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# 'Too little, too late'? Compensation and family memory: Negotiating Austria's Holocaust past

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**Abstract**

Monetary compensation to victims of historical injustice is a worldwide political and academic theme; however, it is rarely seen in the light of family memory. This article, based on evidence from 90 semi-structured interviews, explores the impact of official policies on individuals and families involved in the reparation procedures set up in the 1990s by the Austrian state for the victims of National Socialism. It focuses on the meaning of the oft-voiced complaint 'too little, too late', arguing that there is a difference between what the phrase has commonly been understood to mean (a critical evaluation of the compensation efforts) and what analysis shows it to mean in the frame of 'family memory'. The article argues that while this *narrative of anger* at first sight boycotts a dialogue, it also has an important performative and empowering function as well as an integrative function within the 'post-memory' generation. Exploring the mutual influence of compensation reception and family memory will help to theorize the role of anger in reconciliation processes.

**Keywords**

Austria, National Socialism, compensation, anger, family memory, post-memory

*Too Little, Too Late* is the title of a video made in 2008 by the artists KlubZwei that investigated the meaning of recent compensation efforts on the part of the Austrian state vis-à-vis former Holocaust victims. The title of the video echoed the scepticism expressed by their interviewees, Jewish women living in London, foremost second-generation descendants (KlubZwei, 2008). I found similar reactions in my research – anger, disappointment, and resignation – when interviewing victims of National Socialism who had applied for compensation from the Austrian state: they had hoped to receive full public acknowledgment of their mistreatment at the hands of their former 'home-country', but were still left waiting for it 60 years later.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, it is a rather sweeping statement, or as one of the applicants put it herself: 'If I say "too little too late" it's a platitude' (Evi I.). At the same time, this platitude is linked to a certain paradox, as pin-pointed well in one of the video statements:

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Austria offers today probably the best compensation. One could also say: Austria can afford it, as 75 per cent of those who fled are already dead. It must be very frustrating to hear it again and again, it's too little, too late. I can imagine that from the Austrian viewpoint, the question arises: Yes, what should we do instead? So it will probably remain forever trapped in this paradox: Whatever you do, it will never be enough. (Reininghaus, 2009: 236)

While these criticisms specifically target Austria's compensation policies, they can also be read as a symptom of the fundamental tension between official efforts and subjective experience that is inherent to the nature of compensation itself. This article takes the apparent incompatibility between the official and the private as its starting point, and goes on to argue that there is a difference between what the phrase 'too little, too late' is commonly understood to mean (a critical evaluation of the compensation efforts), and an analytical reading of this narrative in the framework of 'family memory'. I maintain that this *narrative of anger* also fulfils certain functions for individuals, both in the familial setting and in their interaction with the state. On the basis of the author's empirical research – including interviews with various victims of National Socialism, as well as with their children and grandchildren, concerning their experiences with the receiving of compensation from Austria in recent years (1995–2010)<sup>2</sup> – this article will give voice to typical reactions on the part of Jewish interviewees to clarify how family dynamics are intertwined with compensation policies, which will help to theorize the role of anger in reconciliation processes.

## The idea of compensation

Before the Second World War, losing states paid reparations to the victor as a form of economic compensation. But today, states also pay compensation for 'injury' sustained by individuals and their descendants. In the international context of post-1989, a tendency developed to acknowledge the 'guilt of nations' (Barkan, 2000), not only in states in transition (such as South Africa, Rwanda, Chile), but also in long-established democracies in Europe that were still addressing their Holocaust past.<sup>3</sup> This development, which was linked to the increased power of the discourse of human rights, also enabled victims of communism and colonialism to articulate their histories and to make their own claims (Rothberg, 2009; Torpey, 2006). Against this background, the idea arose that memorializing historical injustice and 'giving voice' to the victims in court procedures was not in itself enough, but that reparations are also needed to restore victims' dignity and to create future peace and stability (De Greiff, 2006; Laplante and Theidon, 2007). In the ensuing 'age of competing claims, multiple histories, and plural perceptions' (Olick and Coughlin, 2003: 56), the German *Wiedergutmachung* – in his memoirs, Adenauer called it a 'material symbol' of a will to repair suffering (Keilson, 1986: 126) – often figured as the preferred model for negotiating justice. Today, the idea of recognition needing a monetary complement is manifest in the Rome Statute (1998), which gives victims of gross human rights violations the right to request reparation at the International Criminal Court in The Hague (Keller, 2007; Wemmers, 2009), embracing the so-called Van Boven/Bassiouni Principles, which have been negotiated since the early 1990s to harmonize victims' rights, and which set a new internal standard for reparations when adopted by the UN in 2005 (Malcontent, 2009).

Monetary compensation and its value as an instrument of recognition and reconciliation is still mainly discussed, however, with reference to the victims themselves and only rarely with reference to their families, while we know that the German *Wiedergutmachung* (Frei et al., 2009) produced personal emotion across generations (Kestenberg, 1995). One general belief, shared across the generations, is that compensation is never a neutral payment, but is always linked to the stigma of buying one's way out of guilt, and to the attempt (mostly undertaken by states) to involve victims

in a 'reconciliation scenario' that seeks to draw a line under the past by converting 'guilt into debts' (Jabloner et al., 2003: 457; Weigel, 2007). Accordingly, there is some consensus in the literature that while monetary compensation is 'special' among transitional measures in terms of 'potential direct impact on victims' (De Greiff, 2006: 1–13), it nevertheless only functions as such in conjunction with other measures such as apologies. Conversely, where compensatory measures are absent in a transition-process, they are nevertheless often demanded. Such was the case with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which advocated truth-telling above compensation, following Archbishop Desmond Tutu's slogan 'Revealing is healing' (Wilson, 2001). Critics of the TRC stressed instead that – for healing of the individual rather than the country, to borrow Molly Andrews words (2010: 150) – compensation is needed alongside truth-telling (Laplante and Theidon, 2007). Charles Maier has argued that a price must be put on incalculable harm, to help end the suffering by drawing a line under the past: 'to remove the losses from the realm of the sacred ... into the realm of the politically negotiated ... making the priceless loss one that can be priced', which gives 'consent to a degree of closure' (2003: 297).

With this dominant discourse on closure and forgiveness, taken over by the UN who proclaimed 2009 the 'International Year of Reconciliation', the reconciliation scenario gained a prominent position during the 1990s in discussions of transition (Torpey, 2006). Following Thomas Brudholm (2008), one could ask how much room this dominant discourse allows for narratives of anger such as those analysed in this article. By using the example of Austria and exploring whether it makes a difference to receive a *lump sum* or an *individually calculated payment* – thus to put a precise price on the harm – this article explores the significance of money to more symbolic forms of recognition, and the extent to which the set-up of payments determines how these policies are perceived by victims and their descendants.

## Austria's compensation politics

On the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Second Republic in 1995, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism was established. To date, more than 31,000 survivors of Austrian origin and/or people living in Austria in 1938 have applied for this symbolic lump sum payment of around €5000, supplemented by an additional €7630 for the loss of household goods, tenancy rights and personal valuables. Many of the applicants, most of them living abroad,<sup>4</sup> saw this as Austria's 'first real step' towards acknowledging guilt for the crimes of National Socialism (Strutz, 2006: 256) even though various post-war reparations had already been made. Austria had passed laws relating to restitution (1946–49), the welfare of victims, compensation for the loss of property, the sale of heirless properties to support survivors, and the creation a fund to support survivors abroad. But these laws often had short deadlines and were not systematic; nor was their implementation victim friendly (Jabloner et al., 2003: 452). That there was in fact reluctance on the part of state institutions to take reparations seriously was revealed in a statement from 1948 by Interior Minister Oskar Helmer: 'I am in favour of dragging this matter out'. Helmer's statement, used as the title of a book by Robert Knight (1988), reflected Austrians' self-image as the first victims of Hitler because of the country's annexation to Hitler Germany in 1938. This victim doctrine also functioned politically to negotiate a state treaty in 1955, which ended the Allied occupation and made Austria independent and neutral at the beginning of the Cold War.

It is only in the wake of the 50th anniversaries in the 1990s that a revision of Austrian wartime history and its attitude towards reparations occurred. These anniversaries – commemorating the 1938 annexation and the night of the pogroms, the end of the war, the liberation and the state treaty – revitalized specific memories. These memories were also co-initiated by political scandals such

as the case of Kurt Waldheim, who became president of Austria in 1986 despite his controversial Nazi past. However, the moment that scholars today see as the turning point in Austria's dealing with its past was the public apology offered in the Austrian Parliament by Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in 1991. In his speech to the Nationalrat on 8 July, Vranitzky spoke of a 'shared responsibility for the suffering inflicted on other human beings and peoples, not by Austria as a state, but by individual Austrians' (Uhl, 2007). He later repeated these words in Jerusalem in 1993, and this paved the way politically for the establishment of the National Fund. Many applicants see this acknowledgement of guilt as the Fund's main value: 'They actually said, "Yes we are guilty." ... They could no longer keep saying: "We were invaded"' (Peter S.).

When Peter S., one of the applicants interviewed for this study, filled in the National Fund application in 1995 he was convinced that Austria still owed him something. He was also aware that negative publicity for Austria's right-wing movement had made a reaction from the government a matter of urgency: 'I think the Austrians had to do it; with the European Union they had to do it, with the publicity about Waldheim and Haider, they had to do it.' The Swiss Nazi Gold Bank affair, the new attention to art theft (initiated by the confiscation of Schiele paintings in 1998 in New York) and particularly the class action suits in the USA against German and Austrian firms: all this served to exert the international pressure on Austria to do more for the victims of National Socialism and their descendants. Consequently, the Austrian government established an Art Restitution Law (1998) for returning art objects stolen from public collections, a Historical Commission (1998–2003) to document the huge scale of the property transfer implemented by the Nazis and the shortcomings of the post-war years, and various Funds for victims of National Socialism. In 2000, the Reconciliation Fund was established, providing lump sum payments to former forced labourers from Eastern Europe. This was followed by the General Settlement Fund in 2001, in which – unlike the lump sum the 1995 National Fund paid to survivors – the material losses of Holocaust victims were to be specifically calculated on an individual basis; this time also acknowledging heirs. The General Settlement Fund was the result of long negotiations between the Austrian and US governments, victim representatives and class action lawyers; the parties finally agreed upon the allocated amount of US\$210 million in the Washington Agreement, signed on 17 January 2001 (Eizenstat, 2003). This agreement addressed both the issue of stolen assets and deficiencies in social welfare benefits withheld from Austrian exiles living abroad. It enabled applicants to receive such social benefits as victim assistance or the possibility of re-buying pension months to be able to receive the minimum state pension from Austria; and many applicants used the compensation money in this way. For decades, such benefits had been linked to having Austrian citizenship, but since 2005 this has no longer been a pre-condition (Embacher and Ecker, 2010: 32).

The General Settlement Fund was a very ambitious attempt to individualize victim stories and to provide individuated compensation for stolen property, based on a detailed 28-page questionnaire concerning categories such as education, bank accounts, mortgages, stocks, bonds, businesses, policies, real estate and movable property. The length of archival procedures and various legal and administrative complexities meant that it would take almost a decade to deal with the more than 20,000 claims submitted. It quickly became clear that the Fund would not be able to meet all the claims. Thus, after having researched everything in detail and divided the amount proportionately among all the applicants, only part of the losses calculated could be paid out in the end, an outcome that would anger many: 'To be given only 15 per cent of what is owed, after so many years, is the final insult', wrote one applicant to the *Jewish Chronicle* (2007).<sup>5</sup>

Although this complex procedure was intended to provide the greatest possible justice by tailoring it to individual cases, it has not always served this purpose. The interviews suggest that the lump

sum offered by the National Fund was seen primarily as a general gesture of acknowledgment and an admission of guilt, while the individual compensation offered by the General Settlement Fund engendered instead a need for truth-finding and for an all-encompassing form of compensation. But the shortcomings of the procedure quickly became evident. Lengthy questionnaires confronted survivors with the details of their losses and the descendants with their lack of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> This individualized method also ended up raising nagging questions about equality of treatment: Why were some claims acknowledged while others were rejected? Why were only parts of the losses recorded in the archives? How was the loss of occupation, education or a certain life-style calculated so that one applicant received *this* amount and her/his neighbour received *that* amount? And when individual applicants did end up with the same amount, there too a sense of injustice was aroused: people felt cheated after they had provided all the documents and waited so long to receive an individual decision. But most of all, the delay in reaching a decision created suspicion and fuelled assumptions about hidden agendas and intentional deceptions and delays.

Given all these problems and the fact that many applicants were confused by the different procedures, it is all the more remarkable that the majority of those interviewed insisted on the importance of receiving individual treatment, one interviewee dismissing non-individualized compensation as 'pure communism at its worst'. Applicant Evi I., an 89-year-old woman now living in London, only became 'really interested' and active in the issue when the individual procedures started. For her and others, it meant the acknowledgement of their personal life story. They thought that the federal law prompted by the Washington Agreement entitled them to make this individual claim and even allowed them to sue the Austrian state, turning a matter of generosity into one of rights. However, legally speaking, the individualized and lump sum compensations had the same legal construction: both were voluntary gestures, not obligatory ones. But the change in public discourse, from symbolic gestures *towards* victims to legal demands *from* victims (Uhl, 2007: 244), combined with the establishment of individual procedures and the need to sign a disclaimer waiving any further claims on the Austrian state and its companies (effectively asking victims to draw a line under the past and their desires), created a sense of entitlement and the right to fight for a better result. As Evi I. put it, 'I have been active ever since', adding: 'I do not pretend not to want it.' As she indicated, many survivors in her circle of friends had been asked or convinced by their friends or children to fill in the forms. At least this is how they like to present it, because compensation deals with money and many survivors felt slightly uncomfortable with it; like Sophie R.: 'It is embarrassing, as if I am after the money.' Some feared revitalizing the anti-Semitic stereotype associating Jews and money. Others did not want to accept money out of pride, or out of fear of being degraded to the status of a mere petitioner. Others accepted it more easily, but many of them immediately gave the money to charity or to their children, demonstrating another way to deal with this ethical dilemma. While many applicants highlighted the gesture's value as a symbolic admission of guilt, others like Evi I. were suspicious as to whether the recent reparations had been done in the 'right spirit', whether they had been initiated by a political will within Austria, or were just due to outside pressure: 'All of a sudden the coffers were open! That was a purely economical and political move; I am a thousand per cent sure.'

## Narratives of anger

Reflecting this suspicion of political motives, members of the second generation were often much more argumentative and were often convinced that the only way to make a successful claim was to hire a lawyer or to be demanding and pushy. As a middle-aged business lady in London gently put

it, 'You need to have some aggression to fill in these forms' (Clare S.). In her case the aggression was based upon the lingering emotional presence of the past and the discomfort being addressed with the details of the documents. For others it was rooted in decades of denial: 'What hurt so much was that it was denied for so long. They needed a gun to the head to do anything' (Walter R.).

However, there are differences between second-generation applicants living in Austria and those living abroad. For many of the latter, Austria is no longer their 'Heimat'; this group takes a more critical view towards compensation. Those living in Austria, however, have been more willing to acknowledge these measures, as their daily life necessitates finding some peace. At least this was how Sandra I. explained the differences she saw in her own extended family:

Sure, my family lives in Austria; they must somehow have arranged it for themselves, to say this is okay now. In England people are much more hostile towards it. They feel that Austria has behaved totally wrongly. They find it much too late, and I can well imagine that they say 'I do not need this at all.' But for them, Austria is no longer a home.

This seems to be particularly true for those who were born in Austria but were too young to have developed nostalgic memories (the '1.5 generation', to use Susan R. Suleiman's term; 2006) – this distanced them not just from their family's past but also from their parents. In such cases there was 'no communication possible', according to one employee of the General Settlement Fund:

And in the generation which was born during the war or in exile, and which has no memory of Austria and no personal memories or ties, there is a crazy grudge against the country and the government and very explicit claims and very accusatory behaviour. They are not open to any explanations on the part of the Fund, as to why it is being done or why so late.<sup>7</sup>

The feelings that one was and still is being treated unjustly are articulated in many ways, but the preferred rhetoric is to blame Austria as a collective ('They got away with it', 'They did not apologize', or 'They delayed'). They call the post-war measures 'second Aryanization' and emphasize that their parents were treated for decades with cynicism, and blame the state for paying today 'too little, too late'. This *angry generation*, as I have called them (Immler, forthcoming), speaks up in the name of their parents, whom they consider to have been 'voiceless'. As I have shown elsewhere, this discontent with the Austrian compensation is closely linked to collective memory patterns, especially Austria's self-representation as victim, which has aggravated the family narrative according to which no substantial post-war reparations had been made, or that those that had been made had failed (Immler, 2009: 217). However, as I will argue here, those narratives of anger expressed by the 1.5 or second generation are also intimately linked to certain dynamics of family memory, as illustrated by the following dialogue:

- Father: What do I think about the whole thing [compensation]?  
 Were we treated fairly? No.  
 Has it made much difference to my life? No... .  
 They gave me the passport back, my citizenship, and I can vote in Austria.  
 Tell me, what good is it for? ...  
 The main good it is, is the pension.
- Son: It is awareness, which is important, make them aware what people did ...to the Jews, hopefully preventing the persecution of minorities, whoever they are.

While the father emphasizes that ‘reconciliation does not exist’, conceptualizing ‘forgiveness’ as a purely personal concept that can hardly be influenced by official means (Griswold, 2007), his son in his late 30s distances himself, like many members of his generation, from the specifics and the money issue, reflecting a ‘moral worldview’ that embraces memory politics as a universal value. He names Rwanda, and many other painful histories, thus exemplifying ‘multidirectional memory’, as Michael Rothberg has called it, whereby various memories create ‘unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity’ (2009: 5, 19). Such solidarity requires turning away from the past and towards the present, from a *therapeutic* discourse (compensation, pension) towards a *political* one (education, minority-rights). Where the father insists on individual treatment, the son refers to reparations as part of a ‘broader political struggle’ (Torpey, 2006: 162): for him the compensation is never ‘too late’. Peter S.’s anger at Austrian reparation measures, however, also has a performative dimension:

By being aggressive I was one of the first people to get money out of Austria in this country [UK]. I made such a bloody nuisance of myself; they just wanted to get rid of me ... I wrote to this poor man [a lawyer of the General Settlement Fund] every other day and gave him hell. He just wanted to get rid of me. If you carry on attacking, they want to get rid of you, even though they are solicitors.

Here, Peter S. presents himself as a successful claimant whose pushiness sped up his procedure, rhetorically transforming the lawyer into his inferior. By claiming that he was ‘not happy’ with the results, he adopts an oppositional stance, not by rejecting the measures as apparently many victims did (though unfortunately we don’t have numbers),<sup>8</sup> but by being argumentative. This allowed him to express his anger in front of his own family. After all, it was his wife who opposed his reacceptance of Austrian citizenship (‘my wife was going mad’), as in her view, accepting this symbolic gesture meant forgiving the Austrians, but compensation was unproblematic because it ‘only’ had to do with the ‘material aspects’ of the family’s life. This again allowed him to calculate the amount with interest rates and compound interest, turning the procedure into a game with fictitious numbers and reducing the symbolic (gesture) to the real (payments), thereby avoiding the personal dimension.

Here we can observe the working of what Marianne Hirsch has called ‘post-memory’ (2008): how the remembrance of past events affects those who have not experienced them themselves. We know from the extensive literature on the Holocaust that loss and pain have a strong imaginary presence in the minds of victims’ descendants. Loss and pain also shape expectations regarding compensation, for example, when the pictures long-imagined in the mind have more truth for the individuals than archival evidence (Immler, forthcoming). Hirsch has emphasized that this post-memory generation is in particular need of ‘familiar and familial tropes to rely on’ (2008: 124) to constitute certain ‘living connections’ between past and present, and between the generations. I suggest that this anger, articulated specifically by the 1.5 and second generation, can be read in Hirsch’s terms as a specific ‘familial trope’, a semantic or rhetorical figure of Holocaust representation typical of the ‘post-memory generation’ (2008: 104). Being angry about the compensation seems to be a fundamental element in the constitution of family memory regarding the Holocaust. Displaying their negative emotions grants the post-memory generation identification and solidarity with their parents or grandparents, which means that this anger can be read as a kind of familial performance.<sup>9</sup>

## Narratives of reconciliation

Those of the survivor generation who were old enough in 1938 to have a specific memory of Austria often reacted differently. When Austria offered its hand, many of them were happy to take it.



As my interviews reveal, those who applied to the General Settlement Fund also often welcomed other efforts in Austria to deal with its past. Survivors who spent a week with the Jewish Welcome Service in Vienna, walking through Vienna and telling their life story to pupils in their old schools, also tended to see this initiative as a 'kind of *Wiedergutmachtung*'. One son described the relief his mother had felt when Austrian schoolchildren listened to her life story. Survivors often mentioned one of the numerous neighbourhood projects in districts of Vienna where commemorative plaques or flowers are placed for 'former neighbours'. They highlighted memory-events initiated by private parties such as 'Letter to the Stars', an initiative in which since 2003 survivors were invited to participate in a letter exchange with Austrian pupils and then travel to Vienna to meet them and attend a remembrance ceremony at one of the main squares. Some historians and psychologists denounced the event in Austrian newspapers as pure show, a 'carnival', with a lack of pedagogic sensibility, and suggested that it even risked exposing the participants to re-traumatization (Mayr and Weißensteiner, 2007). This psychologization was answered by some survivors with outrage, rejecting to be seen still and again as victims, as 'pale wrecks who need protection' (Whiteman, 2007). Also participants such as Daisy N., as she related when interviewed, experienced it as emotionally exciting and satisfying: 'Sitting on the platform at Heldenplatz, surrounded by school children, I got the feeling that society had changed.' What gave her hope was less the 'late confessions' of the state than being able to witness generational change. The encounter, she claimed, was important. Similarly, her husband recalled his own 'formative moment' when, having met a stranger his age at a political demonstration, he told him his life story and thoughts on the importance of a personal apology, and received an apology in exchange.

It is this kind of encounter that survivors (and their descendants) recalled when they reported having felt some kind of 'recognition' or 'reconciliation', although they usually did so without mentioning those loaded terms. Their stories simultaneously describe and interpret such encounters with Austrians today, such as saying that recognition comes only through actual encounter. Similar as in autobiographical accounts, where having met one 'good German/Austrian' symbolizes hope, the encounter is often an intrinsic part of memory-projects, which enables former victims to be spectator and actor at the same time. The encounter is acted out *for* them, and *with* them, thereby raising feelings of involvement and agency. This exemplifies the extent to which memory is a form of social action. It relies on acts of remembrance, on framing and on performing. And it is dialogic, addressed to someone. As memory scholars have pointed out, 'collective memory is not a matter of collecting, but of continuously performing' (Rigney, 2008: 93). Similarly, compensation is a social act because it needs a gesture, a dialogue or an encounter – a particular type of performance – in order to be experienced as compensation.

The importance of such personal encounters is also evident in the applicants' references to 'their' person in charge at the compensation Fund, or when they indicated feeling that they had a personal relationship with the General Secretary, who is Jewish, and is thus seen as representing the victims and the state alike. In this way a personalization and individualization of the compensation experience occurs. It creates the vision of a real dialogue-object to which you can talk and complain, which is important when you want to see yourself as an active dialogue-partner and not as a helpless applicant awaiting a decision. Many survivors sought out exactly such a dialogue when they visited the Fund to tell their life story or attended one of the General Secretary's public speeches 'to hear what they want to hear' (Alice A.). Still others, often descendants, used these forums to complain and to perform their discontent.

## Conclusion

These examples emphasize how compensation needs an intersubjective experience (a dialogue or encounter) in order to be experienced as recognition. The whole communication process

itself is at least as important as the specific outcome of the proceedings. Those who applied for compensation often felt a need to get involved, practically or through narrative. In this sense, individual payments did make a difference.<sup>10</sup> Less because of the exact calculation of amounts, but rather because of the concomitant communication process; this created not only a sense of entitlement, but also a power-position: the power to decide whether to accept or reject the offer, or to fight for a better result. Although filing a claim for compensation is often more about wanting answers and recognition rather than compensation as a ‘primary purpose’, and although the language of law in reparations politics often fails to correspond to individual stories of loss and grief, and to deal with moral injuries (Leydesdorff, 2010: 135, 129), these examples show the extent to which compensation laws and procedures can at least make it possible to perform subjectivity by entering a dialogue. This possibility, as this article stresses, is twofold. It involves both engaging in and resisting dialogue. However, instead of interpreting this anger as a failure of the Austrian compensation, the articulation of rejection is also what gives it substance. In light of this, the popular phrase ‘too little, too late’ – as the video of the same title by the artists KlubZwei – should not be read only as direct criticism of the Austrian compensation model (the amount of money, its very belatedness, its procedures and its lack of political will), but also as a *performance of anger* that has important functions for the individual (preserving moral integrity) within family memory (creating solidarity and identity) and vis-à-vis state authority (providing empowerment and agency). In this sense, a narrative of anger is ‘socially productive’ (Brudholm, 2008). While this performance of discontent initially boycotts the (reconciliation) dialogue, it also serves to create relationships, not only within families, but also with the outside, between accuser and accused.

However, the performance of anger on the part of the post-memory generation also has its downside: it may prolong dichotomous thinking about the victim–perpetrator dialectic, perpetuating clear identities that, although they have been the precondition for today’s memory-society, are also its ambivalent legacy. While for the individual and family dynamics the narrative of anger can fulfil important functions as such, those narratives often complicate a dialogue in society and consequently any reconciliation process by enforcing opposing identities; an inherent dilemma of memory and reparation politics.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

1. The video *Too Little, Too Late* synthesizes from a reparation-perspective some of the interviews made for the film *Things. Places. Years* (KlubZwei, 2004, 70 min, Production: Amour Fou; Distributor: Sixpack), which shows more generally how experiences of emigration, diaspora and genocide are passed on from generation to generation. Some interview-passages are printed in: Reininghaus (2009: 234–7).
2. This study, performed by the author between 2007 and 2009, covers about 90 qualitative semi-structured interviews with applicants from Austria, the Netherlands, England and Argentina, including members of different NS-victim-groups (Jews, Sinti and Romanies, partisans and others) and different generations. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently analysed using textual and discourse analysis. All quotes without further reference are from those interviews.
3. This global spread of reparations politics is explained by some as the triumph of liberal Enlightenment and a result of a new international morality (Barkan, 2000), while others see it as a substitute for a progressive politics that is linked to the collapse of socialism, the decline of the nation state (Olick and Coughlin, 2003: 52, 56; Torpey, 2006: 5) and the celebration of human rights as ‘last Utopia’ (Moyn, 2010).

4. Most of the applicants for the National Fund (1995) came from the USA (35.4% = 14,404 applicants), Austria (21.8%), Israel (13.7%), the UK (10.6%), and Argentina (1.5%); similarly for the General Settlement Fund (2001). The rest are divided up between more than 70 countries. See National Fund (2008–09).
5. The present article does not address the role of the General Settlement Fund in returning pieces of art or real estate to its owners on condition that it was publicly owned in 2001 and that no (proper) compensatory measures had been taken after the war.
6. For descendants this individual procedure often meant a re-discovery of family history, confronting archive truth and family speculations (Immler, forthcoming).
7. Cf. interviews by the author with 10 employees of the Austrian Funds in 2008–09.
8. Reparations only reach those who want to be addressed; to summarize an article by employees of the National Fund (Lessing et al., 2006).
9. When descendants articulate their difficulties in growing up in a post-Holocaust-family, their anger about failed compensation is also one about spoiled childhoods and directed towards their parents.
10. However, individuated compensation often also causes problems such as creating hierarchies between victims (De Greiff, 2006: 6) or disadvantaging marginalized groups (Keller, 2007: 212–15).

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