

Book Review: National Policy, Global Memory: The Commemoration of the "Righteous" from Jerusalem to Paris, 1942-2007 by Sarah Gensburger

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Gensburger, Sarah. *National Policy, Global Memory: The Commemoration of the "Righteous" from Jerusalem to Paris, 1942-2007*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2016. x + 217 pages. Hardcover, \$90.00.

In *National Policy, Global Memory: The Commemoration of the "Righteous" from Jerusalem to Paris, 1942-2007*, Sarah Gensburger extends the body of work on memory studies from the fields of history and sociology to her discipline, political science. As the most recent volume in Berghahn Books' Monographs in French Studies, the work necessarily focuses on commemorations of French actions between 1942 and 1945, the years of the Nazi occupation of France, and the political meanings of those commemorations as they evolved from 1945 to 2007. Specifically, Gensburger traces how French institutions appropriated and transformed the Israeli concept "*Righteous among the Nations*" into "*Righteous of France*," providing a case study of "a public policy of memory" (p. 2).

Gensburger begins her book by detailing how Israel came to create the title, *Righteous among the Nations*, and how it came to be used as an instrument of Israeli foreign policy after the establishment of Yad Vashem (the World Holocaust Remembrance Center located in Jerusalem) in 1953. The title applies to those non-Jews who assisted or rescued Jews during World War II, and who have been nominated for the honor by Jewish witnesses. Honorees were expected to travel to Israel to receive their awards, and together with the person they had rescued, plant a tree along Yad Vashem's Avenue of the Righteous. Gensburger explains how the Yad Vashem committee's selection of honorees from particular European nations served as an international diplomatic effort, seeking the ongoing support of those nations for the state of Israel.

After this introductory chapter, Gensburger comes to the heart of her work, namely, how France appropriated the term *Righteous* and used it for its own national political ends. France's memory politics in the immediate post-war period worked at negotiating a French identity that disavowed a connection to Vichy France where, calling for 'National Regeneration', the French Government at Vichy reversed many liberal policies and stressed anti-Semitism. Members of the Resistance, Gensburger argues, were deemed the French heroes, with, at first, no room for French civilians who were heroic by virtue of having risked their lives to protect Jews in occupied France. Although Israel had issued medals to French citizens for being *Righteous among the Nations*, these medals languished in a drawer at the Israeli embassy in Paris, with seemingly little interest among French politicians or organizations.

The shift in France's approach to its memory politics came when Jacques Chirac replaced François Mitterrand as president in 1995. Asked to speak that July at the commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv roundup of July 16, 1942 (where French police arrested and held more than 13,000 Jewish men, women, and children before the deportation of most of them to Auschwitz),

Chirac—the first French president to do so—accepted the responsibility of the French state for its actions. In the same speech, Chirac spoke of the foundation of French identity, namely "humanist values, values of freedom, justice and tolerance" (p. 62). He also referenced the *Righteous among the Nations*, and this, Gensburger argues, was one more step in the evolution toward the French term of recognition, *Righteous of France*. This recognition provided the needed positive counterweight to the act of accepting state participation in anti-Semitic actions during the occupation.

Aside from archival work, Gensburger relied upon questionnaires and interviews with, among others, French legislators and members of the French Committee for Yad Vashem. She also attended numerous medal ceremonies and commemorations. These sources added a humanizing aspect to Gensburger's work which provides a wealth of detail about the individual actors, as well as the interest groups, lobbying for the recognition of non-Jews who came to the aid of Jewish victims of Nazi policies throughout World War II-era Europe. The text also explores the tensions and cooperation among such groups, not only within Israel or France, but between Israel's Yad Vashem committees and the various French interest groups working toward the recognition of France's *Righteous*. Not fully explored was the reaction of Israeli actors to the fundamental changes to the original Israeli concept of *Righteous* (individual and universal) by the French appropriation and translation (individual/collective and national).

Gensburger's work artfully demonstrates how memory studies benefits from political scientific analysis, and as such ties the social sciences together in the field of Holocaust Remembrance.

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