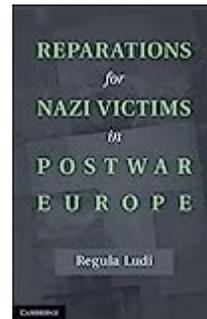




Regula Ludi. *Reparations for Nazi Victims in Postwar Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 270 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-02397-0.



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Published on H-Judaic (November, 2013)

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Three Approaches to Reparations: Nazi-victims in Post-war France, Germany and Switzerland

During the last two decades, attempts for repairing the past have become an important issue both for political actors and for scholarly inquiry, and sometimes the borders between the groups are blurred. Historian Regula Ludi has written an important study on reparations for Nazi victims in postwar Europe with the aim to show how reparations evolved in different national contexts since the late 1940s as specific responses of modern democratic societies to the challenges embodied by unprecedented mass victimization (p. 3). Her analytical approach distinguishes between the notion of "reparations" as opposed to state-to-state "reparation," thereby focusing on a "victim-based response to mass suffering" (p. 8). In contrast to the mainstream of existing research, she does not consider the German case of *Wiedergutmachung* as the gold standard of reparations for Nazi victims. Rather she aims at analyzing diverse institutions, discourses, and practices of reparations in three countries—France, Germany, and Switzerland. This approach allows her to describe a European model of postwar reparations, which in her view is closely related to

the rise of individual human rights after World War II. Ludi's well-written study is structured in five parts. After outlining in an initial chapter the rise of the politics of reparations in the 1940s as part of attempts to create a new postwar world order, she describes in three chapters the cases of France, Germany, and Switzerland before finally drawing general conclusions on a European model of talking about victimization in the last chapter.

In her first chapter, Ludi summarizes the well-researched topic of the emergence of Nazi victims as a problem of postwar planning. She emphasizes the semantic shift that altered the well-established meaning of war reparation from a purely state-centered perspective to a perspective that also included individual Nazi victims. In her view, the problem of stateless displaced persons played a key role for this process, since their plight was no longer manageable within the limits of traditional state-oriented war reparations. The quite modest share that was allocated for them in the Paris Reparations Agreement of 1946 set a precedent, however, without providing an encompassing solution of the problem

of Nazi victims.

The following chapter on the French case is probably the strongest and most original part of the book. As Ludi shows, the case of Nazi victims in France, where legal measures for this group were enacted even earlier than in Germany, was dealt within the framework of the war pension system of the interwar period. As a consequence, the male fighter became a normative measuring stick for all claims for redress. So while resistance fighters were in a privileged position to assimilate to the model of the sacrifice of the drafted soldier, both Nazi victims and deportees were in a much more complicated situation. Given the predominant interest to reestablish after 1945 the French republic with its emphasis on the principle of *laïcité*, the uniqueness of the Jewish fate could only play a minor role. Ludi rightly avoids assessing the postwar situation in France according to current Holocaust sensibilities that are profoundly suspicious of any denial of Jewish particularity.

Ludi's analysis of the German case is not equally convincing. She draws very much on a conventional narrative that shows German restitution foremost as a succession of scandals. So, while looking at the French case, she highlights the price for the inclusion of Nazi victims in the republican pattern of heroic sacrifice. Looking at the German case, she emphasizes that the story of Nazi victims had been mostly one of exclusion from the national collective of suffering and compensation. Certainly there is some truth to this interpretation, yet in Germany after 1945 other war-damaged groups like war-disabled persons also had to struggle with a harsh climate. A major problem of Ludi's analysis of the German case, however, results from her concentration on the initial phase after the Second World War. Other than in France and Switzerland, where after early steps in the aftermath of the war the issue of reparations for Nazi victims was more or less dormant for several decades until it became important again in the 1990s, in Germany it was continuously in the making. Consequently, Ludi does not adequately explain the changes that took place in the field of German restitution after the 1950s, and her short outlook to the 'forgotten-victims' debate of the 1980s, which she arguably describes as a human rights shift, remains rather superficial.

In the next chapter, Ludi shows that she is much more familiar with the case of Switzerland, where at least in a domestic perspective the problem of Nazi victims remained quantitatively very limited, which also meant,

that this group did not have any voice throughout the political process. Convincingly she argues, that in the Swiss case restitution for Nazi victims was mostly handled as a matter of damage control by limiting debates on the responsibility of Switzerland for acts of Nazi persecution. It resulted in attempts to shift the problem from a political to an individual level, which worked quite well until Switzerland was shaken by a new wave of restitution claims after the end of the Cold War.

The last chapter puts the three case studies in a common perspective to point out the novelty of claims to redress as a cultural and political pattern for dealing with the historical experience of mass violence in postwar Europe (p. 186). One might object to the appropriateness of the term 'Europe,' since all her cases refer to Western Europe, and hiding the Eastern European side of the story means more than an incidental omission, especially given the fact that most Nazi victims came from this area. Within these constraints, Ludi arrives at important conclusions regarding the specific nature of postwar reparations, which she describes as a 'particular European innovation: the significance of money and the individual character of redress' (p. 200). Both points, however, provoke discussion. It seems that the author has retrojected developments of the 1990s to the postwar era—or one might rather say, has retrojected a fashionable critique of neoliberalism. At the same time, it is also disputable whether the European reparations story was as individualistic in its nature as Ludi describes. A major source of reparations claims for Nazi victims were Jewish collective claims that found their organizational expression chiefly in the Jewish Claims Conference—which significantly only plays a marginal role in this book. It seems that in her laudable attempt to get rid of the dominant narrative, which is very much focused on the German history of *Wiedergutmachung*, Ludi develops a new teleological argument that frames the history of European reparations for Nazi victims as part of the rise of (Western) individual human rights, which is a rather ambivalent story anyway.

All in all, Ludi has presented an impressive study that rearranges existing literature in a thought-provoking manner and that also offers numerous new empirical insights. In many respects, this book is highly stimulating, even when she overextends the conclusions drawn from three Western European case studies to a European model of restitution. Ludi has opened new paths into a complicated historical process, and she has proved that it will be worthwhile to go further.

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Citation: Constantin Goschler. Review of Ludi, Regula, *Reparations for Nazi Victims in Postwar Europe*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. November, 2013.

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