

6 Thomas U. Berger, *War, Guilt & World Politics after World War II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Conclusions

Varieties of Penance

The forgoing chapters have told the story of how the governments of Austria, Germany, and Japan have struggled for over half a century to deal with the consequences of terrible histories that continue to haunt them to this day. The evolution of their official historical narratives, along with the changes in their collective memories and the domestic and international tensions that have arisen over historical issues have been traced in some detail. Now, in conclusion, it is appropriate to step back from the particulars of the empirical cases and ask what their stories have told us about the dynamics of the politics of history in general.

Five sets of conclusions stand out. First, with respect to the determinants of the official narrative, we can see that no one theoretical approach alone – be it of the Historical Determinist, Instrumentalist, or Culturalist variety – can provide an adequate explanation for any particular case. Instead, as the Historical Realist perspective developed in this book suggests, a combination of the explanatory factors emphasized by the different theoretical schools is needed to understand the evolution of the official narrative and the politics of history over time.

Second, with regard to the causes and consequences of tensions over history, the evidence suggests that tensions over history are not only the product of material interests but that differences in historical views themselves can be a significant determinant of conflict. Although countries do not fight wars directly over history, the tensions generated by different interpretations of historical issues can degrade the quality of interstate relations in ways that make conflict over other issues – such as disputed territorial boundaries – more likely.

Third, the three cases suggest that there are certain common problems associated with the pursuit of historical justice in the aftermath of regime change. Whereas to some extent such problems were the product of the missteps of the American occupation and the pressures of the cold war, they were rooted in more fundamental dilemmas associated with trying to deal with past transgressions in the context of societies struggling to come to terms with the political

and economic challenges of reconstruction. These problems constitute a syndrome that can be fairly described as the “tragedy of transitional justice.”

Fourth, the cases also suggest that there are powerful new forces making history and official narratives increasingly contentious and difficult to avoid. Although the effects of these forces are unfolding at different rates in different parts of the world, they appear to be global in scope and suggest that governments around the world are likely to be confronted with these types of issues for some time to come.

Fifth and finally, the Historical Realist perspective on the history problem suggests that policy makers confronted with conflicts over the establishment of an official historical narrative would do well to adopt a hard-nosed approach that correctly assesses the costs as well as the benefits of attempting to achieve reconciliation.

In what follows, each of these five points will be elaborated upon in turn.

Historical Realism: The Eclectic Determinants of the Official Historical Narrative

This book started out with a synopsis of three approaches to this topic: Historical Determinism in which the narrative emerges from the actual facts of the particular history (“what really happened”); Instrumentalism in which the outcome is determined by the political interests (domestic and/or international) of the narrators; and Cultural Determinism in which the outcome is to a considerable degree influenced by the general culture of the society to which the narrators belong. This distinction is useful; however, in light of the empirical record reviewed here, it should be clear that any explanation based on only one of these approaches will fail to explain the formation of the official narrative.

The Historical Determinist position is correct in emphasizing the lasting impact that the historical experience of World War II had on Germans, Austrians, and Japanese as well as on the nations that fell victim to German and Japanese aggression – such as China, South Korea, and Poland. More than sixty years after the end of World War II, groups of survivors and their supporters continue to push for the recognition of their suffering and for compensation, even if they had been ignored for decades, as in the case of the Korean comfort women. The same can be said for groups that represent the perpetrators of atrocities themselves – such as veteran groups in Austria or the bereaved families of fallen soldiers in Japan. The historian Carol Gluck has described such groups as the “energizer bunnies” of the politics of history – they keep on going and going. Especially in democratic societies, such groups cannot be ignored, and they can have a decisive impact on the formation of the official historical narrative, both in terms of pushing it in a more contrite direction, or conversely, in suppressing contrition.

At the same time, Historical Determinism by itself cannot provide an adequate account of the development of the official narrative. This can best be demonstrated through comparison. Take the cases of West Germany and

Austria. The same facts about Nazi crimes prevailed in both countries after 1938 (when Austria became an integral part of the Third Reich); however, vastly different official narratives were constructed by the two governments after the war and sustained for decades to come. The differences between the two countries' official narratives can be readily explained through reference to Instrumental factors: From the outset of its existence, the Federal Republic was subject to overwhelming external pressures to apologize and make restitution – external pressures that overcame the powerful sense of victimization existing in German society at the time. Austria – and to a lesser extent Japan – were relatively insulated from such pressures and, consequently, developed less penitent official narratives. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, when external pressures for Austria and Japan to apologize began to build, their governments too began to adopt more contrite narratives.

Instrumentalism thus can explain a great deal about why states develop the kind of official narrative that they do. It is particularly useful for explaining shifts in the official narrative. In every instance examined in this volume, calculations of national or partisan interests informed the government's policies on history. This is as true of the Federal Republic, which usually (and deservedly) is praised for its sincere efforts to come to terms with the past, as it is of Austria and Japan. However, the West German decision to pay compensation to the victims of Nazism in the West, but not in Eastern Europe, can only be understood against the background of the cold war. President Willy Brandt's decision to offer apologies to the East was motivated by the exigencies of Ostpolitik and detente as well as by domestic German politics and the Social Democratic Party's need to reach out to the new generation of student activists emerging at the time. The long-delayed payment of compensation to former slave laborers in Eastern Europe was a product of the end of the cold war as well as by Germany's interest in forging closer relations with the post-Communist nations on its Eastern borders. Although German contrition may have been sincere, it was clearly a calculated sincerity. Instrumental calculations were, if anything, even more prominent in shaping the development of the Austrian and Japanese official narratives.

There are clearly limitations to the Instrumental approach as well. Even the most imaginative and repeated retelling of the past cannot deny certain facts completely, whatever political interests might suggest. The former inmate of a concentration camp will be disinclined to ignore what happened to him or her regardless of what the official narrative contends; a veteran will continue to remember the self-sacrifice of his comrades who lost their lives fighting bravely against what they saw to be a vicious and implacable foe. Cultural factors can trump calculations of interest as well. This can be seen particularly clearly in the case of Japanese-South Korean relations. Rarely have there been two nations that have so much to gain from cooperation. Rarely, however, have efforts to cooperate been as difficult to achieve and maintain as between Korea and Japan because of the deep-rooted biases and animosities that continue to color their relations.

Cultural factors as well played an important, if often subtle, role in the cases under examination, although not necessarily culture as it is often thought of – that is, as a set of deep-rooted, unchanging cultural traits. Despite the many very real cultural similarities between them, West Germany and Austria developed strikingly different official narratives during the cold war: the Germans a relatively contrite one, the Austrians an impenitent one. Despite the supposed differences between Japanese “shame” versus Western “guilt” cultures, the Austrian historical narrative in its blithe impenitence was closer to that of Japan than to that of their cultural kinsmen, the Germans.¹

This does not mean, however, that cultural forces have played no role. The cases we have looked at underline the importance of understanding that culture is not an inert constant. Cultures change. Specifically, cultures are shaped and reshaped as different narratives come to be widely accepted. The changed culture then becomes sedimented in the politics and broader culture of a given society and consequently hard to change. This is part of the paradox of the “sincerity of insincerity”: Even though historical narratives are a social construct and are often adopted for instrumental reasons, they can have a very real, powerful emotional impact once they are commonly accepted.

Over the course of the cold war a *culture of contrition* came to be established in Germany. German guilt was continually reaffirmed in public rhetoric and ritual and widely diffused in the population both through state-controlled and private media. This does not mean that given changed circumstances a different, much less contrite culture, might not come into being; however, this will not be easy – the culture of contrition will resist a revisionist narrative. President Weizsäcker's 1985 speech had greater resonance with broad swathes of the German public than the arguments of conservative historians like Andreas Hillgruber because it was more consistent with the nearly forty-year general trend of contrition and its correspondingly political rhetoric. Conversely, in Japan there formed a *culture of incomplete contrition* in which gestures of contrition by the political leadership had to contend with widespread passive resistance and even open opposition by right-wing groups.

As we have seen in the case of Austria, however, it is possible to change the cultural discourse on history. Austria's discourse on history was even more impenitent than Japan's. However, over the course of the 1990s, it came to display German levels of guilt. Such a dramatic change, however, requires a major sustained effort and is likely to generate resistance. The Austrian government

¹ This is not to say that deep-rooted cultural tendencies have played no role in the shaping of the Austrian, German, and Japanese historical narratives. The terms in which issues of responsibility are spoken of are deeply shaded by cultural meaning and nuance. Instead of guilt (*kokai* in Japanese), the Japanese have been inclined to talk of “war responsibility” (*sensōsekinin*), which does not have the strongly moral and religious connotations of the German word for guilt (*Schuld*). The German churches have played a particular role in the debates over war guilt that no Japanese religious institution has, whereas Shinto theology has deeply colored the way in which Yasukuni is debated and understood. Their role, however, is not as central as an earlier generation of scholars – beginning with Ruth Benedict – once believed.

began to adopt a more penitent official narrative already in the early 1990s, but in so doing, it helped to feed the rise of the blatantly revisionist Jörg Haider and the FPÖ. It took nearly a decade of international pressure and fierce domestic debate before a societal consensus in favor of a penitent stance on history could be forged. In the case of Japan, where the international environment provided fewer positive reinforcements for the adoption of a penitent narrative, the shift has been more difficult, and it has been more arduous to overcome entrenched resistance.

More broadly, and this is a point to which we will return to later in this chapter, there exists considerable evidence that beyond the specific culture of discourse on history that develops in a given country, there is a broader global culture that has a very real and significant impact on the politics of history on the national level. This global discourse on history developed over the course of the cold war and has been diffused across national boundaries through a broad variety of mechanisms. In some cases, they are cultural artifacts, such as the American-made TV miniseries *Shoah*, which was broadcast in both Austria and Germany in the late 1970s. In other cases, they are the work of scholars, such as Iris Chang's *Rape of Nanjing*, which inspired history activists in China to redouble their criticisms of Japan.

Transnational networks of activists, such as those that sprang up espousing the cause of the comfort women in Japan and Korea or the slave laborers in Europe, have also played a role, as has the international media, which has helped spread their message to a far wider audience than they could ever have reached on their own.

In the case of Germany, the politics of history evolved in tandem with the development of the global culture of contrition, and therefore, the impact of global trends are more difficult to discern. The influence of the international discourse can be seen more clearly in Austria and Japan, where public views of their respective histories began to shift in the late 1970s and 1980s toward a greater receptiveness to contrition in a way that an interest based, an Instrumentalist approach, would have difficulty accounting for. For instance, in 1970, after the Austrian Freedom Party member Karl Öllinger was forced to resign over revelations concerning his past in the Waffen SS, Socialist Prime Minister Bruno Kreisky's decision to appoint another former Nazi in his place was met with little public protest. In contrast, in 1986, after Kurt Waldheim was elected federal president, the outcry was so great that Socialist leader Fred Sinowatz was forced to resign and his successor, Franz Vranitzky, tolerated Waldheim only because of the exigencies of coalitional politics. Between 1970 and 1986 something important had shifted in public attitudes toward the past, especially on the Left, that could not be attributed simply to changes in Austria's geostrategic landscape or the electoral calculations of the Socialist party.

Clearly, there are limits to the power of this global cultural discourse. For one, countries can resist the global discourse. Austria, for instance, was out of step on the issue of Nazism for many, many years. Likewise, it is clear that not all historical injustices are treated equally in the global discourse. Allied

transgressions during the war, beginning with the atomic bombings, have not been the object of global opprobrium. Beyond the legacy of World War II, there are many historical injustices that have been ignored or only partially addressed. For instance, the former European Imperial powers have by and large evaded the issue of the responsibility they may bear for colonialism. The darker sides of the history of Communism remain much disputed. The same Chinese history activists who focus on Japanese wartime atrocities often blithely ignore the much more recent misdeeds of the Chinese Communist Party. Indeed, as the Chinese example underlines, local elites frequently seize on the global discourse and use it to pursue their own interests – be it to protect or indirectly criticize Chinese communism. The list could be extended almost ad infinitum. There is a lot of potential guilt in the world. Despite these caveats, however, the evidence here strongly suggests that such a global discourse exists and that it has effects.

The forgoing observations have both practical and analytical implications. We will return to those relevant to policy later in this chapter. For analytical purposes, however, it is important to recognize that any account of the development of any specific country's official historical narrative will by necessity be eclectic in character. Simple but common explanations, such as "The Japanese show little contrition because of the atomic bombings" or "Germans are inclined toward guilt because of the immensity of the Holocaust" are both inadequate and misleading. However, although the determinants of the official historical narrative may be eclectic, this does not imply that there cannot be a systematic division of labor between the different approaches in analyzing the development of the official historical narrative. The following four-step schema is a first cut effort to develop such a systematic approach on the basis of Historical Realism.

- 1) The analyst should begin with the historical events themselves and recount how they were remembered on a societal level in the time period immediately after those events occurred.
- 2) With the next step the analyst should focus on the instrumental calculations that political elites make in choosing the kind of official narrative they adopted in the period immediately following when the events occurred. Of particular interest in this context is to show how conflicting pressures – between material calculations of interest and the different ways in which the recent past are regarded on a societal level – are resolved. The way in which specific versions of history are linked to other policy objectives – such as integration in the West, internal reconciliation and rebuilding, and so forth – deserve special attention because such linkages can have a lasting impact and may serve to anchor a particular historical narrative in the political system.
- 3) The analyst must then trace the development of the official narrative over time and look at the extent to which the views it espouses win – or fails to win – broader acceptance among elites and the society at large. Over time, certain views are likely to become embedded in the political

culture – e.g., Germany's culture of contrition or the trope of China's century of humiliation.

- 4) Finally, the analyst must note and analyze the implications of changes in the international system and domestic politics – for instance, the rise of a new generation, the coming to power of a new political party, the development of new issues (such as the pressures of reintegrating East Germany into the Federal Republic or adopting military missions going beyond territorial defense) – that have the potential to generate new pressures for change. Such critical junctures in a nation's history allow the analyst to gauge the degree to which official narrative has become institutionalized in the political system and the broader collective memory of the society. At the same time, it is in such periods that the historical narrative evolves and changes in potentially new ways.

The Domestic and International Impact of History and Contentions over Historical Issues From a Historical Realist Perspective

Beyond sorting out the determinants of any given official historical narrative, the other central question that has motivated this study has been to investigate the conditions under which history becomes the object of political contention and to gauge the broader impact of such tensions over the past when they do emerge. Here again, the data support a Historical Realist approach, namely that a multiplicity of variables – Instrumental but also Historical Determinist and Culturalist – feed conflict over history. In many instances, battles over history are simply reflections of clashes of interest over other issues. To the extent that countries are in conflict over resources, territory, or other concrete interests, it may be only natural that they invest their animosity with extra emotional depth by citing differences over history.

To the extent, however, that particular understandings of history are embedded in the memory of individuals and the political culture of a society drive the kind of official narratives that they adopt, the official narrative itself may have a causal effect on conflict that goes beyond what other considerations would suggest. To put it another way, the more people believe in a particular historical narrative, the more it can itself be a source of conflict. Although states and groups of people may not fight wars directly because of differences over history, the evidence reviewed here strongly suggests that because people are attached – for personal as well as cultural reasons – to particular historical narratives, historical issues can have a disruptive impact on domestic politics and interstate relations that can set the stage for conflict later on.

The independent impact of the historical narrative is perhaps most visible on the level of domestic politics. One of the best examples comes from a comparison of the German and the Austrian cases. In the Federal Republic, the stigma attached to the Nazi past made it impossible for any mainstream political party to openly appeal to any organization or political group that was associated with Nazism. In contrast, for the better part of half a century, the

Freedom Party in Austria effectively held the political balance of power and both the left-wing Socialists and the more conservative People's Party actively tried to court its support despite its roots in the prewar Nazi movement. There is no obvious structural reason for this discrepancy. The proportion of ex-Nazis was not any greater in Austria than in Germany, and the issues that the Freedom Party capitalized on – such as anti-immigrant sentiments and populist dissatisfaction with the clientalism of the major parties – existed just as much in the Federal Republic as in Austria. Nonetheless, politicians in Germany went to great lengths to prevent the emergence of a political force resembling the Freedom Party, and when on occasion such formations did emerge in the Federal Republic, they were isolated and soon withered away. The most obvious difference between the two countries lies in their very different conceptions of history and in the very different moral as well as practical lessons that they drew from the past.²

The influence of historical memory and the official historical narrative on international politics may be most clearly observed in the enormous difficulties that continue to beset relations between Japan and South Korea. Despite the many common interests the two countries share and despite the many social and economic ties that bind them together, historical issues have time and again had an amazingly disruptive effect on their ability to cooperate. Of course, there are also instances in which their objective interests clash. A Realist might point out that South Korea, as a continental power, is far more exposed to the military threat posed by China and North Korea than Japan is. Thus, South Korea is likely to be more sensitive to any changes in Chinese or North Korean behavior than Japan is, and this fact alone should generate tensions between Seoul and Tokyo. Likewise, a liberal might be inclined to argue that Japanese and Korean firms are fierce competitors on global markets and that that competition could be expected to translate into sharp pressures on their governments to seek advantage for their own country's producers at the expense of the other. Nonetheless, similar differences have characterized the strategic relationship between Germany and France, however, these differences have not translated into intractable territorial disputes or prevented the two sides from forging one of the strongest and most enduring partnerships between any two major powers. Although, obviously, various factors make the relationship between Germany and France different from the one between South Korea and Japan, it is almost impossible to overlook the role of historical memory and the official narrative in ameliorating tensions in the case of Europe and exacerbating them in the case of Asia.

In these and other instances, the argument here is not that historical memory rooted in actual historical experience and embedded in evolving cultural discourse shaped outcomes entirely independent of instrumental calculations of interest. Political leaders and elites were generally aware of the possible costs

² This is a point that has been made with great persuasiveness by David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past*, op. cit.

and benefits of conflicting or reconciling over history and acted accordingly. Nonetheless, the existence of these broader societal trends crucially shaped the way in which leaders and nations calculate their interests and their ability to implement their plans. Of course, President Roh Moo Hyun exploited anti-Japanese sentiment to bolster his sagging poll numbers; however, he was only able to do so because there already existed powerful anti-Japanese sentiments deeply embedded in the Korean national identity waiting to be tapped.

On a very general level, it is possible to view the official narrative as resting on a more or less stable equilibrium of interests and beliefs about history (be they grounded in historical experiences or in the cultural discourse on history). To the degree that there exists a disjuncture between official narratives and either interests or historical memory, there are likely to be tensions over history. When a shift occurs in the constellation of interests and/or the societal discourse on history, these tensions may increase, creating the possibility for domestic or international political conflict. The rise of the student movement in Germany in the 1960s, for example, created a powerful incentive for the Left and the Social Democratic Party to reopen the issue of German responsibility for the Holocaust. There then followed a powerful and vitriolic controversy over history that led to demonstrations, bitter parliamentary debates over issues such as the extension of the statute of limitations, and the destruction of political careers. In Asia, the pluralization of Korean and Chinese politics in the 1980s, as well as the PRC's new emphasis on a more nationalist version of history, increased regional sensitivity to the Japanese official historical narrative, setting the stage for first the 1982 textbook controversy and subsequently the 1985 crisis over Nakasone's trip to the Yasukuni shrine.

Although in both Europe and Asia governments were ultimately able to reign in the passions that were unleashed by disputes over history, those disputes were often costly and disruptive. In Europe, Austria found itself at least twice diplomatically isolated, first during the Waldheim affair between 1986 and 1991 and then again – more briefly but more dramatically – after the Freedom Party joined the governing coalition in 2000. Germany as well found itself embroiled in a protracted diplomatic dispute with Poland, which spilled over into EU-level diplomacy during the Brussels conference of 2008. Both Germany and Austria benefited from being embedded in a regional system of institutions that provided powerful incentives to harmonize their official narratives with international political expectations and offered an effective forum for resolving disputes when they did emerge.

In the case of Asia, there were no institutional structures comparable to NATO or the European Union. Thus, there was less incentive for Asian countries to harmonize their official narratives and historically grounded disputes. Moreover, when such tensions did emerge in Asia, they were potentially bigger and more difficult to manage. Issues that in principle should have been manageable – and had been manageable in the past – such as the Dokdo/Takeshima and Senkaku/Diaoyutai island disputes took on a magnitude far beyond any of

the European cases that we examined and potentially could have escalated to the level of militarized conflict.

The Tragedy of Transitional Justice

A third set of conclusions that emerges from the cases we have looked at concerns the great difficulties involved in pursuing historical justice in the aftermath of wrenching systemic changes. Despite the considerable differences between the Austrian, German, and Japanese experiences in the immediate postwar period, the problems that were encountered in trying to deal with the legacy of the past were broadly similar. This suggests that the difficulties they faced were inherent to the situation they found themselves in.

There is, today, an international movement demanding that the horrors of the past be seriously confronted. The movement has become a central component of the larger campaign in support of international human rights and is actively promoted by a plethora of international nongovernment organizations as well as by important elements in the media, the churches, and academia. All over the world this international movement has led to conferences, truth commissions, redress movements, and even trials (the latter sometimes resulting from claims of “universal jurisdiction” by courts in Spain, Belgium, and elsewhere). The call is for a public accounting for all past atrocities, followed by solemn acts of apology, the incorporation of the victims' perspectives in the official narrative of the state, and the payment of compensation.³ The Nuremberg trials and, to a lesser extent, the IMFTE are often pointed to as important precedents by the advocates of this movement. The successful reintegration of Germany and Japan into the international community after World War II and the establishment of democratic systems in what once had been brutal authoritarian systems are frequently advertised as proof that such forthright transitional justice policies can offer practical benefits.

The problem with this argument is that the empirical facts do not fit this tidy version of German, Japanese, and Austrian history. In the three cases analyzed in detail in the preceding chapters, transitional justice was at first imposed by the victorious Allies. The Nuremberg trials and those of the major Japanese war criminals are paradigmatic; however, all three cases underline the limits of this type of formal jurisprudence. There emerged powerful domestic political resistance against “victors' justice,” with public sympathy for at least some of the defendants. There were also serious criticisms of the courts in question: Just what kind of law was being applied? Were some laws invented ad hoc

³ Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations*, op. cit.; Robertson, *Crimes against Humanity*, op. cit. See also Thomas Risse, Stephen Roppe, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *The Power of Human Rights International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge, 1999); and Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

overwhelming. Internationally, it legitimated Austria as a morally respectable country. Domestically, it provided cover for the reentry into politics of parties representing the old German nationalist sentiments, which could now parade as Austrian nationalists and avoid the legal strictures against "renewal of Nazi activities." Among other things, this made possible anti-Semitic rhetoric in Austria that would not have been tolerated in Germany.

Austria would furnish an ideal case for Santayana's famous dictum; however, what actually happened during the decades of the victim narrative hardly supports Santayana's view. A stable liberal democracy had been established, as had a robust market economy – in a country that after 1918 had been widely viewed as being politically and economically unsustainable. For the first time in history, there developed a strong sense of Austrian national identity (as against the old identity of being German in a multinational empire). For example, in European value surveys more Austrians said that they were "proud to be Austrian" than Germans confessing pride at being German – a remarkable historical reversal. A Jew – Bruno Kreisky – was elected to head the government and was widely popular. Austria reacted courageously to the events following the Hungarian revolution of 1956 (only a year after the departure of Soviet troops from Austria) and again to the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia, both times risking Soviet wrath by accepting large numbers of Hungarian and Czech refugees. And in the 1970s, it became a major gateway allowing the exit of Soviet Jews to the West. Austria may have forgotten the dark chapters of its past, but it certainly did not repeat it.

Other cases may be added to an anti-Santayana argument. Japan, newly redefined as a peace nation, succeeded in getting along with its Asian neighbors by emphasizing its peaceful and democratic features (though in recent years it proved to be less successful in smoothing over the horrors of the war). France rebuilt its national pride by exaggerating the scope of the resistance and minimizing the extent of collaboration with the Nazi occupation (including the collaboration of French authorities in the deportation of Jews from France).⁴ The list could be easily extended. In sum, Santayana's famous dictum may well apply to individuals – a restatement of Freud's notion of the "return of the repressed" – but there are good reasons to be skeptical of its applicability to collectivities such as nations and states. It is possible that Machiavelli's idea of the useful lie may serve better in understanding the behavior of such collectivities.

Of course, one would need to look at a broader range of cases to determine how robust these findings really are; however, even a cursory examination of other cases suggests that similar problems seem to be endemic to the transitional

⁴ See Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Eric Conan, Henry Rousso, Nathan Bracher, trans., *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past* (Hannover, NH: Dartmouth Press, 1998). For a useful overview, see Richard Goslan, "The Legacy of WW II in France," in Richard N. Lebow, ed., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

justice enterprise. For instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that dealt with the crimes of the apartheid regime in South Africa has been widely hailed as a successful case of transitional justice; however, it too has exhibited some of the same problems that beset the Austrian, German, and Japanese cases. Its *modus operandi* had features reminiscent of a Protestant revival meeting – confession of the crime, expression of repentance, followed by an act of forgiveness. (Perhaps one should not be surprised by this: On the Commission sat an Anglican bishop and a prominent Calvinist theologian.) The accused had to recite the details of their crime, demonstrate that the motive was political rather than personal, and express regret. If these conditions were met, amnesty could follow (although the granting was at the discretion of the judges – in some cases the apology was judged as insincere or the crimes so egregious that a trial followed anyway).

Some of these procedures had a farcical character. Thus, in an effort at even-handedness, the Commission held hearings about crimes committed by the anti-apartheid forces as well as those committed by the supporters of the old regime. In the course of one of these, Winnie Mandela was examined about a murder committed by her bodyguards, presumably with her knowledge if not by her command. She was quite willing to acknowledge the act, but she explained it as an unavoidable side effect of the struggle. She would not express regret. This created a dilemma for the Commission: Unless she showed a willingness to repent, there could be no amnesty – and there might be the politically untenable spectacle of Nelson Mandela's ex-wife on trial for murder. In addition, Winnie Mandela had a large following on the left-wing of the African National Congress who might have been alienated by a conviction. So Bishop Desmond Tutu, who was chairing the hearing, kept pressing her to express contrition for her role in the affair. Finally, with obvious reluctance, Winnie Mandela agreed that she was sorry (though it stayed unclear whether this was an admission of guilt on her part). The bishop was visibly relieved, and amnesty could be pronounced. One positive result of these hearings was generally conceded: They provided a public recognition of the suffering of the victims, providing a very therapeutic catharsis. Was this justice? The accused walked out of the hearings as free citizens, without having to fear any further steps against them. Some of the victims would have preferred prosecutions.⁵

As in Germany, post-apartheid Africa made a serious attempt to confront the moral implications of the past; however, as in the post-1945 cases that have been examined here, the South African effort to confront the past soon ran afoul of the practical need to reintegrate society. Not only was Winnie Mandela spared, so was Chief Buthelezi of the Zulus, whose followers were responsible for large-scale massacres in the last years of the apartheid regime. Likewise,

⁵ For a devastating account of the Mandela trial, see Martin Meredith, *Coming to Terms: South Africa's Search for the Truth* (New York: Perseus Books, 1999). For a broader look at the politics of the historical justice issue in South Africa, see Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

some of the senior Afrikaans leadership – most notably former South African President Pik Botha⁶ – refused to cooperate with the Commission but were left unpunished. Instrumental calculations of political expediency repeatedly trumped the quest for justice.

Similar dynamics can be observed in many other cases – in Latin America or in post-Communist Europe. Either amnesty was declared during the transitional period – as in Spain after Franco or Chile after Pinochet – or what efforts that were made soon ran into serious difficulties – as in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall or Rwanda after the Rwandan genocide.⁷ In many of these cases, years later efforts were made to come to terms with the past. Spain today, for instance, is in the throes of a painful reexamination of the horrors of the Spanish Civil War and the authoritarian period.⁸ In each case, there are significant differences stemming from the unique histories and the varying political circumstances within which these debates over the past unfold. In each case, however, broadly similar problems soon emerge: The complexities of history and human psychology dwarf the capacities of the judicial system; the practical necessity of reintegrating the old elite tends to trump the desire for a reckoning; deeply rooted popular resistance to accepting any moral responsibility makes the implementation of contrite historical narratives – especially in the immediate wake of a political transition – extremely difficult. Only with the passage of time do societies seem to have the capacity (or perhaps the luxury) to reengage with the moral implications of the past. In this sense, transitional justice seems very much a tragic enterprise – a noble project, often pursued with great courage and vigor at its outset but destined by its very nature to failure – at least in the short term.

The Rise of Discord over History – Sooner or Later We Will All Be Sorry!

Whatever difficulties may be attendant upon every effort to come to terms with the past, the cases we have looked at also suggest that the past is becoming increasingly salient on a global level. The quest for historical justice is not purely a European or Western phenomenon but is very much present in Asia (and Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East) as well. Although it may be possible to put off questions of historical justice in the short term – as in Austria and Japan after World War II, in Spain or Chile in the 1970s, or in

⁶ Botha was fined and given a suspended sentence by the Truth Commission, but the sentence later was overturned on technical grounds by the South African High Court.

⁷ On some of the problems afflicting transitional justice efforts in Rwanda, see Helen Hintjens, "Reconstructing Political Identities in Rwanda," and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, "We are Pretending Peace; Local Memory and the Absence of Social Transformation and Reconciliation in Rwanda," both in Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, eds., *After Genocide: Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁸ Carolyn P. Boyd, "The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617:1 (May 2008), pp. 133–148.

Russia and the PRC today – in the longer run the spreading global culture of contrition seems to make apologies for past injustice almost inevitable.

What drives this increased salience of history on a worldwide scale? Of course, as we have seen, the particulars of each country's domestic politics and international setting will have a critical impact. However, beyond case-specific factors, on the basis of the cases we have looked at here, it is possible to identify at least key critical elements that help generate powerful pressures to critically engage with issues of historical justice: the spread of international human rights norms; rising levels of economic, social, and political interdependence (what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have referred to as "complex interdependence"); and the spread of democracy.⁹

Time and again we have seen how international networks have played a vital role in putting issues of historical justice on the diplomatic agenda. The Jewish Claims Conference, which began its campaign to win support for compensation and restitution for the Jewish victims of Nazism already in 1951, is prototypical of the many organizations that followed. Backed by a sympathetic media and employing the increasingly refined and widely accepted language of international human rights, such organizations have been able to win public attention and political legitimacy for their demands around the world – particularly in democratic societies. The growing organizational capacity and density of these networks have increasingly become a factor in international politics, one that governments can ignore only at a cost.

However, although such groups may be able to focus attention on historical justice issues and make legitimate demands for apologies and compensation, the cases we have looked at suggest that by themselves they cannot generate sufficient pressure to bring about a shift in government policy. The second set of forces that has played a critical role in this connection is the increased interdependence of nations today. Japan's desire to improve its relations with its Asian neighbors was an important factor behind its decision to adopt – at least on a rhetorical level – a more contrite official historical narrative already in the 1960s when it set out to normalize economic relations with South Korea. Japan's increased economic stake in Asia led to further revisions in its official narrative in the 1980s and even more so after the cold war as Japanese officials sought to promote the creation of Asian regional institutions that would lock in patterns of cooperation.

Similarly, it was not until Austria began to prepare for becoming a full member of the European Union that the Austrian government finally began to make the switch to a contrite official historical narrative. The spread of human rights norms may have helped legitimate historical justice claims; the rise of complex interdependence gave those claims teeth.

The third and final factor that has made for the increased salience of historical justice internationally is the spread of democracy. Groups demanding

⁹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977).

justice find it easier making their voices heard in democratic or democratizing regimes than in nondemocratic ones. When China, Poland, and South Korea were authoritarian dictatorships, it was possible for the ruling elites to squelch their voices in the name of the national interest. When they democratized (or, in the case of China, loosened their control over the public discourse), various groups representing the victims of past injustices emerged to press their claims. Moreover, such claims tend to be viewed with greater sympathy in democratic societies when they are seen as emanating from genuine currents in the other countries' societies than when they are advanced on behalf of an authoritarian government. Chinese criticism regarding Japan's supposed impenitence tended to be dismissed when made by Jiang Zemin, the head of a Chinese Communist Party that maintained its hold on power through the ruthless application of force. Kim Dae Jung, on the other hand, with his background as a human rights activist and his status as a democratically elected leader, was in a better position to gain an audience for his views in Japan. Although the messy nature of democratic politics can make it difficult for leaders to respond to external pressures regarding historical justice issues because such demands are likely to trigger societal resistance, the spread of democracy also makes the increased occurrence of such demands almost inevitable.

To the extent that other countries become subject to similar pressures, we can expect a continued proliferation of demands for apologies and compensation. To the extent that dealing with such issues is difficult, such demands are likely to generate considerable controversy. As we have seen in the previous section, posttransitional societies are likely to find such demands especially difficult to satisfy. Even in nontransitional societies the complexities of history, the multiple instrumental calculations of interest that underlie the existing official narrative, as well as the inertia created by the extant historical political culture, are likely to make it difficult for governments to respond effectively to the growing international discord over the past. Sooner or later, it seems, we are all going to be sorry.

Policy Implications

How can governments best respond to conflict over the historical narrative when they emerge? Generally speaking, there are two very different strategies that can be pursued. The first is the strategy of damage control. This means making a few gestures to appease hostility, without making any fundamental changes in the narrative. This strategy was followed by Japan from the 1950s to the 1980s by using highly ambiguous apologies coupled with development assistance to demonstrate Japan's benevolent character. The above-mentioned pressures have made this strategy more difficult since then both for Japan and for other countries in general. Instead of being appeased by such token efforts, many Koreans and Chinese were incensed.

Although there may be reasons to want to go beyond just damage control, nonetheless, the virtues of damage control should not be underestimated. First, it is arguably a major philosophical error to think that gratitude is much of a factor in international relations. One may recall the exclamation of an Austrian foreign minister of the nineteenth century when asked whether Austria was not grateful to Russia for support against the Hungarian revolution of 1848 – "Austria will astound the world by its ingratitude!" Even countries that have pursued historical reconciliation for decades can find that when political circumstances change, gratitude is swept away, and the past can become once again a controversial issue – as the Federal Republic discovered to its cost when the Kaczynski government took power in Poland in 2005. Second, in many cases it may not be possible to pursue a more ambitious strategy of reconciliation. The requirements for pursuing a successful reconciliation strategy are stringent, and the potential pitfalls many. Most importantly, as the Austrian as well as Japanese cases have shown, it is possible for countries to work with one another for decades by papering over deep-seated differences in their official narratives. Palliatives are better than nothing.

The second strategy is the active pursuit of reconciliation. This strategy was pursued by West Germany from the beginnings of the Federal Republic – first with the countries of Western Europe and with Israel and the world Jewish community and then with Eastern Europe. Despite occasional setbacks, it has been very successful on the whole. Although against the background of the cold war it may appear that the nations of Western Europe had no choice but to work together to rebuild their war-shattered economies and face up to the Communist threat from the East, in actuality cooperation was difficult to achieve because of deep-rooted tensions over territorial and other issues and lingering fears of possible German revanchism. German apologies and compensation helped make the project of ever-deepening European integration possible and allowed it to forge a lasting partnership first with France and the nations of Western Europe and, after the cold war, with the countries of Eastern Europe as well.¹⁰ As a result, other European countries rallied to Germany's defense in 2007 when the Polish government demanded the Federal Republic make far-reaching concessions on the grounds of its history of aggression in World War II.¹¹ Even in Poland public opinion data from around the same period indicated

¹⁰ Jennifer Lind has argued that Germany managed to cooperate with France already in the 1950s, before it began to adopt a more sincerely penitent stance on the past. Although this is partially true, it is also an exaggeration. Germany had already begun to pay large sums in compensation to the victims of the Third Reich, and it continued trials of war criminals even after the Allied occupation had ended. If it had not made such penitent gestures – incomplete as that penance may have been – it is quite plausible, even likely, that the European integration process that began in the early 1950s and in earnest after the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957 would never have been able to get off the ground. Jennifer Lind, "The Perils of Apology: What Japan Shouldn't Learn from Germany," *Foreign Affairs* 88:3 (May/June 2009), pp. 132–146.

¹¹ "Der Stete Blick zurück im Zorn," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 23/24, 2007, p. 2.

relatively benign views of the Federal Republic, despite the tensions that existed between the two governments.¹² In contrast, Korean public opinion data from the 2001–2007 period showed that the average Korean developed a sharply more negative image of Japan as a result of their dispute over historical issues. Nearly three decades of sustained German efforts to improve relations with its Eastern neighbors had not been in vain.

The conditions that have to be met for a successful reconciliation strategy are quite stringent, however. There are at least five basic points:

- 1) There must be a powerful interest in seeking reconciliation on the part of the political leadership. The pursuit of reconciliation is bound to generate considerable political resistance, especially if it means adopting a more contrite historical stance and if it runs counter to the existing historical narratives that may exist on a societal level. Political leaders have to believe that reconciliation is in their own and the nation's interest. Only then will there be a willingness to override the political and emotional costs of the strategy, not to mention the willingness to invest the necessary time and energy. Put simply, reconciliation does not come cheaply.
- 2) There must be a degree of reciprocity – that is, a willingness by the designated victims to accept the apology. The Japanese case offers two very different outcomes of reconciliation moves. Kim Dae Jung, the democratically elected leader of South Korea, visited Japan in 1998. The Japanese government chose the occasion to issue a formal apology for Japanese crimes against Korea. The apology was formally accepted. There then followed a real improvement in relations between the two countries. In the same year, the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin visited Japan. He also put the history issue on the diplomatic agenda, albeit in very stark terms. However, not only did Jiang give no signal of his willingness to reconcile, but he also lacked the democratic legitimacy of his Korean counterpart. The Japanese believed that apology or no apology, nothing much would be changed. Thus, no formal apology was forthcoming.
- 3) There must be consistency across the various domains of the official narrative. Thus, rhetorical apologies will not convince if history textbooks in government-controlled schools continue to feature a narrative sharply at odds with the rhetoric – a chronic problem in Japan. Similarly, the rhetoric of contrition loses plausibility when leading Japanese politicians continue to make formal visits to the Yasukuni shrine (which, along with many other soldiers who died in battle for Japan, also contains the souls of several convicted class A war criminals). In other words, it is very unhelpful if a government is seen as speaking out of two sides of the mouth. More importantly, if a lasting political consensus is to be built in

¹² Mateusz Falkowski, *Meinungen der Polen über die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen nach dem Regierungswechsel in beidern Länder* November 2005, available at <http://www.isp.org.pl/files/20442810390940702001134394938.pdf> (accessed April 20, 2007).

favor of a contrite political narrative, it is necessary that the government does what it can to reshape the historical narrative as it exists on the societal level. Changes in educational policy and in the ways in which the society commemorates the past are prerequisites for such a successful transformation.

- 4) There must be a degree of coherence between government and grassroots actions, at least in a democracy. Put differently, the reconciliation effort must be bottom-up as well as top-down. Of course, in a democracy, government does not control the public manifestations of views divergent from its own. A reconciliation strategy will be helped if it is supported by significant actions of civil society – conferences, media programs, public diplomacy. Such actions will not be very effective, however, unless it is clear that the government supports them. Conversely, government efforts will have only limited plausibility unless it is clear that they have support from civil society.
- 5) A successful reconciliation strategy takes time. This follows directly from the preceding condition. The necessary coordination between government actions and public opinion cannot be orchestrated overnight. In 1951, when the Federal Republic signed the Luxembourg agreement on compensations for Jewish victims of Nazism, it accepted the rather humiliating stipulation that the agreement only settled the material claims against Germany. In the language of the text, it said specifically that no reconciliation between the two peoples was achieved by the signing of the treaty only that they could now begin “to walk the path of reconciliation together.” It was a long walk, but in time German-Israeli relations improved dramatically. Just as importantly, the Federal Republic's efforts to reconcile with Jews around the world underlined its penitent stance and helped it to improve its relations with its neighbors in Europe.

Not all countries at all times can pursue reconciliation strategies. Arguably, democratic countries are better positioned than nondemocratic ones because once a consensus in favor of confronting the past has been built, it enjoys greater legitimacy. Likewise, there needs to be a favorable alignment of international and domestic political interests to make such efforts successful. However, there is no reason to believe that reconciliation is a uniquely European or Western phenomena. There are signs that such a strategy could be implemented between Japan and Korea, for instance. When the basic conditions are met and leaders understand the dynamics of the history problem, it is possible – even probable – that other countries as well will “begin to walk the path to reconciliation together.”