

# 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. Csikós' 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, socio-economic 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.