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## Beyond Memory. Can we really learn from the past?

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**PALGRAVE MACMILLAN MEMORY STUDIES**

*Series Editors: Andrew Hoskins · John Sutton*

This book provides a fresh perspective on the familiar belief that memory policies are successful in building peaceful societies. Whether in a stable democracy or in the wake of a violent political conflict, this book argues that memory policies are largely unhelpful in preventing hate, genocide, and mass crimes. Since the 1990s, transmitting the memory of violent pasts has been used in attempts to foster tolerance and fight racism, hate and antisemitism. However, countries that invested in memory policies have overseen the rise of hate crimes and populisms instead of growing social cohesion. Breaking with the usual moralistic position, this book takes stock of this situation. Where do these memory policies come from? Whom do they serve? Can we make them more effective? In other words, can we really learn from the past? At a time when memory studies is blooming, this book questions the normative belief in the effects of memory.

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**PALGRAVE MACMILLAN  
MEMORY STUDIES**



# Beyond Memory Can We Really Learn From the Past?

Sarah Gensburger  
Sandrine Lefranc

palgrave  
macmillan

*To Noah, Tristan, Norah, Esther and Jacob,  
members of the “future generations”*

## **Introduction**

“Forgetting the past means being condemned to repeat it”. This motto has been the inspiration for the widespread development of memory policies since the late 1990s in North America, Europe, and throughout the world. These globalized policies aim to articulate both the good and the bad, and speak them to everyone, in order to enable citizens to learn “the lessons of the past” and to build peaceful societies. They express a belief that memory can help us to build the future. Yet, after more than twenty year of these memory policies, the development of terrorism, populism, and discriminations in contemporary societies forces us to conclude that they have well and truly failed. Instead of the quiet social cohesion and tolerance they hoped for, the countries that invested in these programs have seen the rise of populisms of all kinds. Evaluating the impact of these memory policies is no easy task. Those who attempt it generally end up moralistic or towing a party line.

Up until now, two mains criticisms have been levelled at these memory policies. A large proportion of the existing literature, particularly by historians, condemns some of these policies for taking the wrong direction, and for using and abusing the past (Macmillan, 2009). A more recent approach from a moral perspective, denounces the very principle of these policies and emphasizes the importance of forgetting (Rieff, 2016 and 2011). This book goes beyond both of these criticisms and the opposition between historians and moralists. It does not seek to evaluate the good and bad uses of history. Instead, it focuses on demonstrating how this debate is framed in the wrong terms and calls for a renewed understanding of what memory can and cannot do.

The field of memory studies is attracting so much attention that the number of books in this area has become inordinately large and diverse, spreading from the subfield of transitional justice and human rights to that of museum studies. This book intends to break with a large portion of the existing literature. It takes a critical perspective on the normative belief in the effects of memory, which is at the heart of so many of the studies dedicated to the presence of the past in contemporary societies. This critical approach is all the more innovative in that it does not begin from a normative standpoint, but rather from a close knowledge of the numerous empirical studies – which are themselves responding to the effects of memory and these policies – emerging around the world.

This book takes a step back to ask— where do these memory policies come from? What do they actually do? Whom do they serve? Can we make them more effective? And, in light of all this, what lies beyond memory?

Contemporary society is imbued with the presence of memory. This “memory boom” has given rise to myriad scientific studies and numerous public debates, in western democracies as well as in authoritarian regimes and countries emerging from conflict. Yet the various participants in these debates, even when they are involved in violent controversies, do not challenge the fact that remembering the past is liable to have an impact on social behavior, both now and in the future.

The development of memory policy has raised many questions. Are we commemorating the “right” past? Should we limit ourselves to condemning perpetrators? Should we prevent victims from taking advantage of their new recognition? Should we defend “subaltern” memories over “dominant” ones and thus remember those “forgotten by history”, such as the legitimate victims of colonial conflicts? Should we prioritize history or memory? Should we welcome a certain degree of “forgetting” rather than encouraging an excessive presence of the past?

Although these political and moral questions are interesting, they do not provide insight into what we would actually do if we had to make a firm decision one way or the other. This book breaks with the existing literature in that it pursues a genuine understanding of what is actually at work in these contemporary reminders of the violent past. We therefore set out to consider the ways in which memory policy could be more effective in reaching the goals that are ordinarily assigned to it, or how its objectives could be re-conceptualized.

To do so, the following pages bring together studies conducted in a wide variety of disciplines – from social psychology, history, sociology, anthropology, political science and economics. Although the French context and the canonical case of the memory of the Holocaust will be given particular attention, this discussion relies on an integrative approach to memory policies in different part of the worlds, in western democracies, such as the United States and France, as well as in countries emerging from conflict in South America, the Great Lakes region of Africa, and the former Eastern Bloc.

This book therefore provides an unusual perspective on the widely shared belief that memory policy are effective tools in building peaceful societies, whether in stable democracies or in the wake of violent political conflicts. Citizens are not always fooled by this consensus - whether they are political figures, administrative personnel, professionals working in the culture sector, teachers and other educators, academics, or the general public; they are not necessarily uncritical, far from it. Yet, despite this, they have good reason to continue to believe (or pretend to believe) that these policies have the power to prevent the return of violence and to help build better societies. A better understanding of what these politics actually constitute and what they do, will enable us – perhaps – to envisage reforming them, and to explore new ways of thinking about what can prevent collective violence, if that is indeed possible.

Let's start with an observation: our lives are peppered with reminders of the past. This is nothing new – states are very good at shaping memory. All those in positions of political power have forged traditions that combine “official histories”, glorification of great deeds, invention of legends, and ostracism of the vanquished. However, the First World War marked a break from this, leading to the democratization of state references to the past. Policy was progressively negotiated more explicitly, firstly with veterans and their families, and local government. Then, from the 1970s onward, minorities and victims' representatives began to challenge the official narratives and have their versions of events heard. This was the time of “negative” memory (Rousso, 2016), which exhumed the wrongdoing of the nation in the name of human rights. But although the perpetrators of these crimes are brought to light, they are rarely punished. Governments today rarely impose sanctions for historic crimes, and when they do, it is seldom with the ferocity of the “victor's justice”. Criminal justice seems to be less a concern here than the denunciation of “hate speech” or the encouragement of “citizens' vigilance”. The state is no longer interventionist, yet it paradoxically increases the number of initiatives in this area, sometimes inspired by other countries. Although there is a global “crusade” against “forgetting” that pushes reluctant states to account for the violence of their pasts, policies tend to focus on the victims. It is they who must be distinguished from the guilty, named, honored, compensated, and appeased. The goal is to help citizens identify with their suffering.

But although the ways of talking about this have changed, one key conviction remains constant. Memorial programs prescribe representations and therefore attitudes, be they

“patriotic” or “humanist”. This is true whether the state is a triumphal transmitter of national identity or whether it is tangled in a throng of contested identity projects, whether crowds gather around monuments or shun them, whether citizens demand their removal or their protection. The mention of violent pasts always takes the form of an enlightened narrative that encourages each individual to learn the lessons of the past and change their behavior. Such narratives once advocated the model of the loyal soldier; today they promote tolerant citizens, or – when the past is used by political extremes – encourage exclusion.

Why should memory be promoted and transmitted at school, through museums, on television, through monuments, commemorative ceremonies, “memory” trials, or even during truth commissions<sup>1</sup>? So that members of the public know the facts, understand the issues of the present, and adapt their behavior accordingly, now and in the future. Few would doubt that contemporary memory policies help build social cohesion, as well as tolerance among individuals. Memory policies today are the corollary of past policies to incite hatred, which were often used by bellicose authorities that also mobilized (and sometimes continue to mobilize) reminders of the past in a very different way (for hate propaganda, calls for vengeance, or references to a supposedly humiliating defeat). What memory has done in the past it has the potential to undo.

Who should memory policies be targeted at? At individuals and groups that are considered intolerant? So that they might be persuaded, and overcome their prejudice? Or should it be directed at the victims of past political violence, to “give them back their dignity”? Or at those who are already tolerant and benevolent, to strengthen their dispositions? Or perhaps those who remain indifferent? Should memory policies focus on “what should be done” or “what should not be done”? The answer from policy makers is often vague – they should talk about “good” and “evil” and do so with and for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup>. Truth commissions are temporary institutions that charge apolitical people who have “good reputations” (academics, church figures, doctors, et cetera), with writing the history of civil war or oppression, based in particular on testimonies from witnesses. Since the 1980s, approximately 40 such commissions have been set up. Truth commissions are now subject to UN guidelines and have become a model in Europe. See the 2008 resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [https://www.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Publications/RuleoflawTruthCommissionsen.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1](https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Publications/RuleoflawTruthCommissionsen.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1) (accessed 12 September 2019) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, “Use of experience of the “truth commissions””, resolution 1613 of May 29 2008, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=17647&lang=en> (accessed 12 September 2019).

As parents of young children, we also profess our belief that it is possible to shape better citizens through memory, first among them the “future generations” whom we teach and raise. Others, who have political beliefs that differ from ours, believe that recalling the past can provoke hatred and intolerance that they are looking for in their conquest of power.

The idea that it is possible to use memory and “lessons from the past” to arm today’s citizens against future violence is a welcome band-aid for our insecurities; it protects the individual who subscribes to it from doubts they may have about their own moral convictions. This belief in the effects of memory has been institutionalized in the form of public policies and through the increasing number of specialized institutions, both of which have been transformed by dedicated professionals convinced of how useful they are. For some observers, this may provide the only moral norm compatible with a globalized world (Alexander, 2002; Levy and Sznaider, 2010). Describing this belief and the concrete way in which it is implemented constitutes the first chapter of this book.

One thing is clear however. The development of memory policy has not been associated with the development of a more tolerant or peaceful society. We may speculate about what touches people’s hearts – from the grand narratives of states to the intimate stories of victims – but this is not easy to demonstrate. Researchers have shown that just because we applaud a president who evokes the glorious past or orders citizens to be tolerant, that does not mean that we listen, that we internalize the discourse, or that we alter our behavior (Mariot, 2011). In this case, like at a commemorative event, attendance does not mean support. We may act in a particular way (applauding, yelling, yawning, quietly commemorating) because the event encourages us to do so. We might actually be silently trying to remember a shopping list, as we listen to the official list of those who died for the homeland. Positive national memory or negative disparate memories may only have the power we give them.

There is a great temptation to try and measure the effectiveness of memory policy. However, evaluating the impact of public policy on hearts and minds is difficult, even impossible. Academics who attempt it often stumble into a political debate. They are caught between deploring the weakening of national identity and defending the recognition of victims’ identities, between the condemnation of exclusive reminders of the past, and demands for the promotion of inclusive memory. We can see this in the debates that followed the events in



Charlottesville in September 2017 and the related discussions about the social status and effects of monuments.

However, the social sciences enable us to put the question differently. Memory policies, both in relatively peaceful democracies and in post-conflict situations, bring ordinary social beings in contact with each other. These individuals live parallel, evolving lives in various worlds (familial, social, professional, gendered, local, etc.). The public is never *directly* exposed to memorial content, whether at school, in museums, in courtrooms during the hearings of victims or trials, or before monuments. The strength or weakness of calls for tolerance and instructions to “refuse discrimination” and to “never kill or consent to murder” all depend on exchanges between individuals, as well as their attitudes toward groups and institutions. If we assume that we learn from the past, it is because we imagine the transmission of past violence (at school, through museums or institutions dedicated to rewriting history) as the encounter between an attentive, receptive student and a teacher who has decided to provide in-depth civic education. In so doing, we put the social world on hold. We overlook the complexity of the implementation of any policy, the misunderstandings that unavoidably arise from their re-appropriation, the decisive importance of the social status of their defendants, the multitude of reasons actors may decide to act, their moods at the time, and so forth.

The second chapter of the book will focus on the study of these very ordinary social facts: memory policies as they are implemented. We will then observe the limits of these policies and their possible negative side effects. Injunctions to remember draw their strength, and their weakness, from interactions and depend on the social situation of individuals. More simply put, our individual personalities and how open and generous we are, count. We try to be coherent with our understanding of ourselves, with what we believe ourselves to be, but we answer “yes” or “no” to a demand (to kill, to save, to not insult, to help) according to how it is put, the context, and the way others may judge us. An individual is not tolerant simply because he or she is open-minded, well-educated, and warm-hearted, but also because of the political context, our situation and our state of mind at the time, the expectations of our peers, or the smile of the “other”.

The third and final chapter will seek to understand why memory policies continue to flourish in spite of this. Their indirect, relational effects are clearly visible here. Our hypothesis is that the impact and efficacy of these policies can be felt in the way they reverberate through a

multitude of situations in different social spheres (some of which include memory professionals), and that this is what gives memory policies their strength. Calls for remembrance, and for the past to never be repeated, are only effective if they have similar echoes in different social spheres, if they exist within a network of powers. This is particularly true in states that do not have the means (in the wake of civil war for example) or the desire (in democracy) to be overly interventionist. Governments are all the more vociferous and loquacious when they are no longer able to prescribe political persuasions or identities, at times when their ability to guide the political economy seems fragile. We have to shift our gaze from the solitary individual, directly targeted by the lessons of the past, to the indirect ways in which these policies may be effective. We should look not at the historical content that these policies are intended to transmit (Macmillan, 2009), but rather at the range of social relations that they actually produce. This book therefore seeks to shed new light on the very consensual belief in the efficiency of memory policies in constructing peaceful societies, whether in stable democracies, or in post-conflict situations, in France or elsewhere. Individuals – whether politicians, public servants, cultural professionals, teachers and other educators, academics, or the broader interested public, but also victims – are not always taken in by this, far from it. Yet they have good reasons to keep believing (or to pretend) that these policies are able to prevent the return of extreme violence, and to contribute to building better societies more generally. Here we again seek to subject both these reflections and the memory policies that inspire them, to sociological analysis. By knowing what these policies really are and what they really do, we may be able to attempt to reform them and find new ways of thinking about how to prevent collective violence – if that is indeed possible.

There are many different terms to evoke the political aspect of the contemporary presence of the past (Olick et al., 2011): “uses of the past” (whether their authors label them as “social” or “political”), “policies of the past”, or “memory policies”. This book is not the appropriate place for a discussion of these terms because this debate, although fundamental, has already been conducted in other places. However, because we must name these phenomena and condense them into an analytic object that can only partially describe the social world, we will use the term “memory policy”. We define the latter as actions that mobilize references to the past in order to impact on society and its members and transform them. In the remainder of the book we will focus more broadly on all arrangements that mobilize references to the violent past, particularly in order to prevent violence and intolerance. Because nothing allows us to assume that there is a difference in nature between similar arrangements mobilized in

established democracies or post-conflict situations (which happen to be our two areas of expertise), we will use comparative analysis to examine the broadest possible palette of memory policies. Although the latter can be defined by their objective to modify or preserve the memory of violent events from the past (whether glorious or shameful) with the goal of influencing contemporary society, there is no justification for limiting our analysis to examples we are familiar with. These places of memory may be specialist museums, classrooms, courtrooms, or even football fields – for example when an international ONG organizes a game between mixed teams in a country where civil war has separated ethnic or religious groups in the past.

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## **Chapter 1. The making of memory policies**

All public policy has a social function – reducing inequalities, fighting unemployment, or boosting economic growth – and draws its legitimacy from this. But memory policies are even more ambitious. They hope to have a direct impact on the way all individuals behave, and interact. They are seen as having the power to shape minds, touch hearts, and build social connections; and in so doing, to increase tolerance within democratic societies, and make coexistence between enemies possible in post-war contexts. The development of these policies is also based on the constant repetition of what seems to be a deep-held belief: that knowing the tragedies of the past means being able to build peaceful and tolerant societies in the present – and prevent the return of hatred and violence. Today this belief is the object of a broad consensus within contemporary societies, from governing elites to ordinary citizens, from the state to local municipalities. It has led to the implementation of memorial tools of various kinds as part of policies that are based on an instrumental and functional approach. Memory policies cannot be limited to simply expressing things; they must be effective. In other words, they must have an impact on the individuals and on the societies they are targeted at.

### **Remembrance as a way to open minds and hearts**

Memory policies are first and foremost policies of knowledge. This explains why so many historians are involved in museums, exhibitions, or memory commissions. They collect evidence, whether from archives or eyewitness accounts, from which they build knowledge and document events. These memorial institutions are considered spaces of “truth”, although curators are often careful to identify multiple, subjective, social, or expert truths. In fact, this is now the name of one of the most common institutions of these memory policies today: truth commissions. In this context, memory work must prevent victims carrying out acts of vengeance, enable the stabilization of political regimes, and establish lasting peace in societies.

#### ***The leitmotiv of memory policies***

By revisiting painful or conflict-laden pasts, memory policies are supposed to settle debts, cleanse wounds, and appease trauma – all expressions that reflect the importance of transposing individual psychological mechanisms onto the social level. All the actors involved share the belief that the past has “lessons” to teach us, that only truth (knowledge as opposed to forgetting) can prevent the return of violence, because when the past is forgotten we are destined to repeat it – a familiar leitmotiv. And if a conflict is periodically reignited through reminders of the past, instead of being appeased, this only encourages people to move beyond it. The unique testimonies of the victims are collected and put in the spotlight, to make them into a shared heritage.

From this point of view, memory policies are one of the rare moments in which societies collectively test, (re)define, repeat, and clarify their shared values. Ultimately, they are designed to serve civil harmony and thus lasting peace. By giving individuals who come together in public shared history and values, memory policies serve to harmonize “hearts” and “minds.” During the inauguration of the memorial at the Camp of Rivesaltes,<sup>2</sup> on October 16, 2015, the then French Prime Minister Manuel Valls illustrated this perfectly, saying “We have come together so that the memory of yesterday’s contempt reminds us of our duty today, and prevents the repetition of such horror tomorrow [...] All the sites of memory are our forward outposts in this *reconquering of hearts and minds* that we must wage in the name of the Republic and all those who identify with it [...]. Among all these sites of memory, schools – because it is above all at school that it all happens – have solid tools for transmitting values, for training citizens” (our emphasis). This discourse resonates with other echelons of the French state. Several *departments*<sup>3</sup> now conduct “memorial actions” that are supposed to protect human rights through the mediation of lessons from history.<sup>4</sup>

This rhetoric, which is at the foundation of memory policies, exists in much the same way outside France. If we stay at the level of heads of state, we only need to cross the Atlantic to find an example. In June 2015, in a ceremony honoring Clementa Pinckney, the African

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<sup>2</sup> The Camp of Rivesaltes is situated in the south of France, near the Spanish border, and was used by the French state to detain families of Spanish refugees during the Spanish Civil War. During the Second World War, it was one of the main holding camps for foreign Jews deported to Auschwitz outside the zone occupied by the Germans. From 1962, following the Algerian war, it was used to detain *Harkis*, Algerian soldiers who fought for the French.

<sup>3</sup> Departments are an intermediary administrative division in France, between regions and towns. There are ninety-six in metropolitan France.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.isere.fr/Deliberations/Delibs/2012/DOITT.pdf> (Consulted July 17, 2017).

American pastor killed in Charlottesville, President Barack Obama used the exact same image of hearts and minds, so essential in memory policies. He paid homage to the victim, who he said had understood that “history can’t be a sword to justify injustice or a shield against progress. It must be a manual for how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, how to break the cycle, a roadway toward a better world. He knew that the path of grace involves an open *mind*. But more importantly, an open *heart*.”<sup>5</sup> In April 2012, President Obama spoke outside the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, saying: “We must tell our children. But more than that, we must teach them. Because remembrance without resolve is a hollow gesture. Awareness without action changes nothing. In this sense, “never again” is a challenge to us all – to pause and to look within. “Never again” is a challenge to reject hatred in all of its forms – including anti-Semitism, which has no place in a civilized world. And today, just steps from where he gave his life protecting this place, we honor the memory of Officer Stephen Tyrone Johns, whose family joins us today. “Never again” is a challenge to societies. We’re joined today by communities who’ve made it your mission to prevent mass atrocities in our time. This museum’s Committee of Conscience, NGOs, faith groups, college students, you’ve harnessed the tools of the digital age – online maps and satellites and a video and social media campaign seen by millions. You understand that change comes from the bottom up, from the grassroots. You understand – to quote the task force convened by this museum – “preventing genocide is an achievable goal.” It is an achievable goal. It is one that does not start from the top; it starts from the bottom up.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, this observation can be made at other levels of society than that of heads of state. At all political levels, from the very local to the international, activists, international organizations, the media, cinema, literature, tourism, culture, or even advertising<sup>7</sup> all share the same conviction.

Since 1995, when it recommended establishing a day to commemorate the Holocaust, the European Parliament has linked commemoration, education, and the prevention of racist violence. The Resolution states: “having regard to the upsurge of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia facing the international community, whereas Europe must respond firmly and

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/26/transcript-obama-delivers-eulogy-for-charleston-pastor-the-rev-clementa-pinckney/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.c34240d7af41](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/26/transcript-obama-delivers-eulogy-for-charleston-pastor-the-rev-clementa-pinckney/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c34240d7af41) (Accessed July 9, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/23/remarks-president-united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum> (Accessed July 9, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Memory sites are sometimes even used as backdrops, for example for fashion photography, as was the case at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (Holocaust-Mahnmal, MWF).

clearly to these threats, insisting that the peace in Western Europe since 1945 will not continue if the totalitarian and racist ideologies of the Nazis which led to the Holocaust of the Jews, the genocide of the gypsies, the mass murder of millions of others and to the Second World War are not prevented from spreading their pernicious influence, having regard to the fundamental importance of education in preserving and passing on memories, particularly with regard to the Second World War, having regard to the emergence of revisionist theses concerning the genocide which took place during the Second World War, [...] [the Parliament] calls for an annual European Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust to be instituted in all the Member States of the Union.”<sup>8</sup> This same conviction is also visible beyond the European level. In November 2005, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution that “urges Member States to develop educational programs that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide.”<sup>9</sup> Making an explicit connection between commemoration and prevention, 27 January – the date at which the Auschwitz concentration camp was first opened – is now an international day of commemoration of the Holocaust and for the prevention of crimes against humanity.

Politicians and experts on post-conflict policies agree that memory policies must express, and rewrite, history by recasting the roles of the good and the bad, appeasing feelings of injustice, and reaffirming shared values and narratives. The figure of the Righteous, who rescued the Jews, is lauded; the former “subversives” of the Cold War are re-baptized “victims” in many countries of Latin America. If memory policies manage to do all this then it is certain that they will help dispel the specter of political or racist hatred and open conflict. This belief brings us all together. In spite of our differences, we all take on this conviction, regardless of our age or social background.

In 2014, more than 31,000 young people aged between 16 and 29, citizens of 31 different countries, from Germany, Ukraine, China, the United States, France, or India, were questioned about their attitudes to memory and the future.<sup>10</sup> Of them, 90% declared that “knowing the history of the Second World War makes it possible to avoid the errors of the

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution on a day to commemorate the Holocaust, *Official Journal C 166*, 03/07/1995 P. 0132

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml> (accessed July 12, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> *Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah* and the *Fondation pour l'innovation politique*; results and discussion (in French) *Mémoires à venir. Enquête internationale réalisée auprès des jeunes de 16 à 29 ans dans 31 pays*, 2014, <http://www.fondapol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MEMOIREaVENIR-RESULTATS-A2-BD2.pdf>, p. 100 (accessed July 17, 2017).

past, prevent it from happening again”; they also agreed with the statement that knowing this history allowed them to “understand the history of [their] country”, “honor the memory of the victims”, “learn to respect those who are different from us”, and “help the victims”.<sup>11</sup> Among the respondents, 83% said they thought concentration camps sites should be preserved. The main reason given for this was the need to “avoid it happening again”. Conversely, they rejected the proposition that “it is the past, we have to put it behind us and forget.” Some years ago, American and Canadian interviewees also expressed similar opinions on the enlightening role of reminders of the past in contemporary society to avoid the repetition of past mistakes (Rosenzweig, 2000; Conrad *et al.*, 2009). Comments by ordinary citizens are concordant with this, whether they are collected from visitors to memorial museums (Gensburger, 2017; Antichan *et al.*, 2016 and Antichan, Gensburger and Teboul 2016), or during interviews on attitudes towards the past conducted outside the context of interaction with memory policies (Klein, 2013). Ultimately, we (almost) all agree that public reminders of past collective violence repair both people and societies, lessen the attraction of calls for discrimination, and in so doing, guard against the risk of history repeating itself.

### ***Emotion, dialogue and individuation***

Rooted in this shared belief, the implementation of these policies relies on three key assumptions thought to ensure their efficacy: emotion, dialogue, and individuation. First and foremost, memory policies rely on the emotional impact of the programs they implement, which focus on innocent children and humiliated women, privileging their unique stories, and exposing their helplessness and their tears. Sometimes more confronting images are shown, in ways that can be brutal, when the victors are in decision-making positions. In 1945, for example, the Allied troops that were liberating the extermination camps forced German citizens living nearby to watch the camps being dismantled and the survivors leaving; they were forced to watch and therefore to know (Jarausch, 2006). The belief in the strength of the lessons from the past and the emotion they convey has, however, become more systematic since then. It is no longer only designed to force the guilty parties to make amends. Today it applies to everyone and must have a preventative and not curative effect. Today raw memories are presented brutally to shake up society, as is the case in Rwanda where the memorials are more like ossuaries open to the sky (Dumas and Korman, 2012), or the

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<sup>11</sup> *Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah and Fondation pour l'innovation politique, The memory to come*, raw data available in English at: <http://data.fondapol.org/jeunesse/memoires-a-venir-2014/>



National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama, which provides an intense and emotionally challenging depiction of the lynchings that took place in the American South (Sodaro, 2018). Confronting, shocking, and provoking intense emotions in viewers appears to be an effective tool in reconquering “hearts and minds”.

Yet at the same time, past violence is today discussed in a way that is more pedagogical and careful to avoid overly-strong stigmatization of perpetrators – because their objective is also reconciliation and dialogue. Memory policies therefore also draw on victims’ testimonies, whether alone or alongside perpetrators (although the latter is often more in theory than in reality). Eyewitness accounts, as we know, have become a social tool that has been privileged wherever possible (Wieviorka, 2006), in legal spaces and museums, but also in new institutions. In nearly forty countries, truth commissions have provided the opportunity for everyone to hear eyewitness accounts and to talk together about the violent past. This forum has allowed historians, religious leaders, lawyers, and psychologists to question the perpetrators of violent crimes committed in the United States at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, for example, or those responsible for the human rights violations perpetrated under South African apartheid or during almost any of the authoritarian regimes in South America. Remembering together, building “shared” memory, is seen as being the necessary precondition to creating tolerant citizens and moving towards the reconstruction of national togetherness. The United Nations now strongly recommends the use of truth commissions, and has laid out a guide for good practice that recommends public hearings for victims of past violence, and the publication of reports on this violence, aiming to awaken previously dormant dispositions for tolerance in each and every viewer.<sup>12</sup>

Memory policies aim for emotional effect. They want the past to be discussed. They are also targeted at individuals rather than groups. They prioritize the testimonies of individual victims, giving them a face and a name, and the narratives of memory policies often follow the stories of people with unique life experiences. Finally – and this observation is one of the guiding themes of this book – they are first and foremost directed at individuals. It is on an individual level that we acquire knowledge, are moved by the experience of victims, and

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Security Council, “The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies. Report of the Secretary-General”, S/2004/616, 23 August 2004 : <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/2004%20report.pdf> ; “The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies: Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council”, S/2011/634, 12 October 2011 : [https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/S\\_2011\\_634EN.pdf](https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/S_2011_634EN.pdf) ; see also [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RuleoflawTruthCommissionsfr.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RuleoflawTruthCommissionsfr.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2017).

consequently modify our attitudes towards the past. And from this point, as an individual educated by memory, each of us must be able to distinguish good from bad, anticipate the negative effects of dynamics of exclusion, and stand against hatred, as a pacifist, or a savior. What makes its way into an individual's heart and mind, through civic education, visits to museums, or viewing documentaries, must remain there and guide his or her future behavior. That is the ultimate wager of these policies. Of course, there are certain policies that intervene more directly in the social sphere. Some peace building programs run by international organizations thus set out to bring about discussions between enemies, like between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, or Croats and Serbs in former Yugoslavia, for example. They intervene in the organization of schools and early childcare to impose diversity or subsidize companies that also favor diversity. Certain governments prohibit references to ethnic identity, inculcating large groups of the population with a particular version of history, or organizing the attendance of their young people at inclusive holiday camps for example. This social engineering, which attempts to create meta-groups bringing together formerly enemy factions, is not a feature of ordinary memory policy. Nor is it certain to succeed; the social world is adept at accommodating policies that seek to change everything and end up changing nothing; it finds ways to work around them or void them of any meaning.

For the most part, memory policies aim to change people on the inside, to make them more tolerant, and to kindle solidarities from the ashes of hostility. But we do not really know how. Calls for social cohesion have echoes that are both less positive and more easily identified. If the reminders of Nazi genocide constitute an effective defense against anti-Semitism today, it is because they awaken individual vigilance but also because they contribute to undermining those who promote and incarnate anti-Semitism. Similarly, transmitting the history of slavery and the emancipation of African Americans is meant to help combat racial prejudice and weaken partisans of white supremacy. In this respect, it is significant that the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened to the public in the spring of 2018, was set up by a non-governmental organization aiming to fight against the ultra-contemporary mass incarcerations of African Americans, and racial discrimination within the justice system.

Past and present proponents of intolerance are grouped together here as a single threat. These policies voice condemnation of acts of political violence. They cast their judgement on history. In 1987, the trial of Klaus Barbie, who was the head of the Gestapo in the region around Lyon during the French occupation, marked the beginning of a series of trials against political criminals in France. These trials, often described as "trials for memory", are now

frequently used by legal institutions from Latin America to Rwanda, as well as by the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Along with other reminders of political crimes, these trials are an important element in the struggle against the impunity of political leaders who ordered repression, provoked war, or made genocide possible.

Today, governments are required to make public statements – expressing their apologies, repentance, homages to victims, and condemnation of those guilty of violence – as well as increasing legal and symbolic initiatives. This is all the more important because practices have not significantly changed: amnesties remain common. When criminal justice is not an option, other means are used. Memory policies are therefore intended to help weaken former strongmen, particularly when they remain strong (because they have weapons, have not been pursued, or sanctioned, or because they still have a degree of legitimacy). These policies are designed to be dissuasive for ex-belligerents, their partisans, or their supposed heirs. They therefore have an immediate political benefit. We should not be too hasty to see this as the vector of a moralization of power. Memory policies are policies like any others; they are thus concerned with the proper use of fictions and subterfuge.

In the French case, which constitutes one of the guiding examples of this book, lessons from the past are presented by political parties on both the left and the right, as a way of fighting against the rise of the extreme right and the French National Front (FN, now the RN, *Rassemblement National*). In his genealogy of the expression “devoir de mémoire” (duty of memory), Sébastien Ledoux shows that calls for this duty to be respected began after the profanation of a Jewish cemetery in May 1990 (Ledoux, 2016). To cite only one example of such calls, the then Minister for Education, Lionel Jospin, inaugurating an exhibition on the deportation of Jews in France just a few days after the profanation, said the perpetrators had: “wanted to wound the Jewish community in France, in the most abject way possible, but [they] also struck humanity.” He then added “so that memory does not disappear, and to give all young people appropriate guides, [...] the school has a role to play, a mission to fulfill. The national education system is above all one of the sites in which collective memory is created [...]. It is a fundamental duty of the school system.” He then discussed the “so-called ‘revisionist’ theories negating the existence of the death camps” and condemned “the presence of teachers and researchers in universities who defend extreme right ideologies” and called on the “academic community” to “fully accept its duty to be vigilant” in this respect. Serge Klarsfeld, the president of the Association for the Sons and Daughters of Jewish Deportees in France (*l'Association des fils et filles des déportés juifs de France*), also

affirmed on March 30, 2015, that if Marine Le Pen were to win the 2017 presidential elections, that would represent “the destruction of the memory of the Holocaust.”<sup>13</sup>

In the United States, an identical mechanism has meant that commemoration, or more precisely de-commemoration has become an accepted way to fight against racism and publicly reaffirm the principle of racial equality. Since the tragic events in Charlottesville in 2017, which followed the decision of the municipality to move the statue of General Robert E. Lee, many towns have removed or destroyed statues and monuments commemorating supporters of slavery (Samuels, 2019). Once again, these memory policies are described as tools to fight against contemporary racism. In 2018, for example, and following recommendations from an expert committee, the city of New York decided to remove the statue of gynecologist James Marion Sims who conducted medical experiments on African American women.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, a statue of a black woman will take its place on the original pedestal, which has been preserved.

These policies constitute a privileged tool in the fight against the extreme-right in France, and against white supremacists and ongoing racial discrimination elsewhere, and they are increasingly an arena in which political parties confront each other over the diagnosis of a “failing” of national identity among certain social groups. In France, after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, “young people from the housing projects” were particularly targeted in this respect. The attacks were claimed by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but because they involved young French men, they logically provoked a revival of political expectations around memory policy. The speech made by the French President during the national tribute to the victims of the November 27 attacks is a good example of this. “The November 13 attacks will remain in the memory of young people today as a terrible initiation to the harshness of the world, but also as an invitation to confront that harshness through the invention of a new form of action. I know that this generation will hold up high the torch that we pass to them.”<sup>15</sup> These words provide a particularly strong illustration of the role that the state, and behind it – or at least alongside it – much of contemporary society, attribute to

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<sup>13</sup> [www.rtl.fr/actu/societe-faits-divers/marine-le-pen-c-est-la-destruction-de-la-memoire-de-la-shoah-selon-serge-klarsfeld-7777185956](http://www.rtl.fr/actu/societe-faits-divers/marine-le-pen-c-est-la-destruction-de-la-memoire-de-la-shoah-selon-serge-klarsfeld-7777185956) (accessed, June 25, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/monuments/downloads/pdf/mac-monuments-report.pdf> (consulted June 23, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> When he took office, President Macron immediately and intensely engaged with memory policies, drawing on the heritage of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, and defending so-called “balanced” approach to the French government’s use of the past. See in particular: <http://www.la-croix.com/France/Politique/Emmanuel-Macron-veut-reconcilier-memoires-2017-07-17-1200863390>.

memory. It is seen as the vector and producer of civic engagement and education for tolerance, as well as being an obstacle to the manifestation of political violence. It is the means by which to identify good citizens, but also bad ones.

## **Memory policy tools**

“He who forgets the past is condemned to repeat it.” This belief is reflected in many concrete elements of public policy. Obviously, there is nothing new about commemoration, and in particular the erection of monuments (Koselleck, 1998). Associated with paying homage to the dead (heroes and unknown soldiers), the leitmotiv “never again” was by no means neglected before the contemporary period. It evolved alongside political organization: the monopoly of strong state authorities gave way to competing “memorialists” (veterans, local authorities, victims’ associations) condemning state violence. The construction of monolithic “myths” was replaced with the uncomfortable regulation of a proliferation of narratives. Whether the state stammers and mumbles, or speaks loud and clear, it must speak.

Public actors of memory policy everywhere, whether elected officials or civil servants, as well as the men and women they are in contact with (leaders of associations or simple citizens), systematically reaffirm their belief that remembering dramatic or tragic past events prevents them being repeated and helps create tolerant and peaceful citizens. There are three key elements to these policies – the emphasis on emotions, the establishment of a dialogue of truths, and the focus on the individual level – and there are several tools that are used to implement them, in addition to sporadic commemorations. We will look at three of the most important of these tools here: museums, schools, and truth commissions.

### ***Memory museums and civic transformation***

In 1993, the United States inaugurated the first national museum dedicated to the history of the Holocaust. The inaugural speech by then President Bill Clinton made a direct connection between the events then unfolding in Yugoslavia, the teachings of the past, and the social role expected of the Museum. “We’ve gathered here to mark the opening of this Holocaust Museum. We do so to help ensure that the Holocaust will remain ever a sharp thorn in every national memory, but especially in the memory of the United States, which has such unique responsibilities at this moment in history. We do so to redeem in some small measure the

deaths of millions whom our nations did not, or would not, or could not save. We do so to help teach new generations the dangers of antidemocratic despots, racist ideologies, and ethnic hatreds. [...] The Holocaust Museum will stand as a stark reminder that, of the many tasks of democracy, the most imperative perhaps, are those of fostering tolerance for ethnic and religious and racial differences, of fostering religious freedom and individual right and civic responsibility; each of us to take responsibility for the welfare of all of us. [...] We know, of course, that the new Europe is not yet free of old cruelties and that contemporary horrors like the slaughter of innocents in Bosnia have not disappeared. Indeed, one of the eternal lessons to which this museum bears strong witness is that the struggle against darkness will never end and the need for vigilance will never fade away.”<sup>16</sup>

One of the stated objectives of the United States Holocaust Museum Memorial is thus to produce a “civic transformation” in visitors, to make the contemporary world more just (Linenthal, 1995).<sup>17</sup> In order to do so, this museum was probably one of the first to implement the systematic individualization of each visitor’s experience, above all seen as having to convey edifying emotions. At the entry to the museum, an individual passport was therefore offered to each visitor, so that they could take on the identity of a character from history as it was told in the museum, whether a deported Jewish child or a convicted criminal.

Since this in many ways pioneering museum was opened, this type of museographical approach has become common around the world. The goal is that individuals will have an emotional journey, and understand the experiences of a particular victim, who is also individualized, through an often-immersive tour of the museum. These memory museums (Williams, 2007) have developed so widely since 1993 that they now constitute a new international administrative category. Since 2001, these *memorial museums in remembrance of the victims of public crimes (MEMO)* have an ad hoc committee within the International Council of Museums (ICM): “The aims of IC-MEMO are to foster a responsible memory of history and to further cultural cooperation through education and through using knowledge in the interests of peace, which is also a key goal of UNESCO. The purpose of these memorial museums is to commemorate victims of State, socially determined and ideologically motivated crimes. The institutions are frequently located at the original historic sites, or at

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/president-clinton-speech-at-the-opening-of-the-united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-april-1993>.

<sup>17</sup> The 2019 controversy around the relevance of the comparison between the Holocaust and contemporary immigration policies illustrates the fact that the importance of civic transformation through historical analogies does not say anything about the meaning of the past per se.

places chosen by survivors of such crimes for the purposes of commemoration. They seek to convey information about historical events in a way which retains a historical perspective while also making strong links to the present.”<sup>18</sup>

These memorial museums cover various crimes and are found in all continents, in Europe of course, but also in North and South America, and in Asia. In May 2019, the specific committee within the ICM brought together 40 institutions including the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile. In 2010, the then President of the country, Michelle Bachelet had inaugurated this Museum of Memory and Human Rights, in Santiago, with the aim of once again “increasing knowledge of the systematic human rights violations committed by the Chilean state between the years 1973 in 1990, so that through ethical considerations on memory, solidarity, and the importance of human rights we can strengthen the national will so that events that target human dignity are never repeated.”<sup>19</sup> The majority of museums in IC-MEMO, however, are dedicated to different aspects of the Second World War and primarily situated in Europe.

France has more than a thousand history museums and nine “highly significant sites of national memory”, of which two relate to the First World War, five to the Second World War, and two to colonial wars. Aside from the permanent institutions, numerous temporary exhibitions are regularly inaugurated; indeed, the Mission for the Centenary of the First World War gave its support to more than one hundred exhibitions between 2014 and 2015.<sup>20</sup>

In France a number of sites related to the memory of the Holocaust have opened recently, which has amplified the phenomenon of memorial museums. Here we will list just a few of these new memorial spaces related to internment practices during the Second World War. In 2001, the Musée Mémorial des enfants du Vel d’Hiv (Memorial Museum of the Children of the Vel d’Hiv Roundup) was inaugurated in Orleans to bear witness to the memory of the camps in the Loiret region of France. In 2012, the Memorial de la Shoah opened in its new location, the former transit camp of Drancy, where 63,000 of the 76,000 Jews deported from France awaited their trains. In this respect, it is both a museum and a site of memory. In the same year, after eight years preparation, the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp opened.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://network.icom.museum/icmemo/about/aims-of-ic-memo/> (accessed in May 2019).

<sup>19</sup> <https://ww3.museodelamemoria.cl/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/discurso-presidenta.pdf> (accessed in January 2018).

<sup>20</sup> This figure was calculated based on the calendar of events for 2014 and 2015 on the website of the Mission, <http://centenaire.org/fr/en-france> (accessed June 25, 2017). The minutes of the meetings of the scientific board suggest a high degree of acceptance for proposed projects.

Finally, in October 2015 the Memorial of the Camp de Rivesaltes opened its doors as a symbol of diverse contemporary society, having interned Spanish republicans, Jews, and *harkis*<sup>21</sup> in turn.

In each instance, these institutions and their promoters strongly reaffirm the way in which the visitors' confrontation with the past and immersion in memory must, on the one hand bring about a transformation in their behavior towards more tolerance and citizenship, and on the other hand foster peaceful social relations. The speech by Manuel Valls at the inauguration of Rivesaltes Camp, cited above, is explicit in this respect. The Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp presents itself as a history and human sciences museum, proposing that its visitors "understand in order to act."

Moving away from France and into the memory of slavery, the opening of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, in the United Kingdom, in 2007, was the result of the exact same conception of the museum-memorial as a factor in social change towards tolerance. "The International Slavery Museum is needed. It is needed, yes, to help illuminate one of the darker, more shameful and neglected areas in our history – an era in which this city played a pivotal role. As well as this, it is needed because the consequences of that era are all around us in the shape of a rich and vibrant multi-national, multi-racial Atlantic world, but also in inequality of opportunity, racial prejudice, ignorance, intolerance and hatred. And these evils will not be overcome through denial or through wishful thinking. They have to be tackled head on, and the most potent weapon at our disposal is education; the essence of museums, and the essence of the International Slavery Museum. It is becoming more and more widely accepted that museums can be powerful engines of social change, through their educational power [...]. Our hope and expectation is that our young people will, through studying the evils of transatlantic slavery and of other, contemporary systems of human rights abuse, come to reject racism as an iniquitous, pernicious and bankrupt ideology."<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the mobilization of museums as tools for memory policies conceptualized as programs for social transformation goes beyond formal tours. It feeds into many social practices, in law as well as tourism. It makes museum-memorials quasi-administrations of the welfare state and the governmentality of contemporary societies. Since 2016, for example, in

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<sup>21</sup> Harkis were Algerian soldiers who fought for France during the Algerian War of Independence, some of whom were detained in camps when they sought resettlement in France after the war.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/resources/opening\\_speech.aspx](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/resources/opening_speech.aspx) (accessed June 20, 2019).



France, the Memorial of the Shoah has organized “citizenship training” for people convicted of racist or anti-Semitic offences in partnership with a number of regional appeals courts.<sup>23</sup> In this context, confrontation with the past must convert those who, by their behavior, flout the rules of the Republic. These new museums have also become tourist attractions in several towns and regions. This “memory tourism”, which has developed on an international level, has now become an important economic and administrative area in its own right, given that recent reforms in France have meant regions are increasingly in competition with each other. In 2010, for France alone the network of museums and memorials commemorating contemporary conflicts had 84 members, and the sites associated with the history of these events attracted more than six million people and generated nearly €45 million in revenue.<sup>24</sup>

### *Memory education in schools*

In addition to museums, the belief that remembering the past is a way to both prevent it being repeated and successfully influence individual behavior often inspires public policy tools in the school system. All around the world, school students are frequently the number one category of visitors targeted by the memorial museums discussed above.

Young people, future generations, and future citizens indeed constitute the main intended audience of memory policies. The Standing Committee of Ministers of Education within the Council of Europe has continually repeated that history and memory are central elements of the “development of democratic citizenship” and that “teaching history at school can and should provide a significant contribution to the general training and education of citizens” (Gensburger, 2008; Sierp, 2014).

This issue recently intensified in France; the year 2015 was marked on several occasions by calls for memory. First there was the centennial of the First World War, then the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, and finally the terrorist attacks in Paris. At a large conference on the Armenian genocide, the then Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem reiterated that memory and republican values are intended to be transmitted together:

“Because Republican citizenship is based on knowledge, a refusal of fatalism, school has a central role to play in this transmission. It is the school that can bring to fruition the promise the republic has made to its

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/le-memorial/les-stages-de-citoyennete-au-memorial-de-la-shoah.html> (accessed April 15 2019).

<sup>24</sup>[www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr](http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr)

children, that they can grow up in equality and tolerance. It is the school that can sow the seeds of shared memory. I want to pay homage here to all the history and geography teachers in France who contribute to this every day. The Armenian genocide under the Ottoman Empire, which is part of the memory we share together, is studied by all students during their compulsory schooling [...]. At school, we transmit the awakenings of citizenship, a culture of debate and ideas, and the fight against prejudice and all forms of persecution. We learn the difference between controversy, dialogue – which is at the heart of knowledge itself – and manipulation or falsification.

To take another example, from the other side of the Channel, British Prime Minister David Cameron, launched the commemoration of the Centenary for the First World War saying that “our children must learn the lessons of the First World War.”<sup>25</sup>

In many places, including Europe, the school system’s use of the past to train citizens not only to be patriots but also to be enlightened and tolerant, is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced back to the immediate postwar period (Eckmann and Heimberg, 2011; Legris, 2014). In 1945, UNESCO was created to oversee educational and cultural policies of member states and encourage intellectual and moral solidarity among humanity. This organization emphasizes the importance of working on and from the past to fight against racism and prejudice. Its slogan – “building peace in the minds of men and women” – is a good illustration of the principal of conquering individuals discussed above.

However, the use of memory to educate citizens has become more dynamic in recent years, being both systematized and institutionalized. In 2012, in France, the Minister of Education created “memory and citizenship advisor” positions within the education system, in order to better mobilize memory: “School has an essential role to play in the transmission of memory to children and young people. It must also prepare each student for their life as a citizen through an education to human rights and the rights of the child.”<sup>26</sup> In keeping with this, in 2016, the Minister of Education and the Minister for overseas territories together launched a competition entitled “The Flame of Equality” which “aims to increase knowledge of the

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<sup>25</sup> David Cameron, “Why our Children must Learn the Lessons of the First World War”, *Telegraph*, 18 December 2013.

<sup>26</sup> <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid73791/les-referents-academiques-memoire-et-citoyennete.html> (accessed June 25, 2017).

history of slavery, the slave trade, and their abolition, their legacy, as well as their current day effects and heritage. This contributes to citizenship and education to Republican values. It participates in the construction of collective memory around shared values in order to encourage a feeling of shared belonging.”<sup>27</sup> Once again, and like in the case of memory museums, the pedagogy used here relies partly on exemplary individual histories that are selected to facilitate a form of identification with students, who are themselves primarily considered as individuals (Antichan *et al.*, 2016).

Teachers are regularly encouraged to use ad hoc pedagogy for the aspects of the curriculum related to the “painful past” (using films, inviting witnesses to speak to the class, visiting memorial sites, and so forth). More than half of teachers in related disciplines (history, French, philosophy) have used these techniques in secondary and senior school, in both general and vocational streams. They see themselves as working towards civic education and making students more vigilant. This civic history has gaps of course; the Holocaust is mentioned systematically, but the violence committed by the French State during and after its colonial period much less so. Nor is much said about the passivity of the French government during the genocide of the Tutsis, in a Rwanda where a large number of French military personnel were stationed; justice and history have each begun to clarify the involvement of these soldiers alongside the murderous government. Yet this silence also reflects the same belief in the behavioral effects of memory education.

Other countries have different ways of mobilizing memory in the school system to transform society. In states that have experienced internal violent conflict, memorial tools can make the school the opportunity for learning conflict resolution techniques to help create peaceful societies. This is the case, for example, in programs inspired by “contact theory” developed by social psychologists, in which young people from antagonistic backgrounds (Israeli Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, Indians and Pakistanis, Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis, but also young people in North America from different ethnic, racial, or religious groups) come together in local schools or holiday programs overseas. This contact, which is more or less short-term, exposes young people to others and their history – whether in the classroom, in football matches, in dormitories, or in dialogue sessions about past controversies (Lefranc, 2011). Once again, these programs are not radically new, but they are now widespread. The

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<sup>27</sup> [www.education.gouv.fr/pid285/bulletin\\_officiel.html?cid\\_bo=101533](http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid285/bulletin_officiel.html?cid_bo=101533) (accessed June 25, 2017). The inspiration for the national competition for resistance and deportation is clear, as President François Hollande reiterated in his speech at the national day in remembrance of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition, on May 10, 2016.

Franco-German Youth Office has organized similar experiences for young people from both countries since the 1960s (Delori, 2008). The government and non-government institutions that promote this kind of contact hope that it will undermine prejudice and lead to lasting friendships between groups. The encouragement of tolerance and re-examination of memories of conflict is thought to then spread among children and adolescents in other spaces, whether in the family, in peer groups, with social acquaintances and so forth. Although these experiments are all met with enthusiastic support, it remains fairly clear that the isolated convictions and any rare lasting friendships formed here are not much of a match for the consensual forgetting and imperious orders of political authorities.

### *Memory in courts and truth commissions*

This same pedagogical and edifying power of public exhibitions of the past is attributed to the trials responsible for judging political crimes. Indeed, the observation of the judicial framework and the courts led Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder to forecast the emergence of a global culture of human rights through memory (2004 and 2010).

These trials, which are described as being “for memory” are partly beyond of the constraints of ordinary law. They break temporal restrictions through the non-applicability of statutory limitations for crimes against humanity, they cross national borders through universal jurisdiction, and they go beyond national institutions with ad hoc tribunals. Back in 1962, the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gourion justified putting Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi SS officer responsible for organizing the extermination of the Jews, on trial, in terms of the lessons that would be drawn from the court proceedings: “Our young people need to remember what happened to the Jewish people” (Marrus, 2000, p. 39). Most of the trials related to Nazi crimes gave rise to a similar reading: “conducted as exercises in collective pedagogy, they [aim] not only to shed light on historical events but also to identify clear morals in these events and shape the limits of collective memory” (Douglas, 2000, p. 213). The number of class visits to these trials is testimony to this. In 1998, in Bordeaux, France, 10,000 senior school students followed the trial of Maurice Papon, a senior police official for the Vichy government during the Nazi occupation of France. In 2014, in Paris, large numbers of high school and university students attended the trial of Pascal Simbikangwa, a Rwandan accused of genocide. Sometimes they even made up most of the audience at the hearing.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>One of the authors was able to observe this trial in its entirety for the purposes of scientific analysis. All these trials are generally filmed, to be used later in classrooms.

By establishing legal truth, these memory trials give each reasonably attentive citizen, attracted by the media buzz, an “anti-denial vaccine” (Bertrand Poirot-Delpech in Jean and Salas, 2002, p. 36). These hearings “are invested with the power to end the intergenerational transmission of trauma” (Salas, 2002, p. 28) and may also have the ability to heal victims, who are often responsible for instigating them. They might even have the power to purge nations through catharsis similar to that expected of truth commissions (Osiel, 2006). Criminal sanctions are therefore another element in the arsenal of tools for civic training and reform.

International organizations have also become invested in the ways in which the histories of past political violence have been documented. Truth commissions (reconciliation is sometimes added to the title, as a clear indication of the social objectives pursued through the public discussion of memories of violence) are the key institution of this transitional justice that presents itself as a form of practical science of peace building after political or civil conflict. These commissions have developed significantly since the 1980s, and even more since the 1990s. Some forty commissions have been set up in the wake of dictatorial repression, civil war, or genocide, by national governments who have given them the mandate of a few months to establish the “truth” about past acts of violence and to lay out a policy program for compensation (financial and symbolic) for victims.<sup>29</sup> The most famous among them were held in Chile, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, South Africa, East Timor, El Salvador, and Morocco. Some have broader mandate, such as the South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which is responsible for providing amnesty to political criminals who accept to disclose their actions. The truth commission protocol is now overseen by UN guidelines and held up as a model in Europe. It was even used in the town of Greensboro, in North Carolina, where community associations managed to reopen a debate – long closed in the legal arena – on the 1979 massacre of civil rights activists by members of the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi party (Ghoshal, 2015; Androff, 2012).

In a context in which criminal convictions for perpetrators of violence are rare (and amnesties frequent) these truth commissions encourage a compromise between former enemies, as well as the recognition of victims. The place for victims within these commissions means they are seen as “benevolent” towards those who have suffered trauma, and able to rekindle dialogue between victims and perpetrators, and even lead them to forgiveness. The philosopher Paul

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<sup>29</sup> [www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-digital-collection](http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-digital-collection) (accessed June 25, 2017).

Ricoeur said that such “a public exercise of political reconciliation” is a sort of forgiveness (2004, p. 627-629).

Public hearings for victims are at the heart of this protocol. They become witnesses to the past; they narrate the violence they were subject to, or the suffering born of lost loved ones. Their memories also feed both work by historians and the commission’s reports. These “tribunals of tears” (Lefranc, 2014) are often covered intensely by the media and encourage the display of emotion. They are intended to both “heal” traumatized victims and re-construct nations in mourning. Both drawing on and focused on memory, the goal here is “nothing less than conceiving the modalities for a global transformation of a traumatized society, and laying down the foundations for a new social contract” (Andrieu, 2012, p. 27), or “new national mythologies” (Hazan, 2007, p. 12-13). Those who promote memorial policies thus aim to prevent the return of hatred and war.

### **“Never again”: the effectiveness of memory policy**

The mobilization of memory therefore has transversal characteristics, whether in the context of schools, museums, truth commissions, or tribunals. First, these programs are targeted at individuals seen as independent of their social groups: it is their minds, their hearts, and their individual consciences that must be reached. Second, provoking an emotional engagement from these individuals is seen as a way of allowing memory policies to achieve their goals. Citizens who are emotionally affected react better to the lessons of the past – the emotional burden will allow them to draw on this in subsequent situations. Finally, telling the story of characters or judging one or several individuals enables both an identification with heroes, “saviors,” and “righteous”, as well as the condemnation of the guilty. This identification is in turn supposed to make these policies more efficient. When transmitted individually and emotionally, the past can serve as an example for individual behavior in the present. The use of memory – embodied and emotionally moving – has thus become standard practice. It has become our means to fight against intolerance and encourage peaceful citizenship. So has the spread of memory policy, which we have seen here through various kinds of indicators, achieved all its desired objectives?

Our goal is not to say that as ordinary people we have no “historic memory”. Quantitative surveys and studies prove the opposite. When asked, most of the population can refer to at

least some historical events: the two world wars firstly, and then in order of importance, depending on the social characteristics of respondents, the fall of the Berlin wall, the 09/11 attacks, the 1973 oil crisis, decolonization, May 1968, the creation of the euro, and so forth.<sup>30</sup> Nor do we seek to deny that these reminders of the past have social power. The mention of a war, and of the need to not forget it, generally provoke a desire among many social groups to adapt to what the speaker is saying, whether in the form of acquiescence or concern (we cannot say how deep). But can evoking the past make an impact on the individual, who we assume would then act accordingly? This awareness of the painful past, or of historical crises, does not necessarily have the strength – nor above all the impact– that it is assumed to have, at least not directly.

### ***Memory policies have not evacuated intolerance***

So-called “negative” memory policies (Wahnich, 2011), which criticize excessive state violence, are most often considered the reverse of the hate propaganda of violent authoritarian regimes. The ability of the latter to provoke hate is seen as an implicit sign of the former’s potential ability to restore tolerance. But in fact, there is nothing to confirm that the power of one leads to that of the other. On the one hand, this is because we know that the exclusion of an ethnic or religious group, for example, is only one of the elements enabling its extermination. Other conditions have to be met for the groups armed by the state to be able to kill. Those who carry out atrocities – whether they are peasants, soldiers, or army reserves – are never primarily, or even essentially motivated by hatred for those vilified by propaganda. On the other hand, the persuasive power of pro-genocide propaganda is largely, and above all, the result of the state’s ability to convince, terrorize, and manipulate indifference in a specific social, economic, and political context. It is not so much the content of this propaganda as the (state) power that is behind it – and the way it resonates in key social groups – that influence people and push them to act. Memory policies focused on guilt, and policies stigmatizing a designated scapegoat are therefore not two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>30</sup>. Harris Interactive survey for Europanova, January 9-10, 2014; *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and Fondation pour l’Innovation Politique, Mémoires à venir. Enquête internationale réalisée auprès des jeunes de 16 à 29 ans dans 31 pays*, 2014. See also the research by the Cost network: Social psychological dynamics of historical representations in the enlarged European Union, 2014-2018: <http://costis1205.wixsite.com/home> (accessed July 17, 2017).

Memory policies undertaken by governments in the interest of restoration or preservation of social peace are often compared with other antithetical approaches: a lack of any reminders of the past (“let bygones be bygones”), on the one hand; or the prohibition of the past, “policies of forgetting” (Loraux, 2002) or praise of forgetting (Rieff, 2016), on the other hand. At the level of families or individuals, silence, secrecy, or denigration give rise to feelings of guilt, resentment, and trauma, and even the repetition of violent acts. Transposed to the level of society, this psychological observation guarantees that at the very least memory policies prevent violence born out of a failure to speak, and thus they protect us against the worst. But things that are repressed, even at a strictly individual level, are not systematically dangerous. Above all, what is true for an individual or a small group is rarely true for a larger group. In fact, the idea that secrecy is necessarily harmful is debatable; we know that resilience, the ability of individuals to bounce back after a dramatic event, does not always involve extensive discussions about what happened (Cyrulnik, 2002) and can in fact rely on a “refusal to testify” (Klüger, 2001). Moreover, the hypothesis that “forgetting means being condemned to repeat” is more a political argument than a psychological principle. The sociologist Ian Hacking has shown that the idea that an abused child is destined to become an abuser was initially formulated not because it was empirically founded, but because it had a great potential to stigmatize and scare, and in so doing, be useful in fighting against child abuse (Hacking, 1991; Rechtman, 2013). The inevitable harm in “family secrets”, the unavoidability of trauma, the danger of denial, these are all principles that psychology has yet to provide support for, and this is even more true when society intervenes. Finally, and above all, states do not have the same capacity as individuals or families to silence themselves, or indeed to force themselves to speak.

Further proof of this can be found reading John Elster and Maurice Halbwachs. The first reminds us that we cannot order somebody to forget; we can force them to stop talking, or to repress, but it is impossible to totally to erase all representations of the past (Elster, 1986). Genuine forgetting is a state that cannot be obtained by pure will. “It is possible to make someone forget something, but the worst method would be to order them to do so, because this instruction, if taken seriously, risks having the opposite effect” (Elster, 1986, p. 118).<sup>31</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, a sociologist of memory, demonstrates that social groups and not nations or institutions maintain memory or obtain genuine forgetting through the repeated mentioning

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<sup>31</sup> In this respect, David Rieff’s argument in favor of forgetting seems to be primarily a political and moral position rather than an analytical one (2016 and 2011).



or omission – even allusive – of a person or event. It is in everyday social interactions that collective memory is forged (1992; Gensburger, 2016). Although all governments are weak in this respect, our contemporary memorialist governments are even more liable to be charged with weakness. They are criticized on all sides – by victims’ associations as well as by historians, accused of loquaciousness, and discussing a past that has never been so publicly aired since it became a part of history. Even states that aspired to prescribing a national identity, during the era of “positive” memory policy, such as that nostalgically evoked by Pierre Nora (1996), did not manage to force people to forget. When their amnesty laws forbade reminders of past tensions, they did not silence many; they merely prevented the political usage of these tensions. Finally, it is worth adding that these memory policies are not incompatible with a form of denial. Indeed, they almost always go hand-in-hand. All public policies provide a framework for interpretation; recalling the suffering of a minority can silence or subdue the suffering of another minority, or indeed a majority.

It is therefore difficult to consider memory policies in light of what they are not, what they replace, or what the challenge. So how can we evaluate their ability to foster both tolerance and to move beyond trauma? The memory of the Holocaust is, perhaps more than others, systematically presented as a means of fighting against hatred, racism, and anti-Semitism. And yet if recalling past violence is intended to prevent repetition and protect potential victims, we must admit this has not been vastly successful. The development of memory policies has not been associated with the advent of a more peaceful and tolerant society.

As we have seen, memory is often considered a tool for civic education. But young people’s involvement with violent groups and ideas seems to be increasing (Zauberman *et al.*, 2013). Many Israeli and Palestinian students have participated in the “coexistence sessions” organized by *Seeds of Peace*, an American charity, and have been thus encouraged to move beyond their prejudices. And yet these two populations seem reluctant – and increasingly so – to work towards peace. When these adolescents return to their war-torn homelands, they may or may not maintain the friendships they formed, but they are quite simply confronted with a political, economic, and social situation in which it is impossible to transform these personal connections into the seeds of peace.

Records of anti-Semitic incidents, which memory policies are supposed to explicitly fight against, are no more encouraging. Although there are difficulties with measurement and definition, a general tendency can nevertheless be observed. In the United States, the Anti-

Defamation League (ADL) annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents recorded a total of 1,879 attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions across the country in 2018, the third-highest year on record since ADL started tracking such data in the 1970s. In a year marked by a white supremacist shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue, which claimed 11 lives, and by a dramatic surge in white supremacist propaganda activity nationwide, ADL's audit identified 59 people who were victims of anti-Semitic assaults in 2018, up from 21 in 2017.”<sup>32</sup>

In France, there were 82 anti-Semitic demonstrations in 1999, 105 in 2013, and 241 in 2014, with a peak of 614 events recorded in 2012. The same thing is true for racism and intolerance, although general evolutions are visible. The sociologist Vincent Tiberj and his colleagues have developed a “longitudinal tolerance index”, designed to provide a condensed longitudinal perspective on the evolution of prejudice towards minorities in France (the closer the index is to 100, the more tolerance there is toward minorities).<sup>33</sup> This indicator has declined since 2000, a year that marked the intensification and spread of memory policies. Although tolerance increased steadily between 1990 and the mid-2000s, the indicator was at 58.2 in 2005, and 55.8 in 2014, thus reflecting an increase in intolerance.

If we see their target as being anti-Semitism specifically, perhaps reminders of the Holocaust have been somewhat effective. In 2014, the tolerance index was 79.5 for Jews, 73.6 for Black people, 62.16 for North African people, 53 for Muslims, and 28.5 for Romani people. Although Jews still constitute a “separate group” for 28% of respondents, this proportion is substantially lower than that declared for other groups, particularly Muslims (48%), and Romani people (82%). The researchers also identified “the resistance of traditional stereotypes” related to supposed wealth and privilege among Jews, which are fueled by criticisms of a “dual allegiance” to Israel and France. They also reveal an unintended consequence of the protection measures implemented after the terrorist attacks in particular. This residual intolerance of Jews is an element of broader dispositions that vary according to respondents' social characteristics. Anti-Semitism is more pronounced among older people, those who are less educated, those who have fewer resources, and those who have the feeling that their economic situation is deteriorating. It also increases for those who identify with Catholicism and right-wing politics: it is 58% among those close to the far-right FN (now the RN), 37% among those who support the more moderate right UMP - Union pour la Majorité

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/anti-semitic-incidents-remained-at-near-historic-levels-in-2018-assaults>, accessed July 6, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie. Année 2014*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2015.

Présidentielle (now the LR – Les Républicains). The variations in these indexes, their sensitivity to respondents' social characteristics or political circumstances above all shows that there is no direct correlation between memory policies and attitudes towards tolerance. In this respect it is striking to note that “young people” appear to be the prime targets for memory policies, even though these studies show that it is above all older French people who have both better knowledge of historical events, particularly those related to the Second World War, and yet also accept the anti-Semitic and racist stereotypes that contribute to discrimination more than young people do.

Finally, if the expected impact of memory policy is to make us think twice about using violence against others, we are likely to be further disappointed. Acts of intolerance, violence, and racism have indeed increased significantly, both in number and intensity. In addition to the terrorist attacks that have spread in several countries concerned by “memorial activism” (Rouso, 2016; Gensburger, 2019), racist and anti-Semitic incidents – which are complicated to measure (Ghiles-Meilhac, 2015) – are also on the rise in all countries that have been involved in developing memory policies, whether in the European Union or the United States. FBI statistics indicate a clear increase in anti-Semitic and racist hate crimes in 2018 in the United States<sup>34</sup>; the situation in Europe is such that the category of hate crimes has been developed by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights as a way to try to act on contemporary society<sup>35</sup> (Brudholm and Johansen, 2019). If perpetuating the memory of violent pasts is supposed to reinforce tolerance and the rejection of discrimination, as well as provoke behavior in keeping with these values – as politicians, experts, and citizens all agree they must – the effects are limited. At the very least, the norms which impose demonstrations of tolerance clearly do not apply to everyone.

In France, the “duty of memory,” which is regularly put forward in eponymous policies has been an important tool for mainstream political parties against the electoral progression of the far right (Ledoux, 2016) – but in vain. Indeed, the success of the extreme-right Front National (FN) in the French political sphere seems like an ironic disavowal of memory policies. Far from declining, the FN has been increasingly successful with French voters since the early 2000. In 2012, after more than 10 years of active policies around memory, partly for the benefit of combatting the FN, two extreme right MPs were voted into the lower house for the first time since two-round majority voting was introduced in 1988. Similarly, the FN score in

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics> (accessed July 3, 2019)

<sup>35</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/hate-crime> (accessed June 15, 2019).

presidential elections has continued to progress steadily since 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen (then president of the FN) was voted into the second round of these elections. In 2017, Marine Le Pen, like her father before her, made it to the second round of the presidential election and scored a record number of votes. In the last decade, the increase in number of events related to memory has developed alongside an increase in the number of people voting for the FN.

This observation is of course not a correlation. It is not meant to imply that memory policy fosters extremism and hate crimes, nor to reduce the progression of far-right parties to a memorial issue. Other political parties have chosen to present this worrying political competitor as the incarnation of racist ideologies, or even as the heir to the violent practices of the Second World War. Other readings may be more appropriate – but perhaps it is simpler to fight a party that incarnates hatred rather than one that reflects the failure of social policy, or which has contradictory positions. So, although there may not be a correlation between the rise of memory policy and the strengthening of the extreme-right, there is concomitant development. Memory policies, their tools, and their sites of memory, have not prevented the consolidation of this extreme right party. Furthermore, an identical observation can be made for the rise of white supremacists in the United States, and for certain countries in former Eastern Europe, for which the European Union implemented a memorial arsenal so extensive that some authors have described it as a “memorial pillar”, upon which membership to the union is implicitly dependent. However, the European Union’s involvement in the development of inclusive memory policies in Poland has not prevented the democratic rise to power of an ultraconservative right, which incarnates values and convictions that are diametrically opposed to those of these memory policies, whether related to anti-Semitism or the persecution of LGBT minorities. These observations lead us to explicitly formulate the question which often remains implicit: do memory policies do what we expect them to do?

### ***(Re)framing the question of the effects of memory policy***

We can no longer avoid the question of how effective memory policies are. It has already been posed by several commentators, expressing their concern or indignation. Both researchers and journalists have expressed queries relating to the soundness of systematic memorial voluntarism. David Rieff, for example, took a stand in *Against Remembrance* (2011), and more recently documented the ironies of memory in *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016). Up until now, the doubts expressed have fallen into two categories. Some expressed

the fear that over-repeating the same warnings would make them inaudible beyond the immediate circle of activists, victims, academics and teachers, humanist activists, and the administrative personnel who have become memory professionals. From this perspective, memory policies have produced strong moral guidelines, but ones that only circulate in closed groups. Other observers criticize the manipulation of civic rituals for ideological (most often identity-driven or nationalist) objectives, by politicians on all sides (Offenstadt, 2009) – this is not unreasonable from our perspective, as political scientists familiar with political instrumentalization of both major and minor causes. Like Margaret MacMillan in her denunciation of the “uses and abuses of history” (2009), the authors who condemn these manipulations of the past do not see politicians as being solely responsible. The victims of political violence themselves, their descendants, and the leaders of associations who seek to represent them, can all be considered hungry for compensation and symbolic benefits – and all in competition with each other. Academics and novelists have used expressions like “the Holocaust industry” to criticize the commercial use of its memory (Finkelstein, 2001; Reich, 2014), “competition” between “memory entrepreneurs” (Chaumont, 1991) or the allegedly propensity of the latter to take on “identity” or “communitarian” claims that are seen as potentially threatening to national cohesion (Nora, 1996; Michel, 2010). In these analyses, memory politics are seen as extending the past hatreds they should enable us to move beyond (Rieff, 2016). Sometimes concerns are related to “social connectedness” which appears to be threatened by the general ambiance of “victimhood” (Garapon, 2002), or the weakening of shared references, a crisis of transmission (Traverso, 2005), a “tribalization of politics” (Stora, 2007), or even an “anthropological breaking point” that undermines the status of truth itself (Coquio, 2015).

In spite of their diversity, these questions about the effects of memory policies are all formulated in terms of morality and principles. They remain largely reliant on (quite legitimate) normative considerations: disappointment about policies that so much was expected of, and rebellion against authority figures who do not use them as they should be used. Here we hope to reformulate the question of the effects of these memory policies in different terms, giving it the simplicity that it often lacks. The social sciences encourage us to critically examine the idea that these memory policies could have this kind of effects on civic education, or conversion for those involved in violent conflicts.

How can we identify the effects of these memory policies? This question echoes the more general reflections on the difficulties of evaluating the “effects” or “reception” of any public policy (Spire, 2016; Revillard, 2017). Memory policies are specific, however, in that they are

directed (at least theoretically) at all citizens, rather than a group that can be defined to measure reception. Moreover, they rely on instruments of symbolic public action, which are essentially intangible and non-technical, and therefore even more difficult to evaluate. In the age of big data we must also face the obvious: no quantitative study can convincingly establish a causal relationship between the state resources invested in memory (financial or human) and the decline of intolerant discourses (in voting rates, or survey respondents), or the prevention of the repetition of violence (measured in years without conflict). The increase in the number of attempts to systematically quantify the effects of memory tools (exhibitions, truth commissions, and so forth), leads to a single undeniable conclusion: the empirical difficulty of this project. As part of the French state's new budgetary approach, implemented since 2006 (Bezes and Siné, 2011), which requires that policy objectives and indicators of success be made explicit, memory policies are one of the rare areas in which the success and performance of policy is considered difficult, if not impossible, to calculate. Although a decrease in explicit intolerance, reflected in actions or declarations is an indicator of the success of memory policies (but this is complicated to confirm), their effectiveness remains unclear. Indeed, their relative ineffectiveness is confirmed if we look at their target audiences. From this perspective, the content is not always appropriated as expected.

In Belgium, for example, at an exhibition commemorating the Centenary of the First World War with the intention of promoting peaceful relations between European states, visitors were asked to express their opinions on a certain number of criteria as they entered and left the museum. These measures are traditionally used to quantify pacifist sentiments in social psychology. The results demonstrate that as they left the exhibition, the visitors demonstrated decreased support for pacifism generally and an increase in nationalistic stereotypes. The researchers who conducted the study hypothesize that, in keeping with the current norms in this area we have already discussed, the exhibition focused on both raw emotions and figures of victims. Yet these two elements tend to provoke a defensive reaction and a form of desire for vengeance against the "Other", instead of the pacifism and peaceful coexistence intended (Bouchat *et al.*, 2017).

Similarly, in terms of the transmission of memory in the school environment, qualitative research in Germany has suggested that for certain students in certain situations the transmission of the history of Nazism can give rise to anti-Semitic jokes in the schoolyard – far from the universal objective of preventing anti-Semitism, but not necessarily a sign that the authors of the jokes genuinely hate Jews; sometimes a joke can be just a joke (Oeser, 2019). Finally, research at the crossroads between schools and museums show that school

visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau for young Israelis do not produce dialogue between Israelis and Poles, or between Jews and non-Jews. In fact, these school visits may encourage the development of a feeling of separation, an “enclave” mentality for the Israeli teens, many of whom leave with the feeling that it is impossible to genuinely exchange with Polish people, or indeed with the rest of the world (Feldman, 2010). In this specific case, we do not observe the education for tolerance through memory that was hoped for, but rather the reinforcement of a form of belonging that excludes both the Other and the rest of the world.

An even more striking example of this comes from an exhibition on the history of Jewish children in Paris during the occupation, where certain visitors interviewed ended up mobilizing, of their own initiative, ethnic stereotypes that are vectors of discrimination – even after stating at the beginning of the interview that their visit to the museum was to respect the duty of memory and fight against hatred and intolerance. One woman interviewed as she came out of the exhibition talked at length about the fact that there were relatively few “visitors of color” and “from immigrant backgrounds” among the exhibition-goers, a sign for her that these groups do not fully adhere to the Republic and its principles, and that they are “not really French”: “we do not have the same history [...] or the same values” (Gensburger, 2017). This brings us a full circle. Memorial practice is no longer seen as a vector of Republican values, but as a sign that those values are shared. It encloses the group that it is supposed to open. Stigmatizing comments such as these, diametrically opposed to the objective of memorialization, have been observed in visitors to other historical exhibitions, for example related to the First World War (Antichan *et al.*, 2016). Like a mirror image of the civic expectations of the power of memory, individuals who are not interested in commemoration are essentially disqualified as citizens. It does not take much to form in-groups and foster the feelings of “us” and “them” that consolidate them – social psychologists have demonstrated this by creating solidarities, which can become competitive, and even hostile, even when they are formed entirely randomly (Sherif *et al.*, 1961). What is conceptualized as a means of unlocking exclusive identities, can easily end up supporting other identities. What should be used to open, closes. In this case, memory policies have their “experts” and those who are ignorant, but this social and cultural divide can reflect ethnic identities and reinforce the dynamics of exclusion that these policies are supposed to combat. Let us therefore try to understand why memory policies have trouble reaching their target, when they do not have the opposite effect to that intended. Responding to this question means moving away from the (futile) focus on impact, to reveal the various reception mechanisms of

memory policies. We will look at what individuals actually do with the events and interpretations that are proposed to them, as they interact with projects mobilizing memory.



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## Chapter 2: Memory policies in action

If we want to understand the apparent inefficacy of memory policies, we must first look very concretely at the way in which they operate. They are not doing what we expect them to do, so we need to look at the way in which they actually function, rather than criticizing their moral foundation or politicization as a matter of principle. What happens when students attend a commemoration, when individuals visit a memorial, when victims testify before a truth commission, or when criminals are judged at a tribunal for memory: all of this has sparked little curiosity up until now, whether from political leaders, activists, or researchers. There are some studies, however, that allow us to identify the impact of memory policies implemented in contemporary societies. Whatever context we look at – whether schools, museums, truth commissions, or courtrooms – two key observations can be made. First, it is clear that memory policies are primarily targeted at an abstract public. Rather than being specifically and clearly directed at groups considered hateful or indifferent, they most often address a universal citizen, who is presented as morally ambivalent (both good and bad) and assumed to be receptive to these policies. This figure is contradicted by the knowledge sociologists have accumulated, which suggests that the actual audience is far removed from this imagined and largely imaginary portrait. It is true that we are all exposed to fleeting references to extremely violent past events, and it would be good to draw lessons from them: whether from novels, the media, or the commemorations designed to reach a broad “national” public. But the few social science studies that exist clearly demonstrate that memorial events primarily concern two groups: first students, who are a “captive” audience, and second, retired people and professionals, a “faithful” and “expert” audience (Davallon, 2000; Eidelmann and Raguette-Candito, 2002). Even the supposedly most attractive incarnations of these policies struggle to attract large numbers. Among the five most popular museums in France there is only one memorial museum: the Caen Memorial. This museum attracts less than 400,000 visitors a year, just 5% of what the Louvre attracts. In other places, in post-war contexts where memory is used for pacification, “ordinary people”, as non-governmental organizations call them (Lefranc, 2006a and 2008), are the target audience. Yet once again, those who benefit are far from average citizens. They are often members of specific groups and even the same circles as the professionals who implement these memory programs. Basic sociological observations reveal that the universality of lessons of the past is more localist and parochial than it first appeared.

The second unavoidable and overarching observation is that before they can produce lessons of the past for the future, memory policies provoke interactions in the present. Memory is appropriated through social interactions, rejection or support, recognition or interpretation. Although they are indeed “faced with the past” (Rousso, 2016), both the promoters and targets of these policies must first experience things (school textbooks, exhibitions, memorials) or exchanges (between students and teachers, between victims and judges, and so forth) that are meaningful in the moment, in the context (Lahire, 1996), and in the social space in which they unfold. Memory policies do not resolve conflicts from the past, and nor do they foretell the future behavior of their audience. Their memorial message is by nature distorted, because it is always embedded in social relations that give it meaning today, like any other social process.

### **School memories: social “noise” in the classroom**

The school’s role in transmitting and constructing national identities in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries is now well known. Even at that time, context was important. Studies like those of Jean-François Chanet, on local and regional identities, which he calls “*petites patries*” (literally “little motherlands”) or Katharine Throssell children’s reactions to banal nationalism show that the appropriation of this educational message – in this case patriotic – always operates through the local, but also social or religious, context (Chanet, 1996, Throssell, 2015). It is most likely the same for the teaching of violent pasts, in terms of their role in civic education. The few studies that have been dedicated to this (de Cock and Heimberg, 2014; Brown, 2014), suggest that certain negative reactions around the teaching of the Holocaust have been documented in France, particularly among young people from Muslim backgrounds living in disadvantaged areas, who see this reminder of the past through the prism of contemporary issues, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Brenner, 2015). Several studies suggest however that, overall, incidents relating to this teaching remain limited, both in France and elsewhere, in Sweden, Belgium, or Switzerland for example (Bonafoux, de Cock-Pierrepoint and Falaize, 2007; Grandjean, 2016; Eckmann and Heimberg, 2011<sup>36</sup>). Our objective here is not to judge the accuracy of these different conclusions, nor to support or condemn the possible rejections of the moralistic teaching of history and its lessons. Instead, let us look at what actually occurs when teachers – and the

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<sup>36</sup>[http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg\\_media/teachersurvey\\_eng\\_webb.pdf](http://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/wysiwyg_media/teachersurvey_eng_webb.pdf), for an international study (accessed July 19, 2017).

memory professionals or eyewitnesses upon which they rely – transmit or teach violent histories in the expectation that students will draw conclusions for their future civic behavior. Instead of looking at the intention to provoke emotions that govern a certain understanding of teaching and the curriculum, let us look at the emotions and other reactions that are actually expressed in the classrooms – in all their complexity. Our goal here is not to criticize attempts to raise awareness by challenging their use of pathos as a matter of principle, but rather to describe them.

***Reticence: fulfilling one's role as a teacher by evoking the violent past***

This shift in perspective leads to the clear observation that there is a gap between teaching recommendations and practices. Although the “civic dimension” is emphasized by teachers, as was clearly demonstrated for the Swiss case (Eckmann and Heimberg, 2011), and although in France many do use the pedagogical tools proposed by the Ministry for Education during classes dedicated to the violent past, often the factual content of the curriculum remains the core of the class. Teachers do not always follow the imperatives of this ritual of civic conversion through memory, and certainly do not do so systematically.<sup>37</sup> Aside from a theoretical acceptance of the importance of the past in building today's society, they do not adopt the civic function that is ascribed to them as mechanically as we might think. For example, and although we do not have a comprehensive study on this, there is reason to believe that the international day for the memory of the Holocaust and the prevention of crimes against humanity, January 27, is not often taken into account by teachers (de Cock and Heimberg, 2014). This gap between expectations and practices is not due to the teachers' lack of support for values of humanism and tolerance, but primarily to the social space of the classroom.

The class is a space for interactions between a professional, the teacher, and students who also live in other spaces of socialization. In France, training for history teachers is primarily focused on their knowledge of their subject, rather than on pedagogy or didactics. Once they are in the classroom, having received a kind of professional socialization, most teachers transmit facts, in keeping with the official curriculum rather than the commemorative calendar. In so doing they confirm that the school remains a space for knowledge. Through their professionalism, the teacher effectively disappears behind their authoritative discourse,

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<sup>37</sup> Aggiornamento history and geography, thoughts and propositions for a renewal of history and geography teaching, from primary school to university (in French), <http://aggiornamento.hypotheses.org/>, (accessed June 25, 2017).



which is primarily directed at the exam. Moreover, they convince the students (and indeed the parents) that a consensual reading of history is possible (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2008). Turning away from this professional habitus to construct an articulation between history and memory is dependent on having time, and the ability to take a certain pedagogic distance, which seems unlikely given the organization and means available, at least within the French national education system.

### *Do memory policies foster indifference instead of tolerance?*

Memory policies are very unevenly implemented in the school system. In any event, they do not have the consistency the curriculum attributes to them – which does not necessarily have a bearing on their mobilizing force in other areas, in particular politics. For various reasons – collective dynamics, personal experiences, local context, or institutional opportunities – some teachers do follow the injunction to promote tolerance. But is teaching actually effective when it takes on this civic role, or when it is perceived as such by the students? The limited influence of citizenship education has been observed in many countries; knowledge about the institutional and political sphere is increasing, on the basis of the shared cultural foundation transmitted by the school system, but this does not have an impact on political attitudes or social behavior. This produces different effects depending on the social characteristics of students. Studies in different countries have shown that the effects may even be contradictory to those intended, leading to increased remoteness from political activity and civic participation (Litt, 1963; Jennings and Niemi, 1974). It seems easier to reinforce norms in groups that are already predisposed to them than to convince people who are genuinely intolerant or simply indifferent.<sup>38</sup> The few studies conducted on the immediate impact of these lessons which draw on an edifying past to promote tolerance confirm this.

For example, an increase in historical knowledge about the Holocaust does not produce a change in attitude among students who consider themselves close to the extreme right. Whether they are socialised by highly politicised families who value learning or are anxious to resist the adult world by subscribing to illegitimate ideologies and flirting with the propaganda of recruiters, these students often have extensive knowledge of the period they glorify. Encountering lessons on the past at school does little to change their convictions. Indeed, the few studies that exist demonstrate, from a comparative perspective, that history

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<sup>38</sup> If there are in fact people who are consistently and coherently intolerant, we will come back to this in Chapter 3.

lessons tend to reinforce their extreme opinions (Deckert-Peaceman, 2002; Eckmann and Eser Davolio, 2002).

A similar observation can be made for post-conflict situations, for example the teaching of the history of apartheid, which is today encouraged in South African schools. The transmission of the segregationist past aims to enable a civic awakening and the condemnation of racism, which the end of legal segregation in the 1990s is far from having expunged. Drawing on a long and painstakingly detailed observation of history classes, Chana Teeger demonstrates that these lessons produce a certain indifference about racism among students (even though they are enrolled in racially mixed classes). And racism is persistent and visible in contemporary South African society. In this context, teaching based on memory ultimately produces a kind of naturalisation of the racism against which it is supposed to fight. Teeger shows that it is in fact the form of the narrative that explains this (Teeger, 2015). Teachers mobilise individual stories that are supposed to be edifying and easy to identify with. In racially mixed classrooms, the teacher also tries to draw on examples of white South Africans engaged against apartheid. Yet this pedagogical framework presents characteristics of depoliticization that are shared by many contemporary memory policies: the refusal of the Manichaeic narratives, emphasis on individual experiences, and the importance of emotion. These attributes explain why students end up with a belief that racism is banal and intrinsic to society, producing a form of disengagement and depoliticization. Narratives that are similar in form – which privilege for example exemplary characters and testimonies – can therefore revive hostile opinions in certain cases, and in others, indifference and fatalism.

### *Social frameworks of memory: from school to family*

Sociology is able to further enlighten us as to the lack of resonance of these civics lessons. Even Emile Durkheim (1956), who saw teaching as having a “quasi-hypnotic power” (at the time teachers were nicknamed the “black hussars of the Republic”, incarnating respect for moral authority and patriotic duty), described the importance of the thousand little “noises” that prevented complete attention and internalization of lessons. Durkheim emphasized the role of this “unconscious and continual education” in which the unintentional transmission by teachers counts for more than what is intentional. Moreover, the school is not a simple interaction between student and teacher; it is just one of the social worlds the students frequent. Among these other worlds that resonate onto the school, the family sphere is particularly important. Several studies demonstrate that the family constitutes a clear filter for

interpreting the message of educational policies concerning memory. For example, the importance of school textbooks and curriculum in Japan has been shown to be secondary to the transmission of family history and the reading of the past it incarnates (Fukuoka, 2011). The same is true in Germany.

Sociologist Alexandra Oeser's study into how the history of Nazism is taught in four German schools is particularly interesting in this respect (Oeser, 2019). Here we see that the countercultural heritage of the 1968 social movements, very present among teachers, plays a driving role in their desire to make their students tolerant citizens, and their reliance on the transmission of the history of the Holocaust to do so. The relative uniformity of the teachers' motivations is in striking contrast with the variety of ways in which the students receive and appropriate this teaching. These consequences can be explained firstly by very different family configurations. Indeed, only the family can impose its vision on the child – when there is no competition from anywhere else. When it transmits its preferences to young children, this is not “one of many possible worlds,” but rather “the only existent and only conceivable world, the world *tout court*” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 154-155). This family-based learning helps construct a vision of the social and political world, its rules, its ideologies, and its histories as an “unshakable reality” which explains why much of what is internalized in this period goes unnoticed (Throssell, 2015, p. 104). However, that does not mean children do not question or challenge what the family transmits; children “recycle” (Pagis and Lignier, 2017), imitate, distort and appropriate what they learn in this primary socialization. For example, rather than well-defined party preferences, they may internalize an interest in politics, habits of family discussions, for example, due to a family “style” that is more or less fusional and open to the outside world.<sup>39</sup> This ability to imitate is one of the explanations for the difficulty in evaluating the solidity and durability of these legacies. For young people in Québec, for example, academic knowledge and attitude towards the past do not always go hand-in-hand; the school system says it is important to know about history, but the content of this knowledge can come from other places, and in particular from the family (Létourneau, 2014; for a comparative approach see Lanthéaume and Létourneau, 2016). National narratives, and with them a certain vision of history, are thus transmitted both officially through the school system, the curriculum, and the hidden curriculum (actual classroom practices), and unofficially through primary socialization in the family. The interactions between these different sources of socialization, and the agency of the child in reacting to

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<sup>39</sup> Generalist studies on childhood socialization overlap with those which have focused more specifically on socialization to the past (Maurer, 2000; Throssell 2015; Pagis and Lignier, 2017).

them, is also influenced by the emotional connections children and young people have to these different spaces and sources, and the way they construct an idea of themselves in relationship to these narratives (Throssell, 2015, p. 341).

When there is a coherence between the various worlds that a person inhabits that legacy is clearer. We are therefore not the mechanical products of a family socialization conveying social identity, nor is there a perfect coherence between the ways people operate in the different spaces they inhabit. We experiment with different worlds in which we acquire dispositions that we use or put on standby elsewhere. Perfectly homogenous socialization is a sociologist's dream, and a historic and social exception (Lahire, 2011).

### *Ordinary social interactions and the appropriation of lessons of the past*

The long-term power of the different social worlds we evolve in must be seen in conjunction with their power in the moment. History teaching, or other moments when the past and its lessons are transmitted at school, are more than just moments in which what was already present within the individual (moral character, social identity, family heritage) resist the teachers' efforts to influence them. Classes are also situations, interactions in a particular moment. A class dedicated to discussing past political violence will not be the same if an incident occurred between the students just before they entered the classroom. It will unfold differently if a rebellious student uses the change in the teacher's tone, for example resulting from the emotion provoked by discussions of the violent past, to express their hostility, or on the contrary, to win back the benevolence of the teacher. Rejection or appropriation cannot always be taken at face value. The desire to be good student facilitates participation in this kind of dynamic, even more so when it reflects discussions that take place around the dinner table.

The description of violent events is not automatically considered a truth that must be learnt from, not because of family memory, or classroom rules, but rather because in the moment of transmission, it is situated within a complex social interaction. A multitude of social relations come together around the classroom, sometimes independently from other social worlds, sometimes not: my classmate may or may not be my cousin, the son or daughter of one of my mother's workmates, my neighbor, and so on. Although genocide and political violence demand an intense level of concentration on a moral level, and although their complexity requires an equal or greater attention in terms of knowledge, our attention is also drawn and maintained by other things. Morality is a rationale for action which does not necessarily

weigh out against the thirst for knowledge, political anger, desire (to please the teacher, to make a good impression on one's classmates) or lack of desire (escaping boredom by more or less discretely texting in class). We are thus able to think of things other than those which – some would say morally – should concern us.

These social interactions that take shape in the classroom influence the ways in which the memorial messages which may be transmitted there are appropriated and become meaningful for the students. Before transmitting a message of any kind, the teacher must first manage social interactions; at best, students must be supervised and guided. Identification with teachers is not generally strong, hostility is more frequent (Percheron, 1984). Given the importance of emotion in the internalization of primary socialization (Berger and Luckman, 1967) this could go some way to explaining why school may not be the best place for the transmission of effective civic messages through memory. School is perhaps not the ideal tool to ensure the transmission of the past, particularly at a time when the devaluing of teachers' qualifications and their unenviable average salary threaten their legitimacy even more.

With that in mind, we can understand why, in South Africa, teachers – including black teachers – in good faith choose a form of pedagogy that leads to a naturalization of racism, as mentioned above. To avoid expressions of anger that prolong the political conflicts so central to the country's history, and based on the idea of scientific neutrality, the teachers have implemented a pedagogy that is no longer exclusively focused on a political system, but rather on individuals who are victims or who fight against the system. In ensuring that this history includes both Blacks and Whites, they also emphasize, in spite of everything, the existence of White "victims" and Black "offenders". Yet when we focus too much on communication problems between individuals, we no longer see the social problems between whole groups. Moreover, apartheid is analyzed with a view to judging the responsibilities on both sides, ultimately overlooking their asymmetry. The students, who were interviewed after a long period of observation in classes, thus attributed behavior to the actions of isolated individuals, desocializing and depoliticizing their perspectives on the problems of South African society. As understandable as it may be, this pedagogical decision – which as we will see below is in keeping with the choices of truth commissions, another institution working towards "reconciliation" – helps explain why these lessons from the past are not mobilized by students to make contemporary society more egalitarian (Teeger, 2015).

Similarly, the organizational constraints that lead British teachers to individualize and incarnate the narratives of the past – for example situating their school's town in the history of the First World War – prevent young people from grasping the meaning expected of them. As

it is told to them, history remains a collection of little stories about individual people in a given neighborhood; it does not take on political meaning. This search for closeness and connection to a period of history produces a paradoxical remoteness for students who, once again, rarely find the foundations they need for engaging with contemporary society, as Catriona Pennell demonstrated in her study of British school students visiting sites of the First World War (Pennell, 2016). Although we do not have in-depth studies on this, we can formulate the hypothesis that it is the fear of a public negative reaction toward the evocation of the memory of the Holocaust (Bossy, 2007), for example a hostile reaction among students of immigrant origin supportive of the Palestinian cause, that fosters these adaptations within the classroom.

Citizenship education is therefore not simply the transmission of a lesson that consolidates the civic dispositions of students who are attentive because their knowledgeable and impassioned teacher makes good use of emotions and identification. This more or less factual or moral content is indeed transmitted, but along with a host of other messages, some of which are reactive, intentional, and significant (political rejection, emotional support, etc.), others which have no connection to the content, nor intention, nor even a clear meaning. The school system transmits a range of things that are not always coherent or intentional; the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968, Forquin, 2008), rules of behavior, educational style, participation practices, the valorization of knowledge, organization of ideas. It is also the space for the transmission of non-pedagogical learning, insults, love letters, and social skills shared in the playground (Young, 1971; Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998). History lessons take on their full meaning in these moments where “noise”, rules, and “meaningless talk” abound. These chaotic encounters can give them great strength, for example when a student who wants to fulfil the expectations of the teacher (which overlap with those of his or her family environment) identifies with an eye-witness account of history, and finds fulfilment in this role that brings together academic, civic, and moral validation. But the proliferation of background noise can also mean the message – in spite of its clear strength – will not be heard, or that it will provoke hostility. For example, Sylvain Antichan and his colleagues followed several high school classes during their visits to exhibitions related to the Centenary of the First World War in different part of France. Each time, the students’ appropriations of the past appeared embedded within a range of social roles, as a classmate within the peer group, as a boy or a girl in a gendered space, as a visitor to an exhibition, and finally as a student. Each of these roles produce their own specific postures and noise, which may be difficult to conciliate. The

student visitors were therefore less invested in the exhibition and its contents, than in its social function and the ways it could be used (Antichan *et al*, 2016).<sup>40</sup>

Holiday camps or programs that bring together adolescents from groups or countries in conflict, to help them overcome hostile memories, can be seen in the same way, taking into account everything that occurs in the moment of interaction. It would be nice to believe that whole societies could be won over to peace and tolerance by the magic of contact between presumed enemies. But, alas, it is more complicated in that. These young people are not official representatives of their national or community groups; they are also members of social groups, possibly the recipients of their parents' political allegiances, and above all individuals, who take either the side of conflict or friendship in their interactions with others. The social psychologists who justify and theorize these experiments recognize this: what is created within a safe space is not easily transposed into a society that is deeply divided and belligerent. Friendships constructed in conditions of relative equality are threatened by the everyday experiences of inequality and war. Sociologists have shown that the criteria for equality are not always satisfied; the equality found in a combined curriculum or the opulence of a holiday camp on the East Coast of the United States frequented by politically moderate and privileged anglophone young people, cannot be guaranteed when they return to their "real life" in Israel and Palestine, for example (Hammack, 2009). Worse still, the contact itself between different social groups could end up reinforcing logics of social distinction and detachment (Oberti and Pr eteceille, 2016), which happens if the teacher or other authority figure imposes a meeting between individuals belonging to unequal groups, without ensuring that these inequalities do not determine perceptions and are not expressed with contempt(which is not easy). The transmission of the violent past, in which victims and culprits both feature, can reinforce the assigned community identities that it is supposed to overcome (Falaize, 2008).

### **Memories in the museum: recognizing the past**

Students are sometimes taken on trips outside the school to have more direct contact with the past. They go to museums, memorials, and other sites of memory. In recent years several studies have been conducted on the increasing number of school visits to Auschwitz, exploring the experience of the classes at the site (Krondorfer, 1995; Kugelmass, 2010; Feldman, 2010). The Centenary of the First World War also gave rise to studies on students'

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<sup>40</sup> For other examples of this noise, see Bonafoux, de Cock-Pierrepont and Falaize, 2007, p. 137.

visits to battle sites (Pennell, 2016) or historical exhibitions within the collaborative context (Antichan *et al.*, 2016). This research teaches us that these sites lead to contradictory interpretations in terms of civic values. And yet scientific research overall has paid scant attention to what visitors to these memorials and memory museums see – and what they do with what they see (Feldman and Peleikis, 2014). The results we do have encourage us to pay attention to the largely ordinary social experiences that take place in these museums that provide a window on the past.

### *Visiting and revisiting the past*

The first observation to make here is, once again, the gap between declarations of principles and practices. Although visits to memory museums and memorials are increasing, they only concern a small percentage of the population. In 2011, for example, 10% of the French population had visited a battlefield, memorial, or a history museum sometime during the year.<sup>41</sup> This figure could be an indicator of wide audience, if it corresponded to a population that was constantly renewed. But in spite of an undeniable trend towards greater diversity, this is not the case. For the most part, the same people go from one museum to another. Although research suggests that these sites are visited by workers and employees more than fine arts museums, most of the people they attract still come from social categories that are economically, culturally, and academically privileged. Moreover, most of the visitors are young seniors, aged between 50 and 69, rather than the future generations that the architects of citizenship want to reach. The situation is essentially the same in other Western countries. Outside the mediating environment of the school, only a small minority of the population has an experience of these sites liable to transmit knowledge of the past and some of the messages that can be drawn from it. How are these messages perceived? By comparison with the number of studies on visitors to art or science museums, there are relatively few on visitors to history museums. However, those that exist converge to emphasize that the representations of the past are firstly *recognized*, before they are *discovered* (Fyfe and Ross, 1996). Through a mechanism that is similar to the “tourist gaze” documented by John Urry (2002), the experience of the visit is framed and structured by a pre-existing familiarity with the past. Between 2012 and 2015, several empirical studies conducted with visitors to seven historical exhibitions in commemorative contexts, relating to both the First World War and to a lesser extent the Holocaust, showed that many visitors already have a base of historical knowledge

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.credoc.fr/pdf/Rapp/R281.pdf> (accessed July 19 2017).



before attending these museums (Antichan, Gensburger and Teboul, 2016; Gensburger, 2017). Similarly, they reveal the ways in which the content is read in light of family history, but also everyday experience, professional occupations, sporting practices, or leisure activities. When faced with the past, it is not necessarily the past that the visitor sees first, or even at all.

### ***From the transmission of values to their reinforcement***

If visitors genuinely see different things in a given site or exhibition, does that mean they take away different civic lessons? Do they even take away any lessons? Conducting sociological observations of class visits is useful here because students' comments allow us to perceive attitudes towards values that are more difficult to observe with adults, who tend to visit in smaller groups and be more silent. In 2012, around twenty groups of upper primary school students were observed on class visits to the exhibition on the deportation and rescue of Jewish children in Paris (Gensburger, 2017). From the beginning of their tour, students systematically exclaimed: "that is really racist!", "It's not fair, it's discrimination!", "That is not fair! They should have called the police!" The children's comments, in interaction with the adults accompanying them, proved that values, tolerance, and indignation in the face of discrimination – in other words civic vigilance – are already present for them. The children arrive at the exhibition with these values already established and their moral norms are sufficiently solid as to be able to be expressed in this space. This conclusion has been confirmed by the observation of visits to exhibitions relating to the First World War (Antichan *et al.*, 2016). This confrontation with the past is more an opportunity to publicly express, legitimize, and refresh values, than to acquire them.

This same observation has been made for adult visitors observed during their visits to *Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes* in Phnom Penh. This museum documents the crimes perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Hughes, 2008). Although the Western tourists questioned and observed by Rachel Hughes almost systematically visit this museum, it is rarely out of a desire for "dark" tourism. Nor is it particularly to learn about the past. Visiting this museum is a way of demonstrating their support for contemporary humanist values and respect for differences – somewhat like visiting a religious site to demonstrate one faith. They certify their support for these values more than they consolidate them. The discovery of this memory museum refreshes and expresses the range of values already in place. For a tourist visiting Cambodia, this museum is a must.

These museums and memorials sites are therefore not so much spaces in which values drawn from the teaching of the past are transmitted, as they are spaces in which it is possible to publicly express one's support for these values – although there is no certainty that this support will be anything more than momentaneous (Lisle, 2006; Bernard-Donals, 2005). This brings us back to Goffman's comment: "In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. Because these standards are so numerous and so pervasive, the individuals who are performers dwell more than we might think in a moral world. But, *qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. Our activity, then, is largely concerned with moral matters, but as performers we do not have a moral concern in these moral matters. As performers we are merchants of morality" (Goffman, 1956, p. 162).

These mechanisms explain the possibly contradictory effects of memory policies, discussed above. Memorial projects can have unexpected consequences when they reach people who do not already share the values that they seek to promote. There is nothing to suggest that attending an exhibition evoking past ethnic discrimination favors the attenuation of stereotypes for visitors who already have beliefs and values that support discrimination. This has been documented in Emily Satterwhite's research on an American music festival which was intended to pay homage to the diversity of local cultures and which in fact provoked stigmatizing and discriminatory reactions (Satterwhite, 2005). The ethnographic observation and questionnaires used by the researcher show how this festival of traditional music, which organizers perceived as promoting multiculturalism and diverse local traditions, was appropriated by a large portion of participants as a vector for the promotion and reinforcement of "white" racial identity.

### ***Ordinary social interactions are always present***

These conclusions lead us to further reconsider the way in which memory can be used to pursue peace (McDowell and Braniff, 2014). Visits to museums and memory sites are embedded within an ensemble of social interactions, which predate them and which they extend and sometimes influence. Let us return to observe the young visitors to the 2012

exhibition on Jewish children during the Holocaust in Paris (Gensburger, 2017). We will look at them in both the school and then the family context.

In the first case, the children attend the exhibition as students, along with their classmates and the teacher. It is worth noting that in the forty class visits observed, all the teachers were female. This is relevant because lessons from the past are “gendered”; like the Ancient Egyptian mourners, and the Furies of Ancient Greece, these “guardians of memory” are often women, even today. The children who attend as students are almost exclusively interested in documents relating to the *schooling* of Parisian Jewish children. They systematically turned towards display cases containing schoolbooks and drawings. It is only in this context that the young visitors engage closely with the materiality of the documents. They cluster around a letter written by a deported child, firstly to admire the beautiful handwriting, and then to check the spelling. Looking for mistakes is a common activity for these visitors in the school context. Before the case displaying the children’s artworks, they marvel at the colors and paper, careful folding and collage. The exhibition of memory is, for them, primarily an activity related to school.

Thus the school provides both a frame and a filter through which the students read the primary reason for the visit, and this is strikingly clear in comparison with children who come with their families. In this context, the children – many of whom are the same age as those on school visits – are instead drawn to objects related to the separation of families, particularly photos and letters.

The importance of the social relations in which the experience of these visits are embedded, and which provide a framework for the visitors’ engagement with the content, has been confirmed by other studies, such as that on school visits to exhibitions relating to the Centenary of the First World War (Antichan *et al.*, 2016), family visits to other museums (Jonchery and Biraud, 2016) and different heritage sites (Jones, 2010). This is also true for the traces left by a visit to an exhibition long after the event. Several studies conducted in America on visits to science museums show that visitors only remember their visit and the content of the museum when these are part of an ensemble of social relations that persist within the academic group, family group, or immediate environment. In other words, the experience of the museum only has a lasting effect when visits are regularly discussed in ordinary conversations, because visitors continue to see an object related to them, or the person they visited the museum with (Falk and Dierking, 1997). As far as visits to history museums are concerned specifically, a study with people questioned in the public space, far from museums, suggests that they have trouble recollecting memories from these visits, which

are often confined to school or family contexts. However, respondents continue to affirm the absolute importance of visiting history museums, especially for young children (Antichan *et al.*, 2016). It seems people remain convinced that what we ourselves have forgotten, everyone (including ourselves) generally remembers.<sup>42</sup>

### **Truth commissions: collective healing for trauma ?**

So lessons from the past do not exist *per se*. Even when they are transmitted with the best intentions, they are distorted and reformulated as they are received. This is quite simply because they are always intertwined with social interactions. They bring together people who are more or less attentive, more or less familiar with each other, and who are all involved in numerous different roles – which are not all favorable to the civic transformation expected. What we see in schools, memorials, or during commemorations in more or less peaceful democracies is ultimately not that different from what happens in post-conflict environments. Programs put into place immediately after a violent conflict, or even when the conflict is not yet finished, also aim to revisit the past in order to build the future.

#### ***Painful memories at the heart of truth commissions***

Let us return to the example of truth commissions. For those who promote transitional justice – the expertise that brings together various tools for managing painful pasts (or those marked by serious human rights abuses) into a supposedly coherent whole – commissions provide a way of “managing” the heritage of a violent conflict in a way that promotes peace, justice, and democracy. As we have said before, they contribute to compromises between former enemies; in this pragmatic logic the consequences of frequent amnesties are attenuated by mechanisms for victims’ recognition. Politicians concerned about their reputations see them as “witch hunts”. Researchers have rightly shown that these commissions facilitate collusion between new elites and former ones, which come to agree on how to conserve and exchange power resources (Wilson, 2001). Others reiterate that evidently institutions that are only in place for two years cannot be expected to reconcile a country that has been torn by conflict for decades. Yet, in the eyes of those who establish them and promote them internationally, truth commissions constitute a memory policy that helps move toward overcoming past prejudice and hatred. They are even seen as having the power to free people from trauma born of political violence, through a sort of collective catharsis releasing emotions, much like in a

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<sup>42</sup> We will return to this paradox in the third chapter.

Greek tragedy. They are also seen being able to establish the foundation of a new form of justice, “reparatory” justice, and improve democracy.

It is the place that they give to victims and the effect they are assumed to have over them that explains why truth commissions are considered so virtuous and useful. They are the emblematic institution of these contemporary memory policies marked by the fundamental concern for the victims. During public hearings, the victims (who are presented as witnesses of the past) recount the violence and suffering they or their loved ones experienced. Their “truths” contribute, along with analysis by historians, to the reports that the commission submits to the political authorities that implemented the commission. By allowing these victims to release their emotions, truth commissions – like the “tribunal of tears” in South Africa – are seen as helping heal traumatized victims and rebuild nations in mourning. They are even seen as having the power to make perpetrators remorseful and ask for forgiveness. In most cases, this is a mistake, because the perpetrators of violent crimes are generally reluctant to admit their actions. For every Apartheid-era politician who made a public display of washing the feet of his victims and other black people (as Adriaan Vlok did), how many in South Africa chose denial? For the handful of military personnel under the Argentinian or Chilean dictatorships who publicly recognized their actions (Adolfo Scilingo, for example), how many have fiercely denied committing crimes, and claim that they were only defending the motherland from subversion, even from behind bars? Political criminals often repent only if authorities – or their significant personal relations – force them to.

Truth commissions have eyes only for the suffering that victims, who thus become witnesses, express. The documentaries made on the truth commissions are full of moving images in which we see people – particularly women, once again in the case of South Africa, elderly, black women – weeping, wailing, and shaking, while those we perceive as their loved ones but who are in reality professional psychologists (also generally women) comfort them (Lefranc, 2014).<sup>43</sup> This outpouring of emotion was appreciated to the point of becoming one of the essential aspects of the protocol that is now promoted by international organizations. Deliberations on the recent past organized after a period of violence must be thus “heated” and cannot be delegated to “cold” historians or parliamentarians, who are seen as closed or dismissive to victims. It is the intensity of emotions liable to facilitate catharsis, rather than

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<sup>43</sup>The archives of the documentary footage that was aired daily during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in South Africa, are now available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTnY5SQYAro> (accessed July 21 2017).

the knowledge of the past, that is expected from these commissions. Making individual memories public, in order to construct a memory that is hopefully shared, should heal society. The victims' testimonies are, of course, deeply moving. Stories of torture, murder, the loss of loved ones, and the resulting financial hardships for families who are often poor, all provoke empathy. The hearings, whether closed (in Argentina, or Chile) or public (in South Africa, Peru, or Morocco), facilitate the expression of strong emotions. But how can we establish a relationship of cause and effect between the expression of traumatic memory by victims, and social appeasement? This expectation reflects the importance of emotions in contemporary memory policies. By rendering knowledge more intense, emotions are seen as provoking a change in behavior among other citizens. Truth commissions seek to unburden witnesses, liberate them of the trauma that is assumed to have "frozen" since the crime (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). Pain, whether physical or emotional from losing a loved one, constitute lasting wounds and this suffering can find an outlet in certain commissions. But should we only focus on this suffering, and assume that this trauma from violence has become a permanent tumor (Hamber, 2009)?

Violence can be experienced in different ways, depending on the situation of the individual – a political leader, or his apolitical mother, for example – and the social existence of the survivor does not stop with this experience. Individual memory,<sup>44</sup> or more exactly an individual's narrative of the past, cannot be dissociated from these "social frameworks", the social structures which organize and thus constitute it (Halbwachs, 1992; Bastide, 1970; Lavabre, 1994). The rare studies that focus on this confirm that victims, survivors, and escapees can all live ordinary lives. Contrary to expectations of depression, victims may even demonstrate greater vitality than other people, like the European Jews who arrived in the United States after the Holocaust who got married more, divorced less, were less delinquent and more involved in community activities than other American Jews (Helmreich, 1992). Make no mistake, this is not to say that these individuals are "normal" on a scale of psychological health (divorce is by no means pathological!). But it is important to emphasize that the roles expected of different actors can vary; those who survived the Second World War were partly forced to be dynamic and well-integrated by the social and political contexts

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<sup>44</sup> As stated in the introduction, this book does not engage with the question of the concepts used for conceptualizing memory (Gensburger, 2016). The reader only needs to know that the expression "individual memory" does not signify that memory can exist outside of the social. Memory is neither collective (in the sense that it would be the memory of a group or collective) nor individual (in the sense of a recollection of something an individual experienced, what Halbwachs called a "monade" following Leibniz). From the sociological perspective, memory is firstly social.

of the time. This runs counter to the frequent representation of victims of political violence and their trauma. It is overly simplistic (and also unjust) to reduce both victims and perpetrators to a single life and a single emotion, when we all live and experience several, often in parallel. There is more to victims than just their suffering.

### ***Banality in the lives of victims who are made witnesses***

If we make the mistake of perceiving victims of political violence primarily, or even solely, as traumatized people, that is because memories, like emotions, are social. They are as much the reflection of deep inner states – forged out of personal experience, social habitus, and institutions – as the effects of a given situation and interactions with the institution or the public present. Similar to the way in which students visiting a commemorative exhibition react to the presence of the accompanying adults, victims who testify recount their suffering because they are asked to do so, warmly but insistently, through questions but also physical encouragements from the psychologists present (back patting, nodding, hugs and so forth). Inversely, when they express material demands, or political anger, they are discouraged from dwelling on this (Lefranc, 2014).

Truth commissions emphasize suffering so much because, like all memorial policies, they are policies. By drawing attention to individual distress, they are liable to distract attention from the complexity of the political games they facilitate. By asking victims and the public to be aware of their language, to depoliticize it, they attempt to contain these expressions that may “overflow”, particularly when they lead to political accusations. The truth commission as a forum for expression is thus in keeping with policies of amnesty such as those that arose after political crisis in ancient Rome and Athens. In this context, the authorities went so far as to organize mourning, encouraging mothers to cry in public, or forbidding them from doing so (Loraux, 2002). In the twenty-first century, the injunction to remember has replaced that of forgetting, dominant in antiquity (Foucault, 1990). These very different policies (on one hand imposing silence by forbidding public mourning, the others imposing expression by allowing mourners to participate in the public funeral procession) share the fact that they oversee the public expression of private grief. Authorities organize mourning in such a way as it does not spill over into the public space and spread its conflictual effects there. Although commissions have not been charged with rubber stamping an official version of history, they have had to deal with political constraints – often an amnesty law, and collusion with former enemies (Wilson, 2001). They are the tools of reconciliation created “by decree” and not produced

(purely) through emotionally moving encounters. But they do not always succeed; often politics returns to the surface. Reconciliation is more a political project (always unfinished) than the consequence of shared memories. In some countries, such as Ivory Coast, which have implemented commissions following the South African model, politics even comes first: the commission was a place to park one of the President's competitors and a means of electoral competition (Griveaud, 2019).

Truth commissions, as specific vehicles for memory policy, encounter another limit. As we have said, the public expression of painful memories – not so much political or historical as therapeutic – must help heal not only the victim but society as a whole, because transitional justice (and memory policies more generally) suppose an analogy between the individual and the collective. What happens in the innermost part of the self affects the whole nation through its emotional and exemplary force.

And yet this effect is variable and very rarely analyzed. Let us take the now canonical example of South Africa. Although it seems like those who followed the debates of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa adopt attitudes that are more respectful of equality and human rights than others (Gibson, 2004), the way in which this effect operates in concrete social terms has not been analyzed. And it is a fact that perceptions of history and the responsibilities of the apartheid regime and its opponents, or Afrikaners and the black majority respectively, have also remained highly divergent, according to ethno-racial groups. There is good reason for this; they do not live together, but in neighborhoods that are still clearly separated. This observation overlaps with others on the consequences of including “radicals”, proponents of exclusive identities, or peace “spoilers” within the peace process, as well as on the effects of truth commissions regarding prejudice about groups perceived to be different.

The study of the truth commission in Greensboro (28,000 inhabitants), in North Carolina, launched by community associations promoting civil rights, also confirms this conclusion. In this context, although interviewees who had heard about the commission's work seemed to have a degree of awareness, a clear negative impact was also recorded among the part of the population that was the most hostile to racial equality. Prejudices were in fact reinforced (Ghoshal, 2015, on the basis of a survey of 716 people): “conservatives” strongly reaffirmed their refusal of any kind of compensation by the government for past injustices. Things that were no longer discussed – such as the condemnation of the Ku Klux Klan – were once again a subject of debate. Memorial projects can therefore convince people who are undecided (above all if they are associated with strong prejudice – for example the negative image of the



KKK), but they may also polarize those who already have strong beliefs. Just as in the case of schools and museums/memorials, when they are implemented in truth commissions, memory policies are liable to have unexpected effects, which may sometimes be quite the opposite of those intended.

Furthermore, what heals a particular individual does not necessarily heal all the other individuals that make up a nation – there is no translation effect, no person-to-person and cumulative transmission. Indeed, society is itself neither healthy nor sick, even when it has experienced extreme violence. Violence itself is social (Naepels, 2017; Collins, 2011). It is not a sickness, but rather the product of social life.

This supposed slippage from the relief of isolated victims to the pacification of democracy as a whole overlooks the findings regarding the limits of the “inclusive efficacy of collective gatherings” presented in particular in the work of Nicolas Mariot (2008, p.113; 2011). Emotional gatherings – commemoration, patriotic celebrations, or painful catharsis – do not have unparalleled inclusive force. Those who applaud or cry on these occasions do not necessarily feel enthusiastic or sorrowful. They might be simply doing what is socially appropriate, “playing the game”, without necessarily believing it. As Mary Douglas describes, Catholics may be bored, or even go to sleep during church. “The case for ritual stimulating emotions is weak. Hasn’t anyone ever been bored in church? ” (Douglas, 1986, p. 34). It is not because truth commission hearings move distant spectators that they affect those who are physically present. Inversely, there is no reason to assume that the emotional states of those who are present at the hearing has any bearing on that of the broader national public. The citizens participating in revolutionary celebrations, or commemorations, may be there by chance, by opportunism or conformism, or because they were forced to attend; and they may act accordingly depending on the event. Similarly, victims are engaged in complex social relations and may have a wide range of motivations for action. When they demand material compensation or defend political opinions, the witnesses heard by commissions are resisting the injunction to limit themselves to the emotions considered “appropriate” for victims and citizens.

***Trials for memory: the law is the law (and politics)!***

We can also analyze the cases brought against those who have committed or ordered acts of political violence, at the national level but also under “universal” jurisdiction<sup>45</sup>. The political crimes that are the object of memory policies are rarely subject to legal proceedings. Amnesties are the norm, even in recent years, when we are said to have experienced a consecration of international criminal justice. Amnesties constitute half of all transitional justice measures adopted in all countries between 1970 and 2007 (Olsen, Payne and Reiner, 2010; Mallinder, 2007). And they seem to be increasing (Jeffery, 2014). Moreover, criminal trials, when they are held, remain selective; they target senior figures, and the “worst” killers, those responsible for “atrocious and outrageous” acts (according to an expression used in post-dictatorship Argentina).<sup>46</sup> Even the extermination of European Jews which has been the focus of a large portion of memorial actions over the last seventy years, particularly in the legal sphere, is far from having led to a comprehensive legal treatment.

### *Lessons from the past or verdicts from a trial?*

Several authors have already noted the fact that these memory policies conducted through the trials of political criminals do not have the pedagogical virtues that those who defend them would hope.<sup>47</sup> Not because the trials are seen as not having significant consequences; some have probably produced upheavals in the way the violent past is perceived. The Eichmann trial, for example, did much to position the genocide and its victims at the center of public and historical memory, which was up until then focused on the war as an expression of aggression against states (at the heart of the Nuremberg trials), and historic figures (Zionists in Israel, Resistant fighters in France, soldiers in the United States). But the fact that a trial – or any other memory policy – rattles contemporary beliefs and renews the dominant frames of interpretation of an event does not mean it has a lasting educational impact on citizens. The verdict cannot necessarily be generalized, nor mechanically internalized by each person, like a golden rule.

The point here, however, is that trials do not always have the power they are assumed to have in preventing the repetition of violent acts simply by speaking the truth. The legal “truth” is not what appears true to historians (Thomas, 1998; Rousso and Conan, 1998). The law in itself is not always compatible with an accurate description of crimes. This is the case when

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<sup>45</sup> Universal jurisdiction theoretically allows cases to be brought against foreigners for serious crimes committed in foreign countries against foreigners.

<sup>46</sup> This is also true for international trials, which only pursue “big fish”.

<sup>47</sup> This disenchantment is shared by numerous authors (Ernst, 2008; Rousso and Conan, 1998; Marrus, 2000).

the law deduces legal misconduct from the intention and moral motivation of an individual – even though mass killings dissolve this relationship between individual will and criminal action.<sup>48</sup> The organization of a trial is not conducive to the production of historic truth: the principle of contradiction, the proliferation of narratives, or the impossibility of tribunals to base their conclusions on the significant historical evidence of hearsay (Douglas, 2000).

Even when the object of these trials is immediately contemporary, like the trials against Holocaust deniers, legal proceedings have political side-effects: adversarial hearings may have to deal with the legal requirement to challenge facts, and thus inadvertently provide a soapbox for negationist ideas. In addition to the distortion of the facts inflicted by legal descriptions, there are also political biases. According to historians, even the Holocaust still gives rise to eclectic and disparate descriptions, each judge considering the genocide from a particular prism (Marrus, 2000; Douglas, 2000). It is important to be clear about this; these observations do not criticize the law, nor the trials of political criminals, but simply shed light on the fact that they are subject to the normal functioning of the legal system. It is first and foremost a matter of law.

Other observers do not expect these trials to provide history lessons, but rather that they grant recognition to the victims who are today seen as being at the heart of memory policies. It is not certain, however, that they have the power to heal victims any more than truth commissions do. In addition to the fact that all of these institutions struggle to act on what is deep inside people, is important to remember that victims are secondary actors in legal rituals (although they are increasingly important, particularly before the International Criminal Court). Criminal trials sanction the crime committed against the state, which takes the place of the victim in the name society. The actual victims, or their representatives, are often seen as little more than key witnesses, even though they are often the impetus for the trial.<sup>49</sup> Criminal trials are therefore not really communions around the suffering of victims that one might expect. They may move people, of course, but emotion is generally restrained in this context; there is much less weeping than in the truth commissions. The court rationalizes emotions, through its organization, its rituals, the desire of the president of the court. Indeed, evicting emotions is even a characteristic of the trial: “Just as belief belongs in church, surely

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<sup>48</sup> See Pendas, 2000, and, for an interesting legal attempt to cover a genocide, see the indictment of the deputy public prosecutor Aurélie Devos at the end of the trial against Pascal Simbikangwa, on March 13, 2014 : <http://www.collectifpartiescivilesrwanda.fr/requisitoire-de-madame-aurelia-devos/>

<sup>49</sup> This was the case during the trial of Maurice Papon, as well as the “Rwandan trials” that are currently being held in France, particularly in response to pressure by victims.

history education belongs in school. When the court of law is used for history lessons, then the risk of show trials cannot be far off' (Buruma, 1994, p. 142).

Moreover, the relentless search for moral lessons can result in the accused being demonized as an individual, when the object on trial is in fact systemic criminality. Like in the case of teaching the history of apartheid, mentioned above, the principal of the individualization of responsibility, which is at the heart of criminal justice means that the judge does not always see that the cause of the crime lies beyond the corrupt personality of an individual. The media, which attempt to draw moral conclusions from the trial, also have a tendency to impute crimes to either a personalized figure (submissive or hateful), or to an impersonal state, and thus save the public from having to confront its own past actions. The media presentation of the Auschwitz trial as a "memorial for future generations [...] teaching them to not despise other people, and resist demagoguery" thus essentially allowed the German people to avoid their responsibility in the genocide carried out during the Third Reich (Pendas, 2000, p. 28).

A trial's popularity is disconnected from the public's support for the legal truth that it incarnates; it can be popular and still be associated with indifference, or with the perception of an unfair justice system. It will not prevent opinions on the guilty party changing rapidly after the trial. For example, the Nuremberg trials received very broad acceptance by the German people, and were later challenged (Pendas, 2000). What is dissuasive – and therefore preventative – in a justice system that tries a single man among so many others, or which focuses on the man who gave the order rather than the one who pulled the trigger? It is important to specify that this does nothing to detract from the other roles of the justice system, and particularly that of sanctioning crimes.

### *Memory trials as ordinary trials*

Finally, and this is the third characteristic of the implementation of criminal trials as tools for memory policies, what is of interest to legal scholars, historians, or elite journalists may bore ordinary citizens, who get tired of the slow rhythm of the legal system. Major trials can be read in the same terms as what happens in schools and museums: a small number of enlightened actors, often memory professionals, attempt to attract an attentive audience, hoping to sow the seeds of future resistance. But just as teachers primarily focus on fulfilling their principle vocation (transmitting knowledge), actors in legal proceedings also reflect their professional communities. Anyone who takes the time to observe a trial in its entirety is therefore struck by the importance of the professional disputes and personal confrontations

that play out here. For example, the trials of the Second World War collaborators in France provided an opportunity for historians to think about what it means to be a professional historian in the public sphere, and to confront each other over this, and in particular on the inappropriateness of their role as key witnesses, rather than as experts (Rousso and Conan, 1996; Israël and Mouralis, 2000; Fleury and Walter, 2005).

During the trial of Pascal Simbikangwa, who was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for genocide and crimes against humanity by two French appeals courts, testimony from victims was relatively secondary.<sup>50</sup> But the trial saw successive confrontations between different experts, psychologists, historians, and sociologists, as well as legal professionals. In this respect the trial was partly propelled by the institutional dynamic of a legal framework, specialized in fighting crimes against humanity and war crimes, which was in search of its own legitimacy. Of course, these conflicts were caught up in moral and political logics – which were all the more salient given France’s involvement in the Rwandan genocide, which cast a long shadow on political figures still in power.

Similarly, the judges at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda undoubtedly incorporated the diplomatic need to protect states’ reputations into their reasoning (Maison, 2017). But these trials are above all animated by specifically professional conflicts: between schools of thought, ways of understanding a profession, between methodologies, between approaches to a given institutional sphere. Ultimately these trials fall within the legal system, which is run through by dynamics of political power. Exchanges are above all oppositions between of legal professionals, who produce a legal truth together (Thomas, 1998) as they play out their professional roles. In spite of their particularities, these trials are ultimately quite ordinary. Indeed, this was the adjective that Rachel Hughes (2015) used to describe the Khmer Rouge trials in Cambodia, in spite of the fact that they were specific in both their object – the genocide – and their modalities – combining national and international law.

If trials have important effects – in addition to their ability to cause upheavals in the lives of the victims and the accused – they occur on the border between the legal and political spheres. Judges and lawyers provide their momentum. Governments authorize them or give them their final impetus, often late in the day. The Israeli government in the Eichmann trial and the French presidency during the Simbikangwa trial both acted twenty years after the events.

Political parties and activists, representatives of victims or members of human rights organizations also often play a fundamental role. The new alternative narrative that they

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<sup>50</sup> Other Rwandan trials will allow them a greater role.

sometimes produce about violent events is also less about lessons for citizens, and more to do with the reorganization of politically legitimate narratives through interactions between judges, historians, victims and political leaders. They achieve both their reason for being and their effects in the political sphere, understood not as civic participation (in keeping with Republican theory), but as a specialized arena and the relationship between citizens and authorities. This is also true of the international level (Lefranc and Mouralis, 2014): the International Criminal Court is involved in a complex political game between major international powers and the (African) countries concerned by charges.

Whatever the memory policy tools we consider, familiarity with sociological questioning leads us to doubt the strength of voluntarist actions focused on the short-term. This might appear self-evident, but it is rarely explained or analyzed. In the short moment of a civic education lesson, a visit to a museum, or a court hearing – even when they are repeated – people cannot be made to apply a principle of tolerance to all their actions, if they did not already do so. A teacher can only awaken dispositions that society has already sown in the child.

Through the economic and social necessity that they bring to bear on the relatively autonomous world of the domestic economy and family relations, or more precisely, through the specifically familial manifestations of this external necessity (forms of the division of labour between the sexes, household objects, modes of consumption, parent-child relations, etc.), the structures characterizing a determinate class of conditions of existence produce the structures of the *habitus*, which in their turn are the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 90)

We are just as unable to counter the propensity for openness toward others (or resistance to authority) as we are to undo the effects of a rigorous primary socialization; “sit up straight” may in fact convey the injunction to “control your body, make a good impression, resist moral slackness.” *Habitus*, these dispositions forged through socialization, guards against any intrusion; its inertia is its best defense (sociologists sometimes call this “hysteresis”). It facilitates non-exposure to contradictory messages, guiding the places we frequent or avoid, the people we socialize with, or don’t; it even influences the attention we pay to what the teacher says. Injunctions to tolerate others, to do no harm even when instructed otherwise, may seem like a kind of symbolic violence from this perspective.

But the careful observation of the sites in which memory policies are implemented show that there is more to this than the vain attempt to influence personalities that are already formed. We see interactions between people with complex *habitus*, whose dispositions are being

continually reformed, and which are again altered in the context of a memorial moment. Teachers bring to the classroom not only their desire for knowledge, their political convictions, and social identity, but also their hesitations about the civic role they have been assigned. For students, it is their grades, their teacher's and parents' satisfaction, their peer-group reputation (with its different expectations), their interest and boredom, which are all at stake. Even the victims who are called upon to testify as men and women affected by violence, trying to overcome their trauma, sometimes don't follow the path mapped for them. If these personalities are all changing over the course of their interactions, how can we ensure the lasting internalization of dispositions for peace and tolerance?

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## Chapter 3: The effects of memory

So we can see that memory policies do not have the effects intended. Some of the people who design them have arrived at the same conclusion and therefore propose to wait, to reinforce these actions, or to modify them. They suggest using constraint, for example by legislating on the past, or encouraging the development of emotionally moving projects to push citizens to evolve on this issue. More rarely, architects of memory policy might rightly reiterate that an invitation to respect others supposes a genuine equality in access to social resources, education, employment, and housing. They raise the issue of political conditions that do not lend support to the messages being promoted: the economic crisis, the situation and conflicts in the Middle East, increasingly frequent terrorist attacks, and so forth. However, they rarely, if ever, question the founding principles of these policies, and particularly the idea according to which the repeated and systematic exposure to memorial content leads to support, internalization, and then application of civic values.

Yet what we have seen sheds doubt on these principles themselves. Memory policies do not expose individuals to a past that is foreign to them. Of course, they connect “ordinary” men and women to one or several memory(ies), but that is not all. These men and women are ordinary in the sense that they continue on with their lives at the very point at which they become the target audience for memorial policy. They may indeed be strongly affected by the lessons they receive: a handful of them may become activists or consider changing their professions; they may be deeply convinced of the urgent need to be tolerant and to refuse exclusion and repression in cases of open conflict. But this change may also not occur. If it does, it is most often because it “resonates” with sensibilities that are already in place, or more specifically with social positions that are already established and recognized as such by others. In any event, people nevertheless continue to live parallel, changing lives in diverse social worlds, in families, social groups, professional worlds, groups of acquaintances, or political parties. These worlds follow different, possibly even contradictory rules. Sometimes these people are caught up in a context that, with the rapid acceptance of a new exclusionary norm, leads to the extermination of a group. To echo Samuel Moyn’s enlightening book on the limits of human rights in changing the world (2018), we might say simply that memory is not enough.

In the early 1970s, a social psychology experiment was conducted in the theology department of a university on the East Coast of the United States. The subjects were students studying theology, believers, with substantial religious culture. The experiment showed that these students, who had just re-read the good Samaritan Bible story, with its colorful reiteration of the importance of compassion, did not stop to help a man who was lying immobile on the ground (like in the story) – unless they could do so and still be on time for a meeting they had to attend for their career advancement! It was therefore not their personal goodness, nor the lessons learned from the Bible, but the situation and the social imperative for success that determine their behavior (Darley and Batson, 1973). One can be a paragon of virtue one day, or even one minute, in a particular social sphere, and an ordinary coward the next day, or the next minute, in another sector of society. It is generally futile to comfort ourselves with the assumption that a given personality is consistent and stable in its opposition to intolerance and violence.

It is only if we recognize the banality of memory, and the echoes that it has in our various lives, that it is possible to identify its political, professional, and civic effects. Memory policies do not create good citizens (tolerant people in this context, nationalist bigots in others) *ex nihilo*, nor even consolidate them, because their effects are different from those intended by the creators of these policies. They are designed to move and change individuals directly, and through them society. But their effects are indirect.<sup>51</sup> This is why memorial programs cannot be simply studied in the spaces where they are implemented, whether it be museums or schools, truth commissions or courtrooms. All of the networks and social relations that the increasing development of these policies has given rise to must be taken into consideration. If we return to the French case which is central to this book, we can see that the density and diversity of social relations and their ability to rely on credible legitimate actors since the 1970s, explains why a large portion of French society today still do not participate in persistent expressions of intolerance, racism or anti-Semitism.

The French support the principles of memory policy and demonstrate their belief that it is important to talk about the past in order to build a democratic society. Thus, and in keeping with the importance of the memory of the Holocaust as part of this discourse, in 2014, 85% of respondents surveyed by IFOP said that Jewish people were “just like other French people”, while only a third said the same thing in 1946. And 86% of respondents consider that

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<sup>51</sup> In this respect, an in-depth study of memory public policy is a particularly insightful case for an approach in terms of "policy feedback", the indirect effects of public policy on the politicization and attitudes towards the state (Gensburger and Saint-Léger, 2018).

criminalization of anti-Semitic comments is necessary, compared to only 76% in 2012. Let us explore the foundations of these widely shared values, and specifically people's ability to be tolerant in their behavior. Then we will seek to identify the indirect nature of the power of memory policies by describing the worlds, professions, and the "memorial field" that they create and cultivate.

## **Can individuals really be changed?**

Before revisiting the fact that memory policies have effects other than those intended, we will first look more closely at the two key assumptions these policies make, which appear to run counter to contemporary social sciences and go some way to explaining certain limits of these policies.

### ***Memory policies do not educate individuals***

As we saw in the previous chapter, memory and its lessons are by no means received without filters or distortion the moment they are transmitted. Whether at school, in museums, in truth commissions, in courtrooms, but also in front of the TV or in the public sphere, all individuals are citizens or future citizens, and they receive the lessons from these policies as such. But they are also sons and daughters, parents, comrades or colleagues, peers, neighbors, congregation members, or members of organizations, associations or political parties. These multiple social positions all constitute filters through which the lessons they receive are read and interpreted. The same is true of the past. Several studies have tried to invent ways to measure this effect of the past on behavior, independently of all the memory policy programs in place. They show certain filters that are already observed in the contexts in which individuals interact with these memory policy programs. Gender (Schuman and Corning, 2006; Antichan *et al.*, 2016), place of residence, particularly in the American North or South (Griffin, 2004), or race (Schuman and Rodgers, 2004) all have an impact on what people remember and understand about the past. In 2019, again, the huge controversy around the historical analogies between Holocaust concentration camps and contemporary camps in the US for immigrants showed once more how diverse the interpretation of the past could be, in this case depending on the political orientations of the people. This political divide even took place at the very core of the Jewish community, where some demonstrated against the interment of migrants, with the slogan "Never again" and others said publically how offended they were by the comparison between the current situation and the Holocaust.



Among these different worlds, which Maurice Halbwachs called the “social frameworks” of memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Lavabre, 2000), the family plays a particularly important role. Families may preserve and transmit contradictory “legends”, like German families who celebrate the memory of an admirable grandfather over family lunches on one hand, eluding his involvement with Nazism, and then strongly condemn Nazism with their friends and colleagues on the other (Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, 2013). Primary socialization has a “particular solidity” to it which makes it “massively and indubitably real” and explains why its effects are more durable over the lifecourse, particularly because they are rooted in emotion (Berger and Luckmann, 1992, p.155). The worlds of school and work are less emotionally charged – a colleague or a teacher are more easily replaced than a mother or father. It is far easier to give up wearing a suit and tie for a more informal workplace where they are not the norm, than it is to give up covering our nakedness, which our parents, and everyone else along with them, taught us to consider shameful. The same is true for political socialization. Although primary socialization and early learning do not determine party preferences later in life, they nevertheless provide a reading of society, at least when the principles provided by the various worlds in which we live converge.

The lessons of the past are therefore not univocal. They are appropriated through the multiple and shifting social frameworks in which the individual who receives them exists. In most cases, they do not leave lasting traces. The belief in the permanence and homogeneity of people is at the heart of memory policies: what a student learns in civic education class or on repeated school trips to memorial sites will help make him or her a good citizen. Yet the studies that are genuinely interested in the social, in other words by the interactions between people, more or less hardened in their ways and institutions, have clearly shown that although habitus and cultures structure people, behavior is never really predictable (except in instances of massive re-education (Shklar, 1990). People’s behavior is less the externalization of dispositions, behavioral norms, political preferences, or moral principles contained deep within them than it is the reaction to watching other people act – if not *all* others, then at least those whose opinion matters or whom they see as models. They adjust their pre-existing dispositions according to the way in which other people react or acquiesce, or not, to their actions. Rare are those forms of habitus that dictate a single possible behavioral response. We chose one attitude among many others that are in keeping with the social role we think we play, in the different worlds we evolve in. Given this, we can understand how, in 1940s France, politicians were able to transfer all their power to the benefit of a regime that would then organize the collaboration with the German occupiers; behavior that may otherwise

initially seem quite irrational (Ermakoff, 2008). It also helps us understand why members of parliament who were not revolutionaries in 1789, became so over the course of the events that followed (Tackett, 1997). No moral character nor ideological conviction can perfectly explain – or even mostly explain – the choices people make day after day.

The idea of psychological coherence, which is so necessary for an individual's sense of wellbeing, particularly in societies that are as highly individualized as ours, suffers in this. The idea of moral personality or character is a rationalization that is reviewed during each interaction and sometimes genuinely tested when the person moves outside their routines (Doris, 2008). Even the most well-learned lessons can be challenged and contradicted:

[...] human beings have no difficulty in bringing together, in what they feel, think and do, the most diverse visions and behavior, the deepest ambivalence, and the most extreme contradictions [...]. It would be a fundamental error to extrapolate the personality of a human being from their behavior in a given situation; on the contrary, we should identify which interpretation of the situation in question leads them to do what they did (Welzer, 2007, p. 49).

What makes a moral injunction effective? It is humans' social nature to think and speak blue in one situation and red (or light blue) in another. This disposition for contradiction is, if not human nature, then at least social nature which is further reinforced by the differentiation of our societies, the fact that our lives now lead us to frequent a large variety of highly autonomous social spheres. The moments in which we converge on more simple and homogenous spheres of reference are rare and brief (Dobry, 1988). This does not mean that there are no universalist values shared in our different milieus: our colleagues, parents, friends almost always expect us to be courteous and respectful. Our differentiated societies – which allow for contextual rules of behavior specific to each social world – make great use of these universal values (which are functional because they are liable to apply to a range of individual cases). In France these are transmitted in particular through the republican school system, and in other places through forms of secular religions. The values within memory policies – tolerance, empathy for victims – are part of this. They have been imposed, with differing degrees of force, in many social spheres. Other values, such as masculine toughness and a disdain for foreigners, are more rarely transmitted today, at least explicitly and publicly.

But should we conclude therefore that these shared values are rules that apply in all spaces and situations? Are they even expressed with the intention of being implemented? As the sociologist Erving Goffman (quoted above) has shown regarding morality, it is the situational framework rather than the internalization of norms that determines behavior. Social sciences

have shown that too much concern for sincerity leads us to overlook the dynamic core of social action. From this new reading, it is no longer assumed that people deeply adhere to what they say, think, and do. Or, more precisely, we are no longer surprised that someone acts in one way – with genuine or relative sincerity – in one sphere and then does the opposite in their exchanges in another sphere. The social games (which are not always fun or playful) produced by this human art of “playing” together, at a moment  $t$  and in multiple places, are more important than moral character in determining behavior. This art of achieving an alignment of behavior, rather than a coherence between actions and intentions, is what makes public policy effective. Based on this sociological finding, we can now ponder what might be the effectiveness of the injunction to “remember the past to avoid repeating it.”

### ***What good are lessons from the past when someone hands you a gun?***

Let us return to the second assumption of memory policies: that “lessons from the past” will be reactivated when the situation requires. This also helps to explain the limits of these policies. They suppose that citizens who are trained for tolerance through reminders of a violent past will know how to protest – we hope! – against exclusion whether with friends or in the street. They will – must! – boycott hate speech and propaganda. They will express their disgust at seeing their neighbors depicted as rats and cockroaches like they were during the Holocaust or the genocide in Rwanda. They will turn off the radio that incites people to kill, like Mille Collines did when it called for the murder of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994. They will refuse to become killers, and choose, if not to be “rescuers” or “Righteous”, at the very least to say no.

But if this is what we assume, we are largely mistaken. The American intervention in Iraq in 1991 gave rise to a series of historical analogies on the part of American citizens, for example. Many of them “recognized” the Vietnam war in their country’s new military involvement. But this shared analogy elicited very different behavior in relation to this specific conflict, from radical condemnation to unconditional support (Schuman and Rieger, 1992).

What has been said about everyday lives in peacetime is no less true for situations of violence or war. There is a need to question the clarity of the borders between war and peace, because both challenge similar social processes and solidarities (Richards, 2005). However, even if we hypothesize exceptional “crisis” circumstances, we cannot mechanically deduce a drastic reduction in the choices available to the individual – becoming a killer or a savior for example – given the range of possibilities within their multiple identities and roles, adjusted to a given

situation in more routine circumstances (Dobry, 2014). War can only be narrated in terms of good and evil in hindsight and through the lens of morality. The tales that associate attitudes toward violence with an acceptance or a refusal of an ideology of hatred, or with the imperative of saving one's own life in the face of an imperious authority, or even with economic greed are for the most part outrageous simplifications. Even the most tyrannical powers provide choices (Hibou, 2017). Hatred and material jealousy are neither the primary fuel nor the only ingredients in genocide. The solidity of the lessons from the past are tested in historic moments that are of course extraordinary, but which, like more banal situations, lead people to act according to the perception of their peers as well as the injunctions of those in power (Milgram, 1983).

It is therefore not possible to prevent war by ensuring that all of a country's inhabitants are virtuous, "good" citizens. Wars, like genocides, are the products of a series or a juxtaposition of thousands of choices made by people, as citizens, neighbors, doctors, or bus drivers. These choices are initially small, anodyne – appearing offended, or protesting at a racist joke, for example – which little by little most often cast us in the role of passive witness rather than resistant. When ordered to hate or kill, people resign themselves to do so as they act in a *given situation*; this decision is never easy, it is always a choice, and therefore a responsibility. They then find ways to rationalize their actions, to make them coherent with the aspects of their personality they want to promote, and their social roles. Testimonies from killers are often rich with these appreciations of work "well done", camaraderie, patriotic devotion, and so forth.

Harald Welzer, following on from Christopher Browning, demonstrates this in relation to the Final Solution and the mass shootings in Eastern Europe by army reserves during the Third Reich. It is important to remember that the *Einsatzgruppen*, around 3,000 men sent to the east between July and December 1941, killed some 500,000 people, often at very short range, most of them Jewish (Browning, 1999; Welzer, 2007; on this subject but less convincingly see, Goldhagen, 1997, or De Swaan, 2016). Yet anti-Semitic hatred is not what led them to kill. In fact, they may not have hated anyone. That is not to say that this anti-Semitism did not become a widespread social norm in just a few short months through everyday minor acts of compliance and indifference. Indeed, it was fed by elements of older moral values such as inegalitarian aristocratic norms, the value of labor, even humanism, and the sense of "correction." But a single "retrodictive" verdict, considering the outcome of history as necessary, and a succession of events as a cause and effect (Dobry, 1988), could impute Nazi crimes to a "war culture" or generalized intolerance among the German population. In this

environment, which very rapidly shifted from a logic of exclusion to one of extermination, the immediate situation was largely responsible for individual action. Peer relations were decisive in this; the feeling of belonging to a group bound by experiences, alcohol, a feeling of obligation, and rapidly also by the experience of working at organized violence, the encouragements or constraints they shared with each other. These were ordinary men, neither particularly ideological impassioned, nor experienced in combat, and who before the war (and often after as well – if an amnesty allowed them to escape prison) were “good” husbands, “good” Christians, and “good” workers.

Men and women who are called upon by a political or military power and engaged in interacting with other people – with whom they share a reciprocal gaze – can kill with or without hatred for their victims, who are dehumanized through this work of killing. The victims are dehumanized in that they are deprived of interaction and communication with their killers. The latter may kill in spite of the strength of their humanist convictions and moral principles. Worse still, this same desire to preserve their moral self-image, both in their own eyes and those of others, can lead someone to either kill or to remind others that “thou shalt not kill”. For example, one man in the army reserve sent to the Eastern front to carry out mass shootings of Jews, says he acted out of “humanism” when he shot children to prevent them being separated from their mothers:

“I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers.” (Browning, 1992, p.73)

These ideas, which are so disturbing to us, also shed light on what happened in Rwanda between April and July 1994: the genocide of around a million Tutsis as well as the massacre of Hutu opponents and resistants. For a long time, the dominant explanations emphasized the strength of ancestral ethnic hatred and political manipulation. From this perspective, the Hutus acted spontaneously out of a feeling of vengeance and detestation; farmers, soldiers, and activists are said to have killed out of a sense of obedience or indoctrination. However, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians have instead demonstrated, based on scrupulous empirical investigation, that these interpretations were false, that these ethnic identities were often much more flexible than it appeared, and that once again hate was not such an important factor. The

genocide was a well-organized political action, passed down through a range of actors: military personnel, activists, church personnel, and leadership candidates. But it was the local appropriations of state policy, and various motivations ranging from material jealousy to personal rancor and including the fear of being judged by others, and the immediate interactions that gave it its unimaginable “efficiency” (Fujii, 2009, p. 571). Embedded in local context, which extends and renews existing social interactions (King, 2012), some killers do not in fact need to sincerely believe the government’s hate propaganda (Fujii, 2009, p. 104<sup>52</sup>). All of them – both killers and those who do not kill – retain their ability to act with an awareness of the plurality of the world. They might kill a Tutsi one day in the belief that they are killing an enemy or an inferior, and the next day spare another Tutsi. Others might do the same thing in full awareness that it is neither an enemy, nor an inferior that they are killing. During the Rwandan genocide, a given individual may have killed someone on one day when his “comrades” were present, and then saved someone else the next day, when they were not (Fujii, 2009, p. 177 and 594).

However, we can consider that the lessons from the past, and moral convictions more generally, provided the foundation for the actions of saviors, those who helped Jews and Tutsis to survive (unlike the “executioners” studied by Harald Welzer). Once again, the situation of the individual and their social relations play a central role in the initiation of their actions. The acts of solidarity during the Holocaust have also intrigued researchers seeking to understand the reasons for rescue actions that provoke such spontaneous admiration. To summarize rapidly, as they stand, these studies lead to a twofold conclusion. Beliefs relating to Jews, whether anti-Semitic or not, do not have much explanatory weight; there were ardent anti-Semites, who were sometimes public activists, were also involved in large-scale rescue operations (Andrieu, Gensburger and Sémelin, 2014). Relational and situational factors dominate. Rescuers came from all walks of life. But they tended to share the fact that they were relatively marginal within their primary groups of belonging (family, professional, religious, et cetera) (Tec, 1986). Moreover, in order to become “good Samaritans” these people who were outsiders within their own sphere, often had to be put in the position of being able to save or rescue, in other words, somebody actually asked for their help (Varese and Yaish, 2000).

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, there were also executioners who were ideologues (Delpla, 2011).

This same observation was made for the Rwandan case. The most consistent rescuers were motivated more by a concern for universal, abstract values than they were by affection – that famous emotional response that memory policies hope to revive when needed. And yet these moral markers could only be implemented because these individuals were in a position of relative independence in relation to other people, and particularly those in their immediate circle. More than other people, these saviors shared the fact that they felt authorized to refuse interaction. Their moral compasses were only activated because of their freedom to act and interact, or to do neither (Fujii, 2009, p. 584-587).

One of the characteristics shared by those who came to the aid of victims, both in Rwanda and in Europe during the Second World War, is thus individualism, or the feeling of being different, imperfect social integration, a preference for strong and selective friendships. Sometimes, the extreme opposite was true, and their actions were more due to their strong integration into a social environment devoted to the cause of humanitarian assistance (Tec, 1986, p. 119; Monroe, 2004). Conversely, research has shown that the killers were often highly sociable, more than saviors in any case (McDoom, 2014).<sup>53</sup> So should we raise our children to shun social integration or even to be misanthropic? This book is not the place for a reflection on the pedagogy that would make them autonomous enough to always preserve their humanity. Let us content ourselves with emphasizing that these conclusions, established in the specific context of social behavior during genocides, nevertheless shed light on an ordinary mechanism.<sup>54</sup> Once again, lessons from the past must be heard in situation in order to be reactivated; they must be embedded within a web of social relations.

## **The political power of memory policies**

The limits of memory policy are therefore primarily due to the fact that the sociological assumptions upon which they are based are false. The mechanisms of these policies cannot directly act on social behavior, nor make people better citizens. Given this, how can we understand that these policies are maintained? They do in fact have real effects, but of a different order. Their power is above all political in the broadest sense of the term. They

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<sup>53</sup> Particularly in the case of “low level” Rwandan executioners.

<sup>54</sup> Michaël Pollak (1990) was among the first to show this, with great subtlety, about women's experience in the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Unfortunately, this pioneering book has not been translated into English.

create a space for resources and interest that attracts an increasing number of more and more diverse actors who are all invested in pursuing them, and affirming the principles behind them. In so doing, they give rise to a sense of support and give the expression “remembering the past to avoid repeating it” social strength in different social spaces.

The objective here is not to reveal the opportunism of any particular social groups, from the “descendants of slaves”, to “Jews”, or those involved in memory tourism or civic education. This was recently portrayed in a biting satirical novel on the “competition” between victims and professionals of the Holocaust, in which the son of the chairman of the Washington Memorial is the director of a consulting firm named *Holocaust Connections* (Reich, 2014). This idea was also explored by Norman Finkelstein in his essay on the Holocaust industry (2000). These analyses seem to overlook the most ordinary functioning of all societies, including the role played by business and capitalism. Our current approach seeks to go beyond this moralistic perspective.

We have already emphasized the fact that no one is simple enough to have a single motivation – nor is society today homogenous enough to accommodate such a person. Much more simply, it is important to demonstrate that the mechanisms by which people become interested and mobilized, which are associated with the development of these memory policies are also ordinary social processes and, furthermore, that they are the best guarantee of these policies’ effectiveness, more so than their incontestable moral validity.

In the case of the development of the memory of the Holocaust, which is so canonical in these debates, Peter A. Meyers had the intuition that such a mechanism was at work. While others emphasized the driving role of the Jewish elites in the development of policies, he reiterated that social life cannot be reduced to strategies. In his view, the proposition – here the leitmotiv “remembering the past to avoid repeating it” – is not efficient because it is defended by a group, but because it interests other groups. We can voice opinions without them having a bearing on our future action. All they say is that we are engaged in an exchange, here and now. Memory policies become “commonplaces” (Meyers, 2001, p. 163), and are sometimes used in ways that are insincere or clumsy, but they enable encounters between people from different worlds. In the eyes of a moralist this may appear to be a misappropriation, or even a distortion by unauthorized groups, but this is precisely where memory policies get their strength.



### *The relational effects of memory policies*

A detour via another era and another space provides us with a new reading of the contemporary period. Paul Veyne, who is a specialist in ancient history, encourages us to examine Trajan's Column in Rome. This 30-meter high column, situated near the Coliseum, was inaugurated in 113 CE, and appears to tell the story, carved into the surface of the column, of Emperor Trajan's victory in the Dacian wars. In reality, it does not tell the story of much at all, because it is impossible to read from the ground. Tourists who cross Trajan's Forum today have to crane their heads back to have a glimpse of the top. Adept of the memory policies that irrigate our societies today, they are convinced that what is written is there to be read, understood, memorized, recalled and held up as a standard for action; action which was no doubt nationalist and bellicose in the Roman period.

But Veyne, maliciously encourages us to look better at the column. This paradoxically means giving up looking more closely to try to read something, because ultimately what is written there is not that important. In doing this, we come to understand what the column actually says: its height reveals the majesty of a power so great that it can build something so high that it does not even have to worry about being readable (Veyne, 2002, p. 6; 1985, 1988 and 1990). The column was not built to be "read" nor to instruct people by recalling the dead and commemorating the actions of a great emperor. Nor was it really built to be looked at. Like the Parthenon and most of the great roman monuments, its very existence is an affirmation that the empire does not need to be fêted. Its power was self-evident. Looking for confirmation of victory by reading the column was already a sign of doubt. These monuments incarnate what Veyne calls *l'apparat*: power that is "illegible" because the belief in its legitimacy is already acquired. Propaganda is a different story however: it seeks to convince. "Weak" regimes, those which have allowed subjects who have become citizens to distance themselves from the state, use propaganda as a persuasive tool. But in democratic – or at least non totalitarian – societies like ours, propaganda often fails or only has limited and temporary validity (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948). In fact, our governments are all the more interested in communication activities when they are not seeking to durably persuade anyone of anything. This detour via antiquity can be used to shed light on contemporary memory policies, which resembles propaganda according to this definition. In other words, they constitute symbols brandished by a "weak" power that has no other choice but to be legible and transparent. A discourse by a political power – whether it concerns the moral importance of the past, as is the case here, or indeed the economy and budgetary austerity – has no lasting effect. Its influence on citizens is the indirect result of the approbation of the social world, in particular the

individual social world; in other words the relatively convergent evaluation (which is always liable to change) of the citizen's primary social groups, for example their family, their social hierarchy, television stations, blogs, and so forth. In this respect, memory policies are only effective if no one is questioning their effectiveness; in other words, they are effective when reference groups are convergent enough to confer force and obligation to an injunction that has no strength in itself, and opposed to others that are divergent. This conclusion is banal, but it forces us to revisit our understanding of the way in which these policies act. It is not their ability to provoke genuine conviction that is decisive, but rather their power to make all of us (or most of us) to say the same thing, even if we do not believe a word of it. Research in social science has demonstrated this: politics is not about genuine efficiency, but efficient fictions.

An injunction for commemoration may not exist to be read, understood, or learned. It may exist to materialize, and where necessary consolidate, a pre-existing political relation. This suggests we should focus less on the content of these policies, and more on the groups and people that they involve. "What is important is not so much the content of the message as the relationship established through it" (Veyne, 2002, p. 8). For the most part, memory policies are not about content transmitted but rather about links between actors that play out in the present (Lavabre, 2007); between policy architects and their audiences, but also between local actors, teachers, museum staff, workers in international organizations, activists on behalf of victims, therapists, lawyers, politicians, even activists and experts for causes that appear unrelated to those at stake here, among many others. And these interactions make a decisive contribution to the form that these memory policies take, the truths that they incarnate, as well as their programs for action, and ultimately their power.

### ***When memory policy gives rise to "victims"***

The effectiveness of memory policies is primarily reliant on the redistribution of identities and the status and functions they are associated with, to the point where Ian Hacking has talked about the emergence of a "memoro-power" and "memoro-politics" in the United States (Hacking, 1995, p.218 and 215). Let us take the example of the emergence of the Holocaust as a moral norm in the 1960s (Alexander, 2002), which undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation of the category of victims in many countries. References to the past are articulated around contemporary issues, such as feminist mobilizations, or challenges to a purely repressive justice system (Lefranc, 2006b). Victims, if and when they manage to speak

openly, have the *right* to have their story heard, to testify, to contribute to the writing of history, before committees of historians, parliamentarians, or tribunals and commissions. The protocols for this are transnational and transversal. They can be seen in the near identical approaches to managing terrorist attacks (Gensburger, 2019), natural disasters (Revet and Langumier, 2013), and asylum seekers, within the sector of emergency humanitarian intervention, as well as in post-conflict policies that use the management of the past as a tool. The official recognition of victims is often associated with a status that provides access to administrative services or psychological assistance, or which involves a role in legal processes at the national, but also international, levels and which up until recently still gave the victim of a crime a very minor role. The category of victims also gives rise to rights and responsibilities, which although not codified, are expressed increasingly assertively, such as the “right to truth” (Naftali, 2013), the “duty to remember”, and also the “right to forget”. From this perspective, the injunction to remember the violent past and learn from it has been highly effective. It has created new titles and resources – defined by many laws and attributed by ad hoc commissions and ordinary administrations. It has even overthrown the everyday interactions that enable people to aspire to positions of social importance, once linked to acts of heroism, now linked to an experience of trauma or demands for compensation. “The discovery of the painful memory is a major anthropological phenomenon of contemporary societies” (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009, p. 15).

Memory policies have therefore strongly participated in the crystallization of victims as a category, among others (Chaumont, 1997; Grandjean and Jamin, 2011). In reaction to this, some actors have emphasized the “competition between victims” and “counter-mobilizations” (Chaumont, 1997; Grandjean and Jamin, 2011). Those “purged” from France after the Second World War, for example, make claims that “mirror” those of communist resisters (Baudinière, 2008). Argentine or Chilean soldiers who “fell” during “battles” (which were in fact a matter of police repression), present their case in the same terms as those used by the loved ones of those who “disappeared” at the hands of the military. These confrontations in fact illustrate not so much the autonomous and decisive strategies of particular groups, but more the power of these memory policies to create a space for resources and interests, sometimes unbeknownst to these same groups. The public evocation of intimate memories gives rise to similar confrontations, the creation of associations and “counter-associations”, and even the birth of a *False Memory Syndrome Foundation*, studied by Ian Hacking (1995) for example in the case of accusations of incest expressed long after the events allegedly happened which give rise to a public scandal.

It would be wrong to suppose that these processes can be reduced to confrontations between aspirations for recognition that only moral or political options are able to decide. Claims made by victims are not the direct expression of trauma. They suppose the creation of a group and the formulation of a complaint. Pursuing this path constitutes a political action which is therefore subject to the ordinary rules of the political sphere. If the fact that victims deserve social respect has become self-evident socially, this has not freed the victims involved from the weight of ordinary social and political constraints (Lefranc, Mathieu and Siméant, 2008; Célestine, 2012).

Politicians clearly have to satisfy more than just victims. Moreover, they do not satisfy them simply to obey the demands of their moral consciences. Memory policies are like any other policies. They have an important bearing on questions of foreign policy, which are sometimes highly conflictual. The trials under international jurisdiction in which French authorities are involved, for better or worse, regarding France's role in the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsis, for example, cast a long shadow over, and ultimately threaten, the reputations and careers of high-profile political figures (in particular former President François Mitterrand and some former Ministers of Foreign Affairs such as Alain Juppé and Hubert Védrine). The French law recognizing the Armenian genocide, voted on January 29, 2001, raised similar legal disputes with Turkey. International relations are full of confrontations (whether open or implicit) between states that are born out of or revived by memorial questions (Rosoux, 2001).

In other contexts, memorial policies and actions provide the opportunity for unexpected rapprochements. Institutions for traditional justice, such as truth commissions, have often facilitated reconciliation between former enemies, for example, between political parties anxious to expel the threat of new military coups, black and white elites in South Africa (Wilson, 2001), the monarchy and Islamic or left-wing opponents in Morocco (Vairel, 2014), or between governments fighting against guerrillas and their historical allies on the left in Colombia (Lecombe, 2014).

But "small-scale" politics also feeds on memorial policies; politics on the edges of the political scene, because memorial norms are often brandished against, or by, actors who are marginal or have limited power. The bill brought before the French parliament recognizing the "positive role" of French colonization was not the gauntlet laid down by France against former colonies and their residents, but the expression of the ambition of a handful of right-wing MPs on the fringes of their parties who were anxious to stand out (Bertrand, 2006). Similarly, attempts to redefine slavery as a crime against humanity are linked to a

convergence between communist MPs and associations from the French Antilles, beginning at the local level (Michel, 2015). It was also local political dynamics that were responsible for memory policies in the United States dedicated to the fate of Korean “comfort women” who were sexually abused by Japanese occupying forces in Korea during the Second World War (Hasunuma and McCarthy, 2019).

Sometimes – and this is the sign of the power of a label as well as of its flexibility – those who appear to be opponents of the current obsession with memory come to sing its praises. In France for example, Nicolas Sarkozy denounced France’s alleged taste for “repentance” during his campaign for the presidency, only to become the author of propositions consolidating this once he became president (de Cock, Madeline, Offenstadt and Wahnich, 2008). Similarly, Marine le Pen, as the president of the far-right National Front, which many actors of memory policy see as a threat that needs to be challenged, also adopted the rhetoric of memory and, in 2015 before the European Parliament, denounced “the contempt and nonchalance regarding the duty of remembrance”, and demanding that the French public holiday on Armistice Day, November 11 be respected, before leaving the hemicycle.<sup>55</sup> In 2019, as we put the final touches to this book, the Polish and Hungarian governments have continued to challenge the memory policies promoted by Europe, which are intended to be vectors for tolerance and togetherness. They challenge these policies not in the name of forgetting, but once again in the name of memory itself. They promote an alternative narrative that situates the “people”, of Hungary and Poland respectively, at the center of this history and advocates their role as victims (Agh, 2016).

The victims and their memory(ies) are thus tightly controlled on the political scene. Notwithstanding their diversity, particularly ideological, memory policies appear to all proclaim and defend the cause of the victims. Yet they often make this an element in transactions and collusions that both constrain and surpass them. Conversely, but in the academic sphere this time, when victims are encouraged to write their memoirs, the social sciences applaud the end of the domination of the vision of the perpetrators, but are also anxious to defend their monopoly on the writing of a History (with a capital h) that aims to be shared and objective. These tensions are often resolved through the adoption of the figure of a “good victim”, who accepts that her story is objectivized, or at least that allows for the positions of others (other victims, even perpetrators), and remains reasonable in her demands

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<sup>55</sup> [www.frontnational.com/videos/11-novembre-marine-le-pen-reclame-le-respect-du-devoir-de-memoire/](http://www.frontnational.com/videos/11-novembre-marine-le-pen-reclame-le-respect-du-devoir-de-memoire/) (accessed June 25, 2017).

as well as in her use of emotion. Many well-known historians and philosophers emphasize the need to move from private memory to public memory, the conversion of the “noise” of complaints into an ethical-legal language liable to break the cycle of resentment and avoid victims becoming trapped in a closed identity. The philosopher Tzvetan Todorov thus makes a distinction between “exemplary memory”, which is a guide for future action, and a “literal memory,” which remains stuck in the past and in the narrative. He writes, “the cult of memory has rarely served good causes [...] It can be the expression of conservatism and an over-valorization of identity.” There is thus “undeniable merit in moving from one’s own misfortune, or that of one’s friends and family, to the misfortune of others, not demanding for oneself [...] exclusive recognition [...]” (Todorov, 1996, p. 15). The impossibility for victims to access this form of universality even led the essayist David Rieff to praise forgetting (2016).

Victims cannot aspire to this status unless they satisfy the criteria of various actors, whose requirements are primarily defined by their different spheres: victims will have to pass an administrative evaluation (when they ask for an official status or compensation), they will be judged by philosophers on their ability to formulate universalist discourses, and so forth. Some people who have been victims of political violence choose to withdraw from these conditions and instead adopt the term “survivors”, thus specifying that they do not expect official certification and reiterating that they survived at the hands of their tormentors. In Argentina, for example, when the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo – the mothers of activists who disappeared at the hands of the armed forces – say that their children are not dead, but they are not delusional; they know that they are dead. They speak as the defenders of a political cause and opponents of a government which came to power through a compromise with the military (Lefranc, 2002).

This presentation of the complex ways in which memory policies have helped to shape the category of victims, which is always embedded within asymmetrical social relations, sheds lights on some of their social effects. It is impossible to understand just what these effects are if we adopt a functional approach, in other words if we persist in seeing these policies as prescriptions and cultural artefacts that are born either from the state’s need for unity and reconciliation of society, or from a social demand formulated by victims.

Contrary to what many contemporary studies of memory policies assume, these are not public policies that act “directly on the imaginary institution of collective identities” (Michel, 2010, p. 5) or enable a “management of memory” (Cossu, 2010). They therefore cannot be reduced to the action – as substantial and insistent and it may be – of any particular associations,

whether “Jewish associations,” or “associations for the memory of slavery and colonization” (Michel, 2010, p. 119); nor can they be reduced to the memory activism that has been the object of numerous enlightening studies in recent years (Tetrault, 2014; Katriel, 2016; Wüstenberg, 2017; Gutman, 2017a and 2017b; Rigney, 2018, Chidgey, 2018; Altinay et al., 2019).

This *ex post* perspective, which emphasizes the intentions and functions of memory policy, overlooks the *practice as it happens*, and its relational nature. If we adopt another point of view, focused on the diversification of actors involved in memorial issues, this “atomization” and “fragmentation” that seem to many to be a sign of the fragmentation of the common good, are not another sign of the pathological nature of these policies but rather of their foundation in social relations. This is what enables them to have social effects, not so much because of the content they convey, as because of the web of social relations, interconnected with power and diverse interests, that they enable. This web of relations is sometimes woven between actors whose readings of the past may even be clearly contradictory, in different situations, as was the case for the commemoration of the Righteous Among Nations in France. This commemoration brought together the state of Israel as the source of the honorary title, a French Mayor who hosted the ceremony, possibly a member of a political party currently engaged against Israeli foreign policy, and a Righteous who was there to receive the medal and most likely indifferent to these questions, regardless of his or her personal views on Israel and Judaism (Gensburger 2016). Far from curbing the influence of memory policies, memorial controversies may in fact be a sign of their power in that they mobilize, interest, and sometimes bring together – even through conflict – an increasing number of actors.

### **Is memory activism special?**

The people interested in memory policy are both increasingly numerous and at the same time more and more diverse. They extend much further than the immediate circle of former victims and perpetrators, their descendants, or those who have an imagined filial link to them. The persistence of memory policy is the result of the imperfect cumulation of their interactions, which creates a broader social space in which the participants can defend their (often contradictory) positions and gain legitimacy.

### ***The small world of memory entrepreneurs***

Today there is an abundant literature on the “actors” or “agents” of memory (Gensburger, 2012). It has even given rise to a field known as memory activism (Tetrault, 2014; Katriel,

2016; Wüstenberg, 2017; Gutman, 2017a and 2017b; Rigney, 2018, Chidgey, 2018; Altinay et al., 2019). Research on memory actors looks at the origin of the individuals who engage in collective action to denounce people who committed acts of violence against them directly or against their ancestors; it also looks at people who were resistant fighters, First World War veterans, victims of deportation, slavery, or colonization. Sociologist Michael Pollak was one of the first to study this kind of social actors. He described them as “memory entrepreneurs” following Howard Becker’s analysis of “moral entrepreneurs.” By analogy, “memory entrepreneurs can be divided into two categories, those who create shared references, and those who strive to have them respected. These memory entrepreneurs are convinced they have a sacred mission to accomplish, and believe in intransigent ethics that equates the memory they defend with the truth” (1993:30). Other authors use similar expressions like “memory actors” (Winter and Sivan, 1999), “memory professionals” (Rautenberg, 2003), or “memory agents” to refer to those who “commemorate” and “control the images of the past” (Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2002: 46).<sup>56</sup> Those involved in memory activism, who have become the object of numerous innovative studies, now extend well beyond the descendants of victims or perpetrators and cover a large range of social sub-spheres. For the French case, and contrary to what is often claimed (Michel, 2010), a close analysis of the declarations made by associations claiming to defend memory suggests that the increasing number of this kind of memory entrepreneurs, particularly since 2000, is a result of the implementation of memory policies rather than their cause (Gensburger and de Saint-Léger, 2018). For example, one of the most central associations in the valorization of the memory of immigration in France today was set up in 1987 without any reference to the past, to history, to memory, or even to heritage and its founding documents. At the time it was merely a question of intercultural dialogue. It was only in 2001 – after rather than before the institutionalization of memory policies in different areas of state action – that a new line was added to association’s statutes. It now had the objective to “produce any work, of whatever nature, related to the memory and the history of immigration in France and in Europe.” In France, the implementation of memory policy therefore created a space for the legitimization of collective action. That this space was then invested by actors who had previously been outside it, was partly a consequence of these policies, which in return were reinforced and made more visible by the actors.

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<sup>56</sup> For more information see the discussion of memory activism in the introduction to this book.



Although there are more and more of them, these memory entrepreneurs form independent social worlds. For the contemporary period in France, several prefecture<sup>57</sup> reports observe that it is largely veterans associations that attend commemorative ceremonies for the wars, while the associations that speak “in the name of Jewish people” attend commemorations for the Vél d’Hiv Roundup every July 16, and the “representatives people from the French Antilles” attend events in remembrance of the slave trade and its abolitions on May 10, and so forth.<sup>58</sup> Research by Jenny Wüstenberg on post-war Germany shows how the dynamics of social proximity and acquaintances played a driving role in the mobilizations that were held in the name of memory (2017).

It is therefore important to move beyond the observation that memory policies are the cumulation of specific causes, in order to understand that what is affirmed in each case in relation to the state, is the importance of talking about the past, whatever it is, and drawing lessons for the future. In understanding the dynamic that is the heart of this book, it may not be so important that these pasts, as well as the lessons to be learned from them, are different. If these memory entrepreneurs are effective agents of normalization, giving strength to these policies, it is because they are assisted by a second type of memory entrepreneur – this time in the literal sense of the term. Indeed, there are an increasing number of professional memory entrepreneurs in various areas. Memory policies therefore result from a “game” (in the bourdieusien sense) of ordinary social interactions, much of which are professional. Far from denouncing what some describe as banalization (a term which implies a certain moral judgement), we considered that these memory entrepreneurs – who make memory a sector for entrepreneurship – are the best artisans for the consolidation and effectiveness of memory policies.

### ***The memorial enterprise: job markets and social spheres***

A close sociological study of the actors involved in the development of memory policies, in France and elsewhere (Dybris and Gensburger ed., 2019) is still yet to be completed. At the transnational level, research is underway on the women and men working to evoke the past as part of transitional justice (Lefranc, 2009) or on museum professionals (Björkdahl and

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<sup>57</sup> Prefectures are representatives of the national government at the local level. They are responsible for the local application of national law and central state public policies.

<sup>58</sup> Bernard Accoyer, *Rapport de la mission d’information sur les questions mémorielles*, National Assembly, 2008, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/rap-info/i1262.asp> (accessed June 25, 2017), and André Kaspi, *Rapport de la commission de réflexion sur la modernisation des commémorations publiques*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2008.

Kappler, 2019); for the French case, other studies have been conducted or are underway on the creation of associations for the promotion of memory since the 1960s (Bertheleu, 2014; Tornatore and Barbe, 2011; Barrière, 2002; De Cock, 2018).

Memory policies primarily have the effect of stimulating, sometimes awakening, professional spheres on these questions. In particular, education, communication, culture, and urbanism now all have specialists working on issues related to memory. One contemporary example provides an illustration of the mechanism that is at work here. Only two days after the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, an association with the object of “bringing together the physical or moral individuals who support the erection of a statue in Paris to commemorate the attacks” was registered at the prefecture in Paris. Its founders, in other words its president and its secretary, were specialists in communication, a film and events producer on one hand, and a communication manager for an architecture firm on the other. In this case, professional practice constituted a key pillar for commemorative practice designed to feed into the city of Paris and the French state’s memory policy.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the academic world also has memory entrepreneurs. There are many possible examples here, but in keeping with our reflexive (and sometimes challenging) approach in this book, we will take the example of one of the authors. For reasons to do with pleasure, (both intellectual and relational), prestige, genuine feelings of duty (of memory), and emotion, as well as simple financial remuneration, Sarah Gensburger accepted to curate an exhibition that was clearly part of the municipal memory policy. With the same engagement, she was later able to examine the evolution of that exposition and the nature of its reception with a critical sociological gaze (Gensburger, 2017).

Memory policies are therefore situated within broader sectorial logics that make them banal and therefore more powerful. They take place in the continuation of social interactions that lack the moral sharpness of the “painful” past. They gain strength not only in the sense that they reflect “traditions” or “trends”; there are genuine interactions between memory professionals and the sectors they belong to. We will draw on two more infrequently discussed examples.

This time let us begin with the transnational level. International organizations – the UN, the European Commission, but also a multitude of other non-government organizations – promote, subsidize, and implement programs for peace-building through memory for countries emerging from civil war. These programs, as well as the experts, academics, and

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<sup>59</sup>. [www.generationbataclan.fr/page3/](http://www.generationbataclan.fr/page3/) (consulté le 25 juin 2017).

local actors involved in implementing them, seek to reconcile the “ordinary people” among the belligerent groups and foster peaceful and tolerant dispositions within them. Indeed these agreements between political and military leaders, armed interventions, or institutional reforms are not enough to establish lasting peace. But a sociological analysis of the history of organizations and the trajectories of professional actors demonstrates that this intention to build peace “from the bottom up” is not the only consequence of the observation of failed peace agreements. The programs that are implemented follow on from the efforts made by these same people to promote various causes, in their countries of origin and in social sectors far removed from the war that is to be laid to rest.

For example, some of the agendas of these professionals aim to reform criminal justice that western countries consider too repressive; the management of the heritage of violent conflict in Africa is thus used for the cause of *restorative* justice. For example, Mennonite groups (Anabaptist pacifists) implement dialogue-based reintegration programs for juvenile delinquents in North America as a replacement for traditional punitive criminal justice. They travel and offer mediation in countries emerging from conflict. This action abroad is, among other things, a way to support their cause at home. Memory policies are often also linked to mobilizations in support of a renewal of forms of conflict resolution: the overflowing prisons in western democracies, or workplace conflicts that avoid going to trial, serve as inspiration for propositions for peace, through work on memory, elsewhere in the world. Other actors have become “pacifiers” through memory, based on their work as psychologists or activists. Exporting tools for peace provides the opportunity to move outside the political sphere. Finally, there are also many who contribute their strictly professional competencies to international peace and memory policies: from academic criticism of the dominant conception of international relations, history, or law, to the therapeutic techniques developed in the United States for couples in crisis or in Alcoholics Anonymous (Lefranc, 2008). These men and women engaged in spheres other than that of the memory of political violence did not become involved in the latter with the simple – opportunistic – objective of gaining a position there. Not everything in the social sphere can be reduced to the pursuit of individual interests or explicit strategies for advancement. But these actors have brought with them the echoes and experiences of past or parallel lives and this must be taken into account in understanding how they act and why, through them, professional spheres compete in giving their indirect strength to memory policies.

This mechanism is identical to the economic development of another sector – diametrically opposed to the first – that exists in many countries today: memory tourism. Since the

beginning of the 2000s, the French ministries of tourism and defense have been working together to create this new sector, which is memorial but above all economic, particularly in conjunction with local councils (Hertzog, 2012). Four “memory trails” have been developed, focused on fortifications (sixteenth-twentieth centuries), the Franco-Prussian war between 1870-1871, and the First and Second World Wars.<sup>60</sup> These “trails”, “routes”, and other “pathways of memory” are now a tool used by cultural and tourism actors in many localities, both urban and rural.<sup>61</sup>

Associated with armed conflicts, and particularly with the memory of the First World War since 2014 (Crépin and Rouger, 2013), this dynamic feeds into the social fabric well beyond these themes. Auschwitz alone attracts more than a million visitors per year, coming from all over the world, while post-industrial Lorraine considers its working-class past a major tourist attraction (Tornatore, 2004). The development of this specific form of tourism has led to the transformation of historic sites into museums and the creation of sites for organized tours, with appropriate tourist infrastructure (hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops and so forth), which are advertised using targeted marketing strategies. Local history groups and research centers are included in these memory tourism projects, which they sometimes depend upon for their survival. This institutionalization of a new kind of economic activity mobilizes a new category of numerous actors, and in so doing consolidates the leitmotiv that is at the foundation of contemporary memory policies.

This phenomenon undoubtedly involves a process of reifying of the past; in other words, transforming it into an object for consumption, making it aestheticized, neutralized, and made profitable, ready to be recuperated and used by the tourism and entertainment industries and in particular by cinema. In this respect, it has been widely criticized by many actors. The term “dark tourism” shows the extent of this reprobation (Stone *ed.*, 2018). Tourism operators thus offer trips to sites of past violence, South African townships for example, or current violence, such as refugee camps in Gaza. In Rwanda it is possible to conduct a kind of pilgrimage from one ossuary-memorial to another. Global Exchange, an American association for the defense of human rights, offers “reality tours” in places like Afghanistan, Venezuela, or Vietnam. These memorial tours are barely distinguishable from other forms of “reality tourism” that visit Brazilian favelas, Bombay slums, Bangkok brothels, even the Chernobyl reactor. Tourists can visit shipwrecks (such as the wreck of the *Costa Concordia*), or sites where

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<sup>60</sup>. [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr](http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr) (accessed June 25, 2017).

<sup>61</sup>. For example the Memorha network which covers spaces associated with the history of the Second World War in the Rhône-Alpes region of France, as well as researchers in social sciences and humanities working on these topics: [www.reseaumemorha.org](http://www.reseaumemorha.org) (accessed June 25, 2017).

murders or crimes were committed (in high-profile murder cases for example), or places particularly affected by spectacular natural disasters. It would be easy to see this as being purely motivated by voyeuristic pity or by search for strong emotions, and therefore take affront at these degraded forms of interest in the painful and violent past.

However, the few ethnographic studies that exist suggest that visiting these “memorial” sites is not so much a form of perverse voyeurism, as a desire to respect an obligation for memory that is present in many sectors of society (Hughes, 2008). In this respect, the massive development of this kind of tourism on an international level reflects not so much a lack of respect for the past as the normalization of the obligation to remember so as not to repeat history’s mistakes. These non-traditional ways of dealing with memory thus contribute to its strength, possibly at the same time as to its fragilization due to over exploitation (Rousso, 2016) (although this is not a prognostic we are able to make).

The professionalization of memory policies can also lead, not to fragilization, but to the transformation of the moral norms that govern them. This is the case for transitional justice which was developed, as we have seen, to justify political transitions based on compromises with those responsible for political violence (and thus amnesties). Subsequently, and in keeping with the development of international criminal tribunals, it has been partially and progressively reinvested by lawyers and legal scholars, and as a result, associated with a demand for criminal justice. What was used to justify the impunity of political criminals can therefore – through the involvement of professionals and activists – ultimately end in a demand for sanctions against them. Similarly, truth commissions often serve the interests of partisans for a compromise between former (violent) and new governing actors. But they also potentially result in the reduction of the number of socially acceptable untruths or false narratives. By organizing a public reminder of the past, they do not impose a single truth but allow the comparison of truths from people on different sides of the conflict, depending on the configuration of actors. In seeking to too rapidly condemn – whether the collusion between political elites or the lucrative aestheticization of the past for tourism – we risk overlooking the complexity of their effects. As a result, it is more fruitful to follow the complex and unpredictable processes during which groups of people come together to call for the remembrance of the violent past, than it is to take a stance for or against the content of this remembrance. In this respect, memory policies can be considered moral propositions whose dynamics and effects can be more accurately understood when they are not judged from a moralist perspective.

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## **Conclusion**

### **Memory is not enough: can memory policies be more effective?**

In the last few years, memory has been considered one of the ways in which we can help build better societies. Memory studies often focus on the objectives of memory policies. Should we prevent victims from taking advantage of their status, or should we limit ourselves to condemning perpetrators? Should we prioritize history over memory (Hutton, 1993)? Should we accept “forgetting” rather than the overabundance of references to the past (Rieff, 2016)? Should we defend the “historical truth” or the memory of “the weak” against “the strong” and thus remember the “forgotten to history”, such as the legitimate victims of colonial conflicts? Although these political and moral questions are interesting, they do not provide an answer to what we would actually do if one option were chosen over the other. In this book, we have therefore sought to move away from the terms of the existing debates in order to understand what is at work in these contemporary references to the violent past. As a result, there is no “lesson” to be learned here. But this does not rule out a reconceptualization of objectives or a reflection on the way in which memory policies could be more effective, in light of the goals that are generally assigned to them.

Memory policies have developed extensively since the 1990s. In both North America and in Europe, the promoters of these policies have tried to encourage open-minded and liberal citizenship and prevent the rise of political actors associated with intolerance and discrimination. This has occurred in almost all countries, both in societies that are peaceful enough to question the vestiges of the violent past, as well as in those emerging from recent civil wars and which must now build lasting peace and find the ways of “managing” the many legacies of conflict.

In spite of the fact that they convey humanist and pacifist messages, memory policies are both particularistic and competitive. They are used to defend a particular vision of history (rather than a universal history at the service of humanity), and maybe even to obtain a job, or a position of social importance. The persistent objections of moralists cannot change this. These policies are developed because they are in the interests of particular groups, whether they may be genuine believers (in other words people whose social life and identity are structured around the importance of belief), people concerned with the victims and their families, but

also professionals. The causes defended become more convincing and efficient when they appeal to people's material interests. When they do so, they give rise to competition – over power and resources – and conflict. Building policies that aim to be the incarnation of universalist principles of humanity and tolerance always involves the risk of “particularizing them”. When they still broadly controlled access to knowledge, religions actually created closed communities and powerful institutions, through their search to define universal rules.

This observation can be applied to any public policy. Policies only “work” if they are adopted. The increasingly complex and sophisticated art of memorial arrangements draws its strength from those who participate. “Memorialists” and “peacemakers” from various sectors of society – whether they are politicians, legislators, judges, teachers, artists, architects, activists, community workers, whether they work in culture, education, or tourism, or leisure activities – all use very similar tools. They rewrite History, illustrate it with pictures, engrave it into stone, marble, or concrete, or teach it. They encourage us to listen to the victims and – more rarely – pursue political criminals. All of them insist upon the pedagogical impact of their work. They all seek to both educate and move the public, so that this affective knowledge is lastingly inscribed in the depths of each individual. It is this arrangement, rather than the forms of action, that give power to the policies that they promote. As sociologists, we have also expressed our doubts as to the effectiveness of this individualization of lessons from the past and the probability that they can be reactivated when needed. It is doubtful, on the one hand, that the public authorities would have the power to influence individual behavior. Authoritarian, and even totalitarian, regimes did not forbid resistance or the bending of the rules (Hibou, 2017) – how could our democratic and liberal governments convince us to always act as tolerant citizens? On the other hand, we are also doubtful as to the principle of action chosen. The goal of preventing violence, which is central in the contemporary pedagogy of memory, obscures the fact that we live in diverse societies. It is blind to the idea that a homogenous and constant personality is partly a ruse. An individual may be tolerant of people all their life and still take up arms to kill their neighbors when an authority says to do so. Moreover, if there are individual lessons to be learned here, their only strength lies in their myriad collective inter-connections. We therefore need to reformulate the objective. It is not individuals that have to be healed or reformed, they will have time to recant later. It is social relations that need to be constantly reoriented. Even the most extreme collective violence results from a socially situated decision, a choice that involves the *responsibility* of the individuals present, and all those whose consideration and judgement they take into account.

Teaching “never again” is not likely to help found future resistance when the possibility of violent action arises. It is vain to expect memory policies to teach citizens to be tolerant, and ready to rise in outrage at racial discriminations or hate speech or to refuse political violence – whether it targets an individual or seeks the extermination of a group perceived as different from “us”. It is futile, firstly because we claim to be able to wipe the slate clean of distinctive logics that are at the heart of the social and the political. Women and men in groups – even in the imaginary groups of social psychology experiments (Sherif *et al.*, 1961) – set themselves almost mechanically apart from other groups. In so doing they achieve a feeling of satisfaction, they believe themselves to be better than others. And memory policies – both propaganda for hate and appeals for tolerance – participate in this. Perhaps there are fruitful avenues for exploration in education that is not competitive but cooperative (such as that promoted by Maria Montessori), but for the moment these are mere dreams or – worse – privileged academic islands accessible only to the very privileged. There is most likely something to be gained from an equalization of social conditions. Memory is definitely “not enough” (Moyné, 2018; Brudholm et Schepelern, 2018). This would not erase the desire for distinction, but it may render violent mobilizations in response to the discrepancies and lifestyles more difficult.

It is also hopeless to aim to provide decisive and definitive education for tolerance. We cannot learn to be good in a day, and he or she who has taken a thousand days to learn it may not stay good forever. We quite probably deceive ourselves about the ability of explicit moral injunctions to have a lasting impact on behavior, whether they are positive – Love! Protect! Tolerate! Remember? – or negative – Do not kill! Do not discriminate! Do not forget! Such imperatives do not work. Each day we do thousands of things that make us good citizens and good people; we resist hitting, we recycle, we hold a door open for somebody, and so forth. The converging prescriptions of our reference groups have led us to this. But we only do so when the circumstances encourage us to, whether by threats, or habituation, or modelling our behavior on others. Moreover, we know that much of this good behavior is maintained during the worst moments of genocidal “work”, but it is directed at peers rather than victims. The soldiers who carried out the Third Reich’s “Holocaust by bullets” in the eastern territories were careful to remain courteous to each other: when one felt a desire to vomit out of scruples or because of the smell, they did so behind a bush, so as to not inconvenience their comrades, and then resumed killing (Welzer, 2007, 156).

This observation goes well beyond the boundaries of memory policies and their effects. In this area, like in others, we model our behavior less on the explanations provided by an authority than by imitation of our role models, their behavior and the implicit norms that they reveal.

The extreme visibility of the scholarly transmission of knowledge in contemporary society often makes us unaware of the fact. But even today, most social and moral learning (including at school) continues to be based on mimetic assimilation rather than the explicit learning of norms and rules. [...] In terms of morals, this is particularly striking, as we can see in the pathetic ineffectiveness of civic education at school each time it is unable to build upon on the norms of sociability already entrenched in children or young people's everyday behavior. The reasons for this are hardly mysterious: like many other basic skills, social intelligence and moral limits are learned behavior, but they are not very easily taught (Schaeffer, 2010[1999]: 327).

We cannot avoid asking the question, both unusual and familiar, what if morality cannot be taught? Or, at least, not deliberately or directly? And most likely not by instructions or injunctions from a less than credible source of authority? This question leads to another remark that is almost as uncomfortable. If the prevention of collective violence, like any other kind of behavior, is conditional on the possibility of mimicry and reciprocity, it also implies the individual adjusting to other individuals. Yet this adjustment itself makes violence possible. The Milgram experiment conducted in the 1960s in a social psychology lab on the east coast of the United States, and repeated hundreds of times since, demonstrates that an individual who is asked by a legitimate authority (white-coated experts but also even television presenters) to inflict electric shocks upon another person (preferably at some distance) almost always does so. More than six people out of ten will accept, after some initial hesitation and nervous laughter, but without challenging the order (although it was given without any physical threat).<sup>62</sup> It is worth repeating once again that what can prevent violence also renders it possible: the social relationship itself.

How can we escape from this paradox? Most probably through the construction of a critical mind. The depictions of slightly misanthropic or aloof rescuers, or highly sociable and

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<sup>62</sup> This experiment was first conducted by Milgram (Milgram, 1983). For the televised variant, in which more than 8/10 people accepted to torture a contestant in a pseudo-reality television environment see the documentary film by Christophe Nick, *Le Jeu de la mort*, 2009.

submissive killers suggest this. Teachers, who are the most sensitive to the complexity of the social interactions that take place when they mention the violent past, know this already. It must be taught as history, non-reified, totemized, or monumentalized, and not spread through a relativist logic of the plurality of narratives or simply warmed by emotion. It also has to be possible for students and teachers to pose their questions and critiques – even if they are disturbing. Visiting schools during the “mobilization of memory” in the wake of the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, the Minister for national education was offended by certain questions from students: “Even in places where there were no real incidents, there were too many questions from the students. And we all heard the ‘Yes I support Charlie, but...’, the ‘an eye for an eye!’, ‘Why should we defend freedom of expression here and not there?’ These questions are intolerable, particularly when they are heard at school, which is responsible for transmitting values” (Najat Vallaud-Belkacem January 14, 2015, quoted by Cock and Heimberg, 2015, p. 125). Many teachers are happy to risk such “intolerable” questions being asked, even though they often lack the means and elements to answer them. Education through memory cannot be understood simply as a vector for the transmission of values. When it is, it runs the risk of being ineffective, or even producing the opposite effects to those intended.

Perhaps there is a fundamental paradox in wanting to “inculcate” the refusal of political violence and the intolerant behavior it is supposed to lead to. This education aims to produce adaptation to the system by relying on a desire for conformity which allows all societies to function and which is particularly strong in children. The goal of socialization is to achieve the adaptation of individual personalities to the social system. Yet the mystery of resistance to intolerance, to exclusion and to political violence seems to lie in the imperfection, or at least the reversibility, of this adaptation to the system.

Even the strongest socialization to pacifism and tolerance is not sufficient protection; the most virtuous morals maybe used to serve violence. This book encourages us to recognize the probabilistic aspect of all reflections on society. It urges a sociological perspective on the respective proportions of causality and chance, in other words on the existence of a part of randomness in social behavior, even in the “predictive” age of Facebook and Twitter. Maurice Halbwachs, a key reference in social sciences of memory<sup>63</sup>, was one of the first sociologists to

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<sup>63</sup> In the contemporary period, the status of founding father was reinforced by Halbwachs’ deportation and death during the Second World War, as an *a posteriori* confirmation of the importance of his work for memorial



reintroduce a probabilistic conceptualization of social behavior in its relational aspects (Halbwachs, 1912; Brian, 2014). The social is not deterministic but operates as a range of possibilities of movements and potential connections between individuals. Memory, like the actions of individuals, depends on the way in which this social matrix evolves according to laws that are neither a matter of pure chance nor pure reproduction.

We all live in different social worlds at the same time. The behavior that we are encouraged to adopt in a particular context may be incorrect in another space. How can any norm aim to shape our behavior in all circumstances at all times? All those who count as important figures – police, legislators, judges, teachers, shopkeepers, parents, friends, or lovers – would have to defend the same discourse, preferably at the same time. And although some of them may do so for opportunistic ends, they would still have to use the discourse in the same way. Yet such unanimity is unimaginable in our societies, even for the universal norms of memory policy.

It is the most ordinary movements – ordinary in that they rarely target this specific objective – of large numbers of men and women in various groups, that make and unmake moral norms. Even the most powerful people do not impose belief in isolation. Their power is fleeting. Voices must resonate to be heard. The power and legitimacy awarded to a group by potential members is decisive in determining the ability of the cause to resonate in other social worlds. In order to promote long-lasting and widespread values, memory policies must therefore rely on many strong actors – for example on popular, well-paid, teachers or intellectuals who give the impression they are involved in the world and are important to it. If declaring a moral position constitutes morality (regardless of the sincerity that is involved), it is conditional on the norm being often reiterated, firmly, by figures from significant groups. This does not guarantee that the norm “takes root” (the uncertainties of social interactions will decide that), but it will help. However, the power of the “never again” norm, which is still real today, runs the risk of breaking down when its institutions and guardians are weakened, as we can see for example in the current situation between the European Union and Poland.

Let us conclude with a paradox. By constructing a memory of violent pasts, political authorities reveal themselves to be highly determined and durably voluntarist. Yet the less the

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questions. Moreover, his deportation gave rise to misunderstandings; he was not arrested for racial reasons (he was not Jewish), nor for his personal and active involvement in the resistance, but because one of his sons was a member of the resistance.

government is listened to (and the more it is aware of that), the more loquacious it becomes. It is all the more ready to police history in schools when it has less funding to allocate, all the more decided to control the political uses of the past when it seeks to avoid debates with opponents, and all the more concerned with paying homage to victims when it awards them neither compensation nor justice. Memory policies are too often policies of powerlessness.

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