German and Japanese attitudes toward the atrocities their nations committed during World War II are often contrasted as if they were completely different, but that is both too simple and somewhat misleading. Nevertheless, as I hope to show, one must start with the observation that the dichotomy has considerable merit. Then I will explain why, for the rest of Europe, recognition of what actually happened during that awful period has been quite similar to Japan’s evasiveness, at least until quite recently, and to a considerable degree, even now in parts of Eastern and Central Europe. This will lead me to conclude that an unwillingness to recognize the dark side of one’s national history is, after all, the rule rather than the exception.

A few years ago, Germany introduced a new schoolbook about the Holocaust for thirteen- and fourteen-year olds. It is a “comic” (or better, graphic) book, that is, a series of illustrations in which the characters speak in “bubbles.” The topic is hardly comic, as it features the life a German Jewish girl saved from death when a kind policeman intercepted her as she is about to get home from school. He tells her that her parents have been arrested, and that she should flee. She never sees her parents again, and survives Nazism to tell her grandchildren what happened. This is meant to get children to identify with the complexities of moral choice and personal responsibility when faced by the nightmarish regime that ruled their country from 1933 to 1945.¹ It is

hard to imagine a Japanese school assigning a book that would be so emotionally troubling to children of that age, or one that would call for so much open discussion about a terrible episode in their country’s history.

It is not that there are no Japanese eager to face their brutal World War II record, particularly on the left and in the Japanese Teacher’s Union. Yet, it is still possible for right-wing nationalist Japanese, including members of the parliament, to force the banning of a film about the Yasukuni Shrine. Right-wing threats can also force the cancellation of a meeting of the Teacher’s Union by a hotel where it was scheduled.\(^2\) Clearly, if there were no tolerance for this kind of intimidation by Japan’s leaders and public opinion, it would not occur. Germany also has right-wing extremists, but they are considered marginal, and such kinds of repressive occurrences are completely unthinkable in today’s Germany.

It is well-known that in the case of Germany, the Holocaust has been widely taught in schools for a long time, and that the public airing of films and television shows over at least the past three to four decades has deeply marked German thinking. The introduction of more personal, child-oriented graphic textbooks is meant to make children think yet more deeply about how they would react, not to soften or evade German guilt. West Germans recognized their guilt after World War II, promised never to do it again, taught their children about the horrors of the Holocaust, made those Germans who resisted Hitler heroes, and have long been accepted as reformed, good Europeans. This fact is reflected in (the now unified) Germany’s schoolbooks that downplay nationalism in favor of appreciation of a “more globalized and diversified world.”\(^3\) Germany’s attitude has contributed greatly to European unity. Japan, on the other hand, has generally been evasive about its brutality and is now still being accused


by the countries it victimized, particularly Korea, and most stridently, China. 4

It is not that Japanese schoolbooks tell lies, but rather that the subject of the war has not been strongly taught, and this has produced a public that generally denies Japan’s guilt. 5 This makes it possible for many, perhaps a substantial majority of the Japanese, to believe that the war their country conducted was a noble effort to free Asia of European colonialism, and that in the end they were victimized rather than having been the victimizers. South Korea, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia may be increasingly economically interdependent, but in some ways the acrimony over war memories seems to be undiminished.

While some Germans have sought to portray themselves as victims rather than perpetrators of the war, or as defenders of European Civilization against “Asian” (by which they really meant Russian!) barbarism, this has not gained wide acceptance in Germany. The issue was fought out in a very public way in what was called “the historian’s conflict” (Historikerstreit) in the 1980s. 6 In the end there has been no revival of any major effort to exonerate the Nazis, least of all at the elite level. Even the racist skinheads who sometimes use Nazi symbols are no more than marginalized, angry, anti-immigrant, lower class youths with virtually no major political or intellectual support. 7

All this is true; however, the major comparative book on the subject by Ian Buruma is much too sophisticated and subtle to fall into the trap of presenting so simpleminded a contrast. 8 It shows how

5 Hiroshi Mitani, “Writing History Textbooks in Japan,” in Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider (eds.), History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia: Divided Memo-
6 Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German Na
8 Ian Buruma, The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).
complicated a story both German and Japanese postwar behavior and attitudes really have been, and how in both cases, they have hardly remained frozen. There have been many strands of opinion in both cases, and some attitudes have changed over time. Furthermore, once the entire story of World War II in Europe is examined, the problem becomes far more complex, and far less dichotomized, because in Europe, too, it has taken many decades for reality to be faced, and that process is far from complete to this day.

Looking into more detail at German memories of the war as a single trajectory toward repentance and admission of wrongdoing runs into several problems. The first of these is that the German story is very much embedded in all of Europe’s interpretation of what happened. For a long time, until some ten to twenty years ago, depending on which European country we are talking about, this was the most troubling aspect of how World War II was remembered. The countries occupied by Germany in Western Europe, without exception, constructed stories that blamed everything bad on Germans and a fairly small number of virtually criminal and deviant collaborators. It was more complicated in Central Europe and the Balkans where the Germans had various allied states (Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, along with Italy that occupied parts of the Balkans) and also deliberately exacerbated ethnic tensions in mixed areas, but the stories put forward were rather similar. Where the Soviet Union set up communist regimes in the East after the war, not only Nazi Germany, but also the local “reactionary bourgeoisie” and upper classes were blamed. In all cases, however, the guilty were said to be either outsiders or a relatively small number of treacherous locals who were quickly disposed of after the war. There was therefore no perceived need for any general national self-examination, much less repentance for wrongdoing in either Western or Eastern Europe, except among Germans.

This story, that the Germans and small numbers of domestic collaborators were the only responsible ones, is mostly a postwar fabrication. It neglects not only the fact that there were many violent, large-scale reprisals after the war against those suspected of collaborating with Germans, but that in many cases once that was settled, the much larger number of collaborators and fascist sympathizers who survived
faded into the background and it was forgotten how much help the Germans really had received.9

The most important country occupied by the Germans in Western Europe was France. France abjectly surrendered in 1940 when it could have continued to fight from its protected colonial holdings in North Africa. Then, the collaborationist, pro-German Vichy government of Marshal Pétain was both popular and almost wholly supported by the French civil service, police, and military. The now famous speech transmitted from London on the BBC by General Charles de Gaulle after the French surrender in 1940, urging France to fight on, was heard by almost no one at the time, and only tiny numbers of French officials, either from France itself or from the unoccupied colonies spread throughout the world, rallied to his cause. The only important colonial governor to join de Gaulle’s Free French was also the Black Caribbean French high civil servant, Félix Éboué, governor of Chad, whose dislike of racist ideologies convinced him to abandon Vichy. The only two generals to join de Gaulle from the colonial forces were immediately pushed out of their positions.10 De Gaulle himself at the time was a fairly obscure brigadier general who had been quickly brought into the last wartime cabinet as a junior minister because he seemed to be the sole French officer to understand the importance of tank warfare. Now, his BBC speech of 1940 is widely memorialized as the start of a resistance movement, but in fact, there was no resistance until a year later when the French communists turned against Germany at the time Hitler broke his treaty with Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Even then, the resistance did not gain much strength until 1943 when, after German defeats in North Africa and at Stalingrad, and after the United States began to actively fight in North Africa and then Italy, it became evident that Germany was going to lose the war. In fact, after France’s surrender in 1940, French


industrial production, largely for the benefit of the German war effort, actually increased.\(^\text{11}\)

It was not until the screening of the 1969 documentary movie *The Sorrow and the Pity*, a lengthy set of interviews with surviving French participants in the war, both as collaborators with Germans and in the resistance, that the full extent of cooperation with the Nazis, and the early weakness of the resistance began to be publicized. Serious historical examination of how thoroughly France supported the collaborationist Vichy regime for some years after the 1940 defeat, and how that very regime is what made resistance so weak for so long had to wait until the 1980s. In fact, one of the first major examinations of the disgraceful anti-Semitic laws and arrest of Jews by Vichy was the work of a Canadian and an American historian, Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, whose 1981 work, *Vichy France and the Jews*, was quickly translated into French.\(^\text{12}\)

The situation varied from country to country, but generally, local authorities and elites worked with Germans quite cooperatively except in cases such as Poland and the Soviet Union, where the population was automatically condemned to eventual enslavement by Nazi racial policies, and where officials, intellectuals, and potential leaders were specifically targeted for annihilation. Germany never had enough soldiers or police in most of the countries it occupied to effectively control them alone. Most occupied European countries, and even supposedly neutral Spain contributed volunteer soldiers to fight with the Germans on the Eastern Front against the Soviets.\(^\text{13}\) On top of this, Germany’s allies, Italy, Finland (which did not participate in the Holocaust and was involved only because it had earlier been invaded by the Soviet Union), Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the puppet states of Croatia and Slovakia were mostly cooperative, and only Croatia (as part of Yugoslavia) produced an early resistance of any sort. Though the communists later publicized stories of partisan resistance to pro-German


governments, these were largely myths. In Bulgaria, for example, a
meaningful partisan movement sprang up only a few months before the
arrival of the Soviet army in the summer of 1944, and the same was
ture for Hungary, while in Romania it was the king who overthrew the
pro-German dictator Antonescu in August 1944 and turned the coun-
try over to the invading Soviet army just as it was entering Romania.\textsuperscript{14}
Austria, which managed to have itself defined after the war as the first
victim of German aggression because it was annexed by Germany in
1938, was actually largely pro-Nazi.\textsuperscript{15} In occupied Greece, the small
and rather ineffective resistance was bitterly split between communists
and anti-communists, while collaborators helped the Germans and Itali-
ians keep control. At the end of the war, as Greece was liberated by the
British, a civil war broke out between the communists and conserva-
tives, so that ultimately most of the collaborators were enlisted in the
anti-communist cause. As Mark Mazower has observed, to this day
Greeks have not integrated a realistic appraisal of what happened into
their national consciousness.\textsuperscript{16}

The communist version of what had happened during the war was
also taught in East Germany, so that blame was assigned to West Ger-
many where the old order had supposedly survived. East Germany had
no need to confront Nazism, leaving its people unprepared for the new
world in which they found themselves after reunification in 1990.\textsuperscript{17} The
same story of communist partisan activity was put forward by com-
munists in Western Europe, especially in Italy and France where there
were very large communist parties after the war.

\textsuperscript{14} Richard J. Crampton, \textit{A Concise History of Bulgaria} (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2005), 175; István Deák, “A Fatal Compromise? The De-
bate over Collaboration and Resistance in Hungary,” in Deák, Gross, and
\textsuperscript{15} Steve Beller, \textit{A Concise History of Austria} (Cambridge: Cambridge Universi-
\textsuperscript{16} Mark Mazower, \textit{Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–
1944} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and Mark Mazower, “The
Cold War and the Appropriation of Memory: Greece After Liberation,” in
Deák, Gross, and Judt (eds.) \textit{The Politics of Retribution in Europe}, 212–232.
\textsuperscript{17} Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar
Europe,” in Deák, Gross, and Judt (eds.), \textit{The Politics of Retribution in Euro-
pe}, 307–308.
Communists did play an important role in the resistances in these countries, but similar to France, it was not significant until 1943 and by then communists were far from being the only participants. The same thing happened in Italy. It was only after Mussolini’s overthrow in 1943, followed immediately by the seizure of most of Italy by German troops, that resistance began.\textsuperscript{18} In other words, as in most of Europe where there either were governments allied to Germany or puppet regimes beholden to the Germans, it was only the decisive turn of events against Germany that unleashed major resistance.

For decades after World War II, Germans’ acceptance of their guilt allowed the rest of Europe to evade this truth, namely that they had been mostly quite willing to help the Nazis, and closed their eyes to gruesome German brutality as long as it seemed that Germany was winning. In official histories and books what were often minor acts of resistance, or tardy ones that became effective only from 1943 on, were played up, collaboration by broad swaths of officialdom was overlooked, and the need for any kind of remorse or apology to the many victims, including, of course, Jews and Roma, were not part of remembrance.

France was a major example of this. As it was being liberated some 10,000 supposed collaborators were murdered in spontaneous local vengeance killings, but once the state got control of the situation, it jailed a few thousand collaborators, freeing and forgiving most of them after a few years except for a small number who were executed. The ugly reality of what had really happened was replaced by the carefully fostered myth that most of France had nobly resisted and was antifascist.\textsuperscript{19} German acceptance of guilt made this evasion by everyone else much easier. Very similar stories about resistance sprang up throughout most of the Continent, even where they were mostly fabrications.

The second, somewhat related problem with the simple contrast between the European and Asian memories of the war is that most of the Central and Eastern European countries, where the worst abuses and the most killing took place, evaded responsibility even more than Western Europe. In part this was because of the communist interpr-

\textsuperscript{18} Maria Wilhelm, \textit{The Other Italy: Italian Resistance in World War II} (New York: Norton, 1988).
tation of fascism and Nazism as a class phenomenon, the last gasp of a historically condemned bourgeois order. Thus, the ultranationalism and ethnic hatreds that had so troubled this part of Europe even before World War I, and only grew worse between 1918 and 1939, were brushed off as yet another manifestation of the evils of the corrupt old order, now replaced by healthy socialism. The problems of ethnonationalist conflict were swept under the rug, even though that had been part of the background cause of the rise of fascism and the early success of the Nazi occupations throughout almost the entire region.

By the time communists took power in Eastern Europe after the war, many ethnic problems actually had been settled either by the Nazis (the extermination of most of the large Jewish minorities), by the movement of borders after 1945 and mass exchanges of population, and by the largest example of ethnic cleansing in European history when ethnic Germans were expelled from Poland and Czechoslovakia or internally displaced in the Soviet Union. Some 11.5 million Germans whose ancestors had been living in these regions for centuries were forced out. Perhaps over a million died.  

Little of this violent history got incorporated into the official record. In Poland, the bulk of the genuinely large resistance had actually been anti-communist and nationalist. This was, of course denied by the communists. At the same time, the suffering of the Jews during the war, Poland’s long standing anti-Semitism well before 1939, and the continuing violent anti-Semitism after the war were also played down to the point of being practically ignored.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of these fabrications was that even in the case where there was the most genuine, strong communist resistance movement, Yugoslavia, the story was overused and eventually lost its power as communism’s legitimacy faded. Josip Broz Tito,

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the leader of the communist partisans during the war, and Yugoslavia’s dictator until his death in 1980, based much of his reputation and his party’s legitimacy on the partisan myth that all good Yugoslavs had joined together to fight the bourgeois, treacherous domestic fascists, and foreign invaders. Here we have a perfect example of why schoolbooks are not necessarily effective if they tell a story that loses credibility. In fact, the Yugoslav war from 1941 to 1945 was a complex combination of a struggle against German and Italian occupiers as well as a very nasty, multisided civil war between the country’s various ethnic nationalists. It is true that Tito’s communists worked hard to overcome ethnic divisions, but the partisan story repeated endlessly in classrooms and in state propaganda did not make people forget the bitter ethnic divisions that had also existed. By emphasizing the myth of class unity over ethnic division, Tito’s state failed to explain the troubling past. Already by the time of Tito’s death, ethnic strains were evident, and in the 1980s they grew out of control. In the 1990s, they exploded into a tragic war that killed hundreds of thousands and broke the country apart into its various ethnonationalist groups.22

The third problem with the easy dichotomy contrasting “good” Germany and a reconciled, harmonious Europe to “bad” Japan and a troubled East Asia has already been mentioned, but needs more explanation. In Europe, the Jewish problem was for the first couple of postwar decades relegated to obscurity, even denial, and in some cases this lasted well into the 1990s. This was true even in Germany where, according to Buruma, the full extent of the nightmare was not quite recognized by the general public until the showing of an American television drama on the Holocaust in Germany in 1979. Der Spiegel, a leading West German newspaper commented at the time: “An American television series, made in a trivial style, produced more for commercial than for moral reasons, more for entertainment than for enlightenment, accomplished what hundreds of [German] books, plays, films, and television programs have failed to do in the more than three decades since the end of the war: to inform the Germans about crimes against Jews committed in their name, so that millions

were emotionally touched and moved.” Aside from being well produced, the American television show featured an assimilated middle-class family that was not obviously Jewish in any way, and perhaps this is what so startled the Germans.

As a French Jewish baby who was hidden with his mother and grandmother during the war in a small village, and as a professional social scientist, I recall thinking in 1979 that this show was too smooth, and not nearly horrible enough. But that may have been the secret of its success in the United States and especially in Germany. It was easier to identify with the family portrayed than with the skeletal, dying concentration camp prisoners one sees in documentaries and pictures. In any case, after this, West German (but not East German) textbooks placed increased emphasis on Nazi crimes that killed some six million Jews. Furthermore, the number of monuments and museums featuring the persecution of Jews under Nazi rule has proliferated so that now German guilt is very solidly established. New generations come out of school aware of how xenophobic ultranationalism and racist theories resulted in such a catastrophe.

What most of the rest of Europe failed to do for a long time, however, was to admit that the Germans could never have killed so many Jews without the help of the countries they had occupied and to which they were allied. In the few cases where local authorities resisted German demands very few Jews were caught and killed. So, for example, Bulgarian public and church opinion protected Bulgarian Jews in Bulgaria proper, but not in the parts of Greece and Yugoslavia occupied by the Bulgarians during the war. There, Jews were turned over to the Germans. The same was true of Hungary where the administration of Admiral Horthy turned over Jews in the countryside and particularly in the parts of Transylvania it had occupied. Elie Wiesel, probably the most famous of all Holocaust survivor writers, was from that Transylvanian Jewish community, almost all of whom died in the Nazi camps. Only in the summer of 1944 did Horthy stop these operations and thus protected and “saved” Jews in Budapest.

24 Crampton, A Concise History of Bulgaria, 171–173.
Romania’s pro-German wartime dictator, Marshall Antonescu, had no qualms about slaughtering Jews in Bessarabia (today’s Republic of Moldova) and in Romanian Moldova where local anti-Semitic feelings were high. Those farther south and particularly Jews in Bucharest, however, were more protected because they were thought to be economically useful, and there most survived.26

Yet, to this day the full extent of these countries’ complicity in the Holocaust, and in cases such as Romania and Hungary, the nature of their particularly vicious native fascist movement remain poorly known and not widely taught in schools. What remains part of the general perception is the help they gave to some selected portions of their Jewish populations, not what happened to the majority of Jews.

In Romania recognition of what had happened to the Jews was partially exposed right after the war but then erased from public discourse. By the time the communist regime was overthrown at the end of 1989, few Romanians had much of a sense of how increasingly racist, xenophobic, and stridently anti-Semitic the atmosphere had been in the 1920s and 1930s, and how viciously cruel the Antonescu regime had been from 1940 to 1944, when it was replaced to try to mollify the invading Soviet army. There was almost no serious Romanian scholarship on that period until the 1990s. On the contrary, by the late communist period, the regime had begun rehabilitating Antonescu, portraying him as a dedicated, honest, and reform-minded nationalist rather than as member of the anti-Semitic Iron Guard. It even provided material support for an American scholar, Larry Watts, to spread this story. After the fall of communism, he continued to receive ample help from the Romanian military, which was intent on proving that Antonescu was a hero.27 Indeed, when the proceedings of the communist-led trial of Antonescu that resulted in his execution in 1946 were published in Romania in 1996, he was again made out to be a

noble, heroic figure. Only more recently has some Romanian scholarship exposed the deep roots of the nasty ideologies espoused by much of Romania’s intellectual and political elite in the pre-World War II period and during the war itself, and of course by Antonescu.

What made this evasion of how much of a role Eastern and Central European xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and general racism contributed to the Nazi Holocaust easier had something to do with the fact that a disproportionate number of the communist cadres right after World War II were Jewish. This was partly because communist parties were originally very small except in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, their leaders consisted largely of marginalized minorities. Later, Jewish communists became some of the main victims of the purges in Eastern Europe as Stalin set out to destroy what was left of Jewish life in the Soviet Empire. All this contributed, first, to a systematic downplaying of the Holocaust, and then it contributed to a lasting anti-Semitism that blames Jews for their countries’ misfortunes. It will take a long time for such popular misconceptions to go away.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Poland where Jan Gross’s best selling 2001 book, Neighbors, caused a sensational debate to break out. Gross, a Polish-American historian at Princeton University, documented how in 1941 in a Polish town that was half Jewish and half Christian, the Christians turned on their 1,600 Jewish neighbors and slaughtered almost all of them – beating them to death, herding them into buildings and burning them, hunting them down in the fields as they tried to escape, all without any prompting by the Germans who were occupying the area but not that particular town. Only seven Jews survived. Poland had generally portrayed itself solely as a victim of the Germans, and therefore free of any possible guilt. Indeed, Poles

28 Marcel-Dumitru Ciura, Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu: Documente (two volumes, with a Foreword by Iosif Constantin Drăgan) (Bucharest: Saeculum I.O. and Europa Nova, 1996).
were deemed part of an inferior race by the Nazis, their intellectuals and leaders were killed in large numbers, and every effort was made to wipe out Polish culture. They, along with Yugoslavs, proportionately suffered the highest casualties in Europe during the war. Yet, Poland was also one of the most anti-Semitic countries in Europe, and some Poles helped the Germans round up Jews. Some others Poles did hide Jews or help them, but most did not, and in some cases, as in the town Gross studied, they took the initiative in killing Jews. Gross’s book woke the country up to what had really happened, but it was also bitterly attacked by Polish nationalists, and by many parts of the Catholic Church, which is particularly powerful in Poland. Even Lech Wałęsa, Poland’s heroic anti-communist leader and its first post-communist president accused Gross of just being another greedy Jew spreading lies to make money. Still, the book finally led to an official apology by the Polish government, and a new monument being put up to commemorate the massacre described by Gross. Subsequently, in 2006, Gross published a new book, Fear, in which he described how some of the few surviving Jews (over 85 percent of the roughly 3 million Polish Jews were killed) who returned to their homes after World War II were set upon by Christian Poles and massacred. This produced another burst of nationalist outrage in Poland, where the debate about the whole issue remains bitterly divisive. It is not just in East Asia that descriptions of massacres that took place more than 60 years ago are still contentious and subject to nationalist distortions.31

In Lithuania, once home to a Jewish community of some 160,000 (7.6 percent of the population, the second largest percentage of the population that was Jewish after Poland) some two-thirds were wiped out. Lithuania had traditionally been quite anti-Semitic, like its neighbor, Poland, and there were many Lithuanian collaborators who helped the Nazis between 1941 and 1944. During the time from World

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War II until 1991 when Lithuania was under Soviet communist rule, collaboration with the Germans was officially deemed to have been a “bourgeois nationalist” phenomenon, though the killing of Jews itself was downplayed. It is no surprise, then, that the period since independence in 1991 has seen a confused conflict between various political factions over what happened. This is complicated, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, by the fact that Jews are often blamed for having worked with the communists. Because Lithuania from 1939 to 1941, and then again after World War II was subject to murderous repression and mass deportations of its citizens by the Soviet Union, the myth that confounded “Jews” with “communists” made it difficult to come to grips with what had happened during the German occupation. It is only now that some efforts are being made to clarify the historical record, but it will take a long time before this gets absorbed into school teaching or general public perception.32

In Austria, also, the fact that in 1938 the population and state officials rallied to the Nazi cause and instituted large scale expulsion and killing of the substantial Jewish population has been, until recently, largely overlooked except by a few scholars. A bitter joke about Austria is that they are the world’s best propagandists as they have convinced the world and themselves that Ludwig van Beethoven (who was born in what is now Germany) was actually an Austrian (he worked and died in Vienna) while Hitler (who was born in Austria) was a German. Austria’s former president Kurt Waldheim, who had previously served as the United Nations’ Secretary General before returning to Austria to run for president, was exposed as a significant participant in Nazi war crimes in the Balkans during the war, against Greek Jews and Yugoslavs. Both the American and Soviet intelligence services knew this before he became United Nations Secretary General, but both countries had backed him for this post, perhaps because they felt that he could easily be blackmailed and would therefore be more compliant. The deceitfulness of his public biography was only openly revealed after his UN term, while he was running for Austria’s

presidency. This, however, had little impact. The Austrians still chose him as their president.\footnote{Richard Mitten, \textit{The Politics of Anti-Semitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria} (Boulder: Westview, 1992).}

In the Soviet Union, official anti-Semitism blocked out most of the story of the persecution and destruction of Jews. After the war, Stalin became increasingly anti-Semitic, and this remained part of a policy of discrimination until the fall of Communism in 1991. Even now, however, Russian anti-Semitism is too omnipresent to produce much official acknowledgment of the massive suffering of Jews during the German occupation, and school books that are not even willing to admit anything close to the full extent of Stalin’s own crimes are hardly likely to dwell on the unfortunate situation of the Jews during and after World War II. Though Hitler’s crimes are taught in Russian schools, what happened to the Jews is not.\footnote{Amir Weiner, \textit{Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 114–126; Robert Maier, “Learning about Europe and the World: Schools, Teachers, and Textbooks in Russia after 1991,” in Schissler and Soysal (eds.), \textit{The Nation, Europe and the World} (New York: Bergham Books), 138–162, particularly, 142.}

Nor has this kind of evasiveness been limited to the Soviet Union, Central, or Eastern Europe. Few French Jews would have been sent to concentration camps without the cooperation of the French police and denunciations by French citizens. To be sure, about three-quarters of French Jews survived, a higher number than in countries farther east, and a much higher proportion than in the Netherlands. This was partly because France was relatively large, and the Germans had few occupying troops to devote to running it. At the same time, this very fact meant that it would have been easier for the French to protect all of their Jews, and in parts of France that were more left-wing, as well as in more Protestants towns and villages (Protestants are only about 3 percent of France but have played a disproportionately large role in the economy and politics), Jews were better protected than in right-wing areas. Where local authorities did not cooperate with orders from the Germans and from the Vichy government to turn in Jews, relatively few were caught.\footnote{Marrus and Paxton, \textit{Vichy et les juifs}, 191–196, 325–339.} In my family’s case, we were in a strongly social-
ist village in Vichy France, but near the border of the part of France
directly occupied by the Germans. The socialist mayor, Anatole Fer-
rant, provided us with false papers and ration tickets. On the other
hand, the Jews and others fleeing the German zone who sometimes
wound up in the same village would be put up in the local hotel only
to be picked up the next day by the police. Presumably, unlike with
us, village people did not feel any personal connection to these strang-
ers, and were less sympathetic to their plight. After the war, France
compensated few of its Jews whose property had been looted during
the war, mostly by other Frenchmen, and it was not until July 1995
that a French president apologized for what had happened. Now it is
all different, and in Paris there are plaques commemorating the arrest
of French Jews, as well as a new Holocaust museum in what used to
be the old Jewish quarter of the city. But it took a long time for this to
happen.  

France only began to include materials on the Holocaust in
its schools in the late 1970s, and the way to best do this remains a sub-
ject of controversy. In February 2008, President Sarkozy suggested that
every child in school be assigned the biography of one of the French
Jewish Holocaust victims, a proposal that was widely deemed exces-
sive, though it was admitted that it was necessary to somehow revive
the study of this topic to make it more relevant. This shows once
more that it is Germany that has taken the lead in treating the subject,
and that other European countries lag behind. The controversy raised
by the French president’s remarks shows also how much the contesta-
tion over memories now more than sixty-years old remains alive.

The Netherlands, Buruma’s home country, also had a somewhat
darker record than most of its citizens were willing to acknowledge
after the war, when everything was blamed on the Germans and the
small domestic Dutch Nazi Party. Anne Frank, the most famous of
all Holocaust victims, was turned in by Dutch neighbors. While the
majority of the Dutch did not like the German occupation, and local
Nazis were a minority, there were enough willing collaborators to run

36 *Le Monde*, “Une dette imprescriptible,” *Le Monde*, July 18, 1995 (www.le-
monde.fr); Shmuel Trigano Shmuel, “Que faire avec l’indemnisation des
37 Stéphanie Le Bars, “Le projet de parrainage d’enfants de la Shoah conte-
a dependent Dutch civil service. Partly because of this, but also largely because of the Netherlands’ small size, over 70 percent of the 140,000 Dutch Jews were killed.\(^{38}\)

Almost everywhere, including in Denmark, a country that saved most of its Jews by shipping them off to neutral Sweden, resistance to German occupation only developed to a significant degree in 1943, when Germany started to lose its war, and also began to use harsher occupation measures to obtain labor and resources.\(^{39}\) Policy toward Jews was largely a secondary consideration for most Western Europeans during the war. Though Jews had made up less than 1 percent of any West European country before the war (most European Jews lived in the East), there was generally enough anti-Semitism to make most people in the occupied countries indifferent to their fate, or in the case of many officials, to cooperate with German orders.

Compared to countries farther east, and also to Russia, Western Europe has finally admitted that it was not just Germans who committed crimes, but this has taken decades of work by historians, filmmakers, and organized efforts to bring about such recognition. In all these cases, it took a new generation that came to the fore 25 years after the war to start the process of admission. Their elders preferred to forget as much as possible, and to keep quiet, except for the communists who distorted history to vilify their bourgeois enemies in order to better conceal communism’s own crimes. That has not yet happened in the eastern parts of Europe even though the overwhelming majority of Jews killed were in the East, in what Timothy Snyder has called “the Bloodlands.”

The contrast between Germany and to some extent (belatedly) with much of Western Europe and Japan or East Asia in general, therefore, stands. But the reluctance of almost all of Europe to face its nationals’ participation as well as the widespread feigned ignorance and indifference to the horrors that occurred during and right after World War II should serve to remind us that there is nothing easy about confronting


\(^{39}\) Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy et les Juifs*, 325.
such moral evil. Europe’s admissions of guilt and acceptance of historical truth did not surface quickly, the process of reconciliation with the past remains problematic, and it has barely begun in some countries.

If we turn back to Germany itself, a fourth problem appears in the effort to explain the contrast between its behavior and Japan’s. It is obviously true that West Germany’s acceptance of its guilt contributed to the reconciliation with the rest of Europe, while Japan’s stubborn tendency to generally evade the issue has continued to sour relations with its neighbors despite the development of close economic links. German willingness to shoulder the blame allowed other European countries to look away for a long time from their widespread cooperation with the Germans during the war, but over time, after decades, it also facilitated their gradual if belated coming to terms with their own role. At least this has been the case in Western Europe, and it is starting to take place, though unevenly, in Eastern Europe as well. But, after all, why did Germany itself behave so differently than Japan?

Perhaps, as some suggest, this has something to do with a difference between German and Japanese cultures, with the former being one that emphasizes “confession” while the latter stresses “guilt” and “shame.” Ian Buruma correctly dismissed this as a rather dubious, shallow explanation. Even if one were to try to delve more deeply into the differences between the two cultures, it would be very difficult to prove that this played a major role because there is a far more obvious and convincing explanation. The key is the international situation in which Germany and Japan found themselves by the end of 1945 and in the years immediately following the war.

France, humbled and in terrible economic shape by 1945, was, nevertheless, the most powerful country on the West European mainland (excluding, of course, island Britain), and the French wanted to see Germany dismantled and permanently crippled. The other formerly occupied West Europe countries were bitterly hostile to Germany as well, and deeply embarrassed about the fact that so many of their countrymen had collaborated with the Germans. The United States and the Soviet Union, however, did not want to fragment Ger-

many into little pieces. Stalin hoped to be able to milk postwar Germany for reparations that his country desperately needed, and the United States, along with Britain, understood that a punitive peace after World War I had set the stage for Hitler’s rise, so they did not want to repeat the same mistake. The creation of an occupied but economically more united Germany served their purposes better than the kind of revenge France wanted.42

As the Cold War developed, and especially in 1948, with strong Communist parties in France and Italy, and the final, complete subjugation of Eastern Europe by the Soviets, the Americans began to think of West Germany as a possible bulwark against communism. But without French and general West European acceptance of West Germany as a legitimate, trustworthy state, it would have been impossible to construct a strong, united North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and probably very difficult to bring about the kind of West European economic recovery able to dampen pro-communist sentiment where it was already strong. It took years of difficult negotiations and the participation of some farsighted French and German statesmen to bring reconciliation about, but helped by the dire international situation and American pressure, it happened. France and Germany began to take steps to cooperate economically, first in the coal and steel industries, and then more broadly. Maurice Schumann and Jean Monnet of France led the way, starting in 1950, in changing French attitudes. In West Germany, the elderly Konrad Adenauer had become head of his country. Adenauer had a history of being friendly to France and Britain in the early 1920s, when he was mayor of Köln. Jailed several times by the Nazis, he had barely survived the war, but as the leader of the new Christian Democratic Party he was also fervently anti-communist. He was therefore receptive to overtures from France. A patient, diplomatic, and generous America greatly helped the process along. What was required was for West Germany to make it clear that it would not fall back into the same aggressive ultranationalism that had dominated it in the first half of the twentieth cen-

Franco-German friendship and mutual confidence thus grew, and became the basis of a united Europe, first through the Common Market, and then eventually in the European Union. This alliance remained the bedrock of European unity, even after the collapse of East Germany and its reunification with West Germany in 1990.

Part of the bargain was that Germany had to educate its young differently than in the past. German schools changed the way they taught history, and with the rise of new postwar generations, attitudes changed. Programs were set up in the 1950s and 1960s to exchange high school students between the two countries. Those who took part in these exchanges still remember them as being among the more significant events of their youth. A German friend born just after the war told me how he was sent on such an exchange program and met his first love, a French girl his age. She had to keep it a secret for fear that if her father found out she was involved with a German he would kill both of them. To these youths, this made no sense at all, but that was how some in the older generation that had actually experienced the war still felt. In France, also, the teaching of history changed, though much more slowly. Since the mid 1980s, French textbooks have gradually shifted away from a nationalist perspective toward a more pan-European and even global emphasis, whereas in Germany the process began earlier and has gone much farther.

Nothing like this was either necessary or even possible in East Asia. First of all, the Americans agreed to maintain the Japanese Emperor (something that would have been totally unthinkable with Hitler, even if he had not committed suicide) in order to better control Japan, so it became far easier for the Japanese to evade the issue of responsibility. Just as important, the countries that had been occupied by Japan had almost no say at all in determining Japan’s fate. China was embroiled in civil war until 1949, and then, especially in 1950, China became a direct enemy of the United States. Korea

was weak and divided, and after the Korean War, it was in ruins.\textsuperscript{47} In Southeast Asia the main issues were a set of anticolonial wars and the dissolution of the French, British, and Dutch Empires. Influencing policy toward defeated Japan was neither possible nor particularly important.\textsuperscript{48}

Thailand skillfully extricated itself from its wartime association with the Japanese and became pro-American. Perhaps only someone born in France still notices that the Victory Monument in Bangkok celebrates a Thai victory over the French in Laos in 1941, at a time when French Indochina was dominated by the Japanese and France itself was helpless.\textsuperscript{49}

In short, there were no hostile Asians the Japanese needed to placate or listen to until much later when a recovered South Korea and an emergent China began to make demands for apologies. By then, the pattern of Japanese denial had been fixed for a long time. To be sure, Japanese leftists did seek to expose their country’s brutality and aggression during the war, but they tacked this on to a strong anti-Americanism unlikely to win much sympathy from the United States. The dominant Japanese conservatives were, at first, very much the same elites who had run Japan before and during the war, except for a few top people who were purged, and today’s elite made its way in the same Japanese conservative circles that ruled in the 1950s and 1960s. So, there is little pressure for Japan to change, and since both the Japanese left and right can agree that they were the innocent victims of the nuclear bombings and Western aggression, the situation has not changed much.\textsuperscript{50} This is all the more so because China and South Korea have been perfectly willing to cooperate economically with Japan, even as they complain about its refusal to make official apologies or change its textbooks.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Bruce Cumings, \textit{Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 185–298.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Gerhard L. Weinberg, \textit{A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 534.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Buruma, \textit{The Wages of Guilt}, 295–296.
\end{itemize}
Finally, there is the question of collaboration. In Europe, as the Germans took the blame for what had happened, it was easy for a full generation to evade the fact that so many other Europeans had helped the Nazis. By the time this began to change in the 1970s and 1980s, West European unity was a solidly established fact, and few felt endangered by the gradual admission in other countries that they too may have been partially at fault. But what about in East Asia? How many Koreans worked willingly with the Japanese? To what extent have Koreans faced up to this? Undoubtedly, the fact that Park Chung-hee, the long time military dictator of South Korea, was trained as a Japanese military officer and had once taken a Japanese name kept South Korean complaints about Japan to a minimum during his rule, and probably also helped South Korean economic cooperation with the Japanese.\(^5\) There were many Chinese who also worked with the Japanese, but during Mao’s rule, this was mostly blamed on bad class elements as in communist Eastern Europe. Thus, the early postwar decades put little pressure on Japan itself to apologize. As post-Mao Chinese reforms weakened the legitimacy of socialist ideology, and the Communist Party replaced this by emphasizing nationalism, however, hostility toward Japan and the cultivation of memories of Japanese atrocities came to the fore once more in the 1980s and 1990s.\(^6\) This is something a poorly educated Japanese public and its conservative politicians have had a hard time understanding or accepting because, unlike in West Germany there was so little pressure to face the facts in the immediate postwar decades.

To conclude, much of the difference between the Japanese and German way of understanding their nations’ behavior during World War II is due to their very different geopolitical situations after the war. It hardly seems necessary to invoke deep cultural differences. Also, within Europe, it was Germany, or rather West Germany that stood out in admitting its fault. It really had little choice. Other countries,

\(^5\) Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 349–356.
most of whom had significant numbers of collaborators, and some of whom had quite terrible records of ultranationalism and vicious treatment of their Jews were very slow to admit this to themselves and to the rest of the world. Seen in that light, it begins to seem that the Japanese public’s reluctance to face the past, and its continuing view of Japan as victim rather than as an instigator of morally repugnant aggression, is normal. That is what is to be expected of those not forced to admit to wrongdoing. There is nothing uniquely Japanese about this.

We should not be surprised by this conclusion. White American Southerners long evaded, and to some extent still fail to come to grips with the fact that they did not fight a bloody civil war for “states’ rights” but to preserve slavery. The Russian government today is busy trying to get Russians to forget how cruel and needlessly bloody Stalin really was. The Turkish government denies that its Ottoman predecessors conducted a genocide against Armenians, though historians have more than adequately documented what happened. The Catholic Church has spent decades trying to avoid admitting the sexual scandals that have besmirched its reputation, though when forced to do so, it has relented somewhat. West Germany, on the other hand, had little choice, and that opened the way for those Germans who really were repentant to gain the upper hand. In other cases, when enough time has passed, and the threat of retaliation no longer exists, sometimes the truth can become widely accepted, as long as it does not threaten the existence and legitimacy of the nation or any major institution. Because after all history is always meant to serve the present rather than the past, we should not expect too much more. But we should also remember that as professional scholars some of us can help accelerate the process of recognition, admission, and therefore reconciliation by providing the raw materials that honest intellectuals and political leaders will use when they finally come to accept the necessity of facing the past.