Introduction

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Historical Responsibility and the Mediation of Difficult Pasts

1 Introduction

Responsibility has become a pressing concern of our globalised world. In Europe, many of the most significant public debates of the last few years, such as those about the Coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the displacement of migrants and asylum seekers, and the environmental crisis brought by human-induced climate change have attested the growing significance that questions of responsibility play in our societies and cultures. Despite the profound differences that characterise each of these events and phenomena, the discussion around them has tended to reveal the interconnectedness that exists among individuals within society and among different societies across the world, calling attention therefore to questions of shared responsibility.

The Coronavirus pandemic has clearly shown such interconnectedness in the requirement for individuals to alter their normal lifestyles to avoid passing the virus to society's most vulnerable members. The war in Ukraine prompted Western countries to quickly establish mechanisms of international aid, supporting Ukraine's military defence and imposing military sanctions on Russia, despite the detrimental effects that these also had on European economies. For at least the last twenty years, the displacement of people seeking asylum and refuge in Europe has been a constant reminder of the inequalities and injustices that are intrinsic to the fortress-like structure of Western nation-states that falsely divides the world into geographical and cultural binaries preventing solidarity. Finally, climate change has put on view the impact of human activities on the planet and the duty we all have to protect the environment and keep the earth inhabitable.

All these major debates of twenty-first century politics have revealed the interrelations that exist among human beings: whether we are faced with a deadly virus that travels across borders at impressive speed, a criminal military aggres-

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sion of a neighbour country with deep geopolitical implications, a flow of human beings forced to leave their homes to reach safety and risking death in the attempt, or the transformations of the environment due to human activities, it appears clear that these issues do not concern limited segments of society but involve us all to different degrees, and we all, both as individuals and societies, share a responsibility to find solutions.[1]

Yet, the awareness of our collective shared responsibilities for problems that have either a transnational or global dimension does not constitute a resolution in itself but only a first step towards the identification of viable solutions. The insufficiencies of any simplistic discourse centred around the notion of responsibility has been epitomised by the Coronavirus pandemic. Although there has been unanimous consensus about the fact that every individual could contribute to the diffusion of the virus and had, therefore, a responsibility to prevent this from happening, such awareness did not automatically translate into any obvious political mechanism to contain the virus, and every country had to experiment with different measures. The divergence of responses in the face of a similar understanding of the same threat is not surprising because thinking in terms of responsibility leads inevitably to a recognition of the complex and multi-layered nature of problems that have collective relevance. For example, in the light of the individual responsibility not to spread the Coronavirus and the individual and collective responsibility to protect vulnerable people, it was necessary to consider whether it was right to curtail individual freedoms and implement lockdown measures that would affect individuals disproportionately according to their incomes, jobs, housing conditions, and mental health. Did the responsibility to protect public health in the present trump the responsibility not to exacerbate longstanding pre-existing inequalities across society? This complex question inevitably found and would find different answers depending on the political and personal inclinations of those who considered it – a fact that shows just some of the difficulties that reflections about responsibility bring forward.

An important facet of this difficulty lies in the fact that when confronted with today's wars, pandemics, human displacement, and ecological disasters, individuals feel at once to be profoundly involved in them but also largely exonerated, since the direct impact of one's actions is limited and can rarely influence the general development of these phenomena. As Stefano Bellin argues in relation to responsibility for phenomena that are global in nature, responsibility appears at

1 This introduction was written in the summer of 2023. Questions of responsibility are also clearly at the forefront of the debates about the devastating war that Israel launched after the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.

once to be “necessary and impossible” to achieve (2023, 4). The tension between necessity and impossibility, between the individual’s involvement and exoneration, grows even stronger if a temporal dimension is added to the equation. If we move from the present day into the territory of the past, we can see how innumerable human-made catastrophes – wars, dictatorships, genocides, slavery, and colonial subjugation – undergird human history. But, since the citizens who live in today’s world did not play any direct role in these crimes, what relationship should they establish with past injustices? Is it possible to use today the language of responsibility to address them? Can we talk about a responsibility for wrongdoings committed in previous eras that concerns individuals alive in the present? In other words, is there a responsibility for what Janna Thompson (2006) has called “historic injustice”?

This volume argues that responsibility is by no means a concept that can be used only in relation to present day issues, but it also has important implications for how we think about the past and the role of memory in negotiating a relationship with it. If memory refers to the totality of the context within which “processes of biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future)” occur (Erll 2011a, 7), and if we agree that it is never simply about a series of discrete events – since, as scholars like Max Silverman (2013) and Michael Rothberg (2009) have suggested, it generates “palimpsests” that have “multidirectional” effects – then memory evidently involves humans in a global web of interrelated histories and stories. To consider more deeply the web of relationships that, through memory, entangle the present and the past, this volume brings the idea of responsibility to the centre stage. Although responsibility has always been a widespread concern of memory studies research, its importance has tended to remain implicit and under-theorised. The volume argues that more critical attention should be given to understanding the concept of responsibility, which can offer the ground to develop a sound relationship between past, present, and future built on human solidarity.

In order to reflect and think about issues of responsibility, the volume focuses on “difficult pasts” in European cultures, addressing the cultural memory of colonialism, wars, dictatorships, genocides, and racism. When discussing difficult pasts, the scholarship has used a commonplace notion of “difficulty” to capture the uneasiness experienced by members of mnemonic communities when referring to certain unsettling violent events of the past. Citing Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi notes how “‘difficult pasts’ [. . .] are not necessarily more tragic than other commemorated past events; what constitutes a difficult past is an inherent moral trauma, disputes, tensions, and conflicts” (2002, 31). Similarly, in her discussions of the architectural heritage of the Nazi past, Sharon Macdonald underlines how “difficult heritage” relates to “a

past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity." For Macdonald, the past is deemed "difficult" because of the way it "threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures" (Macdonald 2009, 1).[2] In a literary review on the scholarship about difficult pasts, Jakub Gortat concludes that the concept refers to historical events that are not glorious and necessitate therefore complex and painful collective negotiations that bring about many controversies (Gortat forthcoming).

Difficult pasts relate above all to injustices and wrongdoings whose memory cannot be easily articulated into widely accepted narratives since the latter have the potential to unsettle members of mnemonic communities by evoking the disturbing – and for this reason preferably disregarded – feeling that they may share something in common with the "perpetrators" of these histories of violence. Vinitzky-Seroussi uses the example of the Holocaust to illustrate the point: while from the perspective of Jewish communities, this period of history constitutes a traumatic and tragic event (captured in the Hebrew term *Shoah*, meaning "catastrophe"), the German state engages with the events of the Holocaust as a "difficult past" (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2016). It is important to emphasise that even when society creates spaces in which historical injustices can be publicly addressed – a process that, as Macdonald has more recently pointed out, "is no longer necessarily a disruption to positive identity formation" and can therefore leave us to wonder whether certain past histories are "still difficult" – this cultural work can rarely resolve the difficultness that are rooted in the past. As Macdonald contends, the public reckoning with specific histories of violence, even the "most heinous crimes," can leave aside other difficult histories, overlook the "everyday complicities" that allowed such crimes to happen, and lead to political diversion and performativity (Macdonald 2015, 19–20).

The conceptualisations that we have examined suggest that the perception of a past as "difficult" relies on the construction of a sense of an individual's and a community's proximity to specific past histories. Such sense of proximity is relative as it depends on temporal, spatial, and generational matters. Moreover, it is always constructed: it relies on the "acts of imagination" through which the ideas of communities are formed (Anderson 1983), and it is affected by a politics of memory that influences how certain segments of the past are remembered in the

2 These kinds of historical "difficulties" are similar to what the literary scholar George Steiner calls "contingent difficulties," arising as they do "from the obvious plurality and individuation which characterise world and word" (Steiner 1978, 33).

present. It is important to stress that by being based on such a constructed sense of proximity – or on what Avishai Margalit calls "thick relationships" between specific past events and mnemonic communities in the present (Margalit 2004, 69) – the study of difficult pasts risks naturalising constructed relationships such as national belonging and may risk reiterating exclusionary worldviews. This volume aims to show that, through a focus on responsibility, it is possible to deploy the sense of proximity that informs the conceptualisation of difficult pasts to promote critical engagement with past injustices that can also challenge the narrow and exclusionary mnemonic practices that come with nation-centric memory cultures.

To achieve this goal, the chapters in this book pursue the notion of disruption and uneasiness that are part of difficult pasts in a self-reflexive and generative way by studying examples of cultural production that trouble uncritical and self-serving discourses of history and heritage. The volume starts from the premise that cultural products – literary texts, films, documentaries, graphic novels, visual artworks, historical accounts, digital resources, and any other human-made artifacts endowed with symbolic meaning – offer a unique site for experiencing the unsettling encounters with difficult pasts and are therefore a privileged ground to explore and reflect on issues of responsibility. The scholars who were invited to contribute are not necessarily direct experts of theories of responsibility, but they have used their expertise on literature, film, cultural studies, memory studies, and European history to showcase and think through the functions and values that responsibility can acquire in the cultural memory of difficult pasts. As a result, rather than imposing a rigid and predetermined conceptualisation of responsibility, the volume has followed an inductive procedure: it started from the specific case studies that the authors have chosen to discuss in order to draw broader and more general considerations about the relationship between memory and responsibility that stems from the study of cultural production about difficult pasts. Not only has this conferred a greater degree of freedom on the authors, but it has also facilitated the emergence of the manifold values that responsibility can have. It is the task of this introduction – in the two sections that follow – to discuss in more general terms the insights that were generated by these case studies through the aid of specific theoretical works about responsibility.

The decision to focus on European cultures was first of all a humbling choice due to both the limited expertise that we, as editors, have and the necessary limited scope that affects an edited volume of this kind. There is much that can be learned by exploring conceptualisations of responsibility in cultural products that

deal with difficult pasts in non-European settings.[3] Yet, by adopting this narrower focus the book also hopes to produce specific insights that we think are important for the study of both memory and European cultures. First of all, the volume adopts a pan-European perspective that dismantles hierarchies between West and East and between North and South. Besides contributions about some of the most studied Western memory cultures, such as the British, French, German, and Spanish cases, the book includes articles on Italian memory – a Western European memory culture that often remains at the margin of the international scholarship of memory studies – and interventions about difficult pasts in the Balkans, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine.

Secondly, the book focuses its attention on the many crimes that Europeans committed in the past century and foregrounds self-critical practices within European cultures – epitomised by many of the cultural products discussed in the volume – that attempt to negotiate memories of past wrongdoings, forming a reservoir of conceptualisations that can help European societies develop and cultivate a critical memory of the past. The pursuit of such critical engagement with the past is in no way specific to European cultures – any cultural system that gave rise to injustices can generate memory narratives of this kind. As researchers working on European cultures, however, we felt a specific responsibility to focus our attention on Europe's difficult pasts and to bring to the fore cultural practices that offer fruitful engagements with the histories of injustice upon which Europe is built.

This endeavour also stems from the awareness that we, as editors, have about our own positionality as scholars who are trained in academic traditions of various European liberal democratic states – Britain, Italy, France, and Belgium – which are all shaped by colonialism and other histories of injustice in which we are inevitably implicated. On the basis of such awareness, we believe in the importance of directing our critical enquiry onto the cultural systems in which we operate – following the numerous invitations that scholars working on memory, complicity, and responsibility have made about the need to recognise the potential for wrongdoing that lies in each of us (Sanders 2003, 8; Meretoja 2018, 209; Wächter 2019, 5; Rothberg 2019, 145). This process also means exploring the ways researchers are themselves implicated in the pasts they study and how the cultural systems of which they are part are entangled with histories of injustice. We argue that such critical work carried out within the study of European cultures, through the deconstruction of dominant narratives and unethical forms of storytelling, and through the

3 In this regard, see for instance Niemi 2021, who has studied the ways in which African postcolonial fiction has addressed issues of responsibility and complicity.

valorisation of self-critical accounts, can contribute to the ongoing intellectual decolonisation of European memory and cultures from within.

The recognition of one's implication and the focus on injustices that shaped and continue to inform the world in which we live are the necessary preconditions for the creation of a more just memory of the past. Yet, such critical engagement with the past is not by itself a guarantee of positive results. Scholars have already pointed out the dangers of a memory centred on the process of facing up to difficult pasts, which can run the risk of fostering selective remembering, generating a false sense of moral superiority, and producing redemptive patterns based on cathartic commemorations of past wrongdoings (Macdonald 2009, 12; Forchtner 2014) – which can also give the false impression that injustices are first and foremost a question of the past and do not take place in the present (Meister 2010). Through its focus on responsibility and cultural mediation, this volume neither wants to suggest a prescriptive model to remember difficult pasts nor offer easy shortcuts for an engagement with past injustices. On the contrary, a more thorough confrontation with the idea of responsibility is seen as a way to explicitly reflect on many of the difficult, complex, and unsettling facets that are part of the process of engaging with the past, which remain too often implicit in ready-made expressions such as "coming to terms with" or "facing up to" the past. The focus on cultural mediation, then, is key to opening up less systematic and *messier* perspectives that can both enrich our understanding of memory, responsibility, and the process of dealing with the past and help us identify ways in which the present can construct a fruitful ethical relationship with historical injustices.

2 Theorising responsibility

Although the study of responsibility is not a defined field of academic enquiry, the notion of responsibility has nonetheless been explored by a vast scholarship, which includes works by philosophers, sociologists, and political theorists as well as interdisciplinary works in the fields of memory studies, complicity studies, human rights, and legal studies for which responsibility constitutes an underlying concern. Without trying to offer a systematic survey of the existing scholarship, this section aims to weave together varied insights stemming from the theorisation of responsibility in different adjacent academic fields in order to present a clearer and multifaceted treatment of the notion of responsibility that can be fruitfully applied to memory studies work on difficult pasts.

A first crucial insight that comes from the scholarship is that responsibility always comes in different degrees (Miller 2007, 105; Young 2011, 76).[4] This means that discussions around issues of responsibility must inevitably start from questions of direct blame, guilt, and accountability but cannot be resolved in such considerations. In relation to any act of injustice, perpetrators are the first actors who bear responsibility for it, but their identification can only be the first step in a thorough analysis that fully engages with the idea of responsibility. In other words, discussions of responsibility cannot be reduced to the assignment of blame and the identification of a few culprits, but they require that we adopt what Mihaela Mihai calls "a cartography of the in-between" (2022, 8) that allows us to go beyond a too limited focus on the victim-perpetrator dyad.

Interrogating responsibility means exploring more nuanced subject positions, such as those of "bystanders" (Hilberg 1992) who are the direct or indirect witnesses of certain injustices, "beneficiaries" (Robbins 2017) who are advantaged by the wrongs done by their societies, those "complicit" in injustice (Sanyal 2015) who support "someone else's wrongdoing" (Wächter 2019, 2), and those who by being "complacent" validate the status quo and resist change (Lazzara 2018, 7). In other words, a detailed investigation of responsibility must take into account any kind of "implicated subject," the umbrella term theorised by Michael Rothberg that refers to anyone who was or is somehow involved in injustice without having directly caused it (Rothberg 2019). Importantly, as Primo Levi famously stresses in his influential reflections on the "grey zone," the consideration of these more nuanced subject-positions does not mean abolishing the difference between perpetrators and victims (2007 [1986], 32–33) – and the responsibility that the former bears – but is necessary to develop a more objective and nuanced study of humanity and the social mechanisms that power produces (27–29).

Approaching injustices through a focus on these complex subject-positions means that the study of responsibility must depart from a purely legalistic paradigm. This move has already informed the study of complicity. Hence, in their theoretical work Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford, and Michael Neu have stressed the importance of going beyond an "atomistic" model of complicity centred on individual accountability – which is the necessary perspective from which the law operates – and develop broader understandings of this notion (2017, 2–7). Similarly, Minna Niemi, building on Thomas Docherty's and Paul Reynolds' works, pleads for a complication of the forensic line that allows us to deepen our understanding of both complicity and responsibility (2012, 8). The demand to go beyond legalistic con-

4 The same consideration has been developed in relation to the concept of complicity (Lepora and Goodin 2013, 8; Afxentiou, Dunford, and Neu 2017, 10; Wächter 2019, 3–4).

ceptions in the understanding of injustice, which characterises the field of complicity studies, is the same urge that pushed Rothberg to drop the idea of complicity all together – which appeared to him too closely aligned to such legalistic frameworks and the idea of individual blame – and theorise implication as a notion better suited to illuminate indirect participation in wrongdoing (2019, 13–14).

Adopting nuanced subject positions for envisioning when individuals are responsible and freeing responsibility from its forensic and atomistic conceptualisations allows us to grasp that responsibility does not only stem from the guilty actions of a perpetrator but also from indirect forms of participation in injustice that include – importantly – structural processes. As Iris Marion Young contends, certain kinds of "wrongs" are not traceable to specific individual actions – although Young is very careful in not denying the role of individual choices all together – but are the result of the positions that individuals occupy in the social structure (Young 2011, 43–48). When the injustice is structural, e.g. a poor family that cannot afford decent housing and a good education for their children, or the difficulties that a transgender person may face to find a job as a result of diffused transphobic prejudices, it is not enough, and sometimes not even possible, to attach responsibility to discrete actions that specific individuals have carried out, as responsibility is actually distributed and dispersed along the complex causal chain that makes that social phenomenon possible.[5] In these cases, some scholars tend to assign responsibility through an inversely proportional lens: the further one is from the actual act of injustice – while occupying a social position that can actually influence that phenomenon – the more one should be deemed responsible. This is, for instance, how Peter French conceptualises responsibility within corporates, in which those designing rules and procedures are more responsible than those who apply them (French 1992, 6). To use a very different example, this is the same logic that Israeli judges who condemned Adolf Eichmann followed when they found the Nazi bureaucrat more guilty than those soldiers operating the concentration camps, since he was making their crime possible – a reasoning that, as Jerome Kohn stresses, was also endorsed by Hannah Arendt (2003, xiv).

The broadening of the idea of responsibility beyond the legalistic paradigm to accommodate indirect participation and structural injustices also necessitates that responsibility is demarcated from too strict an association with guilt. Iris Marion Young has thoroughly theorised the distinction between guilt and responsibility, arguing that this is not a question of degree but of kind (2011, 104). In dialogue with Hannah Arendt's work, Young argues that locating guilt and levelling blame are acts that aim to single out specific individuals for discrete actions they commit-

5 For an account of distributed agency see Crowley 2022, 94–96.

ted: they are processes that aim "to say that this person, or these people, by virtue of what they have done, bear direct moral and often legal responsibility for a wrong or a crime, whereas others do not because their actions have not done the deeds" (76). As such, for Young, discussions about guilt are necessarily "backward-looking" entirely focusing on what has happened (108). On the contrary, she proposes that when related to structural injustice, responsibility should be understood as "forward-looking" since it entails a political obligation to act together with the goal of transforming the social structure that generates injustice (96).

Young's idea of a backward-looking guilt that differs from a forward-looking responsibility is corroborated by the views of several thinkers. For instance, philosopher Herbert Fingarette contends that responsibility contrasts with guilt's retrospective dimension since responsibility "is prospective," it is "for what shall be done," and is built upon a moral demand that has little to do with the past but concerns the future (2004, 17). Similarly, legal scholar Peter Cane criticises studies that posit sanctions as a central element in their conceptualisation of responsibility, such as Herbert Hart's, Graham Haydon's, and Tony Honoré's, arguing that these works develop a "backward-looking" perspective that conceals the importance, "both within the law and elsewhere," of the "prospective" dimension of responsibility (2002, 30).

Yet, establishing a difference between guilt and responsibility does not mean denying the numerous occasions in which these two concepts go hand in hand and the former contributes to developing the latter. In their introduction to a special issue on guilt in the journal, *Economy and Society*, Sam Ashenden and James Brown argue that the difficulty of defining individual and collective notions of guilt is worthy of exploration because of the way inner feelings of guilt as well as constructed ideas of collective guilt interact with notions of civil and collective responsibility (Brown and Ashenden 2014). While Ashenden and Brown concede that guilt exists in constructed symbolic frameworks (whether they be moral or legal), it is nevertheless important to understand how discourses of guilt impact people's everyday lives and the powerful role guilt plays as a form of ethical self-reflection. As Martha Nussbaum argues in the preface to Young's book, the danger, in removing guilt from responsibility, is that "we turn outward prematurely, before we conduct an honest critique of our own inner world" and thereby "our dedication to ameliorative action may prove shallow or short-lived" (2011, xxv). For Nussbaum, guilt is "a powerful incentive to make reparations, and [. . .] it can produce such motivations even more powerfully" (xxiv). Thus, a feeling or sense of guilt can be a means of bringing about greater responsibility.

As much as it comes in different degrees, so responsibility comes in different kinds. Hence, the scholarship has developed several categories to differentiate between responsibility's various functions. For instance, philosopher Matthew Talbert

has distinguished between "role responsibility" (i.e. the duties and expectations that come with specific social roles, such as, for instance, being the captain when your ship goes through a storm, or being the sibling of someone who needs caring for), "causal responsibility" (which applies to every case in which individuals are part of the causal chain that caused a certain event to occur, whether or not they are the principal agent in such an equation), and "moral responsibility" (which concerns cases in which individuals acted having the capacity to deliberate about their behaviour) (2016, 12–16). Political theorist David Miller prefers to think about responsibility in terms of outcomes rather than causality since questions of responsibility emerge not simply because someone *did* something, but rather because something *happened*. Hence, he talks about "outcome responsibility" in relation to situations in which a certain outcome can be "credited" or "debited" to an agent, and he distinguishes this concept from the idea of "remedial responsibility," which is the type of responsibility that is assigned to those who can do something to redress a wrong or an injustice (2007, 84–88). In her work, Iris Marion Young differentiates between a "liability model" of responsibility – which is linked to specific actions for which someone can be blameworthy – and a "social connection model" – which refers to the responsibility that comes from one's position in a social structure that produces injustice (2011, 96–97).

In the light of the manifold meanings that responsibility can acquire and its numerous applications in situations of a diverse nature, one can rightly wonder whether it is possible to conceptualise responsibility in a way that links its various values. Without believing in the necessity of clear-cut definitions, which would just limit the understanding of a concept that – as most core ideas that are at the centre of humanities research – is plural and elusive and gains its power from its multifaced values, it is possible to offer a minimal conceptualisation that can keep these diverse facets together. The ground for this conceptualisation can be found in Mark Sanders' meditation on complicities. Weaving together reflections on the subject put forward by Arendt, Habermas, Zola, Benda, Jaspers, Gramsci, Derrida, Heidegger, Fanon, and the South African Truth Commission's report, Sanders contends that responsibility should be understood in close connection with complicity as something that emerges from the "basic folded-together-ness of being, of human being, of self and other" (2002, 11), what he also refers to as "the being of being human" (5). In the light of this idea, we can understand responsibility as a relationship that is established among individuals, events, and an outside world made of communities of others. As Minna Niemi stresses, responsibility refers to "human interconnectedness" and to the idea of a "shared world" (2021, 5). Individuals are responsible for events that occur in the world in which they live, meaning – as the Latin etymology from the verb *respondere* "to respond, to answer to" indicates –

they are answerable to themselves, to societies, and to fellow human beings for things that happen and in which they are somehow entangled.[6]

From this minimal conceptualisation, it follows that reflecting on responsibility means looking at the relationship between agents, events, and communities. At its core, this process entails considerations about who is answerable, for what, and towards whom. In this regard, a first set of important reflections revolves around the subject who should be deemed responsible. Should this always comprise specific individuals or can collectives, too, be responsible for something? This question can also be framed differently by focusing on the relationship between agents and events. Should people only be deemed responsible for actions they personally enact, or can they be deemed responsible for what others have done? The conceptualisation of responsibility as a relationship based on human interconnectedness – as much as the considerations regarding structural injustices – already points to the necessity of going beyond a narrow atomistic understanding of responsibility centred on individual actions and embracing the difficult questions that come with the notion of collective responsibility.

Hannah Arendt is among the first thinkers who devoted critical energies to reflect on the idea of collective responsibility.[7] In her work, she criticises the idea of a collective form of guilt arguing that, morally speaking, it is untenable to feel guilty for something that one has not done as much as it would be unacceptable to feel innocent when one is guilty of something (1964, 28). Collective guilt is for Arendt a sloppy metaphor that should not be used because it risks exculpating those who are actually culpable. As she famously argues "Where all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged" (2000 [1945], 151) – an idea that she has repeated in various forms in all her writings on the subject (2003 [1964], 21; 1987 [1968], 43; 1969, 65). For Arendt, guilt singles out individuals on the basis of the actions they have taken and it is, therefore, a strictly individual matter. By contrast, she opens to the idea of collective forms of responsibility for actions that one has not personally committed – what she also refers to using Feinberg's terminology as "vicarious responsibility" (Arendt 1987 [1968], 43).

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6 This conceptualisation has also the merit to stress the strong connection that links responsibility to the concepts of complicity and implication. As Wächter stresses, the term "complicity" comes from the Latin verb *complicare*, "to fold together" (2019, 2). Rothberg explains the etymology of "implication" from the Latin verb *implicare*, "to entangle, involve, or connect closely" (2019, 1). All these concepts, therefore, point towards the interconnectedness of the human condition as outlined by Sanders.

7 This issue is at the centre of her 1945 article "Organised Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (2000), her 1964 essay "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorships" (2003), and her 1968 lecture "Collective Responsibility" (1987).

Arendt's conceptualisation of collective responsibility is based on a strong communitarian assumption – and was strongly influenced by Karl Jaspers' reflections on German political guilt for Nazism (Jaspers 1946). In her view, human beings live in political communities and the fact of being part of these communities requires group-members to bear responsibility for what the community does. In her treatment of the subject, Arendt refers above all to the national community and, in recent years, her reflection has been criticised for reiterating the nation state as the privileged ground of an analysis that loses sight of those inequalities that have structural and transnational dimensions (Rothberg 2019, 49–50). Yet what lies at the core of Arendt's analysis – as much as Jaspers' – is not so much the nation, but rather a humanist outlook that holds, as Jaspers puts it, that "there exists a solidarity among [. . .] human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world" (Jaspers 2000 [1946], 26). This standpoint leads Arendt to argue that human solidarity must be grounded in the "shame at being a human being" and should require – in its purest form – that every individual could "assume responsibility for all crimes committed by human beings" (2000 [1945], 154–155).

This general assertion about shame and responsibility may at first appear unrealistically broad, but it actually has a long history of practical applications since it is the same perspective that, since the Nuremberg trials, has informed the idea of crimes against humanity, which exactly concern those wrongs that, as Klaus Neumann and Janna Thompson put it, "are everyone's concern and not merely the business of citizens of a particular state" (2015, 12). Nonetheless, this extensive understanding of responsibility based on a humanistic outlook must be reconciled with individuals' situatedness in specific temporal, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts. As it was observed in relation to structural injustices, the responsibility that human beings bear is the result of their embeddedness in specific positionalities within the social order. Hence, it is first of all within those social relations in which they are embedded – and toward which they feel proximity – such as their family, their friendships, their jobs, their local communities, their nations, and the many transnational processes in which they are implicated, that human beings can experience and apportion the responsibilities that are part of the human condition and that are intrinsic to the fact of sharing and inhabiting the same planet.

If we conceptualise collective responsibility as a structural phenomenon that stems from one's entanglement in a social order, it becomes simpler to see that among the issues to which human beings are answerable there are also those that concern past crimes, meaning what Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Melissa Nobles have called "inherited responsibility" (2013, 4–5). Societies across the world are the products of specific histories of violence – wars, occupations, persecutions,

systems of racial discrimination – that left both a material and immaterial heritage that gives shape to the present. Being part of the historical continuum, following generations cannot completely disentangle themselves from such history since they live in a world that was moulded by those injustices – to use Rothberg's term, they are "diachronically implicated" in such difficult pasts (2019, 53).

Scholars who have explored the notion of inherited responsibility have tended to conceptualise it as a matter of debt and inheritance. For Arendt, the members of a community are inevitably "burdened by the sins of the fathers" as much as they are "blessed with the deeds of the ancestors" (1964, 27). For Jerzy Jedlicki, there is a responsibility of the community, which does not entail the right to blame and punish new generations for the wrong done by their ancestors, but that entails "the inheritance of obligations" that stem from past injustices (1990, 60). Similarly, Miller argues that if a community wants to "claim the advantages created by previous generations [it] must also accept a responsibility to offer redress for the injustices they inflicted" (2007, 156).

The focus of these scholars is above all the national community. As it has been argued, though, responsibility is a relationship that arises from human interconnectedness, and the national community is just one of the social structures in which individuals are embedded and for which they bear responsibility. Importantly, as Young argues, this collective responsibility does not stem from mere group membership, but it arises from the understanding that, as group members, individuals play a role – whether actively or passively – in shaping the social system (Young 2011 87–88). This inter-subjective proposition is the one advanced by Danielle Celermajer, who argues that "what makes the collective responsible is also what makes it (or has made it) the distinct political community that it is" (2009, 231). This entails that individuals must bear responsibility for the collective systems they contribute to keeping alive. Such understanding goes beyond national issues, as reflections on racism clearly show. As Grada Kilomba underlines, fighting everyday discrimination against Black communities requires that "the *white* subject recognises its own whiteness and/or racisms" and takes responsibility for it by "changing structures, agendas, spaces, positions, dynamics, subjective relations, vocabulary, that is, giving up privileges" – a process that for Kilomba, in line with Arendt, can be fuelled by shame as a revelatory and thus reparative experience that can "call into question our preconceptions about ourselves and compel us to see ourselves through the eyes of others" (2021, 21).

The conceptualisation of inherited responsibility produced by history as a structural phenomenon in which individuals are embedded means, however, that responsibility cannot simply be understood through its future oriented dimension as proposed by Young. This view is not sufficient because – besides running the risk of developing instrumental and consequentialist perspectives that allow the

use of the language of responsibility only in relation to problems that can be solved in the future – it fails to capture the ethical demand that lies in the past, no matter what can be done to address it in the present. We can turn to James Booth for a community-based explanation of collective responsibility that preserves the importance of the past. Booth argues that as part of "intergenerational communities," human beings stand in a moral relationship not only with future individuals but also with past ones. As a result of such interconnectedness, communities are "a transgenerational site of moral-political inheritance" (2020, 81) that entails that present day citizens inherit a responsibility towards past victims who, despite being dead, do not cease to be "subjects of justice" (119). Despite being acted out in the present and oriented towards the future, inherited responsibility derives from the past and from what is owed to victims of injustice. This is an ethical demand that lies at the core of collective memory and that requires new generations to remember and try to "deal with the past."

3 Dealing with the past through cultural representations

According to Paul Ricoeur, the duty of memory is the "duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self" to whom we are indebted, and in particular to the victims of past injustices to whom "the moral priority belongs" (2004, 89). The moral demand to commemorate and remember past victims has become a central tenet of European cultures. This memory work was first fuelled by the world wars and the experiences of totalitarian regimes, but, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, it progressively coalesced around the Holocaust, which became the heart of European memory politics as well as cosmopolitan memory practices (Levy and Sznaider 2002). The centrality that victims have progressively acquired in Western memory produced a shift from celebration of national achievements to the commemoration of what Henry Rousso has defined as a "mémoire négative" [negative memory] (Rousso 2016, 251). As part of this process, attempts to address the past through mnemonic actions have become widespread in societies across the world giving rise to what Jeffrey Olick has famously called "politics of regret" (2007, 121). Such mnemonic practices have been varied, ranging from musealisation, reforms of civil calendars, and historical education initiatives, to political actions aiming at redressing past wrongs through reparations, restitutions, official apologies, and truth commissions (Barkan 2000; Torpey 2003; Gibney 2008; Thompson 2009; Celermajer 2009).

These initiatives see the past as something that individuals across present day society should deal with – or, to use some alternative expressions, as something that should be confronted, engaged with, addressed, faced up to, come to terms with, mastered, overcome, reckoned with, coped with, worked through, worked on, or worked out (Adorno 1998 [1959]; Habermas 1997 [1995], 17–22; Pfister and Skinner 2006, 13–21).[8] The fact that this perspective has progressively become dominant in many memory cultures led Barbara Misztal to stress, already in 2010, that "coming to terms with the past has emerged as the grand narrative of recent times" (147). The process of dealing with the past embraces the ethical duty of commemorating victims of past injustices, which as we have seen lies at the heart of collective memory, and transforms it into political – often institutionalised – actions that are based on the implicit assumption that such mnemonic work will foster reconciliation, tolerance, and peace; will enhance democracy and its values, and ensure that human rights abuses similar to those that happened in the past will not happen again. The most overt and influential example of this process has been offered by Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, i.e. the attempts to negotiate the memory of Nazism first in West Germany and, after 1989, in the re-unified nation.

The process of dealing with the past has come under the scrutiny of recent scholarly works that have criticised many of its presuppositions, arguing that there is no evidence that such models for memory politics can actually achieve their supposed goals (Gensburger and Lefranc 2020; Pisanty 2020). Lea David has offered a radical deconstruction of this process and has shown that what can be called the "German model" was based on unproven assumptions stemming from Western individual psychology for the treatment of mental illness and from idealistic notions of healing that were rooted in Christianity (2020, 2–3). The underlying principle that remains implicit in the dealing with the past agenda is that, through proper memorialisation, nations can be healed from the wounds of the past and can eventually reconcile with their troubled history and move beyond it (2). Not only does this model apply Western psychological explanations of the psyche to whole societies, but, even more problematically, it creates a prescriptive and normative scheme that suggests that, as long as a society follows a specific pattern, past injustice can cease to be problematic.

8 Each one of these terms entail some variations and nuances. Several scholars have expressed preferences for the most neutral expressions, such as the ideas of "addressing," "engaging with," and "dealing with" the past – the latter was also chosen for the title of this volume – against terms such as "working through," which has a strong psychoanalytical connotation, or "coming to terms with," "master," and "overcome" which suggest some sort of closure. Despite these important differences, all the terms refer to similar processes and to a similar conceptualisation of the relationship between present and past.

Believing in the ethical validity of the duty of memory and in the importance of answering its demand, this volume wants to suggest a potential way forward to address the problems that scholars have correctly identified in memory cultures centred on the idea of dealing with the past. We suggest that the core of memory work should not dwell on the attempt to come to terms with past injustice and overcome it through proper memorialisation, but in the never-ending process of fostering the idea of responsibility for it. We argue that it is in a responsibility-oriented memory that we can find a more fruitful declination of the idea of dealing with the past that can fulfil and enlarge Rothberg's call for a "radical democratic politics of multidirectional memory" based on the idea of implication (2019, 139). Rather than giving prevalence to the singular process of remembering, or seeking some sort of "correct" memorialisation of a specific experience of suffering that would allegedly address the past and solve its disruptiveness, we should strive to develop plural, diverse, inclusive, and continuously evolving memory narratives that can renovate the present's need to bear responsibility for the past by: 1) engaging with the interrelated histories of past violence, answering therefore the victims' call for a just commemoration; 2) using the awareness of past crimes to help members of mnemonic communities recognise both their diachronic implication in these histories of violence and the role they may be playing in injustices of their time. It is in a critical culture centred on responsibility that the inescapable ethical duty to remember and deal with the past can be fully answered.

While any form of memory politics can be important in promoting such critical engagement with the past, this volume aims to show that cultural products are key to this process. Besides the fundamental role that literature, cinema, visual arts, and other forms of cultural expression play in the production, negotiation, and circulation of memories across society through the processes of mediation, remediation, and premeditation (Rigney 2008; Erll and Rigney 2009; Erll 2011a), cultural products are also one of the main loci in which the past can be experienced and thought through – in the form of narrative and through the filter of cultural memory. Erll has encapsulated such dynamics arguing that the consumption of artworks about the past does not produce so much an idea of what the past was like but generates above all "horizons of meaning" through which human beings can think about the past in the present (2011, 165).[9] Being such powerful meaning-making objects, cultural products constitute fundamental moments of encounter with difficult pasts. Through such encounters, members of mnemonic communities can be ex-

9 Erll develops her considerations in relation to literary fiction, but the relevance of her observation can be extended to the consumption of other artistic practices.

posed to forms of violence that predate their coming into the world, engage critically and ethically with them, and develop a sense of responsibility for both the past and the present that can transform ways of imagining the future.

Not only are cultural products fundamental in such memory work, but they also enable us to think through the notion of responsibility itself that is, we argue, at the core of this critical engagement with difficult pasts. This is why the chapters that compose this volume are centred on the mediation of difficult pasts in cultural production: through the analysis of literary texts, films, and visual artworks, the authors of this book give us major insights on how responsibility works and how a responsible memory can be shaped. These contributions, as a whole, offer a concrete overview of the diverse roles that responsibility plays in addressing past histories of violence, and they map the narrative and artistic strategies through which cultural products can spur responsibility and develop fruitful engagements with the memory of past injustices. While the next section will offer a quick overview of the specific topics and case studies that each contribution addresses, what follows will flag the broader implications of the chapters for the understanding of the memory-responsibility nexus and the development of a critical memory culture grounded in responsibility.

Memory, mediation, and responsibility are closely entangled. There are, therefore, varied layers through which the interconnections between these processes can be explored. One of these layers is situated at the level of the producer of memories. Members of mnemonic communities have a responsibility for the narratives they use to remember past injustices. This is due to the fact that, as Donald Bloxham argues in his chapter in this volume, no narrative is morally neutral and the representation of the past in the present is always an ethically charged activity. Bloxham develops this perspective in relation to the writing of history, but his argument has wider relevance and entails that every citizen must bear responsibility for the ethical implications of the words they use to narrate and interpret the past. Similarly, Alison Ribeiro de Menezes points out in her chapter that such responsibility is particularly strong for memory scholars and memory activists, since through their work they are directly involved in a process of “exclusion, selection, listening, and silencing” that is instrumental to the construction of the political order.

A second layer through which responsibility intersects memory and mediation concerns what can be called – by borrowing a term from literary theory – the *diegetic* level of what is narrated. Any narrative about the past, whether fictional or non-fictional, creates a storyworld in which characters take part in the historical events of their reality and are confronted with the responsibilities that stem from such involvement. Responsibility can therefore become the theme of a story, which cultural products can explore through a focus on individuals who are embedded in specific historical situations – as is the case of the characters in

Nora Krug's *Heimat* that Claire Gorrara analyses in her contribution to the volume. Importantly, as both Katarzyna Chmielewska and Hanna Meretoja show in their chapters, the life stories narrated by cultural products can powerfully reveal historical actors' agency, and, by doing so, bring attention to the responsibility that individuals have in the unfolding of history. Furthermore, as elucidated in various chapters, cultural products can shape narratives that transcend narrow legalistic interpretations of responsibility by spotlighting acts of complicity and implication, thereby unveiling the underlying social and structural mechanisms that enable the perpetuation of injustice.

Besides the creation of a diegetic world in which responsibility becomes visible, there is a third layer through which responsibility can become an important component of cultural products' engagement with difficult pasts. Several chapters of this volume show that it is above all in the dynamic exchanges between texts and audiences, meaning in the interpreting process that comes with the acts of reading and viewing, that responsibility is produced. In other words, responsibility is not just a theme that cultural products can explicitly address by providing a reservoir of examples of how human beings act through history and reflect on their direct and indirect involvement in it; often responsibility is a value generated at the level of reception through the relationship that readers and viewers establish with the past events that cultural products mediate. As windows opened to unknown worlds, cultural products can expand their audience's perception of history and reality (Meretoja 2018, 306) and bring them into close proximity to the injustices of the past. By doing so, the arts compel their audiences to do some memory work and constitute, therefore, a fundamental resource to tackle what Miranda Fricker has called "epistemic injustice" – meaning the wrong done to someone in their capacity "as a subject of knowledge" that is essential to their human value (2007, 5).

Many of the strategies that the arts can employ to counteract epistemic injustice can have positive effects in fostering a sense of responsibility for the past. Cultural products can, for instance, bring attention to little known historical facts, give voice to victims of violence, expose the haunting presence of the past in the present, and deconstruct dominant exclusionary ideologies that inform our cultures – as highlighted by Emiliano Perra, Charles Burdett and Gianmarco Mancosu, Itay Lotem, Uilleam Blacker, and Gaia Giuliani in their chapters. Moreover, they can reveal, as Meretoja argues in her contribution, "the conditions of possibility of injustice" that were available to certain historical actors, which is something that can help the public reflect on how they may actually be involved in other forms of injustice in their current world. The arts, as Gorrara shows, can bring readers closer to the materiality of the past producing affective engagements with it that can be "more truthful to people's lived experiences". They can – and

this is Meryem Choukri and Lara Saadi's argument – create spaces for the expression of emotion and solidarity that can push the public to act in favour of marginalised minority groups and victims of violence.

These mechanisms that cultural products initiate can contribute to instilling a sense of responsibility upon readers and viewers. Yet, it is fundamental to stress that there are limits to the positive ethical effects that cultural artefacts may generate. In the study of their respective case studies, for instance, Itay Lotem and Emiliano Perra show that cultural products can articulate a reason to care about past injustices, but they may easily fall short of generating any substantial changes especially in the lack of a widespread shared vocabulary and reiterated debates charged with political momentum that can link past events to present concerns and affect broad portions of society. Besides the question of what the arts can achieve alone, a limited engagement with the past can also be the direct result of the specific functioning of certain artworks. As much as they can foster a critical memory of difficult pasts, cultural products can also prevent it by supporting self-serving narratives, promoting the commemoration of screen memories, obfuscating widespread complicities in wrongdoing, and disregarding issues of responsibility – as some of the case studies discussed by Uilleam Blacker and Caroline Williamson Sinalo in their contributions show.

The fact that cultural products can be as instrumental as detrimental in addressing the past through responsibility is not surprising. Scholars who have explored the ethical dimension of artworks have been careful to stress that only *certain* cultural products, because of their specific features, have the potential to exercise a positive impact on their public (Meretoja 2018; Mihai 2022). This volume draws the same conclusion regarding the capacity of cultural products to generate a sense of responsibility for the past, and many of its contributions focus their attention on artworks that possess specific characteristics that make them particularly apt to engage the past in responsible terms.

For Max Silverman, for instance, works of art can aspire to have positive effects on their public only if they are capable of offering impure, messy, non-systematic accounts that contrast with linear and prescriptive memory narratives and can oppose totalising systems of thought through freedom, ambiguities, and plurality. In other words, cultural products are especially beneficial when they contribute to the pluralisation and complexification of memory cultures. Similarly, in their chapters, Meretoja and Juliane Prade-Weiss stress the importance of those artworks that can preclude a false impression of closure by showing that the past "is not at all settled" and cannot be easily left behind. For Prade-Weiss, cultural products that can achieve such critical engagement with the past are those that generate what she calls a "poetics of discomfort:" they promote a hesitancy and sense of moral di-

lemma that unsettle readers, forcing them to reflect on the complex moral situations and the varied degrees of complicity and implication that history generates.

For Blacker, Gorrara, and Diana Popa, artworks that can generate such critical memory are those that foster self-reflectivity, question the way we conceive of history, and force us to observe the constructedness of the meanings we assign to the past. Moreover, for Popa, an effective artistic engagement with difficult pasts comes from those cultural products that, while addressing past histories of perpetration, prevent "enjoyment of the spectacle of massacre" and invite reflection from unusual and non-dominant subject positions – a strategy of mediation that she names "symbolic responsibility." Meanwhile, for Gaia Giuliani, it is by preserving and disseminating counter-memory practices that the arts can object to repressive, irresponsible, and discriminatory structures of domination, such as those that inform the neocapitalist order. A productive responsible memory can also be facilitated by cultural products that, as Itay Lotem's chapter stresses, support the mobilisation of certain stories to make a further demand of justice that also involves other victims and communities – putting in place, in other words, multidirectional mechanisms of solidarity. Similarly, both Prade-Weiss and Stijn Vervaet argue that it is by enlarging our sense of kinship and rethinking the borders that affect our sense of community beyond narrow ethno-nationalist perceptions that cultural products can contribute to the cause of responsibility.

4 The chapters

As with any collective volume such as this, the editors are presented with the challenge of ordering a series of chapters that focus on a wide range of diverse but interrelated topics. While there is a certain temptation to desist from ordering or framing the chapters in any way, we thought it necessary to come up with a series of thematic containers that can help readers navigate through the volume. Such containers are by no means all-encompassing. As is made clear above, the chapters of this book intersect at various levels, whether by method, research questions, or geographical and historical focus: they all deal with issues of responsibility and study cultural production to address memories of difficult pasts in varied European cultural contexts. Importantly, the contributions elucidate that while memories of difficult pasts are embedded in specific memory cultures, they never develop in a vacuum. Not only do difficult pasts intersect – boundaries separating the history of European colonialism, dictatorships, World War II, and racism can only be artificial constructions – but their memories constantly *travel* (Erll, 2011b), meaning that they are developed through dialogic processes of bor-

rowing that always go beyond national borders and include transnational and postcolonial dimensions.

The first thematic section, "Responsibility and the Mediation of History," contains four interventions that, while focusing on specific literary, cinematic, and historical case studies, have the clear goal of advancing new theoretical perspectives on responsibility and the mediation of history. In "Memory as Interpretation: A Hermeneutics of Agency, Historical Responsibility, and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* [*Visitation*]," Hanna Meretoja turns to phenomenological-hermeneutic approaches to show that our individual and social selves are the result of never-ending acts of interpretation through which we construct the meaning of reality. In this process of meaning-making, the way we imagine the past, also in dialogue with cultural artefacts, is key. Meretoja develops this argument by analysing Jenny Erpenbeck's 2008 novel on twentieth-century Germany, considering how the text constructs the "spaces of possibility" that are available to historical actors, revealing both the limits and contextual availability of human agency in affecting historical and traumatic events, and inviting readers to self-reflexively consider how past injustices continue to implicate us in the present.

Donald Bloxham's chapter, "Beyond Neutrality: Historianship and Moral Judgement," discusses the place of moral judgements within historical scholarship. Weaving together philosophy of history, case studies drawn from Western historiography, Levinas' philosophy, and two different conceptualisations of "doing justice," Bloxham discusses the perspectives of both neutralists and contextualists in relation to the use of value judgements in the writing of history, and he convincingly shows that it is impossible to remove moral evaluation from historical accounts. As a result, Bloxham concludes that historians need to take responsibility for the moral prompts they use in their writing.

In "Impure Memory and the Figurine: Rithy Panh's *L'Image manquante* [*The Missing Picture*]," Max Silverman offers a close reading of the French-Cambodian filmmaker's film-essay in connection to the history of Holocaust cinema and the debate about the representability of genocides. In Silverman's reading, Panh's film reveals that mediation – and therefore memory and any traces of the past – are always impure and relational. In so doing, Silverman points towards the uniqueness of artistic freedom and cinematic expression to disrupt and complicate totalising ideas of history, memory, and responsibility.

Finally, Juliane Prade-Weiss's contribution, "Responsibility, Complicity, and the Poetics of Discomfort: Commemorating Dictatorships in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Documentary Fiction," argues for the necessity to address difficult pasts through a "responsibility grounded in complicity" that can prevent both moral and spatio-temporal distancing. To illustrate this idea, Prade-Weiss discusses three novels about dictatorships in Central and Eastern European societies: Herta

Müller's 2009 *Atemschaukel* [*The Hunger Angel*, 2012], Katja Petrowskaja's 2014 *Vielleicht Esther* [*Maybe Esther*, 2019], and Maria Stepanova's 2019 Памяти памяти [*In Memory of Memory*, 2021]. Out of this discussion emerges the notion of a "poetics of discomfort" that brings difficult pasts into an uncomfortable proximity to the present act of reading.

The three chapters in "Legacies of Colonialism," offer detailed accounts of how colonialism persists in the present, whether through the figure of the ghost, the British justice system, or television. In "*End of Empire* (Channel 4, 1985) and the Public Memory of Decolonisation in Britain," Emiliano Perra discusses how the 1980s is an overlooked period in British public memory during which the end of empire played a significant yet somewhat downplayed role. Drawing on the design, production, and reception of the 1985 Channel 4-produced television series and stressing its relative failure to fully challenge the myth of "benevolent" colonial rule, Perra nevertheless shows how the documentaries were a rare, but important, development towards bringing about a "swing of the pendulum" when it came to British reflections on the empire in the 1980s.

Itay Lotem's chapter, "Why Care about the Violence of the Past? Addressing Collective Responsibility in British Debates about Colonial Violence during the Mau Mau Insurgency," turns to a later example of public interest in decolonisation in an examination of the Mau Mau debate, which experienced a resurgence in public attention in Britain between 2005 and 2013, after a court case forced the British government to issue a formal apology to the victims of torture and colonial violence in Kenya. Lotem's chapter focuses on the strategies of historians, journalists, lawyers, and politicians to address historical violence and their attention to the concerns of contemporary audiences. In so doing, it examines the place, and relative absence in the British context, of memory politics and its role in formulating discourses of responsibility on difficult colonial pasts.

In "Haunting Debris: The Transnational Legacies of Italy's Colonial Past in Addis Ababa," Charles Burdett and Gianmarco Mancosu engage with the history and memory of Italian colonialism by focusing on the liminality of Italian communities in the Horn of Africa. Drawing on research that the authors carried out during two visits to Ethiopia in 2015 and 2016, the chapter offers a series of reflections on the memories of the Italian communities living in East Africa, their self-perceptions, and sense of identity, and how postcoloniality has been recorded in Italian literary texts and journal articles. Deploying the concept of "ghostly presence," Burdett and Mancosu ultimately show how the Italian colonial past hybridises the present, complicating linear accounts of history and the way in which it is remembered through culture and public space.

The third thematic section, "Genocides," gives an account of three varying geopolitical contexts which are connected by a focus on questions of responsibil-

ity for some of the most extreme moments of violence perpetrated during the twentieth century, the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi. In "The Holocaust and Decolonisation in Contemporary Ukrainian Commemorative Culture, Literature and Art," Uilleam Blacker considers how postcolonial criticism, discourses of decolonisation, and the Holocaust have proved central in the ways Ukrainian intellectuals, historians, writers, and artists have reimagined their recent history. Focusing on the Ukrainian writer Iurii Vynnychuk and artist Nikita Kadan – whose positions are distinct when it comes to decolonial treatments of Holocaust memory – Blacker explores the implication of anti-colonial perspectives in Ukrainian memory culture and how it affected questions of collaboration in and responsibility for the Holocaust. While doing so, the chapter also offers a precise account of history and memory politics about World War II Ukraine, which is developed in the light of the current violence Ukrainians are experiencing at the hands of the Russian Federation.

Diana Popa's chapter, "Symbolic Responsibility: Holocaust Memory in Romania through Radu Jude's Archival Documentaries," explores how one of Romania's most celebrated contemporary filmmakers addresses the controversial topic of the country's active role in the Holocaust. Focusing on two of Jude's archival documentaries – *Țara moartă, fragmente de vieți paralele* [*The Dead Nation. Fragments of Parallel Lives*] (2017) and *Ieșirea trenurilor din gară* [*The Exit of the Trains*] (2020) – Popa contends that these films, thanks to an inventive reinterpretation of archival material, offer a compelling exploration of Romania's long history of antisemitism and racism, which is discussed through the notion of "symbolic responsibility."

In "Between Guiltless Responsibility and Current French Interests: Uncovering Motive in the Media Coverage of the Duclert Report in *Le Monde* and the Rwandan *New Times* and *Pan African Review*" Caroline Williamson Sinalo uses the media coverage of the 2021 Duclert Report – a detailed report on the French involvement in the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi (1994) – to compare contemporary Rwandan and French media approaches when it comes to reporting the Genocide. Through this comparative study, Williamson Sinalo shows that Western claims of bearing responsibility can often be self-serving and informed by a cynical geopolitical agenda, which can be deconstructed and contrasted only by adopting multinarrative methodologies nurtured in decolonial thinking.

In the fourth part of the book, "Memories of Dictatorships and World War II," the chapters turn to the narrative frameworks that cultural producers have used to address histories related to Nazism, Francoism, Communism, and the last world war. In "Memory Unboxed: Reckoning with German Memories of the Second World War in Nora Krug's *Heimat: A German Family Album* (2018)," Claire Gorrara explores Nora Krug's celebrated graphic novel as an innovative visual artwork that addresses the continuing impact of the Second World War on indi-

vidual and collective identities. The chapter demonstrates how the graphic novel offers a particular form of affective and interactive historiography, in which material objects and past experiences are reimagined to self-consciously reveal the process of making history, and thereby draw attention to questions of individual and collective responsibility for the past.

Considering the function of memory in the public realm, Alison Ribeiro de Menezes' chapter, "'Democratic Memory,' Public History, and Responsibility in Spain," discusses recent developments in Spanish memory culture, which has seen the emergence of a new paradigm for talking about the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship centred on the idea of "democratic memory." Examining the intersections between memory work and the practice of public history, and reflecting on her own involvement in the co-creation of a Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War, Ribeiro de Menezes explores the memory-democracy nexus in its recent formulation within the Spanish context, showing both its limits and potentialities for any memory entrepreneur committed to justice, and advancing a conceptualisation of memory and democracy as unending processes of learning, revision, and transformation of humanity's relationship with the past and the future.

Finally, Katarzyna Chmielewska's "Communism without Guilt: Autobiographical Family Narratives of Communists in Poland" examines three common and recurrent plots that have shaped life narratives about Communist supporters in Poland – namely penitentiary discourse, Judeo-Communism, and the familial or generational narrative. In response to these dominant accounts, the chapter looks to offer a counter in the example of Stefan and Witold Leder's *Czerwona nić. Ze wspomnień i prac rodziny Lederów* [*The Red Thread. Memoirs and Works of the Leder Family*] (2005), a text that problematises dominant paradigms of Polish memory culture and rejects essentialist readings of the Communist past. In so doing, Chmielewska argues that the Leders' work helps forge a much-needed microhistory of real Communist supporters, with all their idiosyncrasies, desires, and life-choices, informing new and pluralistic interpretations of the Communist past in Polish memory cultures.

The final section of the volume, "Fighting Racism and Rethinking Belonging," brings together three chapters probing discourses of belonging in the context of structural racism that persists across European society. Stijn Vervaet's "Remembering Migration, Rethinking Belonging: Saša Stanišić's *Herkunft* [Where You Come From]" uses Stanišić's 2019 novel to examine how literature, and translingual writers in particular, probe contemporary European identity from the point of view of supposedly marginal memories of ethnonationalist violence of the past. Vervaet argues that *Herkunft* deploys the Bosnian and Yugoslav wars as a critical lens through which to understand citizenship and migration, nationalism, structural racism, and inequality in Germany as well as in Bosnia and Herzego-

vina today. Engaging with Althusser's, Butler's, Derrida's, and Rothberg's thought and with the legacy of romanticism, Vervaet shows how the novel allows readers to rethink the entanglement of language, memory, responsibility, and belonging beyond the nation-state and ethno-national communities.

Meryem Choukri and Lara Saadi's chapter, "Archives of Solidarity after Hanau: Remembering Right-Wing Terror, Racism and Antisemitism in Germany," examines the cultural response to the right-wing racist terror attack in the German city of Hanau that took place on 19 February 2020, during which nine people were murdered. In their reading of the anthology *Texte nach Hanau* [Texts after Hanau] as an "archive of solidarity," Choukri and Saadi show how this publication opened up an affective memory space and called for responsible remembering against a societal background that de-thematises racism and right-wing terror and thus renders the experiences and realities of racialised people in Germany invisible.

Bringing the volume to a close is Gaia Giuliani's chapter, "Private Memory, Postmemory, and Public Memory in a Battlefield: Mediterranean Border Crossings, Italian Public Discourse on the Invasion, and the Counter-Public Political Project of a Common Postcolonial (Post-)Memory," which engages with discourses of migration across the Mediterranean – focusing on both Italian mainstream media iconography and the wider context of Western Europe. Developing a critical discourse analysis based on political philosophy and postcolonial, feminist, and critical race studies, Giuliani deconstructs the border logic implemented by global neoliberal racial capitalism and probes the possibility of a more inclusive political project centred on counter-archives, activism, and a collective postmemory of migration as a site of social responsibility.

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