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# “I am not comfortable with that”: Commemorative Practices among Young Jewish People in France

On 13 March 2019, the French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe delivered a speech at the Holocaust memorial in Paris. Philippe mentioned the “collective duty” of both the state and historians. Since the end of the twentieth century, the expression “duty of memory”, which refers to the need to remember violent events – especially crimes against humanity committed during World War II – has been widely used in France (Lalieu 2001). In practice, multiplication of public policies and events dedicated to the commemoration of the genocide of Jewish people during World War II<sup>1</sup> have multiplied (Gensburger and Lefranc 2017). Hundreds of commemorations – gatherings “organised in the intent to be publicised beyond the circle of its participants, whose motives, among others, is a tribute to one or several deceased persons” (Latté 2009, 116) – are organised by a variety of state institutions and cultural, political, memory and religious organisations in Paris and the surrounding areas alone. Across France, such commemorations of the anti-Jewish genocide are expressly intended to teach French citizens about the atrocities of the war and, therefore, to avoid the repetition of such events. Transmission of memory is highlighted as a particularly significant part of the “duty of memory” when policies are drawn up and events are organised (Lapierre 2007). However, neither commemoration organisers nor researchers regularly interrogate how those events are perceived (Antichan et al. 2016).

In this chapter, I seek to study how young Jewish French people commemorate – or do not commemorate – the anti-Jewish genocide, using sociological interviews and observations of twenty-two ceremonies in and around Paris over the course of three years. I use this source material to find out what young people really think of the anti-Jewish genocide memory in modern France, to explore the grief practices of young French Jews, and to understand why young people’s attendance at commemorations is particularly low. I explore how the French national context impacts the memory practices of Jewish people by questioning how young

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<sup>1</sup> I will refer to the genocide of Jewish people during WWII as “the anti-Jewish genocide” to ease the understanding for the reader. I do not use the expression Holocaust because, even if it is the most common expression in English, and as I explain below, the use of the term is contested in France.

French Jews perceive public policies and I interrogate the appropriation of religious and biblical commemorative practices.

I argue that, beyond the injunctions to commemorate, the duty of memory and the religious laws, and the expectations that young Jewish people will attend ceremonies, individuals approach memory pluralistically and appropriate both secular and religious memory practices in heterogeneous ways. Even when those injunctions are conveyed by strong institutions, I conclude that many young Jewish people do not take part in the anti-Jewish genocide remembrance practices in a unique way: their investment is shaped chiefly by familial, religious and educational socialisations.

Jewish people – those who identify and are identified with Jewish heritage – are one of the most important target audiences for World War II-related remembrance ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> This fact speaks to the large number of Jewish victims of the genocide, but also to the idea of the Jewish people as the “people of memory”. This discursive formulation is often invoked during contemporary ceremonies. The President of the Holocaust Memorial in Paris, for example, opened a speech to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 2019 by using the phrase. Meanwhile, researchers such as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (2008 [1984]) also draw on the idea of the Jewish people as the “people of memory” to imply that the conceptions of memory and history in the Bible and in the sacred texts of Judaism suggest that Jewish people are inclined to have strong remembrance practices: “Jewish people have, after all, the reputation to be both the people guided by history, and the people for whom the memory is the greatest and the most tenacious.” (2008 [1984], 12). Judaism is, moreover, perceived as a religion of memory, partly because it incorporates many religious rituals thought of as commemorative or grief practices: the Jewish law (some commemorations may be rabbinical, which means they are not in the Bible *per se*) itself guides many practices ranging from holidays to individual or collective mourning rituals. In spite of the common idea that Jewish people are the people of memory, attendance at memorial ceremonies in modern France by young Jews is low.

Scholars widely agree that collective memory is strongly linked to social identity and the groups with which individuals align themselves (Rothberg 2019; Feindt et al. 2014). My interviewees are all Jewish and French and may have been exposed to different interpretations of the same events. In spite of these common experiences and identities – and the idea of the Jewish people

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<sup>2</sup> Some people may identify themselves as Jewish people even if they are not believers and do not practice Jewish religious rituals; others may be seen as Jewish based on discriminatory factors (Hennebert 2018, 158).

as the "people of memory" – my research suggests that young French Jews do not have particularly strong remembrance practices. Indeed, considering they belong to a variety of groups beyond being Jewish and French, this plural identity is central in the analysis of the appropriations of the memory rites. We showed in the introduction to this series of chapters on the anti-Jewish genocide that the concept of "cosmopolitan memory" does not necessarily bear much scrutiny in national contexts, as the diversity of remembrance practices even within a single group can vary strongly.

In order to reflect the wide range of practices of my interviewees, I classify each of the anti-Jewish genocide memorial events I study as belonging to one of three groups: secular commemorations, religious commemorations and biblical commemorations. Secular commemorations include ceremonies organised by the state or an association such as the "National Day for the Memory of the Victims of Racists and Antisemitic Crimes of the French State and Tribute to the 'Righteous' of France", which I discuss in depth later in this paper. Secular commemorations may involve some element of religious rituals, but such practices are neither prescribed by scripture nor organised in a religious context. Religious commemorations, meanwhile, are organised by religious organisations but not governed by strict adherence to religious law. For example, one synagogue in Paris hosts an annual conference to remember the deportation of the Jewish people from France. This event includes religious elements, such as prayer, and is inspired by Sabbath services, but is not strictly religious. Finally, biblical commemorations make use of remembrance and mourning practices outlined in the tradition. For example, Tisha Be'Av, a commemoration of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, is marked with a fast.

While I focus on youth interaction with these events, the category of "youth" is a social construct that may refer to several realities depending on when and where it is used (Galland 2011; Bourdieu 1978). However, especially when it comes to commemorative practices, the term "youth" is somewhat fluid. Indeed, most of the people who attended the events I observed in and around Paris were over the age of sixty – I have heard forty-year-olds referred to as "young"! My analysis, however, focuses on young adults. The shift in the official memory of the anti-Jewish genocide in the France of the 1990s means that people born at that time are now in their late twenties, so they are the first generation to be totally exposed to the new memory narrative. However, in order to combine both the general category and the particularity of the field of memory, I have included subjects up to 30 years old.

I conducted interviews – focusing primarily on memory practices – with six young Jewish French people from different religious and family backgrounds who had recently attended some or other commemorative event; all of them went to a

memorial, a commemorative demonstration or a ceremony at some point, which allowed me to question what the triggering factor was. Two of the interviewees are members of the same liberal synagogue: Yanis and Leo are both 24 years old; the latter converted to Judaism in his 20s. Two further interviewees were raised in traditionalist families: Romi (20 years old) and David (30), who now rarely attends synagogue. The final pair, Romain (29) and Camille (25), received a non-religious education and rarely attended synagogue in their youth, but today both appropriate or reflect on religious practices as adults.

All were educated in the state school system, except Romi, who went to a Jewish school. They all grew up, and still live, in Paris and its surroundings except for Yanis who grew up in Lyon and now lives in Paris. Camille, Romain and Yanis come from families that were persecuted during World War II; some of their ancestors were murdered in the anti-Jewish genocide. Five of the six rarely – if ever – attend commemorations. Leo, the late convert to Judaism, is the exception. He regularly attends secular, religious and biblical commemorations. This plurality of interviewees allows me to show that despite many differences (in age and religious practices for instance), most of my interviewees share at least one commonality: they go to commemorations because they are taken there by others. Indeed, despite being Jewish, and despite family members' wartime persecution, they do not attend remembrance ceremonies on their own. By studying the national and religious frameworks, I intend to explain how young French Jewish people appropriate the frameworks and narratives given to them – especially considering they do not necessarily commemorate the anti-Jewish genocide as they are expected to.

## 1 The national framework of the memory of the anti-Jewish genocide

Young Jewish people in today's France have grown up in a society with a relatively stable national memory framework of the anti-Jewish genocide. In 1988, the study of the anti-Jewish genocide was incorporated into the French secondary school curricula and the programme regarding this subject was expanded throughout the 1990s (Schneider 2005). During the 1990s, the French state passed several pieces of memory legislation, such as the *Gaysot Law*, which made anti-Jewish genocide denial illegal. In 1995, President Jacques Chirac acknowledged publicly the responsibility of the French state and its functionaries for the deportation of the Jewish people living in France during the war.

## 1.1 Is the genocide a Shoah or a Holocaust?

Exploring the rhetorical framework for discussion of the anti-Jewish genocide in France allows an extended analysis of "cosmopolitan memory": even if many countries agree on a broad outline for remembering the crimes against humanity committed during the war, national frameworks must be studied to understand what young Jewish French people appropriate from that transnational outline. Globally, for example, there are two main expressions to refer specifically to the anti-Jewish genocide: the "Holocaust" and the "Shoah". Etymologically, Holocaust means "religious sacrifice by fire".<sup>3</sup> In France, historians and some Jewish people encouraged the removal of this term from school textbooks because of its connotation of sacrifice and because of its religious implication (Schneider 2005). The word "Shoah" (which means "catastrophe" in Hebrew) or the expression "Genocide of Jewish people" are the only expressions used in museums and classrooms in France. The expression "Shoah" was first used among some Jewish communities since it is a Hebrew word. On the other hand, despite the use of the expression "genocide" by some older people, the way the anti-Jewish genocide was taught in French schools has impacted the younger generations, who refer to the event as "the Shoah". Commemorative habits – here embodied in the way people name events – are related to people's socialisation, and not necessarily to transnational frameworks and therefore to cosmopolitan modes of memory.

English speakers, meanwhile, do not distinguish between "Holocaust" and "Shoah", even if they attended French schools. Camille, for example, went to a French state school and learnt about the Jewish genocide as the Shoah, but also spent time with her extended family in Australia and the USA:<sup>4</sup>

Camille: So, I used to say Holocaust, but now I tend to say Shoah. And . . . I am not sure why. I've seen there are many criticisms of the word Holocaust . . . I didn't really dig into that. But I try, I say to myself, at least Shoah it's a word that is, how can I put that, that is Hebrew, given by Jewish people, so I think it's a word that seems safer. But sometimes I still have the reflex to say Holocaust.

Different socialisations – in particular the anglophone influence – have left her perplexed: Camille knows that one word is seen as more appropriate, especially

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<sup>3</sup> "Holocauste." *Le Robert Dictionnaire*. <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/holocauste> (14 May 2021).

<sup>4</sup> The use of English is important to note here because many French organisations translate Shoah to Holocaust in English. For example, the Shoah Memorial of Paris is called "Holocaust Memorial" in English.

in the French context, even if she cannot explain why. For others, the term “Shoah” is important and offers a space for internal resolution:

Leo: The word Shoah is very good; by the way “Shoah” is in the Bible, it’s a natural catastrophe, it is incredible. That’s what is beautiful, it is a disaster that we are not looking to explain. The word is very much sought after. Holocaust, it’s a catastrophe to use that word.

Leo’s quote shows that the naming of the genocide is not incidental: naming in and of itself is an opportunity to understand more about the way people remember events. Leo was raised in a Christian family and questioned his relationship to G.od<sup>5</sup> when he was a teenager. For a while, any evocation of the anti-Jewish genocide was enough for him to reject religion altogether. In Leo’s statement, the interpretation of the anti-Jewish genocide as something “that we are not looking to explain” can be understood as a way for beliefs and historical knowledge to coexist in his mind. The way Leo now considers the anti-Jewish genocide allows him to think about it not as a punishment by G.od or as something over which G.od had control. His historical and religious beliefs can peacefully coincide by using the term “Shoah”.

Commemorative habits – here, the way people name events – are clearly related to their socialisation. However, the national framework is not imposed on people’s practices; it interacts and intersects with their other socialisations. Indeed, teaching is often legitimised – or not – through other experiences. Just as a museum visitor projects a specific meaning onto an exhibition based on their pre-existing values (Doering and Pekarik 1996), a person studying the anti-Jewish genocide will appropriate the meaning of lessons according to their pre-existing knowledge. Similarly, international recommendations do not define national narratives; in turn, national frameworks are appropriated by a plurality of individuals who make sense of them based on their heterogeneous socialisations.

## 1.2 Remembering the genocide with the French state

During the anti-Jewish genocide, Jewish people were killed because they were Jewish or were identified with Jewish heritage. Because of that, in France, and despite the official policy of state secularism – “laïcité” – commemorations have always blended secular and religious traditions (Wieviorka 1993). Consequently, most

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<sup>5</sup> Out of respect for my interviewees, I chose to write “G.od” because for very religious people it is forbidden to write the whole name for non-sacred purposes. As many of my interviewees are very religious, I chose to respect their practices.

ceremonies, even those organised by the state, include religious rituals such as Jewish prayers. However, even if young Jewish people feel affected by the events of the wartime and have studied the anti-Jewish genocide in schools, they do not necessarily choose to attend commemorations spontaneously as adults. The choice to attend depends on socialisation, not the state-encouraged "duty of memory".

The state organises or co-organises many of the major national commemorations. Sometimes, as in the case of the "National Day for the Memory of the Victims of Racists and Antisemitic Crimes of the French State and Tribute to the 'Righteous' of France", these dates are enshrined in law. The National Day is co-organised by the French Representative Council of Jewish Institutions and held every year on the Sunday following the anniversary of the Vel' d'Hiv' Round-up. It commemorates both the crimes and the acts of solidarity of French citizens during the war.<sup>6</sup>

I attended ceremonies marking the National Day in 2017 and 2018. Few of the hundreds of participants were young. Those who did attend tended to accompany an older family member who was persecuted during the war. For instance, one woman in the audience explained to me that "I came here with my grandmother. She is in the front row." This commemoration, despite its size, and despite sometimes being broadcast on television, does not attract young people. Indeed, the commemorations that young people do attend tend to take place in and around schools. The National Day takes place in July, when schools are closed, which may be one of the reasons why there are few young attendees.

Those who do attend are at the National Day with family. The importance of socialisation to remembrance practices within the family context is therefore paramount to young people's interest in and attendance at such ceremonies. When I asked Camille if she goes to commemorations, for example, she answered thus:

Camille: I thought about it, but I feel like it would make me uncomfortable. [. . .] Like, if my parents, or my grand-mother, people more concerned in terms of generational closeness don't go, I would feel like it is indecent. I thought about going, maybe I will someday, but it's not something I'm . . . I am not comfortable with that. It is something I would not do on my own.

Camille's quote confirms that the "duty of memory" and the injunction to remember the victims is not necessarily appropriated by young people, even those who – like her – lost a family member to the anti-Jewish genocide. However, Camille's argument that she is not comfortable with attending a ceremony must be understood sociologically: first, because she has never been to such ceremonies in the past, doing so is not part of her habits; second, since her family does not commemorate

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<sup>6</sup> During this round-up (16–17 July 1942), more than 13,000 Jewish people (including more than 4000 children) were arrested by the French police in Paris then deported to Auschwitz. Few survived.

the great-grandfather who died, she is afraid to hurt her family by doing it alone. It is not uncommon to find that attendance of public and collective commemorations is related to personal grief (Roberge 2018), which might include, for instance, the loss of a great-grandparent. However, there are very few survivors of the Vel' d'Hiv' Round-up today: this family factor is not central for the National Day.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, even when there is a surviving family link to this sort of event, the appropriation of family history varies based on a young person's position in both their family and wider society (Muxel 1991).

Studying the national framework shows us how young Jewish people remember the anti-Jewish genocide in France. Remembrance is linked to the classroom teaching, but also to state commemorations. While these public policies contribute to shaping an official narrative within a given society, young people's interest in engagement with memory is dictated by family and other socialising factors. Despite the injunction of the "duty of memory", young Jewish people appropriate commemorative rites differently. The French national framework and French teaching interact with socialisations, which is why not all young people abide by the "duty of memory" or participate in its rites.

## 2 Appropriations of religious remembrance practices

Religious institutions and religious education within the family offer another socialising space for transmission of memory practices. However, religious laws are not necessarily put into practice unless they are taught, and more importantly appropriated (here by young Jewish people) – even by those young people socialised in religious institutions.

### 2.1 Remembering the genocide within religious institutions

Yom Hashoah, the annual commemoration often known in English as Holocaust Remembrance Day, is another major commemoration in France. It exemplifies

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<sup>7</sup> There are fewer and fewer survivors of World War II in general, but some commemorations such as Yom Hashoah (mentioned below) are about all the Jewish people who were deported from France, not a specific event.



the importance of socialisation.<sup>8</sup> In France, Yom Hashoah is organised by the Paris Holocaust Memorial organisation and by liberal Jewish organisations. Initiated by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) in 1951, I consider this ceremony as religious because it was imported to France and is today organised by a religious organisation.

Every year in Paris on the day of Yom Hashoah, the names of Jewish people deported from France are read uninterrupted for twenty-four hours. Some young people do attend this ceremony, which seems to play a significant role in their engagement with public commemoration. Details of the ceremony are often shared in liberal synagogues, so young attendees learn about Yom Hashoah and are encouraged to attend. Leo, for example, attends as a result of his synagogue attendance.<sup>9</sup> Yom Hashoah is, moreover, usually on a weekday, so the organising committee invites classes of schoolchildren to participate. Some young people who lost family members in the anti-Jewish genocide join in the readings. Given that Yom Hashoah is a major commemoration organised every year, people may come to expect and mark it as a routine event. Moreover, every year about half of the 76,000 names of people deported from France are read. This large number has increased the number of families that get involved to read the names of the members of their extended families who were deported. However, they do not attend the ceremony just because *their* ancestors were persecuted. If paying a tribute to their family was the main driving force, then most Jewish people whose families were persecuted would be present. Young Jewish people mostly come with school groups, with their parents, or with their grandparents. Indeed, a young person's presence at a commemoration like Yom Hashoah should not automatically be assumed to be the result of personal and conscious reflection:

Camille: No, I've been to the Holocaust Memorial, because . . . It wasn't really my initiative, a friend of mine worked there. We met by accident on the eve of Yom Hashoah. It came up in conversation because some people were talking about it next to us [. . .] And I think I mentioned that one of my great-grandfathers disappeared in Paris during the Shoah. And she told me that I should go to the Memorial with her the next day. And I went [. . .]. But I don't think I would have done it on my own.

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**8** It should be noted that Holocaust Remembrance Day (organised every year on the 27 Nissan of the Hebrew Calendar) is in April or May. Most importantly, it is different to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day which falls on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau (27 January).

**9** This may explain the difference with the Vel' d'Hiv' round-up commemoration, which may be less well advertised in synagogues.

Camille attended Yom Hashoah not out of some deep-seated personal sense of loss, but because her friend convinced her after they had overheard someone mention the event. Similarly, Romi visited Auschwitz on a school trip. She also listened to two survivors telling their stories (not during a specific commemoration): the first spoke during a class, the second at a Jewish scouting organisation (the Jewish Guides and Scouts of France).<sup>10</sup> Camille and Romi have their own particular family histories. Camille's family survived the persecutions, while Romi's family was in Northern Africa during the war and was not persecuted. Neither of them, however, intended to go to a public commemoration – even if both were taken to a commemorative event at some point in their lives.

Leo, meanwhile, is a convert to Judaism. He has no Jewish ancestors, and therefore no personal links to anti-Jewish wartime persecution. Nevertheless, Leo attends most commemorations, including Yom Hashoah, Yom Haatzmaut<sup>11</sup> and biblical holidays. Attendance at a commemoration is based on family socialisation and/or a triggering external factor like being invited by a friend: family links in and of themselves do not make attendance at such ceremonies either a certainty or a likelihood. The “duty” to remember is hardly upheld – at least in the terms envisioned by the state – even in the case of young Jewish people with family links to the past.

Nevertheless, the French Jewish cases I explore here are not unusual. Taking part in public commemorations can, as Fanny Jedlicki (2001) explains, be motivated by many factors: even different members of the same family may (or may not) commemorate and pass down the memory of traumatic events in the family. My examples show that, by considering all the groups that constitute an individual's identity – school, family, religion and so on – we can see that motivations for participation in memorial events extend far beyond what the state or the Holy Scripture suggest or prescribe.

## 2.2 Remembering the genocide during biblical commemorations

From Tisha Be'Av to Passover, the Bible is filled with narratives of persecutions and religious ceremonies that commemorate them. Jewish remembrance, however, is not limited to specific holidays. Guided by a plethora of prescriptions for mourning, Jewish people incorporate remembrance into everyday life (Hidiroglou 2013).

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<sup>10</sup> The organisation is known as “Éclaireuses et Éclaireurs israélites de France” in French.

<sup>11</sup> This secular holiday is the celebration of the creation of the State of Israel.

As in any religion, involvement in rituals is influenced by familial socialisation by the individual’s personal path:

SH: So, Yom Hashoah is the only commemoration you go to?

Leo: I also go to commemorations at the [Synagogue] [. . .] for Yom Hatzmaout, the day, the year, the creation of the State of Israel [. . .] It is right after [Yom Hashoah], in May. But Yom Hashoah, the liberals . . . for that, I’m really proud of them. It’s a huge victory for the liberals, because the orthodox had said that there was already Tisha Be’A. I like this holiday, it’s a great holiday.

For Leo, the secular and biblical commemorations are inextricably linked: Yom Hashoah is associated with the biblical holiday of Tisha Be’Av. Since his conversion, Leo has been a regular Synagogue attendee: he always goes to Sabbath services and attends the celebrations of each and every religious holiday.

Leo’s personal commemoration practices are interlinked with his commitment to religious practices and beliefs. The way he describes Tisha Be’Av is notable: for Leo, the biblical commemoration of Tisha Be’Av is an occasion to commemorate every historical persecution the Jewish people have suffered.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, many religious Jews are of the opinion that Tisha Be’Av renders secular commemorations unnecessary. I discussed this with two student rabbis who attended Yom Hashoah in 2019. One of them explained that he was present because he had been asked to attend. However, for him, Yom Hashoah was pointless: the anti-Jewish genocide was meant to be remembered religiously and on Tisha Be’Av, and not on Yom Hashoah at all. Taking part in biblical commemorations is closely tied to religious education.

Finally, attending some biblical holidays is often linked to family gatherings. Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is a holiday that involves repentance and remembrance. At the end of the day, for the Yizkor,<sup>13</sup> people recite the name of their deceased loved ones and the entire congregation prays for the elevation of the souls of the dead. Moreover, liberal communities have introduced specific prayers to remember the anti-Jewish genocide. However, practices around Yom Kippur show how collective commemoration can be an intimate moment to remember a personal loss, and how attendance may not be related to the community. Romain, for instance, explained that he had taken part in Yom Kippur to avoid hurting his relatives, who considered it an important holiday. His “duty” was to his family – and not to history, to the French state, or to religion:

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<sup>12</sup> This habit of assimilating recent events and major events of the past is partly inherited from the Middle Age Rabbinical tradition (Yerushalmi, 2008 [1984]).

<sup>13</sup> *Yizkor* can be translated as “remembrance” and is a part of the Yom Kippur service.

SH: Do you fast for Kippur?

Romain: Hmm . . . Yes. Yes, I don't know why I hesitated [to reply], yes, I do it. I must have done it twice. I think . . . but yes I do it. Yes, I do it with my family. For a while, it was to not hurt them, because I know it's a founding holiday, and it's the most important for them, but now I do it [. . .] We go to the synagogue for the whole day, and it's kind of traditional, a family gathering.

Family socialisation is central even to involvement in biblical commemoration for Romi and Romain. However, attendance at or celebration of biblical holidays is not a must even for young Jewish people who grew up in more traditional families. Indeed, for some, participating in such events may be related to their religious path (as is the case for Leo). For others, it may simply be about spending time with family. In short, even if religious laws tells people to do something, people will not always act accordingly: they first have to be socialised with a particular set of principles. Indeed, like any other teaching, religious laws and traditions are appropriated and made individual. As my examples show, appropriation of any given biblical law may vary between two people, each of whom is inevitably socialised through multiple institutions.

### 3 Conclusion

In France, there are a plethora of public policies that aim at transmitting the “duty of memory” regarding the anti-Jewish genocide. However, the declaration of this principle is not performative, and the ceremonies and commemorations are not necessarily appropriated personally by young people. Young Jewish people do not necessarily adhere to it even if they are linked to this history. Moreover, Jewish people are considered to be a people of memory. Yet Jewishness itself does not define people's remembrance practices. As Yerushalmi explains in *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory* about Jewish people and History (2008 [1984], 42), the reason why the idiom “Jewish people are the people of memory” does not match the reality of practices derives from a linguistic inadequacy: memory in the Bible, memory as a social concept, and memory as a sociological theoretical debate are different subjects, yet the same term – “memory” – is used in each case.

Indeed, my study of six young Jewish people's memory practices shows that their engagement with history is significantly more nuanced than the theory would suggest. Being Jewish certainly affects their remembrance habits, especially because they may feel related to people who were murdered for their

Jewishness. However, this fact alone does not explain why people attend public commemorations and ceremonies. Indeed, Yanis, Romain, David, Camille and Romi rarely or never go to remembrance ceremonies, even though they all are Jewish. Family history, which is often seen as a driving force for attendance at such ceremonies, likewise has a limited predictive factor, as shown in the cases of Camille, Yanis and Leo. Even though Camille and Yanis’ families were persecuted during the anti-Jewish genocide, they rarely attend ceremonies. On the contrary, Leo, whose family was not persecuted as Jewish, participates in ceremonies. The state’s influence is just as non-pervasive as familial or historical Jewishness: the way my interviewees learnt about the anti-Jewish genocide in schools certainly impacts the way they talk about it; even if they went to different schools, their history curriculum was the same.

By studying the memory of the anti-Jewish genocide, I have demonstrated how a global anti-Jewish genocide narrative is not the only way young European Jews interact with history. The anti-Jewish genocide is remembered as a part of the war and has become an integrated part of the French secondary school curriculum. However, “globalised” and even national memory do not provide the sole narratives that impact remembrance practices. To understand the phenomenon of my interviewees’ remembrance practices in its entirety, one needs to look beyond normative speech on remembrance to consider the intersecting strands of an individual’s socialisation – family, religious associations etc. – and the differing connotations of religious, secular and biblical commemorative practices. Moreover, it should be noted that beyond socialisation, context and social interactions can also impact individuals’ appropriation of memory practices. Indeed, Camille went to a commemoration because she was taken there by a friend. She took part in the event once, but she did not return later on her own.

The transmission of memory is not linear, but as with any social process, it is appropriated by individuals depending on how they were socialised, driving transmission beyond the realms of the “duty of memory” and religious laws. As we explained in the introduction to these chapters on memory of the anti-Jewish genocide, individuals appropriate national narratives – just as states like France and Russia translate international memory frameworks to fit their national framework and narrative.

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