"… 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

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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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