

Introduction

Täter, Mitläufer, and the Responsibility for Evil

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The present issue stems from a seminar experience addressed primarily to doctoral students of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, held on January 27th, 2022, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The initiative, organized by guest editors Veronica De Pieri and Elisa Pontini, aimed to reflect on the sensitive issues of transgenerational trauma and the ethics of memory in light of the international debate around the so-called ‘cancel culture.’

Recently, the term has been taken to emphasize the cultural tendency to ostracize, obstruct, or even remove a specific practice of memorializing historical heritage, usually already institutionalized and promoted as a cultural legacy to future generations. Thus, on the one hand, the international community questions the permissibility of keeping alive traditions and cultural manifestations related to sensitive phases of colonialism and postcolonialism; on the other, the risk of rewriting and, consequently, attributing new meaning to the collective traumas of the more recent past has stimulated *Memory Studies* and *Trauma Studies* to formulate convincing answers.

Michael Rothberg proposed in 2009 the concept of ‘multidirectional memory’ to highlight the public articulation of memory reflecting the dynamics of remembering no longer reserved only for witnesses. In 2012, Marianne Hirsch coined the term ‘post-memory’ to refer to transgenerational trauma and its multiple variables. The critical literature has thus shown a shift in interest that has turned the focus of analysis from the voice of survivors to the multimodal reproduction of historical accounts.

This issue questions the traumatic memories of post-World War II Germany to understand how they have been performed and manipulated in public discourse today, starting with the studies by Hannah Arendt.

Indeed, the topic has found wide space in international historical and philosophical debates, especially following the Eichmann trial (1961). However, the apparent ‘National Socialist abulia’ ascribed by Arendt to the regime’s hierarchs – including Eichmann – to this day prompts the scholarly community to question the definition of the concepts of guilt and responsibility for the Shoah, their limits and their implications, not only at a legal level but also at ethical and moral ones.

Despite the rich testimonial repertoire bequeathed by the *Häftlinge* (the survivors of the concentration and extermination camps of the Third Reich), still controversial are the studies devoted to the figures of the hierarchs and the reasons capable of prompting individual political figures to concert the Final Solution. Similarly, the seemingly passive attitude of their supporters and the responsive, willing or inert reactions of the following generations are still not so much investigated.

This issue offers an alternative viewpoint to that witnessed by the victims, focusing on the actors of regime policies, the *Täter*, and the passive followers, the *Mitläufer*. Building on Hannah Arendt’s accounts (*The Banality of Evil* and *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany*), this issue of *DIVE-IN – An International Journal on Diversity and Inclusion* brings together contributions that embrace this perspective from a broader perspective, not just limited to the field of German studies: the discussions and comparisons open up to other geographical areas that experienced repressive government institutions, the cause of large-scale violence and social abuse. The common thread is trauma and memory in the context of a cultural past dominated by social injustice, turning attention to perpetrators and passive collaborators.

Also included within this broad discourse is the transgenerational dimension involving second and third generations of survivors in memorializing collective trauma, often shouldering the burden of responsibility and guilt. There is thus a protracted rejection of historical reality and related responsibility of family members and one’s own, not only from a retroactive viewpoint but also from a present and future perspective. However, some manage to see the attitude of parents and grandparents with a critical eye, denouncing their hypocrisy and the faults concealed over the decades.

This volume brings together three of the contributions presented at the doctoral seminar (by De Pieri, Pontini, and Colelli, respectively), integrating

the innovative contributions of other scholars and researchers committed to these themes.

This issue opens with Veronica De Pieri's study, which proposes new interpretations of the "banality of evil" ascribed by Arendt to Nazi hierarchs, by adopting a psycho(pato)logical approach, starting precisely from an analysis of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).

The second contribution, by Elisa Pontini, is devoted to analyzing another work by Hannah Arendt, the essay *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany* (1950). Here, the German author seeks to investigate the causes of German indifference to Nazi crimes. While Arendt finds a profound inability to judge and feel provoked by the regime, the Mitscherlichs emphasize the failure to reframe Hitler's 'loss.' Central in both cases is the denial of reality, which is responsible for removing the past and disavowing one's responsibility. Studies by Bar-On, Pohl, and Wenzel (et al.) demonstrate the relevance of the phenomenon even in later generations, thus representing, even today, a threat to a true reworking of the past.

The third article, by Jente Azou, focuses on the transgenerational dimensional trauma, looking at Nora Krug's graphic novel – or rather, narrative – *Heimat* (2018). Krug uses information from archives, photographs, and objects to reconstruct her family history, shaping a creative, multi-media narrative. Clear is the attempt to investigate her grandparents' degree of involvement and responsibility in the face of the Holocaust and, more remarkable, to rediscover her relationship with her family and homeland. The article also delves into the discrepancy between family history and Holocaust history.

The fourth paper, by Daniel Milkovits, looks at Carl Merz and Helmut Qualtinger's monologue *Herr Karl* (1961), a play that sparked wide public controversy. Indeed, the author shows how, through the figure of Herr Karl, the mentality of the typical postwar Austrian citizen, characterized by opportunism, guilt removal and oblivion, is unmasked. Hannah Arendt's observations in *The Banality of Evil* are reflected in his work: Austrian society 'prefers' to see itself as a victim, thus relativizing its guilt.

Michele Paolo proposes a study on Fritz Bauer, Hesse district attorney. This character always stressed in his writings the need to change German society from the ground up. It was precisely society – not the figure of Hitler – that would allow the totalitarian logic to take hold and push it to its extreme consequences. That is why, in Bauer's view, it is not enough to institute criminal

trials of Nazi war criminals; instead, it is necessary to educate the population in democracy, critical thinking and self-analysis.

Filippo Pelacci's research focuses on the growing need in the 1960s to confront the uncomfortable Nazi past. This need was also reflected in the literary sphere, as evidenced by the study of the plays *Der Stellvertreter* by Rolf Hochhuth (1963) and *Die Ermittlung* by Peter Weiss (1965), as well as the novel *Billard um halb zehn* by Heinrich Böll (1959). Pelacci's article investigates whether and how these texts contributed to combating and overcoming collective amnesia, which is now firmly entrenched in German society and widely criticized by the authors.

From an inclusive perspective, Giulia Colelli and Anne D. Peiter's papers move away from German studies to investigate how the culture-specific elements of Japan and Rwanda influence trauma and memory performances.

Giulia Colelli, in particular, emphasizes children's literary production, usually little explored in the field, to highlight how the trauma of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima engages future generations in the process of perpetuating the memory of victims and executioners.

Anne D. Peiter compares in her analysis the genocide of the Jews and the genocide of the Tutsi population carried out in Rwanda in 1994. Starting from autobiographical accounts of survivors of the Holocaust and the massacre of the Tutsis, the contribution reflects comparatively on the "extreme groundlessness" (*extreme Grundlosigkeit*) of these events.

Finally, in the miscellaneous section of the issue, Valeria Tettamanti offers a reflection on Pierre Ronsavallon's *Raconter la vie* collection (2014) aimed at the shared production of life testimonies. In her study, the author reflects on the concept of literariness and the attribution of "literary" to works of art and testimonial writings.

This issue concludes with reviews of three recent publishing releases. The first volume, *Ein Verbrechen ohne Namen*, published in 2022 and reviewed by Michael Dallapiazza, consists of a collection of essays that aims to counter the current criticism of an exaggerated celebration and protection of the cultural memory of the Holocaust. The authors motivate how the Holocaust is an unprecedented episode in history, the function of which is not to overshadow other historical crimes, such as colonial ones. The second review, by Giulia Fanetti, looks at the new edition of Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, published in 2021, with the German text opposite, which "allows one to appreciate all the nuances" of the original. The review highlights the relevance of the text, written in 1914, which places power – including that of the past over

the present – at the centre of the work. In the third and final review, Alexandra Müller presents the survey *Das Unsagbare verschweigen: Holocaust-Literatur aus Täterperspektive. Eine interdisziplinäre Textanalyse* from 2021. This study analyzes literary texts that feature Holocaust perpetrators and focuses on their points of view. The author highlights strategies to guide and control the reader's reception, preventing one from sympathizing and identifying with the perpetrators.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the authors who contributed with their valuable analyses and reflections to the release of this issue. Sincere thanks are also due to the reviewers for their constructive suggestions and critical comments, as well as to Prof. Maurizio Ascari and the entire editorial board of the journal, who have welcomed our project with great enthusiasm from the beginning. We also reserve special thanks to Prof. Michael Dallapiazza, who, in addition to guiding us in organising the doctoral seminar with Prof. Paola Scrolavezza, was always available and present for any doubts and clarifications, helping us, especially in the revision phase. Thanks also to Dr Carmen Bonasera for her valuable work in the editorial phase. With this issue, we would like to contribute to keeping the debate around trauma and memory alive, with the hope that the events described and investigated here will continue to be protagonists in the process of memorialization in the face of the threat of the *cancel culture*.

References

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