



Jennifer M. Lind. *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. x + 242 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4625-2.

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Published on H-German (October, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Contrition and Reconciliation in International Relations—A New Field of Historical Research?

This work, which aspires to combine political science models and historical analysis, focuses on the consequences of states' attempts to atone for atrocities committed in World War II. Lind's central question concerns how a state's policy, or lack of one, of apologizing for past misdeeds either helps or hinders its relationship with former enemies. In Lind's study, apologies include obvious government statements, but also the ways in which a society remembers and commemorates victims of past crimes for which it was responsible. Some of these gestures might be visual, such as memorials; others are rooted in everyday life, such as history textbooks. She categorizes what a state stands to gain from displays of contrition as either material, such as military power, national wealth, and geographical or territorial advantage, or ideal, including participation in international organizations. She is most interested, however, in the topic of remembrance and the perceived right to determine how to narrate the past. Her main case studies draw on the relationships between post-World War II Japan and Korea on the one hand and Germany and France on the other. Lind also briefly discusses Australian and Chinese reactions to Japanese modes of remembrance and the British impression of Germany's memory of its past. Focusing on these relationships as typical, she necessarily omits a number of other cases of the aftermath in international relations of violence inflicted by one nation upon another in the last sixty years. On the basis of her studies, she develops a program for further research with the aim of a normative theory that will describe the role of positive

and sincere atonement through acts of remembrance in international relations. Grounded as it is in the discipline of international relations, this ambitious undertaking—which would have been difficult to fulfill even in a much longer book—falls well short of presenting a convincing historical argument.

The bulk of the book consists of two chapters that discuss collective memories and public examination and commemoration of the war in Japan and Germany after 1945. Lind divides her analysis in phases that extend to the present. After these major chapters, smaller sections follow on the extent of change over time in Korean and French perceptions of their neighbors' memories and commemorations of past crimes. Lind is particularly interested in the role played by new public commemorations and images of the past in attempts at reconciliation between former enemies. In these parts of her work, Lind distinguishes between government policies and broader social reception and contrition.

Her first hypothesis is that contrition shown by a state leads to reconciliation with its former foes. Her evidence does not support this assertion, however. Lind repeatedly compares West Germany's successful demonstration of contrition to Japan's less successful one, but attempts to display contrition were present in both cases. This assessment flatters Germany's politics of memory, but such monocausal analysis does not draw out the nuances between two rather different cultures. Such a blunt dichotomy might be more acceptable if this topic had not

already been addressed in historical literature. Ian Buruma, for instance, has differentiated between a Japanese culture of shame and a German one of guilt.[1] This potentially helpful methodological framework is not mentioned in Lind's study.

Local differences are important in understanding the process of reconciliation, for—as is clear from Lind's work—states face a significant challenge in garnering domestic support for apologies offered to other countries in the pursuit of improved international relations. For instance, when Japanese governments apologized for past crimes (especially those involving so-called comfort women), strong domestic opposition in Japan to this policy endangered the potential for meaningful reconciliation between that country and its former enemies. Moreover, while contrition may be sufficient for reconciliation in some cases, Lind cannot demonstrate that it is absolutely necessary, for, as she maintains, some instances show that “international conciliation is possible—even in the aftermath of horrible crimes—with little or no contrition” (p. 3). This situation, she contends, obtained in Franco-German relations in the 1950s and early 1960s, before the conclusion of the Elysée treaty in 1963. Moreover, many examples also show that contrition may not even be sufficient for reconciliation. Good international relations do not always result from apologies, even those made for major past offenses.

Lind attempts to lend support to her argument by discussing likely counterarguments to her conclusions in each chapter, but this strategy fails. Not only are some of these anticipated criticisms valid; others are immediately evident. For instance, Lind ascribes human emotions to the entity of the nation, which is moreover seen to function as one body: “The Korean people shared their leaders' dismay” (p. 89); “West Germany and France would transform their relations from hereditary enemies to warm friends” (p.101); “the French did not discuss German remembrance during negotiations over unification” (p.141). Even without viewing the historical evidence used here, it is unlikely that any entire populace has ever simultaneously shared the same opinions as its leaders. To put it another way, it is absurd to suggest that every German hated every French person and vice versa, with all parties doing an about-face so that all German and all French citizens became transnational bosom buddies.

Other problems with the book develop from the uneven manner in which Lind analyzes a government and its people. For instance, Lind conflates governments' and politicians' declarations and public speeches with official

state policy. Although she admits to this problem, the concession is not reflected in her argumentation. The dichotomy between state action and the broader public is also problematic. Although Lind cites government statements to an almost excessive degree, she often characterizes broader public opinion via apparently arbitrary citations that have only questionable applicability when deployed as generalizations. One such example comes from the French newspaper *La Libération*. Lind writes, “The French media decreed June 6, 2004—the sixtieth anniversary of the Normandy landings—the last day of World War II,” suggesting that this single claim stood for all of French opinion (p. 150). She recycles this single source at least once in a later argument. Given that the role of the public is so important in this book, the imbalance in treatment of the actors in question calls her findings into question.

The author is well aware that “misdeeds” or crimes in World War II, whether committed by the Japanese or Germans, were local events that arose from contingent circumstances, and not exclusively or primarily directed against Korea or France. Admittedly, gestures of reconciliation are often staged in the locations of these crimes. Nonetheless, she relies heavily on isolated instances of contrition or apology to imply a larger argument about these gestures. Photos of Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer in Reims, and François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl at the World War I battlefield of Verdun are claimed to stand in for national attitudes about wartime actions. But the extent to which these media events were connected with specific crimes and apologies for them, or even contrition, remains unclear. Genocide and most of Germany's other major war crimes were committed in the East—on Polish and Soviet soil. France played only an indirect role in these atrocities. In this particular case, too, the problem of French complicity and perception of it in the French public remains. While historians established German responsibility for the deportation of French Jews to extermination camps some time ago, the extent of Vichy involvement remains underresearched and the French public has long shown an allergy to discussion of it. Seen in this light, the juxtaposition of an assumed French cult of remembrance that accepts the role of the French as victims with the perpetrator state of Germany, which must say “sorry” for its past, is too simple. Lind's conclusions as regards those two nations would have been more convincing if she had analyzed the tangled French-German history of remembrance. France (like Korea) is too often regarded only as a victim nation. Any conclusion drawn on this basis ig-

nores historical context.

Some of the problems in this book stem from the international relations approach that Lind tries to enlarge methodologically. The approach itself is laudable, but the codification of variables and the manner in which Lind develops, tests, and confirms theories leads to many historical errors. I cannot address the East Asian cultures of memory that Lind describes, but I can state that gross generalizations and outright mistakes are numerous in the case study of Germany. This problem may result in part from Lind's reliance on English-language single-topic studies. Although these works are in and of themselves sound, Lind too often turns to a single authority on any given topic. Her contextualization thus remains problematic, and her argument does not take into account ongoing debates. In this vein, for example, she makes a number of odd representations about the *Historikerstreit*. Moreover, German and other names are often misspelled, and Lind identifies some figures with incorrect titles or positions, which undermines the scholarly impression made by the work. One particularly troubling example is her misunderstanding of Nazi racial ideology. It is incorrect that "Hitler's racial views privileged and even admired the French" (p.103). Lind also claims, without explaining her reasoning, that German debates about unification and the eastern border in the 1950s "should have elevated French distrust of West Germany" (p. 115). She thus seems to imply that a public taboo on discussing the expulsion of millions of Germans would have made for better German diplomacy. Other mistakes abound. A short list includes the claim that, by 1960, "French and West German power exhibited rough parity" (p. 116); that the Waffen-SS members buried in Bitburg belonged to "an elite German army unit used for 'cleansing' operations" (p. 132); and that the German government chose the day of unification, October 3, as the national holiday after reunification "to protect the pogrom's anniversary" (p. 147). Not all of these points are central to Lind's argument, but they highlight her tendency to generalize on a great quantity of information of dubious

quality.

What remains? The scholarly aim of this book poses a serious challenge to historians. Certainly, it is an impressive endeavor to try to enlarge international history by incorporating "soft" factors such as contrition and memory. But to combine this objective with evidence that is not historically accurate in order to make generalizations about history is to satisfy oneself with crude results and at best questionable conclusions. Memory matters and remembrance play a role in international relations, but can one really ascribe contrition to states? To be sure, states usually attempt various degrees of reconciliation after wars. But concepts such as apologies or contrition, at least as they are employed here, are too vague and too country-specific to be useful instruments for the generalized comparative analysis of complicated interactions between states and societies. The title of the book suggests that Lind finds apologies important to diplomatic relations and points to mountains of national and international data to prove it. But successful comparison requires cases where comparisons are meaningful and in which similarities between cases are significant. The fact of having committed war crimes during World War II and attempted to atone for them on the state level is too slim a basis for such analysis. Ultimately, the social and cultural environments in these cases are too different for this line of investigation to be successful using methods of political modeling. These countries' internal dynamics and even political cultures after World War II vary too much to produce credible arguments about the role of remembrance in international policy. Intriguing though this topic is, better evidence is needed if such an approach is to contribute new fields of study in the history of international relations.

Note

[1]. Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994).

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Citation: Jost Dülffer. Review of Lind, Jennifer M., *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.

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