

## INTRODUCTION

### *From “The Righteous among the Nations” to the “Righteous of France”*

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On 18 January 2007, the French president paid tribute to the “Righteous of France” and unveiled a plaque in their honor in the crypt of the Pantheon. This ceremony was the concrete realization of national recognition instituted by the law of 10 July 2000, the text of which defines the “Righteous of France” as those “who, risking their own lives and with no compensation whatsoever, took in, sheltered or defended one or more persons threatened with genocide” under the Occupation. This book aims to shed light on the process that brought about the creation of this new commemorative term.

The expression “Righteous of France” is explicitly borrowed from the Israeli term “Righteous among the Nations,” a translation of the Hebrew *Hasidei Ummot Ha-Olam*. Since 1953, the state of Israel has used this rabbinical expression to refer to and honor non-Jews who “risked their lives to save Jews” during the Holocaust. Within the Yad Vashem Institute, the state authority in charge of commemorating the Holocaust, a special department manages the awarding of this title, which is decided by a commission that rules much in the same way as a criminal court does. To initiate the nomination procedure, two Jewish persons having directly received the help of non-Jews must petition the Israeli institute. Once the title is bestowed, the person recognized as Righteous among the Nations has his or her name engraved on a plaque in the Yad Vashem Garden of the Righteous in Jerusalem, and a representative of the state of Israel awards the person a certificate of honor and a medal.

The ceremony generally takes place in the country of which the person is or was a citizen; recognition can be posthumous. As of 1 January 2015, more than twenty-five thousand people had received this distinction, among them 3,853 French, 6,532 Poles, and 1,690 Belgians. In 1999, scarcely a year after the French Parliament had created the category, Belgium also instituted a “Diploma of the Righteous”; in Poland the “Polish Righteous” became eligible for war veteran status. In 2007, the year a commemorative ceremony was held at the Pantheon in Paris, twenty-one members of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly signed a solemn tribute to the “Righteous” of Europe. In recent years, certain states have begun using this term to officially commemorate other genocides, such as in the Rwandan and Armenian cases. A “Garden of the Righteous” modeled after the Israeli original now exists in Yerevan on the site of the memorial of the Armenian genocide.

## **Making memory policies a topic for political science**

As this brief presentation shows, analysis of the gradual institutionalization of the Righteous of France as a category provides material for a real case study of both contemporary public action and the current relationship between memory and politics in that “it is the set of questions one puts into it—and that are likely to be put to it—that forms a case.”<sup>1</sup>

By studying the shift from the Israeli term “Righteous among the Nations” to the expression “Righteous of France,”<sup>2</sup> this book first sets out to advance a new topic for political science: memory public policies. Aside from a few recent studies,<sup>3</sup> political scientists have so far shown little interest in public actions that have to do with evoking the past.<sup>4</sup> However, the term “politics of memory” is currently used mainly by historians and sociologists in contemporary social sciences.<sup>5</sup> It oscillates between two meanings: it refers either to the political exploitation of the past in order to promote official memory through speeches and commemorations or to a diffuse memory of which speeches and commemorations are the public manifestations.

This study, however, sets out precisely to open up the black box of the public authorities’ evocation of the past. The political nature of the exploitation of memory narratives by representatives of the state is not founded per se on the distance from factual truth as established by the work of historians.<sup>6</sup> It flows, like for any public policy, from the status of the public actors and institutions concerned as well as the objectives pursued and resources used. This analysis of the institutionalization of the Righteous of France category thus aims to provide a case study of a public policy of memory. It calls for public policy and public administration scholars to take these public policies dealing with the past more seriously.

However, in addition to examining a sector of public action that political science has neglected until now, this case study will touch on transversal issues. The research topic of the institutionalization of the Righteous of France category is constructed at the junction of the private and public spheres or, rather, at the point of passage from one to the other. Originally the expression of individuals' testimonies, the evocation and recognition of the Righteous has become a matter of state and adheres to a variety of calendars and trajectories. This dual interaction is at the very heart of the object of study here: between individuals, social actors, political actors, public authorities, and institutions but also between local, national, international, and transnational scales. It is conducive to undertaking a sociological study of the transnationalization of public policies, and this at various levels of public action.<sup>7</sup>

How do separate initiatives, stemming from actors occupying different spaces and operating in different periods, finally connect to produce a public policy? Symmetrically, what effects, in particular in terms of interest, do such policies have on the configuration of actors? In short, what respective roles do the mechanisms of transfer and translation of public policies play in the institutionalization of the term "Righteous" concomitantly in different countries? How do they play out on a global scale of which, precisely, the contours remain to be delimited and the nature determined? The approach here is therefore comparative; the institutionalization of the Righteous of France category is put in perspective with comparable phenomena observed in other countries, mainly Poland and Belgium. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms<sup>8</sup> of appropriation and hybridization and the roles played by political institutions and the "institutional matrixes"<sup>9</sup> specific to each national configuration as well as the dynamics of Europeanization and globalization.

This volume thus provides a close analysis of the processes that inform these policies in order to explore the contexts, networks, and social actors as well as their practices and the social fabric of their interactions. It shows how the actors' logics are articulated with the institutions that structure them and that they modify in turn. In this respect it takes up "the institutionalist challenge"<sup>10</sup> discussed by Alec S. Sweet, Neil Fligstein, and Wayne Sandholtz: to explain the emergence of new institutions and, in this instance, of a new memorial category from its creation and codification to its shaping into an instrument of public action.

This study of a specific remembrance policy carefully identifies the types of motivations public policy actors can have. Much research has underscored the way in which the links between politics and memory are situated at the junction of symbolic practices and strategic practices.<sup>11</sup> Seeking to understand the institutionalization of the Righteous of France

category offers a way to empirically study the articulation of “frames of meaning” and “logics of power”<sup>12</sup> at the heart of public action as well as the way in which institutions orient both. In particular, it raises the question of the relationship actors have with memory and especially the borderline between its instrumentalization and instrumentation: does politics instrumentalize the past to act on memories or is commemoration of the past first and foremost an instrument that serves policies of which the ultimate goal is anything but to influence representations of the past?

### **What is political about remembrance policies?**

This last remark finally leads to an interrogation of the political nature of memory public policies. For instance, the study of the passage of laws aiming to commemorate the wars that France has been involved in since 1939 shows that these policies were usually adopted by consensus.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in his analysis of the controversy surrounding the commemoration of the colonial past, Romain Bertrand has shown that with regard to highly polemical issues, remembrance policies are nevertheless enacted according to “the euphemizing mode of depoliticization.”<sup>14</sup>

This mode would appear to be carried to the extreme in the case of the emergence of the term “Righteous of France.” A total political and media consensus surrounded the ceremony at the Pantheon in January 2007. The law of 10 July 2000 was unanimously passed by both houses of Parliament. The present case study deals with this depoliticization and its corollary, the depoliticizing politics in which public actors who evoke the past regularly partake. Although the question of the relationship between public policy and democracy is currently a major research theme, it has particular resonance in the case of policies related to “memory.”

Collective actors that regularly criticize public actions evoking the past do not so much denounce recourse to memory in principle, which is viewed as essential, as they do the interpretation(s) of history that are proposed on such occasions. The lack of any controversy in the case of the gradual institutionalization of the category Righteous of France merely underscores this state of affairs: studying it is a first step toward understanding. How did this shared belief in the capacity of memory as an instrument to act on contemporary society and improve its democratic nature emerge?

In France, a certain interpretative framework for the involvement of politics in the field of memory has come to hold sway in academia as well as in public debate following the controversy around so-called memory laws. The passage of these laws<sup>15</sup> was first criticized on the grounds that it was akin to dictating an official truth, a modern form of propaganda. At the

same time, it was presented as being the result of campaigns by pressure groups, mainly described as communitarian.<sup>16</sup> The mechanism is moreover not specific to Parliament—even if by nature it is more attuned to memory clientelism; it is believed to affect all components of the state.<sup>17</sup> The multiplication of national commemoration days is particularly considered to be an indication of the rise of “communitarianism” and the shattering of the “national memory” into as many “competing memories.”<sup>18</sup>

The institution of the national day devoted to the memory of victims of racist and anti-Semitic crimes committed by the French state and paying tribute to the Righteous of France has an important place in the debate. Never questioned by those who subscribe to this analysis, it nevertheless ushered in a period in which recourse to this instrument became increasingly frequent. When Parliament passed the law, it made use of an instrument it had not resorted to since the creation of the National Day of Remembrance of the Victims and Heroes of the Deportation in 1954.<sup>19</sup> Since then and up until 2006, five new dates have been added to the official calendar of historic memory.<sup>20</sup> The present volume offers a critical examination of the analysis presented briefly above through the study of one specific case. By paying particular attention to the intersection of state intervention and memories expressed by individuals, it provides a means of gauging the supposed social effects of remembrance policies.

This research was carried out over a long period and across several national spaces, which makes it a privileged case study of the question of social change common to studies on memory and analysis of public action. While with the former there seems to be, in France, a consensus regarding the “tyranny of memory” and the “regime of historicity”<sup>21</sup> that are said to characterize our contemporary societies, the ultimate horizon of the latter is the understanding of changes in the nature of politics. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the conclusions currently drawn regarding the change in politics as well as the transformation of memory “are the result of a change in reality, a change in representations of reality or a change in how the social sciences apprehend reality.”<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

1. Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, eds., *Penser par cas* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2005), 111.
2. The present volume is a partial reformulation of Sarah Gensburger, “Essai de sociologie de la mémoire. L'Expression des souvenirs à travers le titre de “Juste parmi les nations” dans le cas français: entre cadre institutionnel, public policy et mémoire collective”

- (Ph.D. dissertation, EHESS, 2006). See Appendix 1 for a presentation of the methodology and corpus.
3. Romain Bertrand, *Mémoires d'empire. La Controverse autour du "fait colonial"* (Bellecombès-en-Bauges: Editions du Croquant, 2006). For an English review, see Sarah Gensburger, *Mémoires d'empire. La Controverse autour du "fait colonial,"* Romain Bertrand, ed. (Bellecombès-en-Bauges: Editions du Croquant, 2006); *National Identities* 10, no. 4 (2008): 453–55.
  4. By way of example, there are no political scientists on the editorial board of the flagship review in *Memory Studies*, published since 2008 by Sage, nor are there many more among the contributors to the readers in this discipline that have emerged since 2005. The most important among these readers is Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
  5. Jeffrey K. Olick, *Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
  6. For further details on this explicit epistemological position, which was already present in the work of Maurice Halbwachs, see Sarah Gensburger, "Fragments de mémoire collective: les Justes parmi les nations," in *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte (1941)*, ed. Maurice Halbwachs (Paris: PUF, 2008), 99–112.
  7. Patrick Hassenteufel, "De la comparaison internationale à la comparaison transnationale. Les Déplacements de la construction d'objets comparatifs en matière de politiques publiques," *Revue française de science politique* 55, no. 1 (2005): 113–32.
  8. In this work, the term "mechanism" refers to the explication of causality; for a discussion of the term and approaches that use it, see Charles Tilly, "Mechanisms in Political Process," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 21–41.
  9. Olivier Borraz and Patricia Loncle-Moriceau, "Permanences et Recompositions du secteur sanitaire, les politiques locales de lutte contre le SIDA," *Revue française de sociologie* 41, no. 1 (2000): 37–60.
  10. Alec Stone Sweet, Neil Fligstein, and Wayne Sandholtz, *The Institutionalization of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.
  11. Jeffrey K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
  12. Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies*, 44, no5 (1996): 936–957.
  13. Claire Andrieu, "La Commémoration des dernières guerres françaises: l'élaboration de politiques symboliques, 1945–2003," in *Politiques du passé. Usages politiques du passé dans la France contemporaine*, ed. Claire Andrieu, Marie-Claire Lavabre, and Danielle Tartakowsky, 39–46 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2006).
  14. Bertrand, *Mémoires d'empire*, 33–34.
  15. For a list of these laws, see Appendix 2.
  16. Françoise Chandernagor and Pierre Nora, *Liberté pour l'histoire* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008).
  17. René Rémond, *Quand l'état se mêle de l'histoire* (Paris: Stock, 2006).
  18. On this point, see the numerous stands taken by members of the commission to reflect on the modernization of public commemorations; report made in November 2008, Appendix 2.
  19. Law no. 54–415 of 14 April 1954 dedicating the last Sunday in April to the memory of the victims of deportation who died in concentration camps of the Third Reich during World War II.
  20. For a list of the texts, see Appendix 2.

21. Pierre Nora, ed., "L'Ère de la commémoration," in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 4687–18; François Hartog, *Des régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et Expériences du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).
22. Jacques Commaille, "Sociologie de l'action publique," in *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, ed. Laurie Boussaguet, Sophie Jacquot, and Pauline Ravinet (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2004), 420. More broadly see also, Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).