* Claudia Leeb, “Austria's Repressed Guilt in Theory and Practice: Personal Encounters”, in Vincenzo Pinto (ed.) *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (*Mastering the Past*) (Leiden: Brill Press, forthcoming).

Title: Austria’s Repressed Guilt in Theory and Practice: Personal Encounters

Abstract:

This paper discusses three personal examples of contemporary Austrians' defensive reactions when confronted with the book *The Political of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence* (Leeb, 2018). The defensive reactions underline that Austrians evaded confronting themselves with their repressed guilt about their violent National Socialist past and failed working through their past. It also explains the centrality of "embodied reflective spaces" and the idea of the "subject-in-outline" to counter the continuation of the cycle of violence engendered through repressed guilt and to assist a nation's successful working through its past.

Keywords: repressed guilt, Austria, National Socialism, working through the past

Claudia Leeb

**Austria’s Repressed Guilt in Theory and Practice: Personal Encounters**

**Introduction**

In my recent book, *The Politics of Repressed Guilt* (Leeb, 2018), I draw on early Frankfurt School critical theory, in particular Theodor W. Adorno, in combination with psychoanalytic theory, to show that individuals and nations must deal with individual and collective feelings of guilt to arrive at what I term embodied reflective judgments, which means that both thinking and feeling are important for making critical judgments. T he idea of embodied reflective judgment is based on the insight that thinking and feeling are not only connected, but deeply entangled with each other. The way in which we think about something can prompt an emotional response, and that response can prompt further reflection necessary for critical judgment.

Not all feelings advance embodied reflective judgment. Rather, it is particular feelings, namely guilt feelings, which individuals and nations must grapple with to secure critical judgment. If guilt feelings are cast aside and people are resorting to defensive mechanisms, then people make flawed judgments, which can be manipulated by political forces. I do not argue, however, that feelings trump judgment in my understanding of embodied reflective judgment. Rather, if feelings of guilt are evaded via defense mechanisms, then they cloud our ability to make critical judgments.

A failure to live up to collective feelings of guilt corrupts people’s judgments in two ways. First, people make all sorts of flawed and even paranoid judgments to ward off having to deal with feelings of guilt, and so thinking and rationality is used merely to fend off feelings of guilt. Second, since it is feelings of guilt that would prompt reflection, steps that ought to be taken to make reparations for the past and to prevent future injustices are less likely to be taken, because people are not judging that there is any need to do so.

Post-crime generations are not guilty in a moral or legal sense, because they were not present when the deeds were committed. While legal or moral guilt cannot be inherited or transferred, political guilt can be passed on to future generations as future generations often continue to reap the benefits of the crimes committed by prior generations of the collective they belong to, and can also inherit the problematic attitudes and beliefs that played a part in the past crimes. The notion of collective feelings of guilt is grounded in the idea of political guilt, which is what I mean to refer to when I talk about the collective guilt post-crime generations must grapple with to make sure that what happened does not happen again.

In the book I am concerned with the legal and moral guilt of individual Austrian Nazi perpetrators through analyzing the court documents that have been produced during their trials in the *Volksgerichte* (people’s courts), special courts established in Austria between 1945 and 1955 to prosecute the crimes of the NS regime. I also expose the repressed political guilt of the descendants of those Austrians who passively or actively participated in reprehensible acts during the National Socialist regime. I explain the ways in which this cohort uses defense mechanisms to keep collective feelings of guilt at bay by analyzing recent public controversies surrounding Austria’s involvement in the Nazi atrocities, and here in particular the vehemence in which Austrians of all political backgrounds aimed to counter the staging of Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplaz* play, which discussed the past and continuing Ant-Semitism Austria in the 1980's, as well as Austrian's many year opposition to building "a house of history", which also aimed to expose Austria's participation in the National Socialist atrocities.

In this paper I turn my attention to the ways in which I was confronted with Austrian repressed political guilt, which became obvious in the defensive reactions of contemporary Austrians, friends and colleagues of mine, when I mentioned or aimed to discuss the topic of the book during writing and completing the book, as well as when the book was finally published. The defensive reactions in these interactions, some of them rather surprising in their vehemence, support the overall thesis of the book - that Austrians failed to work through their National Socialist past, and repressed their guilt pertaining to the horrors of the crimes committed in that past, instead of confronting themselves guilt feelings. As a result, whenever somebody or something, such as my book, brings back the repressed, they react defensively and embodied reflective judgments remain absent. That the problem of anti-Semitism and foreigner hatred remains persistent in Austria today indicates that Austrians, as a nation and individually, have not fully worked through the disconcerting elements of their violent past.

The negative consequences of reacting defensively to keep political guilt repressed are especially salient in the continuing electoral successes of Austria's far right Freedom Party (FPÖ), which has had two periods of being part of the leading governmental coalition with Austria's conservatives. Furthermore, we see in Austria a growing extremist right "Identitarian" movement, which has ties to the Freedom Party. Insofar as Austria remains one of the last countries in Europe with a strong welfare system, and people are in generally "well off", the argument that people's economic concerns drives the support to the far right must be modified in this case. Rather, the far right in Austria is skilled in manipulating the repressed guilt of Austrians for its own political gains, which is why it is so important to grapple with this topic.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The paper is set up in two parts. In the first part of the paper, “Encounters with Repressed Guilt”, I will outline three examples in which I was confronted with repressed Austrian political guilt as reactions to my book. I will also draw on theory to elaborate further the practical examples. In the second part of the paper, “Countering Defensive Reactions,” I will elaborate more how the two main theoretical concepts that I have introduced in my book to counter defensive mechanisms that keep guilt repressed, the idea of “embodied reflective spaces” as well as the idea of the “subject-in-outline”, work in practice. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the ways in which these concepts are connected theoretically, which I have not done previously. This is important to further detail what needs to be done on a practical level to counter the continuation of the cycle of violence engendered through repressed guilt.

**I. Encounters with Repressed Guilt**

The following three examples pertain to the encounter of defensive postures of Austrian friends and colleagues of mine, all of them highly educated and belonging to the bourgeois class, when they were confronted with the topic or content of my book. Here it is important to note that when I mention the topic or content of my book to my friends and colleagues, I do so in general. I am not making any claims about their descendants, nor am I asking them if they feel guilty or otherwise claim that they should be feeling guilty.

However, while the content of their reactions is different, what all of them have in common is that they react to me as if my book was a personal attack on them or their family, when instead I am talking in general about the themes of the book. I did not know, and neither asked specifically, about their family background in relationship to the National Socialist regime. Such affectively charged reactions, in which they felt personally attacked by me although I was not doing so underscores that the content of the book is enough to “touch the sore spot of guilt” (Adorno 2010: 51), and that their defensive reactions are a means to fend of those guilt feelings.

The first example where I was confronted with defensive mechanisms that pertain to repressed guilt was when, in the summer of 2017, I spent some time in Vienna during which I also worked on a deadline to finish *The Politics of Repressed Guilt*. I initially had planned to finish the book in the United States, since the distance to Austria both physically in terms of location, as well as mentally as I was writing the book in English instead of German (my first language), gave me the necessary distance to write about a difficult topic, such as the guilt pertaining to national Socialist crimes of the country I grew up in. I had planned to finish the book prior to an already set trip to Vienna, but this did not happen, as completing the book took longer than initially planned, so I had to complete the book in Vienna. It felt strange when I completed the chapters of the book in the National Library (*Nationalbibliothek*), in the same building where Hitler, in 1938 gave his "annexation talk" to a cheering crowd of excited Austrians.

My concerns about completing the book in Austria turned out to be not unfounded. Whenever Austrian friends and colleagues asked me about my current research, I would give them the title and a brief synopsis of the book. Most of the reactions I encountered were defensive, some of them rather vehemently so. One example is my long-term friend A., whom I first met in high school in the town I grew up in Upper Austria, and who, like me, went to Vienna to study.

One day, when I was sitting with her in her kitchen, we came to talk about my book. When I briefly explained what it is about, right away, and without asking about any further details of the content or methodology of the book, she pointed out that "she does not at all feel guilty for what Austrians did during the Nazi regime," and immediately added that "all of her uncle had died as soldiers in the war". I was rather startled about her immediate and defensive reaction, in which it becomes clear that the mere mentioning of the topic of my book touches on the sore spot of guilt, insofar as she feels that I personally attacked her and her family. By what Hannah Arendt called drawing up of a balance sheet between German (in this case Austrian) suffering and the suffering of others (Arendt 1950: 345), A. aimed to avoid having to touch this sore spot of guilt.

Adorno, similarly, calls such a defense mechanism a balance sheet of guilt (*Aufrechnung der Schuldkonten*), which attempts a rationalization of guilt that is itself, for him: "irrational. As though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz. Drawing up such calculations, the haste to produce counterarguments in order to exempt oneself from self-reflection, already contain something inhuman, and military actions in the war . . . are scarcely comparable to the administrative murder of millions of innocent people (Adorno 2010: 214).

A.'s haste to produce counter-arguments to the topic of my book, in which she immediately asserted that "she does not feel guilty", and that her family suffered as a result of the war, were attempts to rationalize her political guilt pertaining to Austria as a perpetrator nation, which has been repressed into the unconscious. Through the mere mentioning of my research, this repressed guilt was reactivated and threatened to return to the conscious. The death of her uncles, although tragic in itself, can scarcely be compared to the administrative murder of millions of innocent people by the same regime her uncle’s actively supported as soldiers. The core aim of her drawing up of a balance sheet of guilt was to keep her feelings of guilt repressed. The problem with using defense mechanisms to keep feelings of guilt repressed is that it leads to both an inability to feel sympathy for the victims of crimes *and* an absence of self-reflection. Insofar as critical judgments necessitate the ability to feel guilt, as such feeling can prompt critical reflection on one's past and its consequences for the present, embodied reflective judgment in this case remained absent - salient in A.'s judgment that she does not feel guilty and that it is Austrians that suffered.

The second example, is another interaction I had during the weeks I finished my book in Vienna, during a meeting with a long-time mentor of mine, U. When she asked me about my current research, I told her that I was finishing the *Politics of Repressed Guilt*. Although she did not encourage me to tell her more about the book, and since our meeting took place in her office at the University of Vienna, I decided to tell her more about one court case I analyzed in one of the chapters of the book, the case of Beiglboeck, who was a Professor at the University of Vienna, and who had carried out lethal experiments on Roma and Sinti in the concentration camp Dachau.

Like the first example, also U. right away (and without much thinking) came up with counterarguments to rationalize her repressed guilt. She hastily and rather vehemently pointed out that she disagrees with the concept of "collective guilt" that occupies a central place in my book. After that, she went into detail and at length about how her father had contributed to resist the Nazis. Although the perspective of those descendants of Austrians who resisted the Nazis (a small cohort) is different from those descendants of Austrians who actively or passively supported the Nazis, the vehemence in which she had to reject the concept of collective guilt and the affectively charged nature of foregrounding the ways her father contributed to resist the Nazis, in which she aimed to draw a picture of Austria as resisting the Nazis, stood in the service of defense. It aimed to do away with another, more threatening, picture of Austria as a perpetrator nation in general, and the picture of Austrian university professors, who actively or passively supported Nazi atrocities in particular.

Adorno points out that a failure to deal with feelings of guilt generates a “neurotic relation to the past,” which leads to “defensive postures *where one is not attacked*, intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation, and absence of affect in face of the gravest matters” (Adorno 2010: 214, my emphasis). U.'s extreme reaction, and given that after our meeting she broke off contact with me, points to an intense affect which is hardly warranted by her mentee writing a book about Austria's repressed guilt, and the absence of any affect in response to the gravest matters - after telling her about the University Professor who murdered Roma and Sinti she did not express any sympathy for the victims, which underlines her neurotic relation to the past. Such neurotic relation is connected to the present, insofar as it hinders the making of embodied reflective judgments, which implies the ability of adequate feelings and critical (self-)reflection, which remained absent in this case. Although the content in this defensive posture is here different from the first case, as instead of pointing at the balance sheet of guilt, U. points at the resistance of her father during the NS regime, what is similar is that the mere mentioning of the concept of "collective guilt" is felt as a personal attack on her and her family. As with the first example, people react as if they’re personally attacked when I am just giving an overview of the themes of the book.

The third example occurred when the manuscript was already finished and under review at the press. I sought feedback on the manuscript from an Austrian colleague and long-time friend, P., who has partly Jewish background (and who lost most of the Jewish part of his family in the Holocaust), and partly National Socialist background. I had discussed the book project with him in the early stages because he has a background in psychoanalytic theory and he suggested to incorporate Anna Freud's theory of defense, and I was eager to get his feedback at this point.

He had the manuscript for several days and when we met to discuss it I was rather surprised when he told me, right away, that during reading the book, he was unable to sleep for several nights, which is a rather strong affective reaction to a book. He then went on and on telling me what is wrong with it. He dismissed everything, from the main thesis, to the methodology, to the thinkers I used, and to the content of the book. His conclusion was that there is no repressed guilt in Austria, and that there is no lingering or continuing anti-Semitism in the present. And finally, he told me that the bad aspects of Austria lie in the past and "that all is fine in Austria today."

These extreme reactions of P., not being able to sleep for nights when reading the book, the complete dismissal of the book, together with the assurance that Austria's problems lie in the past, and that this past has nothing to do with the present, point at the defensive posture, and to what Adorno calls "intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation" (Adorno 2010: 214). His intense affective reaction is salient insofar as it is hardly warranted to have sleepless nights over an academic book and dismiss its content with such vehemence - it is after all just an academic book that one can disagree with. However, not only at the meeting were such intense affects salient, also after the meeting P. kept on writing me several emails in which he reiterated that everything in my book was wrong. Such intense affects point out that I had also in this example touched the sore spot of guilt. P. Also, like in the other examples, P. felt that I personally attacked him and his family with the content of my book, although this was not what I did. His reaction to such feeling was that he, in some sense, made a counter-attack, he attacked the content of my book by questioning if it was "academically sound", which is a defense posture to keep unconscious guilt repressed. What had to be repressed is the guilt that pertains to the part of his family that supported the National Socialists. Perhaps his defensive posture is so strong, because it brings back the pain of the erasure of the Jewish part of the family by the National Socialist regime, and the threat that such violence might be repeated in the present.

In this example, we can also see the ways in which the inability to confront political guilt is connected to the inability to make embodied reflective judgments. P.' s defensive posture, expressed in his attack on the content of my book, was used to avoid having to touch the sore spot of political guilt of the Nazi regime. Insofar as the ability to confront political feelings of guilt can trigger one to think in different terms about what (a part of) one's family was doing during the NS regime and the effects of such deeds upon the present, defensive reactions keep such feelings at bay, and as a result embodied reflective judgment is arrested.

In this example P. wrongly judges that Austria did not fail to work through its past, and as a result he cannot see the lingering effects of such a failure in present day Austria - the continuing anti-Semitic and xenophobic sentiments in Austria, which have been brought to full force by the rise of Austria's far and extremist right. Perhaps it is also the threat that he himself might become a victim to similar forces that already murdered a part of his family, which plays a role in P’s defensive posture.

There is also an important question about the different perspectives in relation to Austria’s National Socialist past, and how one ought to engage with those differences. The perspective of descendants of Austrians who actively or passively supported the Nazi regime differs from descendants of Austrian Jews and Roma and Sinti whose family managed to flee the Nazi regime. Such perspectives will differ still from Austrians who have a part-Jewish and part-Nazi background as in this case, or from descendants of those who resisted the Nazi regime, as in the previous example.

I think what is necessary here is what Jaspers calls an openness and a willingness to communicate with each other across these differences, and a willingness to *listen* to the other’s perspective and “hear what the other thinks” (Jaspers 1947: 11), in particular, the perspective of the victims of the Austrian Nazi terror, or in this case somebody who lost part of his family in such terror. In such communications, instead of using defense mechanisms that break off communication and do not allow one to listen, one needs to be sure to keep the communication open.

I must admit that this task was not an easy one in this case, particularly because I was confronted with the defense mechanisms of A, in which the content of my book was attacked, which aimed to expose defense mechanisms, and also, because at this time in the process, I had not received any other feedback. So I felt I needed to defend the content of my book, which did not, as I hoped, lead to a scenario that allowed me to deal with the defense mechanisms of A. and which would perhaps have been necessary to re-open the conversation between us.

**2. Countering Defensive Reactions**

The only one who is free from neurotic feelings of guilt and is capable of overcoming the whole complex is the one who experiences [her/] himself as guilty, even of those things for which [s/]he is not guilty in any immediate sense (Adorno 2010: 183).

In this second section, I would like to further detail in theory and practice my ideas of the "subject-in-outline" and "embodied reflective spaces" as central means to overcome the guilt/defense complex. This implies to constructively “work through the past” (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*), instead of “mastering the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) (Adorno 2010: 216). When one works through the past, one remembers past crimes and confronts oneself with individual and collective feelings of guilt around such a past. In contrast, when one masters the past, one uses defense mechanisms to keep feelings of guilt at bay. Here one aims to close the book on the past, and tries to forget what the collective one identifies with has done, which is what happened in Austria.

When one aims to work through the past this means that one confronts oneself with the deeds of one’s forefathers and foremothers, and one does not shy away from conversations with people that aim to evade the past and that expose defense mechanisms whenever you bring it up, such as the three examples outlined above. I believe that it is a certain form of subjectivity, what I call a "subject-in-outline", which enables one to be in a good position to work through one's nation's past.

In my conceptualization of the subject-in-outline, I draw on the idea of the political subject, as developed in my other recent book, *Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism: Toward A New Theory of the Political Subject* (2017)*.* In this book I engage with Lacanian psychoanalysis and early Frankfurt school critical theory to theorize the political subject-in-outline as an individual and collective subject, who moves within the tension of a certain coherence (the subject) necessary for transformative agency and permanent openness (the outline) necessary to counter its exclusionary character. Applied to the topic of working through the past and confronting repressed guilt, this conception of subjectivity implies that the subject remains an outline, and as such moves within the tension of a certain level of identification with the collective who committed crimes but without wholly identifying with it, because it is such a subject who is best in a position to confront guilt feelings without having to resort to defense mechanisms.

In the introduction of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains, “The name of dialectics says no more, than that objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno: 1973: 5). The remainder is the moment of non-identity in identity. Whereas in identity thinking one aims to expel the moment of non-identity, in dialectical thinking, once embraces non-identity. A subject-in-outline embraces the moment of "non-identity" in her identity, which implies that she accepts that she is not whole, but has "holes" in her subjectivity, and which allows her to engage in dialectical thinking.

Over-identifying with a collective is an example of aiming at a whole identity. One is trying to expel the moment of non-identity in the sense that one expels the unpleasant aspects of the collective one identifies with. If one wants to think of one’s nation as ‘all great’, then one has to deny any wrongs of the past. A subject-in-outline, in embracing “non-identity”, can accept both the good and bad in one’s collective identification. In contrast, a subject that aims at having a whole identity, expels the non-identical aspect in her identity. As a result, such a person is more likely to engage in identity thinking.

Here it is important to note that the moment of non-identity is not only connected to thinking. It is also connected to feeling. In the section of *Negative Dialectics* entitled “Suffering Physical,” Adorno argues that the moving force behind dialectical thinking, is physical impulses—pain and negativity. Physical impulses are the only source of hope to resist the negative consequences of identity thinking: “The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different” (Adorno 1973: 203). In this physical moment—the moment of non-identity—one *feels* that things should be different, and it is such feeling that tells our knowledge (thinking) that suffering is wrong. A subject-in-outline, who embraces the non-identical moment in her identity, is more likely to have appropriate feelings about what ought or not ought to be. In contrast, those who aim at a whole identity and engage in identity thinking, which aims to eradicate the moment of non-identity, are prone to instead deny the suffering, and thus the related feelings that things should be different.

Connected to my idea of embodied reflective judgment, which implies both the capacity to think and feel, this means that we can only make critical judgments when our capacity for appropriate feelings, in particular the feelings of guilt, is a possibility. This is more likely for a person who bases her identity on the idea of a subject-in-outline, insofar as the embrace of the moment of non-identity in her identity allows her to feel guilt for what she is not guilty or in the immediate sense. It allows her to feel guilt for the past crimes of the collective she identifies with.

However, the idea of embodied reflective judgment, which is grounded in the somatic, is not divorced from the mental. Feelings (such as guilt feelings) do not automatically generate insight into what is wrong with the world. Rather, the feeling that there is something wrong needs at the same time thinking (and here a form of dialectical instead of identity thinking) for embodied reflective judgment to be possible.

The embrace of the moment of non-identity as a subject-in-outline allows us to neither under-identify nor over-identify (or too strongly identify) with the political collective one considers oneself a part of. Too weak an attachment allows one to evade responsibility for what the collective does. An example would be here that when an Austrian person moves abroad and then, instead of continuing to primarily identify as being Austrian, makes one’s identity as a European more central. Since the person feels herself to be primarily European rather than Austrian, she is under-identified with the Austrian collective, which allows her to avoid feeling guilty for what the collective did, and as such evades taking responsibility.[[2]](#footnote-2)

If I am over-identified (or too strongly identified), I would instead insist that "I am Austrian and not otherwise". Here my whole individual identity is wrapped up in the collective I identify with. Since my own sense of wholeness is dependent on the whole of the collective, then pointing at any holes (such as its unpleasant aspects of its history), become a threat to my own sense of wholeness as a subject.

But if I am also not too strongly attached, because I remain a subject-in-outline, then my identity is not wholly wrapped up with the collective, and so critique on and reflection upon what the collective did does not become a threat to my identity. Insofar as the moment of non-identity is also connected to the capacity to feel guilt, I am less likely to engage in defensive mechanisms to fend off feelings of guilt. Furthermore, since the concept of non-identity is also connected to a better capacity for dialectical thinking instead of identity thinking, which squelches the moment of non-identity, I am also in a better position to think critically. The subject that remains a subject-in-outline is then in a better position to have embodied reflective judgment and take responsibility for the crimes committed by the collective.

In the three encounters I had discussing my book with fellow Austrians it was salient how all of them were reacting as if their own identity was being challenged, when I was merely discussing the general themes of the book. This highlights that their subjectivities were not based on the idea of a subject-in-outline, but that they were over-identified or too strongly identified with the collective of Austria. The topic and content of my book pointed out to them that the collective they identify with had non-whole aspects (Austria's National Socialist past). Since they were strongly, if not over-identified, with Austria as a nation, the mere confrontation with the title or content of book, which made these holes obvious, questioned their wholeness as a subject, and was experienced as a personal attack on their identity to which they reacted defensive. The defense mechanisms they used to keep political guilt repressed was a means to keep their own sense of wholeness as a subject intact.

These examples outline the centrality of a subject-in-outline to overcome the guilt/defense complex. If one accepts the moment of non-identity in one's identity, then one can avoid being over-identified with the collective, and one can also accept that the collective itself is non-whole, which allows one to avoid feeling that one's personal identity is challenged when the holes in the collective become obvious. The embrace of non-identity puts one also in a better position to feel guilt for what the collective did. As a result, I do not need to fend off guilt, but can use the feeling of guilt as a moment that can engender self-reflection, which are both necessary for embodied reflective judgment. At the same time it is the subject-in-outline, which is based on a subject that identifies to a certain degree (albeit not wholly) with the political collective, and as such it is not under-identified, which is necessary for feeling guilt for what the collective did and also for critical reflection on such deeds, and which generates embodied reflective judgment.

My second idea to overcome the guilt/defense complex are “embodied reflective spaces,” in which working through the past and through guilt can take on a more public dimension. Embodied reflective spaces are spaces where people can work through their past and confront and engage with their feelings of guilt, which allows them to feel guilty for the atrocities committed by the nation they identify with, even if they are not guilty of such atrocities in an immediate sense. Such spaces can invite people to integrate the less pleasant actions of their nation into their subjectivity. As a result, subjectivities can become redefined in embodied reflective spaces. I suggest that it is subjects-in-outline that are best in a position to engender a transformation of their subjectivities, which is a result of the integration of the negative aspects of the nation they identify with. As outlined above, one needs to identify with the collective, else there are not guilt feelings and no need to redefine their subjectivity. But an over-identification seems to prevent this kind of integration and redefinition, as one’s identity is too dependent on thinking only well of one’s collective. A subject-in-outline, insofar as it is not whole or a closed off subjectivity, is best open to this sort of integration and redefinition of subjectivity.

Embodied reflective spaces mean that the past is not only engaged with through fact checking, such as learning facts about the atrocities committed by one's nation. Rather, such facts need to be substantiated with the deeper and emotional elements, for example by learning how one's forefathers and -mothers were involved in such atrocities, and how such involvement and the way they dealt with (or did not deal with) affects the following generations. I believe that such an emotional involvement requires that those people that inhabit embodied reflective spaces are subjects-in-outline. Only if one remains a subject-in-outline or a non-whole subject, can one go beyond the facts of past atrocities, and feel the emotions connected to it. If one is a whole or closed-off subject, even when confronted with the deeper and more uncomfortable (while emotional) elements of one's nation's past, one cannot take those in and thus uses defense mechanisms to cast them off.

I believe the most important spaces for engaging with feelings of guilt are educational spaces on all levels. All adults, but in particular those who educate the new generations (which includes parents), must have tried to work through the past and confronted their own feelings of guilt, otherwise they will not be in a good position to educate a new generation to confront collective feelings of guilt, in order to take responsibility for past crimes and make sure such crimes are not repeated in the future.

Furthermore, it would also be helpful for educators to have some training in psychoanalysis, to get a deeper understanding of the guilt/defense complex, and what to do when they encounter it. When teaching children and youths about a country’s criminal past, educators must have an understanding of psychoanalysis to be able to teach the affective side of such a past, to counter an education where children and youths merely learn about the facts and are left on their own to deal with their emotions around it, which can be manipulated in the wrong direction if not addressed.

As Adorno puts it, (u)ndiluted knowledge of Freudian theory is more necessary and relevant today than ever. The hatred of it is directly of a piece with anti-Semitism, by no means simply because Freud was a Jew but rather because psychoanalysis consists precisely of that critical self-reflection that makes anti-Semites vivid with rage (Adorno 2010: 225). Unfortunately, it is precisely such hatred of psychoanalysis that one encounters in educational contexts in both Europe and the United States.

Embodied reflective spaces can help the new generation understand that they have unpleasant feelings for something they are not responsible for in an immediate sense, and why this is so. An example of such an embodied reflective space was my recent talk about the book at Columbia University. The students in the audience opened up about their own repressed guilt feelings or the ways they are repressed in the various countries they were from, and this required a response from me more than challenging or defending an argument. My training as a psychologist and my psychoanalytic background helped prepare me to deal with the students' confrontation with repressed guilt, while also handling the responses of a few students who reacted defensively to keep their feelings of guilt repressed, which was despite my background in psychoanalysis a difficult task.

I believe that it is necessary for post-crime generations to not shy away from difficult conversations with friends and colleagues about this topic, even if this generates defensive mechanisms, which one can better deal with when trained in psychoanalysis. Although such defense mechanisms can lead to a breakdown in conversations and long-standing relationships, because of the vehemence of affect it generates, there are also other examples, such as the example with A., which was my first example.

Although A. was displaying strong defense reactions at our first conversation, I kept the conversation about this topic going whenever I went back to Austria and met with her. In a most recent one in November 2019 to Austria, I showed her the concentration side-camp that had existed in Vöcklabruck, the town where we grew up and which was located at the exact place where we both went to high school, and which we never learned about in all those years until our Matura. That we never learned about it outlines the defects of the Austrian educational system, and underlines the necessity to continue having difficult conversations about it with friends, colleagues and family members to help engender a working through the past in a country where the past and the guilt feelings connected to it has been so effectively evaded. Only this can provide the hope that such a past is not repeated (which seem more likely than ever given the political developments of the far and extremist right in Austria, and globally). That A. is now less defensive and more willing that engage with this topic underlines the centrality of embodied reflective spaces, and continuing these difficult conversations.

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1. I am currently working on this topic in a new book titled *Analyzing the* *Far Right: A Psychoanalytic and Feminist Critical Theory Perspective* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Here we can see how the concepts of "guilt feelings" and "responsibility" are intimately connected and the ways in which guilt feelings, which are considered to be strictly belonging to the private are connected to the public realm of politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)