The Holocaust in North Africa (Revisited)

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INTRODUCTION

This paper began as a response to a letter which appeared several years ago in the Intermountain Jewish News, a weekly published in Denver and serving the region from New Mexico to Montana. The letter is discussed briefly in the body of the article. The present paper is an expansion of an initial response to the letter, also published in the Intermountain Jewish News. The expanded paper was largely completed before 2001; it has been possible to make only very minor revisions to the paper since that time.1

The letter's author was able to assume that the Holocaust really did not affect Morocco; this despite the ready available of scholarship showing the role of the Vichy government, the existence of labor camps, and the inclusion of North African Jews from France. Although such facts were readily available, this was not the only example of the All-Ashkenazi approach to the Holocaust, the typical view of the Holocaust which is Eurocentric and especially concentrates on Poland, Germany and adjoining areas. On the one hand, there is good reason for this: half the 6 million were Polish Jews. There is another good reason for this: the Holocaust brought many Sephardic communities to an end, but the significance of the demographic shift that occurred during and after the rise of the State of Israel may have been numerically more significant, when examining Sephardic, Near Eastern and North African Jewry as a whole. However, to the extent that Jewish communities throughout the world were affected by the Holocaust, the Eurocentric view of the Holocaust denies the impact and meaning of the Holocaust for Jewish communities from Morocco to Sarajevo to Iraq.

In the few short years since then, much has changed. Many factors could be suggested; this is only a partial list, and in no particular order.

1 The historical injustice of having neglected the Jewish survivors in countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area. Della Pergola, p. 21. At the January 1942 Wannsee conference, which can be considered the beginning point of a systematic, operative logistical effort to destroy all Jews worldwide, statistical tables were circulated indicating that the Nazis had quite a correct perception of the size and distribution of Jewish population worldwide. Given the opportunity, all existing Jews would have been destroyed. Hence, in the broadest sense, any Jew who was born and lived before the end of World War II and the demise of Nazism and its allies in 1945, regardless of country of residence, is a survivor.
1. The current situation in former Yugoslavia: One end result of the fall of communism and the more peaceful situation in former Yugoslavia is the greater visibility of Jewish communities in Bosnia and Serbia, and interest in their World War II stories. This is illustrated in part by the report of Evelyn Dean, included elsewhere in this issue.

2. Greater visibility and availability of Sephardic history: In the past several years, Sephardic organizations in North America have been very successful in remaking their images, adding to their professionality, and adding to their sense of the importance of Sephardic history. Affiliations are often symbolic and pragmatic, rather than ideological or conceptual, but the symbolism of the association of the American Sephardi Federation in the Center for Jewish History underscores this greater popular awareness of Sephardi history. Moreover: Visitors to Auschwitz now see a Sephardic plaque; the US Holocaust Museum and Memorial has benefited from several Sephardic and North African oriented events; the study of North African and Sephardic deportees from Drancy, discussed in the body of the paper, has been completed and disseminated online.

3. Greater tendency to link the Arab-Israel story with the Holocaust story. More specifically, in addition to the traditional narrative, the role of the Holocaust in showing the need for a Jewish state, there is more frequent reference to the role of the Arabs in supporting Hitler’s regime and implementing, where they could, actions against the Jews or against the enemies of the Nazi state.

Perhaps this is the most important change. Again, the materials were always there: to cite only one example: no one could discuss the Mufti of Jerusalem without mentioning his support of Hitler.

But it may be argued that differences in the way this part of the story is presented are striking. In the 1980s, Nissim Rejwan could write a popular history of the Jews of Iraq without emphasizing the connection between the Farhud and the Nazi sympathies of the Iraqi government of the time. I am unaware of major institutional Jewish discussion of reparations to Jews who lost everything when they left Egypt or Iraq or other countries. Jews who left Arab lands told of attempting to get some settlement but ultimately dropping the matter when their attempts either led to propaganda favorable to the current Arab regimes and/or worsening situations for the small Jewish communities still left in those countries. Today, the situation is very different: the younger generation, perhaps, has sparked a much more aggressive stance. Compare, for example, the activities of the Institute of the World Jewish Congress, which has published a study by Carole Basri “The Jews of Iraq: A forgotten case of ethnic cleansing” (Foreign Policy Study no. 26, 2003) and circulated it widely; Basri has compiled several documentary films on this subject, and—as is evident from the title of her article—is unambiguous about how to interpret the material.
The Israeli Declaration of Independence mentions that “the Jewish people in Palestine made a full contribution in the struggle of the freedom-loving nations against the Nazi evil. The sacrifices of their soldiers and the efforts of their workers gained them title to rank with the peoples who founded the United Nations.” This was not a vehicle to draw out explicitly the contrast between the Jewish people in Palestine, who supported the Allies, and the Arab leadership in Palestine, who opposed them. In recent times, however, Arab support for the Nazis and opposition to the Allies is a motif in, for example, Alan Dershowitz’s most recent book on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It would be hard to imagine anything else, given the Israeli-Arab politics. Abu Mazen’s Holocaust denial was mentioned widely in Jewish sources when he was selected to become Prime Minister of the Palestine Authority; the Arab world has seen a tremendous rise in both Holocaust denial and attempts to depict the Jews and Israel as the true Nazis of our times. Reaction and resistance to this is an obvious course of action.

Recently, Israeli demographer Sergio DellaPergola wrote about issues arising from “the historical injustice of having neglected the Jewish survivors in countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area” A brief discussion of this report and a copy of a letter I wrote supporting it are given in an appendix to this article.

Despite the greater awareness of the inclusion of Sephardic, North African and Middle Eastern Jewries among the victims of the Holocaust, it remains to be seen the extent to which Holocaust museums and memorials, documentaries and other repositories of popular culture make more space for non-Ashkenazi victims.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Holocaust is a powerful symbol. For better or worse, the Holocaust looms very large in the contemporary Jewish narrative; the story of how this came to be has been the subject of several recent books, most notably The Holocaust in American Life by Peter Novick.

The Holocaust is also an overwhelmingly Ashkenazi symbol. Several reasons seem to lead inexorably to an Ashkenazi emphasis in any retelling of the Holocaust story. Most prominent is the sheer size of the Eastern European Jewish community in 1939;

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2 A shorter form of this essay was published in the Intermountain Jewish News, (Denver, Colorado) 20 May, 1999. Thanks to M. Mitchell Serels who offered suggestions and corrections. Any errors are of course entirely my own.

3 Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. This and several similar works are reviewed by Lawrence Baron, “Experiencing, Explaining and Exploiting the Holocaust,” Judaism A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought 50:2 (Spring 2001), pp. 158-175. My thanks to Professor Baron for making a copy of this paper available to me in advance of publication.
Holocaust victims from Poland and the Soviet Union alone, largely Ashkenazi, dwarf the numbers of victims from Yugoslavia, Greece and other southeastern European countries with traditionally-Sephardic populations. The overwhelming demographic preponderance of Ashkenazi victims is not in question.

Also relevant is the location of the major concentration camps and death-sites in Germany and Poland, (although there were forced-labor camps in North Africa as well as in Europe), and the overwhelming Ashkenazi ancestry of English-speaking Jewry. Even in Israel, despite its large Sephardic population, the telling of the Sho’ah emphasizes Ashkenazi memories, for many of the same reasons, and reflects the leading role played in Israel by Ashkenazim. There was nothing like Maidanek in Morocco. Nevertheless, in some Sephardic areas, such as Salonica in Greece, the final solution was as final—or more final—than it was in Warsaw or Vilna. In North Africa and the Middle East, however, it was not the Nazi Holocaust alone which brought these communities to their end, but the rise of the State of Israel, and Arab nationalism and anti-Zionism, which led to mass emigration.

Nevertheless, many Jews whose ancestry or professional interests lie in South-East Europe, or the lands of Africa and Asia, including Mandatory Palestine, can note with some justification that the Holocaust, as it is memorialized and studied, under-references these areas. Their history is indeed largely ignored, with maps, memorials, and listings of victims largely limited to Europe. Lists detailing Jewish losses typically aim to present “a well-founded and comprehensive picture of the losses incurred by the Jews of Europe as a direct result of Nazi persecution.” Despite an occasional reference, for example, to Libyan deportees, non-Europeans are absent from most presentations of this materials. This makes it harder to compare deaths on French soil “as a result of Nazi-fostered persecution” with deaths in other countries under Vichy’s control in North Africa and the Levant. At Wannsee in 1942, Heydrich described the “final solution of the European Jewish Problem,” noting that “approximately eleven million

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4 Poland and the Soviet Union are usually estimated to have had about 4,000,000 victims; Yugoslavia and Greece together with only 125,000; adding Thrace, Macedonia, Albania, Rhodes, Libya and other traditionally-Sephardic populations of SE Europe might bring the number up to about 130,000-140,000. These enumerations do not include North Africans deported from France, or those who died in forced labor in North African countries. Demographic lists consulted include: Jacob Robinson, in his article “Holocaust” in Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem, 1972); Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, New York: Harper 1961, p. 670; Martin Gilbert, especially in his map of “Jews murdered between 1 September 1939 and 8 May 1945: An Estimate,” in Martin Gilbert, Atlas of the Holocaust, New York: William Morrow, 1993, Map 316, p. 244; and Yehuda Bauer and Robert Rozett, “Appendix 6: Estimated Jewish Losses in the Holocaust,” in Israel Gutman, editor, Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, New York: Macmillan, 1990, 4:1797-1802.

5 Bauer and Rozett, p. 1797.

6 Of the sources surveyed above (note 3), only Martin Gilbert refers to non-European losses.

7 From Bauer and Rozett’s language about the meaning of their figure for a loss of 77,320 persons in France, p. 1800.
Jews are involved.\textsuperscript{8} Clearly, the total elimination of all Jews from Europe was envisioned, but the estimates of Jews in France (including both the occupied and unoccupied sectors) exceeded the total Jewish population of European France by over half a million. Jews from the provinces and dependencies of France in North Africa and perhaps Syria were thus considered within the Jewish population of unoccupied France marked for extermination at Wannsee.\textsuperscript{9} Nevertheless, one rarely encounters any assessment of the overall numbers of Moroccan and Algerian Jews included among French deportees (these readily available records also record deportees born elsewhere in Africa, the Middle East and Asia).\textsuperscript{10} The situation is less true in Israel, where Yad Vashem has included definitive volumes on Libya and Tunisia by Irit Abramski-Bleigh in its Pinkas Hakehilot series on the Holocaust in various countries,\textsuperscript{11} and includes among its historical displays maps and photographs relevant to seventeen forced-labor camps in North Africa and some of the slave labor activities.\textsuperscript{12} Thanks to Abramski-Bleigh and to Michel Abitbol, North Africa and the Middle East are also well documented in the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{13}

This is just the point of a well-known anthology of Sephardic poetry about the Holocaust, in the original languages, edited and translated by Isaac Jack Lévy: And the World Stood Silent: Sephardic Poetry of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{14} The difference in tone between the introduction and the poetry reflects the phenomenon of an increasing “centering of the Holocaust.” One of the featured poets is Henriette Asseo, a woman of Salonican heritage living in Paris. She wrote:

\texttt{Mon peuple n’existe pas}

\textsuperscript{8} W. Schirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960, p. 965.
\textsuperscript{9} 865,000 Jews were marked for death in France at Wannsee, 165,000 in the occupied zone, 700,000 in the unoccupied zone; See, for example, Martin Gilbert, Atlas of the Holocaust, p. 85, map 99. The total pre-war population of France is given as 350,000 by Bauer-Rozett. A substantially smaller figure was given in the American Jewish Year Book for several years at the beginning of the War, based on a 1937 census.
\textsuperscript{12} Photographs of these displays, as well as conveniently organized materials about the Holocaust in North Africa, are found at www.u.arizona.edu/~shaked/Holocaust/lectures/lec10b.html (Accessed 24 May 2004).
\textsuperscript{13} These scholars wrote the articles “Morocco,” “Algeria,” “Tunisia,” “Libya,” “Syria-Lebanon,” “Iraq,” and “Haji Amin al-Husseini” (see p. xxxix in the Introduction).
exil de la mémoire
aux portes des camps.

My people do not exist
Banished from memory
at the gates of the camps.15

Asseo was aware of and moved by the Salonican experience; an early publication of
ers (in 1979) was entitled “From honey to ashes...: where have the 70,000 Jews of
Salonica gone?”16 Three of her poems were chosen for this anthology. Originally
published in 1983, each could easily be seen as relating to the entire Jewish community
of Holocaust victims, and dealt with the enormity of the experience. Indeed, in this
poem “my people” are defined as none other than “followers of the Covenant /
identified with God” and not specifically as Sephardim or even Salonicans. Much the
same can be said of poems by other authors collected in this anthology, which recall the
loss of victims from Sephardic centers—and from elsewhere. The poems speak
movingly of the loss of life, the destruction of whole communities, and the brutality of
the camps, but not of the invisibility of victims from the poets’ hometowns as
compared to others.

Yet, the translator and editor, Isaac Jack Lévy, notes— in a sentiment copied onto the
dust jacket— “The Sephardic victims of the Holocaust were, indeed, forgotten at the
gates of the camps. Their tragedy at the hands of the Nazis remained unknown....”17
This is no doubt the meaning of the title given to the anthology: And the World Stood
Silent. Lévy’s purpose in publishing the poems is to give voice to the message that
Sephardim— not only Ashkenazim—perished in the Holocaust. Lévy’s reading of the
poetry as a message of Sephardic involvement reflects precisely the increasing centrality
of the Holocaust in American life that Peter Novick and the others mentioned at the
beginning of this article have commented upon.

Regardless of what one may think about this centrality— and Novick is not convinced it
is a good idea— it is very much a reality, and given its centrality, Sephardim and Jews of
Islamic Lands clamor to bring their part of the story to the fore. Although
proportionately a very small portion of the Jews destroyed by Hitler, the destruction of
Sephardic culture in former Ottoman lands may have been even more total than that of
Ashkenazi Europe. Moreover, the stories of Vichy, German and Italian activities in
North Africa and the Middle East are virtually unknown except to specialists.

15 Lévy, p. 60-61.
16 Lévy, p. 53.
17 Lévy, p. 19.
It is hardly surprising that the Holocaust in the Sephardic and Arabic world seems to be an increasingly controversial subject. The Sephardic caucus within the Association for Jewish Studies and the International Sephardic House discussion group have noted the need to discuss the Holocaust’s effect among Sephardim and the “Eastern Jews” (edot ha-mizrah). The U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum had a seminar bringing together eight scholars for two weeks culminated with a public presentation in mid-August, 1999. Interspersed with coverage of the ongoing bombings, genocide and atrocities in former Yugoslavia, the news media carried reports about Croats and Serbs as Nazi collaborators or resistance fighters, and about Serbian and Albanian “Righteous Gentiles”—those who protected Jews.

Even before Lévy’s publication, Solomon Gaon and M. Mitchell Serels published a volume of essays entitled Sephardim and the Holocaust, with a substantial bibliography; they published a revised and enlarged volume in 1995, with a new title: Del Fuego: Sephardim and the Holocaust. Lévy’s introduction to the anthology presents a good summary of research about the Jews of Salonica, Rhodes, Greece, Bulgaria, the Dodecanese Islands, Libya and Tunisia. In an article which appeared in Judaism, Lawrence Baron references more recent bibliography for some of these areas. Perhaps less familiar to Western readers is the complex role of Turkey, which protected its Jews and served as a refuge in the Holocaust, but also bowed to British pressure and refused passage to refugees seeking passage by boat to Palestine.

In the central Arab lands, the support of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem for the Nazi cause is well documented, and there are links between the Holocaust and the Farhud in Iraq. In a more contemporary vein, there has been much media attention to the way the Holocaust is taught and presented in Arab societies, and to Arab tendencies to equate the effects of the formation of the State of Israel on the Arab Palestinian population with the Holocaust. This has, however, garnered less scholarly attention, and

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18 Sephardic and Oriental Holocaust Workshop, August 1-15, 1999. U.S. Holocaust Museum and Research Institute, Washington D.C., USA. Program schedule and details may be found in Sefard, the Sephardic Newsletter (an electronic publication), Volume 8 Number 9, September 1999.
21 Lévy, pp. 8-16.
22 Baron, “Experiencing,” note 1, provides ample bibliography of recent works on the fate of Greek Jewry in the Holocaust.
24 A very readable account of the Farhud is given by Nissim Rejwan The Jews of Iraq, Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1985, 217-225. Rejwan places the Farhud in the context of Iraqi resentment of the British conquest of Iraq, and notes both that the Farhud took place, in effect, after the pro-Nazi regime of Rashid Ali had already been toppled, and that many Muslims protected Jews. But see the arguments of Carole Basri, presented in the letter to the Special Master, given as an appendix to this article.
little attention has been given to attempts to provide sensitive but more accurate presentations in the Arab educational sphere, at least among Israeli Arabs.25

Typical of the marginalization and exclusion of non-Ashkenazim from the Holocaust is a letter from David Harris, which appeared in the Intermountain Jewish News (published in Denver, Colorado), of April 30, 1999. Harris took exception to reports about internment of Jews in Morocco during World War II. He noted his own warm reception in Morocco with the Peace Corps,26 and implied that references to deportations cite a single scholar, Michel Abitbol, presumed by Harris to be the only source to say Jews were interned in Morocco. It should be noted, however, that some Sephardim see themselves as marginalized as well. Serels argued against a sense of marginalization when he wrote: “We as Sephardim, must realize that the Holocaust is part of our history. We cannot pretend that the Holocaust was a European problem experienced only by Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe.”27

Abitbol is of course a recognized authority on the Jews of Morocco. He is the author of a standard monograph on the subject, The Jews of North Africa during the Second World War.28 Michael Laskier has written a more recent monograph on the subject of North Africa under Vichy domination, The Jews of the Maghreb in the shadow of Vichy and the Swastika29 (in Hebrew) and discusses this material in his English-language North African Jewry in Twentieth Century.30 Laskier’s findings on this subject are similar to those of Abitbol, and already available in English, as much the same is reported (in briefer form) in the Encyclopedia Judaica article on Morocco, published in 1974.31

The Vichy law of 4 October 1940 provided that “foreign nationals of the Jewish race” in Morocco would be detained in “special concentration camps.”32 This law, however, had been preceded by an order of the King of Morocco on 2 January of the same year providing for detentions of various persons who could be used as forced labor. Apparently, however, these camps were intended for European Jews, not Moroccan Jews. Laskier says there were 12 camps, and that the Jews there were reportedly...
suffering from harsh conditions, although their fate was better than that of the Tunisian Jews in concentration camps. Nevertheless, he characterized the Moroccan Jews’ situation at this time as “precarious.” Although the King is said to have protected Moroccan Jews, Vichy restrictions imposed in Morocco included severe limitations on Jews’ professions and schooling. There were forced relocation to the mellahs (the Moroccan “ghettos”) in some but by no means all communities, as well as financial extortions, land expropriation, prohibitions from public office, and other regulations. The situation improved only after 3 June 1943, when Charles de Gaulle was able to end the period of Vichy influence.

Vichy France controlled Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and, from December 1940 to July 1941, Syria as well, which at that time included Lebanon. The 1940 regulations were extended to all these places. Algeria experienced Vichy patterns of persecution of Jews and removal of rights. Committees for Aryanization were set up and Jews lost the French citizenship they had enjoyed for seventy years. In Tunisia, additional legislation in 1941 increased the harshness of the situation. It may be noted that the Vichy-appointed High Commissioner in Syria, Henri Dentz, also planned to establish concentration camps, but was unable to do so before British and Free French forces occupied the country in July 1941.

In the broad context of the Jews of Arab lands, the situation in the Maghreb under Vichy paled compared to Tunisia and Libya, occupied by Germany and Italy. Raul Hilberg recognized a certain irony in the North African situation, writing that “Tunisia was Africa, and the ‘final solution’ by its very definition was applicable only to the European continent.” Therefore, according to Hilberg, “so far as the Germans were concerned, the African Jews could have been left alone. But they were not.” The Tunisian situation worsened substantially when the Germans occupied the country in 1942. Some 4,000 Tunisian Jews were deported from their homes, most forced into hard labor camps in Tunisia where some died; moreover, some Tunisians were deported to the European concentration camps. There are reports that the Germans may have begun building extermination camps in Tunisia. But they were distracted by continued Allied attacks in North Africa, their occupation of Tunisia lasted only for a short time, and their Italian partners in the Tunisian occupation exerted a moderating influence. If they had begun such camps, the Germans did not succeed in moving very far along this plan before their occupation ended in 1943. Nevertheless, Mitchell Serels notes that Tunisian Jewish leaders were deported to European death camps, and estimates that a total 2,575 Jews died in Tunisia.

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33 Irit Abramski-Bleigh, Article Syria-Lebanon, in Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, 4:1444.
34 Irit Abramski-Bleigh, ibid, 4:1445.
36 Ibid. p. 401.
Libya was also occupied. Mussolini’s anti-Jewish regulations of 1938 in theory applied equally to Libyan Jews. At first they were more effective in Italian governmental agencies and businesses in North Africa west of Libya than in Libya itself. Nevertheless, eventually close to 5,000 Jews in Libya itself were subject to internment and even deportation to European camps.  

In Abitbol’s three-volume Israeli reader History of the Jews of Arab Lands, he refers to the Tunisian forced labor camps and the worse conditions in Libya—and little about the camps in Morocco. But in Jews of North Africa, he refers to the Moroccan internment centers with some further details, although notes that the surviving documentation does not allow for a full picture. Nevertheless, he is able to give detail of the working conditions at some thirty camps, naming fourteen in Morocco and the rest in Algeria, and cited a New York Jewish weekly which published a census adding up to 2,100 internees in Morocco and 2,000 in Algeria. (Abitbol noted differences in the purposes of some of the camps; perhaps this is the reason for the disparity between the figure he gave and Laskier’s reference to twelve camps).

Moroccan Jews venerate the memory of King Mohammad V, but under the Protectorate of Vichy France, Moroccan Jews nevertheless suffered various limitations. Laskier delineates the differing approaches of Abitbol, H.Z. Hirschberg, David Cohen and M. Dutheil regarding the role of the King and the Moroccan government under the Vichy French protectorate. Hirschberg thinks the King was in effect totally powerless, others say he actively cooperated with the Vichy anti-Semitic program, refrained from doing things within his power to thwart it, or did his best to oppose—or at least delay—implementing the Vichy directives. Laskier believes that future access to more government archival materials may clarify the record. In any case, the Vichy government could act without the King’s consent, but the reverse was not true.

In recent years, as noted, memorializing the Holocaust seems to have played an ever increasing and central role both among Jews and in our society in general. Uncommon energies are dedicated to recording the personal testimonies of survivors, celebrating

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38 These paragraphs largely summarize Laskier’s presentation of this material. It is not clear to me how many deaths there were; at least 500 perished at Giado (Jado), out of 2,500 removed from Cyrenaica. Maurice Roumani, “Aspects of the Holocaust in Libya,” in D del Fuego, p. 126, and additional deaths among Jews of French, British and other nationalities who were deported to Tunisia or to European camps.

39 M. Abitbol, Shalom Bar Asher, Ya’akov Barnai, and Yosef Tobi, Toldot Ha-yehudim be-artzot ha-Islan, ed. Shmuel Ettinger, Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, three volumes, 1986; volume 2, pp. 429ff.; Vol. 3 has Hebrew translations of Vichy decrees of October 31, 1940 and August 22, 1941; German reports about the effectiveness of anti-Jewish laws, reports about the camps in Giado (Jado) and elsewhere in Libya, Albert Memmi’s report about forced labor in Tunisia, and a telegram from Ribbentrop to the German ambassador in Rome regarding Italian policy about Jews in North Africa. (pp. 246-259).

40 pp. 97-101

41 Maghreb, pp. 44-45.
acts of defiance of the Nazis, and building museums and electronic archives. It would seem to be of crucial importance that this endeavor not exclude documentation, analysis, exhibition and videotape records of the effects of the Holocaust in countries occupied or administered by the Nazis or those under their domination outside of Western, Central or Eastern Europe. Especially in the Balkans, in Salonica and Rhodes, and in former Habsburg lands, there were Sephardic victims whose story is no different from those of the other European victims. The North African story may be somewhat distinct, but those whose lives were destroyed in internment or work camps—and there were some too who were sent to the European crematoria—are no less victims.

The lower visibility of the Holocaust in North Africa and in Southeast Europe goes beyond issues of documentation, disparities in the size of the communities effected, or in the end result. Ultimately, it reflects the centrality of Central and Eastern Europe in the Holocaust narrative, especially as it is retold in North America.

In his letter, Harris disputed the claim that there were camps in Morocco, which he supposed to have been supported by the research of only a single scholar. In fact, the comments of Abitbol and others make it clear beyond doubt that Jews in Morocco were forced into ghettos and into internment camps. In the latter case, however, they were mostly “foreign” rather than “Moroccan” Jews, the camps were for labor, not execution, and the numbers affected were relatively small; these camps were not on the scope of Auschwitz. It is true that Abitbol tends to attach more importance to them than some others do, and to emphasize Moroccan complicity in anti-Jewish actions. Nevertheless, even those who credit the King of Morocco with protecting “his Jews” presume that Vichy French collaboration with the Nazis extended to Morocco. Questioning the very existence of Nazi-inspired legislation, expropriations, quotas, forced evictions to ghettos, and even internment and extermination, reflects a lack of awareness in the Jewish community of the Holocaust narrative outside the main region of the focus of the American Holocaust narrative: Eastern and Central Europe.

There are several important points here:

1. Sephardim and Jews of Arab Lands have history as well as folkways. Music, recipes, and ethnography of these communities have had some visibility in North America, but their history has been nearly invisible. The same is somewhat true about Eastern European Jewry: Americans are far more likely to be aware of Yiddish phrases or songs, and recipes for gefilte fish or matza balls, than the populations and occupations of the pre-War Jewish populations of Warsaw and Vilna. Nevertheless, the history of the Nazi actions in Europe are well known; the ramifications of the Holocaust on the life of the Jews of Arab lands and of the Sephardim—particularly in the Balkans and Aegean—deserve no less scrutiny than that of Jews anywhere else.
2. We must avoid too narrow a focus on events we perceive as central—even if correctly—when such focus leads to the marginalization and eventually exclusion of all others. This is especially true when our focus is on ourselves. The procession to marginalization and exclusion is easy: "we are interested primarily in our role" leads to "...only in our role" to "only our role is of interest." This kind of procession often leads to a myth of self-centrality, in which the undisputed fact that a group played a role in an event leads to a perception that the role was of central significance, indeed of such central significance that nothing else is important. Conversely, we must draw the story of the Jews in lands that were Arabic or Muslim into the mainstream of Jewish history. Hilberg believed that the "masses of Jews in Moslem lands were inert and forgotten" before the Second World War, and that the "Arab Jews will increasingly be drawn into Jewish history" to supply the "replacement for the European Jews who have been killed." Many might say that this "replacement" occurred in Israel, which had a non-Ashkenazi majority at least until recent mass immigrations from Russia. But Hilberg's observation also should be understood in a broader sense: a call for drawing the narratives of the Jews of Arab Lands into how we retell Jewish history—and that the loss of vibrant European centers of Judaic life in the Holocaust will not be fully overcome without full attention to North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean that had so often been ignored or forgotten.

3. Holocaust memory plays a central role in the narrative history of the Jewish People in our times. The destruction of European Jewry seems to be growing in its importance to Jewish identity. Almost every community has monuments, memorial services; thousands of youth go on the "March of the Living" from Auschwitz to Birkenau. Indeed, given the presence of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum, of large museums in New York and Los Angeles, of Holocaust units in the schools, of public memorials in cities and states—it is a part of the American narrative as well, and it is often argued that it speaks to all humanity. Why or whether this should be is beyond our scope here. But clearly the telling of the Holocaust is and ought to be a crucial part of the Jewish heritage. In North Africa, the Holocaust did not wreak the final destruction of the Jewish communities that it did in most countries of Central Europe, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Moreover, Arab and Islamic nationalism and rise of the State of Israel play a more important role in the narrative of the end or dramatic reduction in size of these communities. Yet if the Holocaust is important and it is important to record and analyze as much of the Holocaust as possible, its ramifications in these areas must not be marginalized.

A final thought: The Holocaust endeavor cannot merely be to memorialize, nor even to teach "tolerance" of the other or "intolerance" for racism. The traditional Jewish

\[\text{\footnotesize Footnote: Destruction of European Jewry, 1961, p. 670.}\]
memorial prayer invokes the memory of the departed with a blessing that they be "bound up in the bonds of life," justified because those who remember them use the occasion for tzedaka, a term translated in some contexts by "righteousness" but here referring to charity. Righteousness and charity—social, communal or educational activities—provide a far more eloquent testimony to the humanity of the loved one than a mere memorial. It falls to our generation to find the correct balance of acts of memory and acts of righteousness in the shadow of the Holocaust.

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