narrative, challenging in so many ways, offers a perspective that is not possible – except in fiction. Whilst ghost narratives are not new in literature[12], readers state that in *Human Acts* the voice of the dead boy adds another dimension:

> you almost engage with two characters, one character addressing itself, then this duplication … I don't think as a reader I've experienced anything of this before … new … strange …. demanding …. Unsettling. (Anya)

> he's talking to his own dead body … unbelievably horrific but so cleverly done. (Julie)

> the way it was written rehumanized that dead boy … that character was incredible because it keeps it personal from the point of view of someone who is already dead. (Lucy)

Ji-Eun Lee clarifies that: "It testifies to the physical transformations of a body whose death came through human violence. The voice warns that the act of killing is not the end for either the perpetrator or the dead" (Lee 2022, 364). This haunting narrative gives the "disappeared" a vivid presence. It also adds to the wider picture; readers are positioned to witness the relentlessness of the killings, the brutality, and the military intent behind the disposal of bodies – destroying the evidence of their acts.

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12 Most readers referenced *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold.

Whilst the tower of bodies grows, the gaze moves from the growing mass to examine the different sets of bodies as they come in. It is this technique of zooming in and out: "the bodies of ten people they'd just piled up seemed to be missing their heads . . . I thought they'd been decapitated; then I realized that, in fact, their faces had been covered in white paint, erased" (62); "The young man in the hospital uniform was clearly set apart, special . . . Someone had washed his body. Someone had sutured his wounds and applied a poultice" (57). Whilst Jeong-dae recognizes this is just another dead body, he comments that: "there was something infinitely noble about how his body still bore the traces of hands . . . a tangible record of having been cared for, been valued . . . Mine, on the other hand, crushed out of shape beneath a tower of others was shameful, detestable" (57). Han reminds the reader of the acts of care taking place despite the dangers involved, whilst confirming the worst fears of the characters in the previous chapter: being in hospital was no protection against the soldiers. Physically dead, his body putrefying, Jeong-dae's soul lingers, and his narrative speaks to the question which troubled his friend so. He is trapped with the "shadows of other souls" who communicate through touch: "I felt it touch me; that breath-soft slip of incorporeal something, that faceless shadow" (52). Whilst the souls are described in ethereal terms, any sense of peace is discounted: "Every time our shadow-boundaries brushed against each other, an echo of some appalling suffering was transmitted to me like an electric shock" (64). Recognizing an ability to sense who has died, he searches for his friend. Dong-ho, he concludes, is still alive. However, he discovers his sister: "I felt an agony that almost broke me . . . she had died even before I had. With neither tongue or voice to carry it, my scream leaked out from me in a mess of blood and watery discharge" (54/55). Jeong-dae's questions are direct: "I needed to know: Who killed me? Who killed my sister? Why?" (55). The insistent questions, the angry tone, emphasize outrage at the loss of life and underline the senselessness of what has happened. They also reference the "failure to thoroughly address the historical legacy" mentioned earlier.

To escape the horror, Jeong-dae invokes memories – over three pages transport the reader back to the warmth of his recent childhood: second

person address calls out to Dong-ho but it works differently here – the 'I' is clearly identified: "remember how you laughed"; "I heard you call my name riding along behind me"; "Summer nights … as you splashed [water] over my skin watching me shudder and oooh" (60). He thinks of his sister, her love for him, and the memories he can never form: growing taller, being stronger, holding his lover in an embrace. The return to circumstances of his death is abrupt, the focus again upon layers of seeing: "Of the eye that had me in its sights, Of the eyes of the one who gave the order to fire" (61). He longs to visit these soldiers in their dreams, "to see their faces … hover above their sleeping eyelids … Until their nightmares are filled with my eyes, my eyes as the blood drains out. Until they hear my voice, asking, demanding why" (61). The chapter ends with soldiers pouring petrol over the bodies and setting them on fire: "the flames ate steadily through the head's thick hair, the fine down covering the body, then fat, muscle, and innards … we soared up into the air as though exhaled in a single breath" (65). This releases the souls, at least from their bodies. Yet, any sense of peace is momentary:

> I heard it: an almighty thunderclap … a distant scream. Living breaths snapped like a neck. Souls shocked from their bodies.
> *
> That was when you died Dong-ho.
> I didn't know where. I only knew that was what it was: the moment of your death. (67/8)

The experience of death as sound is sharp, loud, visceral. The "exhaled in a single breath" as the fire burns the pile of bodies to the "Living breaths snapped like a neck" as Dong-ho dies, reconnects the boys in dramatic style. Readers state the impact of this scene:

> The most powerful joined together parts were of Dong-ho and his friend and how they connect … when he said this is the moment when you died, I still remember that … we don't see the moment … this is such a clever and powerful thing to do. (Olga)

> you are distanced from it … but you still feel very connected … makes it harder to process emotionally but easier to read as a narrative. (Lucy)

> all the way through you are hoping he might have survived because he was the first character you got to know in the book. It was a very powerful way of doing it, but I found it very very sad. It confirms your worst thoughts. (Laura)

As the comments show, the close relationship of the boys and the commitment to finding each other creates emotional and sensorimotor resonance in the readers.

EPILOGUE: The Writer. 2013

Han begins the final chapter with the line: "I was nine years old at the time of the Gwangju Uprising" (202). She explains to the reader that her family moved from Gwangju to Seoul in 1980, shortly before the uprising occurred and that their escape from the horrific events that were to come are "a kind of survivor's guilt [that] troubled my family for a long time"[13]. She discovers that Dong-ho and his friend moved into their house, and that her father had taught them. Seoul was far away from the events in Gwangju, but their reach is evident: "all through that autumn in 1980, my thoughts returned to the tiny room at one end of the kitchen . . . had the boy used to spread out his homework . . . then lie stomach-down just as I had?". She wonders: "How had the seasons kept on turning for me, when time had stopped forever for him that May?" (217). Some years afterwards, her father obtains a photo book from Gwangju produced in secret. Although hidden away, the young Han seeks it out. Aged eleven, she remembers: "the moment when my gaze fell upon the mutilated face of a young woman, her features slashed through with a bayonet. Soundlessly, and without fuss, some tender thing deep inside me broke" (207). Then just under ten pages later:

13 https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-han-kang/

> And there is still that young woman's face.
> That young woman whose photograph had made such a terrible impression on my eleven-year-old eyes, dead with a bayonet wound from her cheek to her throat, one eye cracked open and the other closed. (216)

The graphic image that haunts Han from her childhood connects the reader back to the description in the opening chapter: "the worst corpse in the furthest corner." It connects Han to the writing of the novel. It also documents the "radio-active spread" as the events weigh heavily on her impressionable mind.

Han shares with the reader the painful process of constructing the narrative, and the huge responsibilities of dealing with someone's family memories in the wider context of the witness testimonies she consults. Obtaining permission to tell the story of the central character, Dong-ho, Han is told she must: "*do it properly. Please write your book so that no one will ever be able to desecrate my brother's memory again*" (220). Violence in this context is not only physical but concerns the destruction of memories in the official narratives that circulate. Han researches the archives at the 5.18 Research Institute and the associated Cultural Foundation. In school records she finds a photo of Dong-ho, "It was a face so utterly ordinary you could easily have mistaken it for that of another" (210), and later she thinks she recognizes him in a video clip from the archives:

> The boy was standing at some distance from the head of the column, staring at the corpses with the stunned look of someone who had just been struck in the face … I just couldn't be sure. Perhaps they all had such gentle single-lidded eyes. Such skinny gangling limbs, poised for the growth spurt into manhood. (211)

As Han watches the video clip again and again, the boy becomes a living presence. These visual images emphasize how young, innocent and representative he is of the many boys who died, and whose futures were never realized.

Han spends two months obsessively reading witness testimonies. This has to stop. "It was because of the dreams" she says. It is more fitting to call them nightmares: "The face of the murdered. And of the murderer, who had thrust his dream-bayonet into my shattered chest. His blank eyes" (220). The struggles and responsibilities, the reliving of the trauma in the writing of these stories, locates her in the dilemmas her characters face. Han also reflects on her own misconception of thinking of those who died or survived as victims. She underlines that whilst they were overwhelmed in terms of numbers and weapons, they stayed to face the army specifically to avoid the label of victim, their actions directed by dignity and a sense of civic responsibility. By opening up to the reader, Han connects the fictional to reality. She frames the stories and their genesis, and thus clarifies her role as mediator: a direct act of connection to the reader. The sharing of extracts from witness testimonies, conversations with Dong-ho's brother, and Han's own reflections in this final chapter, forge wider connections between the real people who suffered the consequences and the characters that Han creates.

Han also contextualizes the story in such a way that the reader understands events in terms of political violence in general. She describes "being glued to the television" (215) as she watches the heavy government response in 2009 to a protest in Seoul: "'Gwangju' had become another name for whatever is forcibly isolated, beaten down and brutalized, for all that had been mutilated beyond repair" (216). The narrative of *The Prisoner. 1990*, connects the events to Vietnam, Bosnia, and the New World within the novel. This is underlined in an interview Han gave:

> I felt that Gwangju had returned to us wearing a different face, no longer a proper noun but a common noun … Gwangju was now a name that applied to something universal rather than particular to any one place or country, the documents I read subsequently related not only to Gwangju, but also to Auschwitz, Bosnia, Nanjing, and the massacre of the Native Americans.[14]

14 Ibid.

The ability to count on a shared political understanding, to make new connections on an international level, reflects how literature can address: "fundamental issues regarding collective identity in a world where the borders between 'us' and 'others' are regularly challenged, defended, and renegotiated" (Rigney 2019, 382). The act of translation allows "an appeal to new constituencies" by crossing "linguistic, cultural and national borders" (Rigney 2021, 15). This highlights how fiction actively works to make difficult stories accessible to audiences wider than those who have been directly affected.

The novel ends at the May 18 National Cemetery. Built to honour those who died during the Uprising, the bodies were exhumed from their original burial plots to be reburied here. Like her characters, Han calls out to Dong-ho: "*Dong-ho, I need you to take my hand and guide me away from all this. Away to where the light shines through, to where the flowers bloom*" (222). It is a tender image that restores agency to the figure of Dong-ho. In her imagination she follows his ghostly figure to the graves: "he turns to look back at me. He smiles, and the smile reaches his eyes" (222). School photos are on the new gravestones: "Those flanking his [Dong-ho's] all belonged to high-schoolers … those youthful faces" (224). But they are the faces of school children, not the faces of "the murdered" who haunt her dreams. She lights candles at the graves, and without sentiment emphasizes: "I didn't pray. I didn't close my eyes, or observe a minute's silence". Instead, she focuses upon the "orange flames" which connect back to the scene in Chapter 1. She stares at "that flame's wavering outline, fluttering like a bird's translucent wing" (224). There is no sense of closure at the end of the novel, but readers reflected on Dong-ho's brother's words: *Please write your book so that no one will ever be able to desecrate my brother's memory again*" (220). The general conclusion was a sense of a story properly told.

3 The "transformative potential of literature", Literary Style, and the Contribution of Readers

The distinctive narrative strategies that Han employs convey the child's experience of violence to the reader through an "experiential" mode of narration: the use of second person address, unnatural narrative perspective (ghosts), sensory language, and community narration around an absent central character. Despite its harrowing content, readers comment that the power of the narrative lies in its refusal to avert the eyes. There is a necessary honesty in the descriptions, and readers often use the word "haunting" as scenes stay with them afterwards, as indeed they have done with Han. The observation was made that if you are to address trauma, you need to look at it and face it, and in this novel, there is no looking away. The sense of being placed within the narrative, "you sitting on that boy's shoulder" (Sharon), and the vivid sensory descriptions create sensorimotor resonance in the reader:

> the use of the senses, the constant references to smell and sweating and feeling like you are really there … I could feel a lot of what the characters were going through. (Will)

> watery discharge, sticky pus, foul saliva … you can smell that. (Louise)

> this novel goes beyond telling us what happened, it makes you *feel* what happened. (Olga)

The readers cannot literally feel or smell the characters' experiences, or what it is to be dead and decomposing, but they express a real visceral connection with the scenes described. I could not come up with this in my own analysis. The contribution of reader responses thus accommodates a different way of thinking. It captures what happens "at the intimate level of reading … in the eyes, ears, and bodies of people who are – literally – *moved* by what they see" (Rigney 2021, 17). Han creates an act of shared perceiving.

How to give someone a voice is noted as a central theme in the novel. Whilst stylistically challenging, the changing perspectives allowed for different ways to talk about trauma:

> I really liked the way the story was broken up into different voices, the way the narrative shifted from first to third to second and shifted back and forth. (Phil)

> It's like nothing I've read before … it was a roller coaster … every story had a very different take. (Anya)

> changing the perspective, changing the narrators every chapter, re-establishing the focus … it was a kaleidoscope. (Katya)

> it's like a canvas, a patchwork of experiences and they are all horrible, but you need to see them to be able to contextualise violence and try to make sense of the fact it doesn't make sense. The more players there are the more chaotic it becomes and the more powerful the message that it's not justified by anything. (Olga)

> there is a structure, a connection between people in each chapter, but it's disconcerting and challenging … second person, third person, it's supposed to be ragged, like the nature of memory. (Jill)

These comments underline the work the reader is forced to do in the piecing together of the fragmented narratives. Structuring the novel in this way, Han creates different spaces in which to entangle the reader in the narrative web. This links to readers' points about the seemingly impersonal chapter titles as representative: there would be lots of boys, factory workers, prisoners, mothers who went through similar experiences; it was not unique. But by focusing in on individuals:

> she picks those little gems of souls out of those thousands … I know why I should not disattach. (Olga)

> it was very cleverly done … focusing on one particular person and one particular story and at the same time the sheer number of bodies … one of the best and strongest techniques in the book. (Anya)

By sharing her motivation and experiences of writing this novel at the very end, Han invites the reader to contemplate the responsibilities involved in the writing and reading of such material.

Overwhelmingly, readers were shocked that they knew nothing of the Uprising considering it is recent history. All mention that after the first chapter, they googled the Uprising to find out more. It shaped conversations with others – had they heard of it? – which led to wider discussions about who controls the narratives readers have access to, who shapes our thinking, our knowledge? Readers stated impressions of South Korea were based upon notions of a successful democracy, TikTok, K-Pop, innovation. This fits well with what Meretoja describes: "At best, encountering a literary narrative becomes a transformative encounter-event in which our world and the world of the text are brought into a dialogue that challenges our pre-understandings" (Meretoja 2017, 303). Readers unanimously stated the power of fiction: it takes a novel written many years later to learn about these events. Readers also talked about how reading *Human Acts* had sharpened their awareness in relation to current events; scenes from the novel were referenced to images from current news reports – Russia's war against Ukraine, protests in Iran and China for example. Readers discussed "what would we do in these situations?" In this way, Meretoja argues that literary narratives "expand our sense of the possible" (Meretoja 2017, 300). She continues: "Dialogic storytelling enables individuals to thrive and to narratively imagine possible selves, relationships and futures" (Meretoja 2017, 301). This is evidenced in some readers' comments:

> we're probably at the age of The Boy … I remember myself in 1980, that's what I want to say. (Katya)

> being 15 at that time, marching for CND and going to the Labour Club … his age in those times, potentially we could have been there. (Sharon)
>
> now you've read a book like this, you've got responsibilities … we should stand up. (Julie)

In relation to Julie's point, signing petitions, joining demonstrations, writing to Members of Parliament, and donating to charities, may be small gestures, but it was agreed that they add to a ripple effect that can indeed affect change. Readers also commented upon how much they enjoyed discussing the novel afterwards; it became a collaborative close reading. It brought new understandings, richer ways of thinking about the novel, and emphasized that reading is very much a social act.

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Language and Trauma

Representations of Narcissistic Abuse on a Survivor Podcast

Morana Lukač

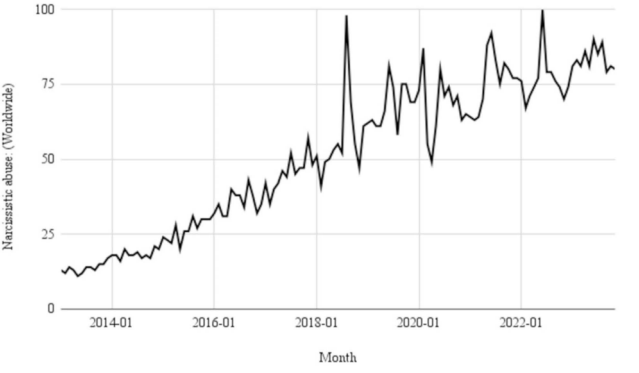
1. Introduction

Narcissistic abuse is a term used to describe the type of abuse inflicted by individuals exhibiting severe narcissistic traits, which is connected to intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, and coercive control (Howard 2022, 84). Although the exact number of those who have suffered from narcissistic abuse remains unknown, according to some estimates, it may be as high as one in five people (Brown 2010). In recent years, this phenomenon has garnered increasing public attention. Since 2016, 1 June has become the World Narcissistic Abuse Awareness Day and different sources offering help to victims of this type of abuse have mushroomed both online and in print. As shown in Figure 1, the Google search term "narcissistic abuse" has increased steadily over the past decade. For all that, this phenomenon has remained underexplored by researchers, not least because the term is not included in current psychological diagnostic classifications, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, popularly referred to as *DSM*-V (American Psychiatric Association 2022).

Although there are overlaps between intimate partner violence (IPV) on the one hand and narcissistic abuse on the other, the two terms are not synonymous. Unlike IPV, narcissistic abuse is always inflicted by people identified as exhibiting traits of the narcissistic personality disor-

der (NPD), which is defined in *DSM*-V as a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. The central characteristic of people with NPD traits is that they often experience problems relating to others. In fact, literature in the field has acknowledged interpersonal dysfunction to be the core component of this disorder. Yet, few studies to date have investigated the experiences of people in relationships with these individuals (Lavner et al. 2016; Day et al. 2022).

Figure 1: Popularity of "narcissistic abuse" as a Google search term.



A value of 100 on the y-axis is the peak popularity for the term as per trends.google.com. A score of 0 means there was not enough data available.

Since narcissistic abuse may remain covert and primarily psychological, it is often unrecognized as abuse by medical professionals and even victims themselves who find it difficult to articulate their experiences (Howard 2022, 84). In other words, they do not see themselves, throughout much of their abusive relationships, as victims of abuse. It has been anecdotally reported that in attempting to make sense of the manipulative behaviors to which they had become accustomed, abuse victims come across online communities discussing experiences of nar-

cissistic abuse, many of which are strikingly like their own. Initially confused and perplexed, they learn that they too were (often subtly) controlled and manipulated by their partners. This path of online discovery is reported to be rather common, with "social media resources [acting as] ultimate breakthrough [sites] in making sense of abuse experiences" (Howard 2019, 649).

This chapter focuses on the representation of narcissistic abuse in a large collection of episodes of the *Narcissist Apocalypse* podcast (2019–). Among the studies that have investigated the consequences of intimate relationships with narcissists, most were conducted by psychologists or health care providers, and none have attended to the ways abuse is discursively constructed *via* an online ethnographic approach. Conducting research on abuse in a more controlled setting, as is usual in psychology, provides certain advantages. Studies that rely on diagnostic criteria enable researchers to focus on individuals who were objectively diagnosed either with NPD or exhibit high levels of narcissism. Stories in this chapter include protagonists who were usually not diagnosed with NPD, yet they are assumed to be highly narcissistic based on the narrators' descriptions of their behaviors. The advantage of this type of analysis is that it offers an insight into lived experiences of abuse. These detailed accounts are promising sites that hint at the complexity of such experiences, and which may inform further research. Upon briefly considering research on narcissistic abuse, this chapter then turns to how the data for this study was collected and analyzed. The latter part of the chapter outlines the findings and ends with the discussions considering implications and further research.

2. Narcissistic abuse

The birth of the term *narcissism* is enveloped in a love story. In Greek mythology, Narcissus, a beautiful young man, was the object of affection of many, among whom the nymph Echo. Both meet a tragic end. Upon cruelly rejecting Echo, Narcissus is cursed to fall in love with the next person he sees, who, ironically, is himself. Echo disintegrates and

is reduced to a voice, not one that is her own, but an imitation of others' voices. Narcissus, paralyzed by his own beauty, transforms into another object of admiration, the narcissus flower. Echo's ego is lost to the love of another, and Narcissus's ego leads to his downfall. The story which explains the origin of the term touches on relevant aspects of what we usually understand to be narcissism. This malignant form of self-love is detrimental, if not always visibly detrimental to narcissists, then to those around them.

The term itself requires some disambiguation. In common parlance, the word *narcissist* conjures an image of someone who is overly vain and concerned with their own needs (Howard 2019, 644). In recent years, the usage of the term has broadened and can be encountered in both speech and on social media in referring to anyone who acts in a selfish, vain, or generally unwanted way (Elise 2018, 4). In the social-personality strand of psychology, narcissism is understood as a universal human trait, with every individual scoring on it from low to high (Miller and Campbell 2010, 180–1). What is usually studied in clinical contexts, however, is pathological narcissism or the narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

Interest in NPD has increased exponentially over the years (Miller et al. 2017, 292). This is likely a by-product of the fact that narcissism in general seems to be steadily increasing across populations (Twenge et al. 2008). Few studies, however, have examined the perspectives of those involved in intimate relationships with narcissists. Their experiences should arguably be of particular interest to researchers considering that narcissism comes at great cost to not only the person with these traits, but also to larger social structures of which they are part. NPD individuals experience different problems: from the abuse of drugs to anxiety and mood disorders (Stinson et al. 2008). What is even more prominent however are their difficulties in relating to others or their impaired interpersonal functioning (Miller et al. 2007). These difficulties are so grave that having a narcissistic partner is associated with experiencing poor mental health, which may even lead to posttraumatic symptoms upon leaving the relationship (Arabi 2023). Research in therapeutic settings shows that even trained clinicians who had patients with NPD struggled maintaining their objective stance. These psychiatrists

and psychologists experienced strong negative feelings towards their patients (Betan et al. 2005).

Not only has it been established that relationships with narcissists tend to be unsatisfactory, but literature also suggests that such relationships follow clear trajectories. Namely, they have been described as initially satisfying yet highly dysfunctional as time progresses (Foster and Twenge 2010, 386). In other words, engaging in a relationship with a narcissist, be it when choosing a romantic partner, selecting political leaders, employees, or co-workers, has been likened to eating chocolate cake. Initially, such relationships appear to be superior to relationships with non-narcissists. This impression begins to fade once the selected partners, leaders, and co-workers turn out to be dishonest, controlling, and lacking in empathy (Campbell 2005), just as eating an appealing piece of chocolate cake results in sluggishness, excessive number of calories, and mood swings. Choosing morally decent people, Campbell and colleagues conclude (2011, 271), can likewise be compared to healthy eating. While it is devoid of the initial excitement, it leads to more desirable long-term outcomes.

Several studies have explored the experiences of victims of narcissistic abuse. Howard (2022) did so auto-ethnographically by reporting on her experiences as a victim of abuse and placing them within the larger mental health care context. Howard's is a heartfelt yet critical approach. What she observes is the lack of attention to victims and general misunderstanding they experience when interacting with mental health providers and with people in their social circle in general. When faced with the lack of understanding, victims of abuse may become re-traumatized and even further blame themselves for the events that had transpired. This lack of recognition can be explained on the one hand by victims struggling to find the language to express their experiences and the fact that psychological abuse is often far less tangible and thus more difficult to prove. For Howard (2019), the solution lies in raising awareness about narcissistic abuse among mental health practitioners and in society at large. This may be done by better articulating what this type of abuse entails.

Language of stories told about narcissistic abuse plays a pivotal role in better understanding such experiences. Since victims of abuse often find similar patterns when exchanging stories, they resort to naming these patterns, which leads to forming an insider language that includes words such as *future faking*, *gaslighting*, *love bombing*, *mirroring*, and *trauma bonding*. These terms for communicating shared experiences are immediately relatable to the victims of abuse and yet largely unknown outside of this community. Howard thus writes (2022, 25):

> These terms appear to be absent from mainstream discussions of abuse, enabling a further obstacle to wider societal recognition, comprehension, and compassion for survivors, and facilitates social injustice by discrediting victims' voices.

In this chapter I attempt to begin removing this obstacle. I seek to shed light on this complex phenomenon and define more closely the language used to describe the experiences that are often difficult to articulate in the first place. My starting point for doing so is the analysis of the insider vocabulary in a collection of stories told on a recovery podcast.

3. Method

Data collected for this analysis involves 105 stories (1,705,433 words) told on the Canadian-based *Narcissist Apocalypse* podcast between 2019 and 2023. The automatically generated transcripts of the stories were retrieved from YouTube in the form of text files. The original transcripts did not include orthography, which is introduced in the examples below to make the examples easily readable. Whereas suprasegmental features and prosody of speech may be of interest for linguistic analysis, they are not the focus of this study, which aims to disambiguate the narrators' word choice and discourse organization. The podcast host consented for the data to be used for this study. The information shared on the podcast was already pseudonymized: the names, places, occupations, and sometimes genders of the people involved were changed in the

episodes. In the analysis below, only the excerpts that do not include any identifying information are introduced. Further, I have replaced the pseudonyms used in the podcast with my own so that the original transcripts cannot be directly traced.

As many as 98 of the narrators identified as female and only 7 identified as male. This difference between genders is staggering and there are several possible explanations for it. Studies show that men tend to be generally more narcissistic than women. This finding is subject to caveats. Namely, the effect sizes are small, and women are just as likely to exhibit characteristics of vulnerable (covert) if not of grandiose (overt) narcissism (Grijalva et al. 2015). Finally, men are less likely to disclose receiving emotional and physical abuse due to abuse stigma which affects all victims but particularly men (Eckstein 2009, 93). In other words, although the number of male victims may be closer to that of female victims, due to the existing gender stereotypes and social barriers, men are less likely to speak out about such abuse. Finally, most of the stories on the podcast are about romantic (mostly heterosexual) relationships, although some are also recollections of abuse by one or both parents, siblings, or friends.

Considering the size of the dataset, a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis was chosen as most appropriate (Partington et al. 2013). The aim of this approach is to uncover in the analyzed discourse "non-obvious meaning, that is, meaning which may not be readily available to naked-eye perusal" (Partington et al. 2013, 11). This is done by combining both statistical generalizations deduced from findings from corpora on the one hand and close and in-depth reading associated with the more traditional approaches to discourse analysis on the other. By employing this approach, I seek to tackle the language used to describe the suffered trauma and abuse by the narrators and detect patterns that they share. The analysis involved carrying out searches for in-group vocabulary used by the community to refer to different abuse or manipulation tactics. The vocabulary search was carried out by using different functions in #LancsBox, a software environment for corpus-based analysis (Brezina and Platt 2023). The visualizations originally

produced in GraphColl, a tool for visually representing connections between words embedded in #LancsBox, were later modified in Python.

4. Analysis of the insider vocabulary

The choice of the vocabulary for this analysis was based on existing literature (Howard 2019, 2022) and initial qualitative analysis during which I listened to each of the episodes. I thus decided to focus on a subset of shared terms presented in the following sections. I began the analysis by zeroing in on the vocabulary describing manipulative strategies employed in narcissistic abuse, starting with the most common initial strategy used by narcissists, love bombing.

4.1. Love bombing

Love bombing is a term that has been used not only by victims of abuse but also in psychology. There it is defined as a display of excessive attention and flattery during the initial stages of a relationship (Arabi 2023, 1). What this implies is that narcissists are constantly in touch with their prospective partner by calling them, sending texts, emails, contacting them *via* social media, paying them compliments, and attempting to leave a positive impression. This behavior is so commonly observed in relationships with narcissists that it has been referred to as "a narcissistic approach to relationship formation" (Strutzenberg et al. 2017). To explore how commonly the narrators refer to love bombing in the podcast corpus, I searched for the term *love bomb**. The asterisk (*) is a regular expression used in programs for text analysis and it replaces any symbol, which means that this search produced results that included the word forms: *love bomb*, *love bombed*, *love bombing*, and *love bombs*. Out of the 105 stories included in the corpus as many as 72 included direct references to love bombing. Out of the remaining stories that do not mention *love bombing*, 15 were stories of narcissistic family members rather than romantic partners, and 9 described love bombing behaviors without using the term.

This initial result, and the fact that *love bombing* is mentioned in most stories involving romantic partners (81/90), confirms what literature has described earlier: love bombing is highly common in relationships with narcissistic individuals, who may use this strategy as a way of seeking self-assurance. The fact that love bombing is often used to gain relationship security may explain why it is commonly not found in stories about narcissistic family members, who are almost always parents. Family ties are arguably pre-established, and there is less need for using overt love bombing strategies to the extent that potential romantic partners do to become an important if not the central part of the victims' lives.

Whereas earlier studies looked at excessive communication and verbal praise as typical forms of love bombing (Strutzenberg et al. 2017), in the stories analyzed here, narrators also describe receiving valuable gifts from their narcissistic partners (1). Moreover, not only is love bombing a strategy used on the romantic partners themselves but also on the prospective partners' friends and family members. This is arguably done to have the attention and praise that the narcissists show during love bombing reciprocated and to gain the admiration that they crave from both their partner and those around them (2).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(1)	Anna:	We got back [from vacation] and again I think we were still in pretty much, like, you know, we were still in the **love bombing stage** (…) He noticed that, you know, I had an old TV, and so, all of a sudden, a new TV showed up at my house and he bought me a new TV.
(2)	Host:	So this is three months in. For everyone listening who is going through it right now: you know this is a classic **love bombing**. Like, over the top **love bombing** where he's, you know, even not just reeling you in but reeling **your kids** in to really like him.

In describing their experiences of abuse, the narrators in hindsight see love bombing as a manipulative strategy, although they acknowledge that they felt completely immersed in the excitement of the experience at the time when it took place. The podcast host often likens this sensation to developing addictive behaviors (3) or being in a state of a trance (4).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(3)	Laura:	I guess we were kind of like dating officially and he's just switched. He seemed like the nicest guy ever. All my friends loved him. He was very generous, he spoiled me big time.
	Host:	So was the **love bombing** so extreme? At that point **you were hooked**. And was it like a continuous **love bombing** at this point?

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(4)	Iris:	I was still in that **love bombing stage** and I kind of overlooked it. And, so, um, when I eventually meet his mum, well.
	Host:	You didn't overlook it. You, you were in a **trance**.
	Iris:	Yeah, I was in a **trance**, yeah.

The term *love bombing* is used among those experiencing it as specialized terminology. Like labels used in professional registers, *love bombing* becomes a shortcut to describe the habitual or repetitive actions of the narcissist. The term is shared among most narrators, although in several instances where love bombing is mentioned (25/91), it is introduced by

the host who refers to it to summarize certain parts of the story. The role of the host as the central figure in the community should not be underestimated. Although the narrators speak freely about their experiences, they are nevertheless nudged to tell them in a specific way and order, and, insider vocabulary, although shared by most, is often used as a linguistic frame introduced by the host.

Interestingly, one narrator, Kelly (5) passes a metalinguistic comment, referring to her own stance towards insider terminology. When describing her experience of love bombing, she notes that she "hates" using this terminology (5).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(5) Kelly: And then he… it just kind of escalated. He started texting me, started, you know, **I hate to use this terminology**, but, like, literally like **love bombing** me. Like, you know, "Oh you look so, you, you look beautiful today. Um, I would like to hang out with you again."

Kelly's stance echoes some critical views of the everyday usage of terminology associated with narcissism noted elsewhere. Green and Charles (2019) who carried out a qualitative analysis of accounts told by victims of narcissistic partners conclude that the accounts studied often included "language and labels … [of] literature and pop-psychology books" (p. 8) replicated in narcissistic abuse support groups. Membership in such groups, the two authors conclude, influences and skews the way in which the stories are told and structured. The two authors are critical because they are interested in studying authentic reports of abuse that have not been "filtered through" support groups. For the purposes of discourse analysis, I argue, it is precisely this joint perspective formation through common language that may be informative of support groups themselves, especially as they are, according to reports of victims themselves, staples of recovery (6).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(6) Nancy: I've been listening to this podcast for probably over a year. So, I never thought I would be in this you know situation. Or I guess I never thought I would have the courage to go on. But, you know, recently something just came over me, and I was like: "Hey, why don't I go on? Why don't I tell my story?" **I know so many people out there have helped me So I'm hoping I can help some people as well**.

4.3. Collocates of *love bombing*

Looking at the direct contexts in which a search term (here, *love bombing*) occurs is the logical first step in the analysis. Exploring occurrences of a search term together with co-text (so-called *concordancing*; Gillings and Mautner 2023) is often seen as "a way into the data." Upon conducting this preliminary analysis, the following step is usually investigating the recurring lexical patterns surrounding the respective search term. The technical term within corpus linguistics for exploring such patterns is collocation. Collocations have been broadly described as the "company that words keep" (Firth 1957, 6). To rephrase, in natural language, words do not appear randomly, but they are often found in specific contexts. Each word has the tendency to occur with other specific words (Evert 2009, 1214). Next to a qualitative, in-depth reading of a text, exploring statistically relevant co-occurrences of words, or collocations of a given word, provides an additional layer of insight into the meanings conveyed in texts.

To statistically analyze the words co-occurring with *love bombing*, I carried out collocational analysis. I have chosen to look at the words that appeared 5 words to the left or to the right of the key term, which is standard in corpus linguistics. I have opted for the cubed version of the mutual information statistic (MI3) (Brezina et al. 2015, 159–160), which measures how often in a corpus words occur next to each other relative

to their occurrence independent of each other. In this study, a link between two words is established where the MI3 score exceeds 9.0, which is the automatic setting in #LancsBox. Considering the modest size of this corpus, the minimal frequency of the two words co-occurring was set to three. Moreover, the raw list of collocates was categorized into nine semantic or thematic categories. The following emerged (Table 1).

Table 1: Collocates of the search term love bombing in the podcast corpus

Semantic or thematic category	Words (raw frequency, MI3 score)
Categorization	*type (of)* (3, 9.7)
Entirety	*all* (11, 11.1), *everything* (5, 9.5), *total* (3, 12.4), *whole* (4, 9.3)
(Initial) period of development	*building* (4, 12.8), *first* (5, 9.7), *initial* (3, 13.2), *stage* (11, 17.3), *started* (9, 11.9)
Intensity	*extreme* (3, 11.7), *(a) lot (of)* (5, 9.8), *really* (8, 9.7), *wonderful* (3, 10.7)
Narcissistic abuse	*devaluation* (3, 11.7), *future (faking)* (3, 10.4), *gaslighting* (4, 13.0), *mirroring* (3, 12.6)
Pronouns	*you* (47, 14.7), *he* (36, 14.5), *I* (36, 12.7), *me* (22, 12.7)
Relational states	*trust* (4, 11.0)

There are several patterns emerging from the lexical relationships depicted here worth commenting upon. The use of pronouns reveals who typically engages in love bombing (*he* or the suspected narcissist) and who is on its receiving end (*me* or the victim of narcissistic abuse) (7, 8). This pattern arguably paints a picture of the narrator as a passive participant in the events that transpired, and the narcissist as the agent.

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(7)	Anna:	**He** was really good at, um, *love bombing* **me**.
(8)	Nicky:	I think that was **him** *love bombing* **me** because **he** took me to the mall. We did a lot of shopping, bought a lot of expensive things.

Love bombing occurs habitually at the beginning of relationships. This observation is so common among the narrators that the term *love bombing stage* becomes an established syntagm occurring in as many as ten narratives, one of them below (9).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(9)	Haley:	He, you know, instantly began what they call the **love bombing stage**. So he just wanted to hold hands. He wanted to, you know, put his arm around me. He kept telling me how beautiful I was.

Interestingly, although in hindsight love bombing behaviors are seen as *intense* and *extreme* in contrast to displays of affections one might experience in relationships with non-narcissistic individuals, some narrators acknowledged that at the time when they took place, they enjoyed the attention they received, and described it as *wonderful*, even regretting not experiencing them after the relationships had progressed (10).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(10)	Katy:	I mean, *love bombing* was **wonderful**. He always, uh. You always wish that part stays, but of course it never does.

Studies have shown that love bombing may directly increase one's positive self-concept, especially among people with lower levels of self-esteem (Strutzenberg et al. 2017), which makes it an effective strategy in establishing romantic relationships. In the narratives on this podcast, love bombing is described explicitly as a strategy for trust building in relationships. In summarizing parts of the narratives, the podcast host introduces a clear connection between *love bombing* and *trust building* (11, 12)

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(11)	Host:	So what other things happened in the **trust building** and the *love bombing* stage to eventually get you hooked on him?
(12)	Host:	This guy, you know, he did all this *love bombing* and this **trust building**. Is there a specific event where you're like "Yeah, stamp of approval."

Love bombing is not the only strategy used; Others mentioned include *mirroring* and *future faking*. Mirroring is an established term in psychology describing the natural phenomenon of nonconscious mimicking of other's behavior (Chartrand and Bargh 1999). In the context described here, it rather refers to a manipulation tactic used to create a false sense of connection with another person by imitating their thoughts, feelings, interests, or behaviors (Drescher 2023) (13).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(13)	Lynn:	This is everything like it went in the beginning with the *love bombing* and the **mirroring**. Because everything I was into he was into. Everything I was interested in, he was interested in.

Future faking refers to a person promising something about a possible joint future (marriage, buying a home, going on vacation) in order to obtain something they desire in the present (14).

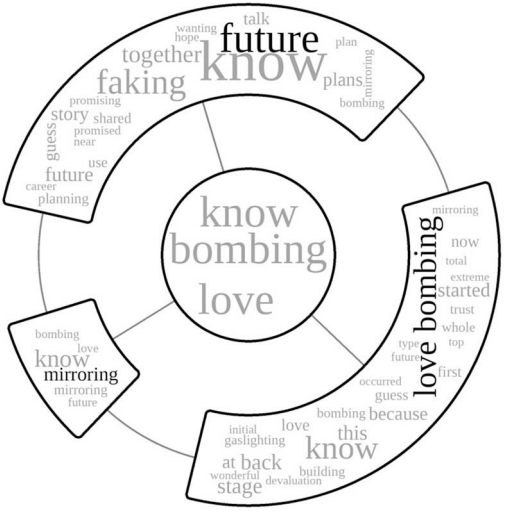
Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(14)	Paris:	While we were on that trip he asked me if I would consider marrying him … and it was, uh, it was all done on **future faking**. It was completely this fantasy that I had.

These three manipulative strategies are so commonly mentioned together in the narratives, that they form a collocational network shown in Figure 2. This visualization is based on a graph generated by the GraphColl tool, which is embedded in #LancsBox. The image is modified from the one originally produced by Graphcoll in Python so that it is legible to the reader. The Python script was written by Herbert Kruitbosch, and it is available on the GitHub repository that belongs to the University of Groningen's Data Science Team (https://github.com/UG-Team-Data-Science/word-cloud-graph). The three word clouds in the outer parts of the image show the collocates of the key terms ("love bombing," "future," and "mirroring"). What the graph in its entirety illustrates is that the three terms are interconnected. The added value in the collocational network approach is that we can examine terms that are related in the narratives of abuse, which may not have been considered earlier. Thus,

to conclude, next to *love bombing*, which takes the form of compliments, attention, and gifts, other mentioned early manipulation strategies in relationships with narcissists may include *future faking* (or promising future rewards) and *mirroring* (intentionally imitating the prospective partner). Once the relationship is established, and the suspected narcissist receives the "stamp of approval" (see 12), the relationship dynamics change and become unstable, a "constant up and down" (15).

Figure 2: Collocation network: "love bombing." "future," "mirroring"



(CPN: MI3(9), L5–R5, C3–NC3;[1] function words removed)

1 CPN: "collocation parameter notation" (Brezina, 2018); MI3(9): statistic used: cubed mutual information with the cut-off value of 9; L5–R5: the position of the collocate respective of the search word – in the 5-to-the-left and 5-to-the-right window; C3–NC3 minimum collocate frequency of 3 (C3), minimum colocation frequency of 3 (NC3).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(15) Petra: At first, it was all love bombing, right? And then as the relationship progressed it was this **yo-yo** of like very much the love bombing and then going back backwards. And then it was **a yo-yo situation, a constant up and down**.

Two stages of relationships with suspected narcissists are described in contrast. The first stage includes trust building and self-esteem boosting periods of *love bombing*, *future faking*, and *mirroring* (Figure 2). The second stage includes *gaslighting* and *devaluing* (Table 1) among other types of abusive behaviors.

Gaslighting, a term that has become so popular in everyday parlance that it has been elected as word of the year in 2022 (Merriam-Webster 2022), is understood as a form of psychological manipulation that causes the victims to question the validity of their own views of the world. Psychologists describe gaslighting as a form of psychological violence where one partner displays controlling behaviors towards the other (Miano et al. 2021). In the podcast corpus, lived experiences of gaslighting are described as follows:

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(16) Mary: He said that I cheated on him with this guy in my gym and I'm like "What are you talking about, like, I've never done any of these things." So I talked about it with my counselor and he's like "Oh, he's **gaslighting** you. He's completely lying to you about your own memories and trying to convince you of them."

(17) Evan: I was getting super sick … and like I can't think straight. She was definitely taking advantage of that and just **gaslighting** me like crazy during that time. Like really making sure that I believed that or trying to make me believe that I was the person to blame, and that I was abusive to her.

Next to gaslighting, the narrators also mention more generally experiencing *devaluation* in the second stage of the relationship (18). Devaluation, or experiencing criticism, degradation, and other distancing behaviors, usually ends in the suspected narcissist discarding the relationship altogether, usually after finding a new partner.

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(18) Adele: I'm not high-maintenance and he made so many comments about that. "Can you put some makeup on? Can you curl your hair? Can't you wear a pair of heels? I feel like I'm walking around with a slob." You know, he just constantly **devalued** my appearance, my weight, my, um, goals, my desires, my dreams.

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(19) Kay: The **discard** was so mean. It was almost like he threw me out like I was trash. And he didn't even look back. I did hire a PI and it did get mean because I was like "I know he's cheating on me." He wouldn't, just, here's the deal: He can't be alone.

Interestingly, however, although the period of idealization and love bombing usually occurs in the first part of the relationship and

devaluation in the second, the two periods are not always consecutive. Idealization and devaluation may be inflicted interchangeably. Even in the final stages of the relationship, the narrators describe experiencing love bombing, which is sporadically used to continue the relationship. Narcissists thus seem to resort to the "carrot-and-stick" approach, using both positive and negative reinforcement in these exploitative relationship patterns (20).

Excerpt from transcripts of the Canadian-based Narcissist Apocalypse

(20)	Anna:	In between the **devaluation**, there was always the **love bombing**. Something would happen and afterwards it would be like, boom: "You're the best, you're perfect for me, you're the woman of my life"

5. Conclusion

Connecting narratives of lived experiences with research on abuse should help further identify the patterns occurring in abusive relationships. My findings indicate that there are striking similarities in stories of abuse: 90 per cent of people who told their stories on the podcast describe experiencing love bombing in romantic relationships with narcissists. As stated in earlier literature, excessive compliments, attention, admiration, and gifts should be seen as a potentially maladaptive strategies when forming relationships. Imitating another's behavior, feigning common interests, and making promises about a joint future, are also described on podcast episodes as rather common. Whereas it has been established that relationships with narcissists tend to turn sour, narrators suggest that the downward trajectory is not always linear. Some positive reinforcement was present even once the relationships worsened. Keeping the victims "hooked" in this way enabled the narcissists to continue the abuse. Although the insider terminology and support groups are sometimes viewed skeptically and seen as skewing

"authentic" personal experiences in favor of shared storytelling, listeners and guests of the *Narcissist Apocalypse* podcast report experiencing relief and joy in being able to share their stories. Considering that the number of men and women in this support group is highly disproportionate, further research is needed to account for such differences and to explore whether there are gendered differences in the language employed to describe abuse. Finally, there is some evidence here to suggest that narcissistic parents use different strategies to those of narcissistic romantic partners. Further research should focus on the stories of those who were victims of narcissistic abuse as children.

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Narratives of Violence in addressing Human Rights Violations

A Plea for an Ethics of Translation in Refugee Mental Health

David Keller

Introduction

In the context of refugee mental health, personal narratives of violence play an essential role in the clinical and therapeutic encounter. They underpin, accompany, and shape the assessment, counseling, and treatment process and take on individual forms. At the same time, the narratives unfolding are often interwoven with accounts of psychological distress, symptoms, and complaints, thereby leading to narratives where the personal experience of illness is closely associated with violence. The coming into being of these narratives rests on a complex set of preconditions and prerequisites, comprising aspects of the setting, social and personal variables, and the interactions between them.

At first, serving as a brief introduction to the field of refugee mental health, the article provides an overview of the potential effects of forced displacement, trauma exposition, and migratory stressors on the psychological situation of asylum applicants. Secondly, it approaches narratives on illness and violence, and their specific coming into being in medical/therapeutic settings. By tracing and describing these different forms of narratives, the article draws attention to the practices of translation that shape their coming into being and materialization. In its concluding section, the article argues that the practices of translation

in place that shape the personal narratives of violence and illness, respectively, have profound ethical implications due to the deeply personal meaning attached to them and the vulnerable positioning of its narrators, i.e., refugees seeking protection. Based on these observations, the article argues for an 'ethics of translation' regarding personal narratives of illness and violence and their specific function in addressing human rights violations.

Forced Displacement, Flight, and Mental Health Needs

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of people on the flight due to armed conflict, war, humanitarian crises, and human rights violations is on the rise. In its global trends report from June 2023, the UNHCR (2023) estimated that as of the end of 2022, 108.4 million people worldwide faced forced displacement. This number includes different categories: refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, and other populations needing international protection as defined by the UNHCR.[1] From 2021 to the end of 2022, the global number of refugees increased from 27.1 million to 35.3 million, the most significant yearly rise ever documented by the UNHCR.

Generally, forced migration confronts affected individuals and groups with extensive adjustment and coping demands. As studies have shown, forced migration can have substantial effects on a person's mental health situation.[2] Research findings indicate that up to 35 percent

1 According to the UNHCR, a "refugee" is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution and, therefore, have a right to international protection. The term "asylum seeker" refers to a person seeking protection in a third country who has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee. In that regard, the person has to apply and go through the legal process to become an asylee in the country selected (UNHCR 2023).

2 For a historical overview of the research on refugee mental health, see Silove, Ventevogel, & Rees (2017). The authors point out that the inclusion of "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical*

of refugees seeking asylum have experienced severe forms of violence, including torture.[3] Having been exposed to multiple forms of violence is a well-established risk factor for a person's overall health and mental well-being. Besides potential physical damages and consequences for one's bodily health, the experience of severe forms of violence renders an individual more vulnerable to developing post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, pain-related disorders, or depression. Thus, as a pretty robust result, a higher prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder has been documented for refugee populations (WHO 2018, 5; Bryant, Nickerson, Morina, & Liddell 2023).

Furthermore, applying for asylum comes with substantial stressors and challenges: First and foremost, the asylum application interview is demanding, as applicants must provide verbal accounts of their personal reasons for flight. From the authorities' perspective, the personal reasons for seeking refuge should be provided coherently, chronologically, and in detail.[4] As an additional stressor, it usually takes quite a

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Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association set the base for new research, leading to an upsurge in epidemiological studies in the following decades. The authors define the period between the 1970s and 2000 as the "formative period of the refugee mental health field." (ibid.: 131).

3 In fact, the reported prevalence of torture exposure among refugees varies, as a systematic assessment proves to be complicated (Campbell 2007; Abu Suhaiban, Grasser, & Javanbakht 2019). The *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." See UN (1984): Article 1.

4 This is particularly challenging for applicants with symptoms of post traumatic stress or other mental health conditions. As Herlihy and Turner (2018: 311) point out, "Interviewers and decision-makers base their decisions largely on this account and their appraisal of its credibility."

while to receive an official response to one's application, often leading to an extended period of existential insecurity and worrying about one's future. Furthermore, the ecosocial environment of the host country is not necessarily welcoming. Housing conditions are often burdensome, as temporary shelters might be far away from the city center, are crowded, noisy, or lack privacy. Above all, experiences of discrimination and racism, together with restricted access to financial resources or social benefits, might also take their toll on an asylum applicant's overall health.

Consequently, research conveys an association between traumatic events before migration, post-migratory stressors, and the mental health situation of refugees (e.g., Carlsson & Sonne 2018). Studies have even pointed out that the effect of trauma experienced in one's country of origin is lower on refugee mental health than stressful post-migratory factors (e.g., Li, Liddell, & Nickerson 2016: 82). Thus, besides traumatic events, post-migration stressors account for a substantial amount of psychological distress (e.g., Schick 2019). From a public health perspective, this gives rise to numerous opportunities for intervention but also speaks to the responsibility of the host country to improve the psychological situation of those seeking protection.

Given this situation, there is a need for facilities that provide refugee populations with medical as well as psychological support, including psychotherapeutic treatment. Depending on the host country's health care system and the bureaucratic and legal regulations in place, different structures might be accessible. To take Germany as an example, public health care facilities like hospitals, outpatient clinics, and doctor's offices are also open to asylum seekers.[5] However, this type of

5 In Germany, the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act ("Asylbewerberleistungsgeset"") regulates access to health care and the benefits available. § 4 AsylbLG limits medical benefits to acute illness and painful conditions. In chronic illness and disability, treatment benefits may be granted on a case-by-case, discretionary basis (see § 6 AsylbLG). After a waiting period of 36 months, asylum seekers who fall under Section 2 of the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act are granted access to the same medical benefits as persons with statutory health insurance in Germany.

'standard care' often lacks easy access to language mediation services and support from social workers who can help navigate the complex bureaucratic conditions refugees face in their everyday lives. Furthermore, specialized transcultural and clinical competencies might still be limited when working with service users beyond the 'Global North.' Under these circumstances, psychosocial centers for refugees occupy an important yet unique position within Germany's healthcare landscape. The Association of Psychosocial Centers for Refugees and Victims of Torture (BAfF e.V.) follows a human rights perspective in Germany. It serves as the umbrella organization of currently 48 psychosocial centers across the country, offering support and mental health treatment due to traumatic experiences.[6] As non-governmental organizations that operate primarily with temporary project funds, these centers commit to a holistic approach by offering medical, psychological, and psychosocial help. The centers regularly work with on-site interpreters to bridge language and communication barriers, translating between the health care staff (usually psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists) and clients/patients. In this vein, the availability of professionally trained translators and cultural mediators is a fundamental prerequisite to making counseling and treatment accessible.

Approaching Narratives in the Realm of Illness and Violence

As scholars in the field of medical humanities have pointed out, the world of medicine, psychotherapy, and counseling is a world of narratives. Generally speaking, all medical, therapeutic, and counseling actors engage to some degree in the production and circulation of narratives. However, it is particularly the patient or client who is "the actual narrator in the treatment room" (Boothe 2009, 55).[7]

6 In 2022, the psychosocial centers united in the BAfF supported 25.861 clients. See BAfF (2024): 10.

7 Translated by the author.

When patients deliver an autobiographical account of their personal illness experience, whether it is oral or written in nature, they produce a genre of "illness narratives" (Hydén (2005/2010, 345). Although very personal and highly individual, these "illness narratives" regularly employ specific structures, stylistic features, and literary tropes. As the psychiatrist and social anthropologist Arthur Kleinman has shown, how patients and clients talk about their health complaints also refers to their respective cultural contexts. These contexts entail local systems of knowledge that shape the perception of symptoms and their attributed meaning. At the same time, the cultural contexts also provide specific illness idioms, thereby influencing the experience of distress (Kleinman 1988/2020, 43f.). Adding to the complex interactions regarding narrative and narrative making, narrative forms in circulation impact the experience of illnesses subjectively and collectively. At the same time, illness influences the narrative form chosen to convey one's perceptions and impressions (Kreitler, Boide, Brendel, & Hommes 2021).

Whether in the doctor's or therapist's office, the emergency room, or at the sickbed — personal "illness narratives" come into being at the very moment when the suffering individual meets the health care professional and begins to tell their story. As Clark and Mishler (1992) emphasize, the stories unfolding are essentially social accomplishments. They depend on complex interactions between the medical professional and the patient/client: "What is included in the story and the way in which it is expressed results from contingencies of that interaction and, in turn, shapes that interaction." The story, thus, "emerges in the context of requests, acknowledgements, expansions, and elaborations. It represents the joint effort of the patient and physician to make coherent sense of a problem within a jointly constructed context of actions and results" (ibid., 367).[8] Also, the emerging narrative is not static or fixed. On the contrary, it might change in relation to treatment response, the course of illness, and other factors (Hydén & Mishler 1999). These observations apply to different medical contexts where encounters between doctors and

8 Consequently, speaking of the "patient's story" is misleading to Clark and Mishler, as it masks the collaborative construction at work.

patients take place. In a broader sense, they also pertain to psychotherapy and psychological counseling, as these operate with a comparable logic.[9]

Regarding personal narratives, mental health clinics as well as psychosocial support centers catering to refugees, occupy a similar, yet also particular, space. As a substantial number of refugees with mental distress have been exposed to violence, often in its most severe forms, the emerging "illness narratives" during the encounter often refer to personal experiences of trauma. In that vein, personal narratives of trauma might unfold when asked about the onset and course of symptoms of mental distress, such as insomnia, anxiety, or mood swings. Alternatively, they come into being regarding aspects of bodily health — including functional impairments that make everyday life difficult, sensations of chronic pain, and visible scars, among others. They might come up spontaneously or only after asking rather explicitly about the exposition to events which might render an individual more susceptible to develop the clinical condition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.[10] According to the diagnostic categories that are currently in use, a "traumatic event" confronts the individual with "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence."[11] The situation or event is "extremely threatening or horrific", including man-made events such as combat, terrorism, and torture, as well as "witnessing the threatened or actual injury or death of others" in a violent manner.[12] In that sense, personal narratives of vi-

9 For critical perspectives in this regard, see Strong (2017) as well as Olney (2015).

10 There are instruments available that explicitly probe for 'traumatic events.' See, for example, *The Life Events Checklist* for DSM-5 (Weathers, Blake, Schnurr, Kaloupek, Marx, & Keane 2013), a self-report measure that assesses the exposure to sixteen incidents that might potentially result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

11 See APA (2013: 271). Further criteria must be met in order to receive the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

12 In the 11th edition of their *International Classification of Disease*, the World Health Organization defines traumatic events as "Exposure to an event or situation (either short- or long-lasting) of an extremely threatening or hor-

olence might take shape in different situations of the encounter between the clinician and the patient/client and at different stages of the psychotherapeutic treatment or counseling process. The narratives can be very explicit and full of details or, quite the contrary, remain rather general by only referring to something that has happened without going into detail and depth.

From a psychological point of view, speaking about personal experiences of trauma and violence can be quite challenging: The narrator faces the task of recapitulating what they have experienced from their very own perspective, thereby moving from the present to situations of the past that have left a significant mark. In such a situation, the teller might occupy or shift between different positions (e.g., protagonist, witness, victim, survivor). Regarding the nature of the traumatic event, talking about the violence experienced can also reactivate complicated and intense feelings, such as fear, sadness, anger, guilt or shame. Thereby, the experience of torture has particularly profound effects on the individual, as through causing pain and humiliation, the victim's "dehumanization" takes place.[13] In his phenomenological analysis, the anthropologist David Le Breton (2007) points out that torture intends to destroy the whole person, including the feeling of self and identity, as the victim's survival depends totally on the perpetrator's mercy. Besides potential

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rific nature. Such events include, but are not limited to, directly experiencing natural or human-made disasters, combat, serious accidents, torture, sexual violence, terrorism, assault or acute life-threatening illness (e.g., a heart attack); witnessing the threatened or actual injury or death of others in a sudden, unexpected, or violent manner; and learning about the sudden, unexpected or violent death of a loved one." Other core elements need to be present to qualify for a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, lasting at least several weeks. These include re-experiencing the traumatic event in the present, deliberate avoidance of reminders, and persistent perceptions of heightened current threat, all leading to a significant impairment. See WHO (2019/2021).

13 See Jović (2021: 354). Jović also points out that among groups of refugees, survivors of torture face the highest risk of developing psychological disorders. See ibid., p. 352.

bodily injuries, torture survivors might thus suffer from a divided self in permanent pain, feeling broken, without confidence and belief.[14] Basic assumptions about the predictability and comprehensibility of other human beings, one's life, and the future might become shattered, leading to mistrust, alienation, and withdrawal (Pérez-Sales 2020, 447f.). In addition to the psychological challenges of addressing these experiences, it is also often difficult to capture the lived experience by means of language. As the philosopher Donatella di Cesare (2018, 68) describes, there is an "unbridgeable gap" between language and the physical sensations caused by torture. Thus, while torture claims that it forces its victim to speak, it, in fact, silences them. For Di Cesare, talking about the personal experiences is, therefore, a powerful, yet often painful way to liberation: "It is the verbalization of the suffering that undoes the tormentor's power. Even if it makes the memory more acute again, only speech can free the survivor from the cell injected into her by torture, opening the way for escape to beyond."[15] In summary, the experience of torture defies simple representation, as the possibilities of linguistic rendering remain incomplete. At the same time, there seem to be no other possibilities than to approach the reality of torture via its representation in narratives and images (cf. Mühlleitner 2013, 15).

14 Regarding the physical impact of torture, see Quiroga and Modvig (2020). The authors differentiate between beatings, positional torture, electric torture, asphyxiation, stabs, cuts, bites, amputations, burns and corrosion, infectious and infesting agents, forced ingestion, infusion or injection, sexual and gender-based torture, deprivation, humiliation, threats, and torture, death, and the punishment of detainees.

15 See ibid., p. 103. In this sense, some psychotherapeutic approaches aim to transform the personal experience of severe violence into an organized narrative within one's life trajectory. See, for example, "Narrative Exposure Therapy" (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert 2011), which intents to create a coherent personal story using a lifeline, which is then handed over to the patient in written form.

Narratives about illness and violence

What follows from these observations is that the narratives arising in the settings described above are not simply there. Instead, their emergence and unfolding are based on an interplay of various conditions and factors which might facilitate, impede, or at least influence their coming into being. In direct relation to the accounts of patients and clients, medical and psychotherapeutic settings are also crucial sites where "narratives about illness" gain shape. According to Hydén (2005/2010), these "narratives about illness" comprise different literary products, ranging from medical reports and discharge letters to diagnostic sheets. As they serve specific purposes within the medical and therapeutic sphere, e.g., to organize a follow-up treatment, make a referral to a specialist, and so on, these "narratives about illness" also follow their respective logic, epistemic reasoning, and stylistic elements, including formal requirements established by the professional medical and therapeutic communities. When it comes to diagnostic and treatment reports, for example, the gaze of the medical professional is trained to identify a "disease entity," thereby translating the subjective illness experience of the narrator into a diagnostic category (Kleinman 1988/2020).

Given these different kinds of "narratives about illness," the question arises how the personal and lived experience of the narrator finds representation in these documents. The field of refugee mental health occupies a particular position in this regard, as significant health conditions and personal exposure to violence might also have wide-reaching legal implications when it comes to applying for asylum. In these cases, health professionals can take on entirely different roles: As "professional witnesses" (Herlihy & Turner 2018, 309), they might provide clinical information in a written report comprising symptoms, a diagnosis based on the assessment conducted, a treatment plan, and further recommendations. In other cases, medical practitioners and psychotherapists might act as "independent expert witnesses" (ibid.) without being the treatment provider. This particular role, in most cases commissioned by the courts, comes with additional requirements, like a primary duty to the court.

A vivid example of the intersection between human rights discourse, the legal sphere, and the health care system is Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Union (EU 2013). This Directive recognizes the vulnerability of particular groups of asylum applicants like those with "disability, serious illness, mental disorders or as a consequence of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence."[16] Member States shall, therefore, assess whether the applicant has special reception needs and specify their nature. Concerning survivors of torture and violence, the members of the European Union "shall ensure that persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious acts of violence receive the necessary treatment for the damage caused by such acts, in particular access to appropriate medical and psychological treatment or care" (ibid.). On a practical level, the Directive speaks to the necessity of identifying vulnerable individuals among asylum applicants.[17] In the case of mental disorders, physical complaints, or the possible health consequences of torture, this is a task that requires appropriate professional skills from the relevant healthcare professionals.

Furthermore, medical and psychotherapeutic reports might also be requested by patients/clients or lawyers as part of their appeal of a refusal to grant protection. In these documents, the personal narratives of the client/patient play a central role. They give the clinician an impression of how the exposure to violence has affected the narrator's life trajectory, the meaning and significance they attribute to the experience, and to what extent the events have affected the narrator's health. The role of the personal narrative of violence is particularly evident when it comes to the investigation and documentation of torture and other

16 See EU (2013), Article 21. The article also includes minors, people with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, and victims of human trafficking. For a critical analysis of the mobilization of 'vulnerability' in the context of migration policies, see Leboeuf (2022).

17 In the state of Berlin, Germany, a network of different non-governmental organizations has been established, funded by the Berlin Senate, to support people with special reception needs according to the Reception Directive of the European Union.

forms of severe violence. In this regard, a crucial document and reference work is the *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, also called "the Istanbul Protocol." The protocol grew out of an international symposium by the Turkish Medical Association in 1996 on "Medicine and Human Rights" (Furtmayr & Frewer 2010). The first version of the Manual was published in 1999 by a committee of international experts, involving medical professionals, lawyers, psychologists, and human rights monitors (Iacopino et. al. 1999). In the same year, it was also endorsed by the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner of the United Nations (Koseoglu 2022, 89). The latest version, which is also a revised and expanded one, was published in 2022 (OHCHR 2022).

Depending on the context, the protocol can serve different purposes. An important one is the documentation of torture and other forms of inhuman treatment in asylum proceedings. The protocol provides a thorough overview of how to collect psychological as well as physical evidence of alleged torture. While practical guidelines for conducting the investigation form the protocol's core, it also places these guidelines in their broader context by referring to legal norms and standards, procedures of the legal investigation of torture and ill-treatment, and relevant ethical codes.[18] Concerning the actual assessment, the protocol advocates for a dynamic and flexible approach, thereby rejecting a fixed structure. What lies at its heart is the interview, to be conducted with the alleged torture victim in a location "as safe, private and comfortable as possible" (OHCHR 2022, 69). During the interview, the protocol advices asking non-leading questions that allow a "narrative answer" (ibid., 55), starting from the broad scene of the proclaimed incident(s) and then going on to a quite specific account. Conclusively, the clinician should try to obtain "as much detail as possible that is relevant to conducting the assessment" (ibid., 80) by asking questions that allow the person to form a coherent

18 This includes relevant ethics of legal professionals, ethical obligations of health professionals, the application of ethical principles in clinical evaluations of torture and ill-treatment, and the case of health professionals with conflicting obligations.

account. In that vein, the protocol points out that "extensive and detailed narratives can provide more information from which to asses the correlation between the allegations and the findings; they frequently provide a sense of 'being there', which adjudicators often consider useful." (ibid.). At the same time, the protocol advises clinicians to apply appropriate interviewing skills to reduce the burden of the assessment and use their clinical competencies to respond to signs of distress in the interviewee before, during, or after the assessment. As the whole process can cause substantial psychological stress to the narrator, the clinician has to strike a delicate balance. To minimize the potential risk of retraumatization, individuals should retain control over their disclosures, particularly "as regards when, how much detail and to whom." (ibid., 70).

Besides the narrative history of the events, the collection of medico-legal evidence of potential torture and maltreatment also requires a medical and psychological examination and the collection of physical evidence from the alleged victim or other persons involved. Finally, the clinician prepares a written report based on all the information and materials collected.[19] When preparing the written report, the personal account is usually being converted to a third-person narrative using conjunctive voice. Regarding the allegations of torture, the report contains a summary of the violence and its circumstances, a chronology of the places of detention and their condition, a narrative account of the ill-treatment in its respective places, and a review of the torture methods employed. Subsequently, the health care professional describes physical symptoms and disabilities and reports the result of the physical examination. In a further step, the report contains a chapter on the interviewee's psychosocial history, including current and past psychological symptoms, a mental status examination, the assessment of social functioning, and, if possible, psychological testing. The report can also contain photographs, body diagrams, diagnostic test results, and consultations.

To arrive at an interpretation of the findings, it is the task of the clinician to conduct correlations regarding the degree of consistency be-

19 For a typical outline, see ibid., p. 211f.

tween the allegations of violent maltreatment and the history of physical symptoms (as well as disabilities) and the physical examination findings. This step also includes a correlation of the consistency between the findings with knowledge of torture methods and their potential after-effects. Concerning the psychological evidence, the report also makes claims about the degree of consistency between the psychological findings and the report of alleged torture, among other steps (ibid., 211–212). In the conclusion and recommendations chapter, the clinical expert finally provides a statement on the consistency between all sources of evidence gathered, reiterates the symptoms and disabilities present as a result of the alleged ill-treatment and provides further recommendations.

As this brief overview shows, the process of documentation involves multiple steps, leading to the composition of a complex medico-legal narrative about trauma, violence, and illness. The individual's personal illness and violence narrative plays a prominent role in the developing process. Alongside other evidence, it is often the cornerstone and a central reference point of the coming-into-being of the medico-legal narrative. However, the patient's voice telling about their life, biography, and traumatic history undergoes significant translations during this process.

Towards an Ethics of Translation: Some Preliminary Considerations

As has been shown, personal narratives of illness and violence are quite presuppositional, depending on a whole web of personal, social, and institutional preconditions. To add to the complexity, they also rest upon intricate translation practices. As these practices of translation condition different effects and consequences, and as the actors involved inhabit different positions in terms of power, resources, and agency, they

open room for important ethical discussions and reflections.[20] While a thorough analysis of the premises of an ethics of translation is beyond this article, the following observations emphasize the particular importance of reflecting on translation in the context of refugee mental health — especially when this results in the production of written documents to address human rights violations.

Following a broad understanding of translation, a closer look reveals that all actors involved are confronted with different demands to engage in translation practices. On a fundamental level, this is also true for the patient/client: Phenomenologically, the experience of severe violence often comes with a feeling of "Unverfügbarkeit," a sense that there is a gap between one's modalities of expression and the lived experience. The narrator has to find ways to symbolize their personal experiences using words, images, or other means to address them, which is often quite challenging and might feel insufficient. However, the processes of translation in place go beyond the individual's symbolization of personal experiences. Particularly in trans- and intercultural healthcare settings, additional translation tasks are at work, necessitating reflexivity and sensitivity. In these encounters, the client/patient often faces the demand of acting as a translator of their own self and experience. Concerning migration, cultural theorist Doris Bachmann-Medick draws attention to a double dynamic at work. For those affected, this double dynamic often has problematic effects in terms of their subjectivity and agency: "migrants act as definers, but at the same time also belong to the defined, in continually being translated and having to struggle with hegemonic discourses and exclusion" (Bachmann-Medick 2018, 277). Being defined and translated can precipitate far-reaching effects

20 The interdisciplinary field of Translation Studies offers promising ideas here. For a general introduction to the ethics of translation, see e.g., Koskinen & Pokorn (2021). For a systematic approach, see Chesterman (2001), who provides an overview of four different models that center on ethical stances toward translation. For example, the literary translator Silvia Kadiu (2019) argues that reflexivity as an ethical practice means making the transformative dimension of translation visible.

in the consulting and treatment room, as medical and psychotherapeutic settings come with clearly defined roles, expectations, and power differentials. This is particularly true in transcultural healthcare. Above all, refugees and asylum seekers often inhabit precarious positions as regards their legal, social, and health status, rendering them highly vulnerable.[21]

The necessity for translation is quite apparent in the case of language barriers. However, when working with language mediation, it is not only about the words being translated. On closer inspection, the obvious duty of the translator proves to be multi-layered, complex, and subtle. Reflecting on this task thus opens up ethical challenges when working with mediation in transcultural healthcare settings.[22] In addition to the efforts of linguistic interpreting, the numerous tasks of "cultural clarification, cultural contextualization, and facilitation of the relationship or connection between the patient and the provider/mental health care system" (Qureshi, Ananyeva, & Collazos 2021, 327) become evident. Being 'the third person' in the treatment and counseling room, language and cultural mediators inhabit a crucial position in negotiating meaning and interpretation (ibid.). This assignment comes with manifold ethical questions, as the discussions and publications on healthcare interpreting ethics testify.[23]

A broad conceptualization of translation underscores that the clinician, being responsible for the overall process of diagnosis and treatment, and being particularly powerful due to the assigned professional status, engages in translatory practices as well: This becomes evident in the construction steps leading to narratives about illness and violence, which build upon the patient's/client's personal narrativization. These narratives operate on the premises of a medico-legal logic, thereby translating the patient's/client's account into the discourse of specific

21 This also means that mental health care providers often face ethical dilemmas and challenges when working with asylum applicants and refugees. See e.g. Kramer, Olsman, Hoogsteder, & van Willigen (2018); Ekblad (2020).

22 For a general overview of ethics relating to translators, see Pym (2021).

23 For a critical review of healthcare interpreting ethics, see Dean (2021).

disease entities such as Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.[24] Thus, when it comes to the patient's/client's voice, there is the risk of epistemic injustice due to dominant biomedical modes of approaching illnesses in the Global North and making sense of them (cf. Montalt 2021).[25] A clinician's ignorance can thus lead to a whole array of negative consequences, including misunderstandings, pathologizations, and discriminations. In accordance with this, Qureshi, Ananyeva and Collazos (2021, 326) point to the observation that intercultural miscommunication is one of the most frequent reasons of medical malpractice. This scenario ultimately requires communication modes tailored to the individual needs and prerequisites of the client/patient. Concerning the health care professional, this also means exercising particular care in educating the client/patient and ensuring they can make informed decisions based on the information provided. In the case of written reports and medical documents, it is, therefore, of utmost importance to inform about these documents' meaning, relevance, potential, and limitations. The process of back-translation, which plays an essential final step in the preparation and finalization of documents, could also serve as a starting point for a reflexive translation practice, bringing together the clinician, the patient/client, and the translator cum cultural mediator. Within this communicative triad, collaboratively organized translation work can, at best, not only prevent misunderstandings and misjudgments from

24 Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has been added to the 11th Edition of the *ICD-11* (WHO 2019/2021), to account for severe cases of psychological distress after repeated, long-lasting or ongoing traumatic events, thereby causing significant dysregulations of emotion, negative beliefs about oneself, and interpersonal difficulties in the surviving individual. For an overview of critical perspectives on the clinical category of trauma, particularly when applied cross-culturally, see Butler & Critelli (2019): 19f.

25 Carel and Kidd (2014) argue that people who are ill might be more in danger of experiencing testimonial and hermeneutical injusticei n the healthcare landscape. Whereas "testimonial injustice" refers to ascriptions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral unreliability to patients, thereby othering them, "hermeneutical injustice" considers the difficulties patients might face when they struggle to communicate their experiences.

entering the documentation of human rights violations but also help the patient/client to redevelop a sense of control and agency.[26]

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26 In a clinical context, retranslations also require particular sensitivity and care, as the recapitulation of experiences of violence can, in turn, cause psychological stress — especially in the case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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