

# **The Holocaust and North Africa**

**Edited by**

**Aomar Boum and**

**Sarah Abrevaya Stein**

**Stanford University Press**

**Stanford, California**

camps were primarily for Jews. Even in Tunisia, there were only forced labor camps, and most of them cannot really be called camps. We know neither the number nor the demographic character of the Jews who were interned at the camps. Boum's research has uncovered the remarkable diary of a Muslim, Mohamed Arezki Berkani, who was interned at the camp of Djenien-Bou-Rezg in Algeria. As far as I know, this is the only diary of a North African non-Jew ever found or published. The Bedeau camp was also unique because it was reserved for young Algerian Jews who served in the French army, not for all Algerian Jews. The two chapters by Boum and Slyomovics illustrate the problematic nature and challenges surrounding the topic of North African camps and the need for careful research.

Another example of the expansion of research subjects is the chapter by Boum and Mohammed Hatimi in this collection (Chapter 5), regarding Jewish-Muslim relations during the war in rural southern Morocco—that is, the periphery of a peripheral area of a peripheral issue in the history of the Jews in Morocco. As the first attempt to deal with this subject, the chapter demonstrates the willingness of North African scholars to push research in new directions.

### Conclusions

We are now in the last moment when the possibility of obtaining eyewitness testimony from Jews, Muslims, and French who lived during the World War II period can still give their accounts. Although these testimonies are likely biased, their collection should be carried out, and urgently. We have the advantage of excellent archives of this unique period and an increasing public interest in the subject, driven in large part by second- and third-generation descendants of those who lived during this era. Among universities, academic centers, institutions, and organizations with an interest in the Holocaust in general, there is now an increasing awareness of the subject of North African Jewry during World War II. However, the small number of scholars dealing with this subject throughout the entire world is still notable. Hence it is important to encourage institutions to pay more attention to the cultivation and support of young researchers and to coordinate the exchange of knowledge among scholars.

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### A Memory That Is Not One

*Michael Rothberg*

IN *MONOLINGUALISM OF THE OTHER*, the philosopher Jacques Derrida uses the lens of language to explore what it means to have lived through the contradictions of French-Jewish-Algerian existence in the twentieth century. One of the refrains of Derrida's reflections is the phrase, "I only have one language; it is not mine."<sup>1</sup> The stakes of this initially mysterious paradox become clear as Derrida situates his account in the trajectory of Algerian Jewish experience from the Crémieux Decree, which granted indigenous Jews French citizenship in 1870, through the Vichy anti-Jewish statutes, which revoked that citizenship seventy years later.<sup>2</sup> Many Algerian Jews embraced the late-nineteenth-century invitation to become French, and by the time of Derrida's youth had—at least according to the philosopher—"lost" previously native languages such as Arabic and Berber and fallen into a half-chosen, half-imposed French monolingualism.<sup>3</sup> This affiliation with French language and culture was then violently severed by the Vichy statutes, which not only rendered Jews stateless but also expelled young members of the community like Derrida from the French educational system.

The application of Vichy's anti-Jewish statutes to Algerian Jews—and in different ways to Jews in other zones of the French empire, including Tunisia, Morocco, and even French West Africa—should not be surprising. Most of Algeria, after all, was a department of France at the time, and the colonial territories were central to France's self-understanding as an imperial power. Yet, as the present book documents, the North African (not to mention sub-Saharan African) contexts of World War II and the

Holocaust have rarely figured in accounts of the persecution and genocide of Jews.

*The Holocaust and North Africa* sets out to readjust our sense of the geography of the genocide and to bring attention to the histories and experiences that have never been a central part of the scholarship on, and collective memory of, the Holocaust. Paraphrasing Derrida, we might say, from the perspective of North African Jews, "I only have one memory; it is not mine." The "one memory" of the Holocaust that has existed is the memory of the persecution of *European* (and primarily *Ashkenazi*) Jews: a memory that is not in any way singular across the length and breadth of Europe but that over the decades has nevertheless consolidated into a coherent story with a global reach. That memory can only have been an awkward affair for Jews, like Derrida, with North African origins and direct experiences of fascism.

From the vantage point of late writings such as *Monolingualism of the Other* and "Circumfession," we can speculate that Derrida's multiply marginal location—as a member of an ambiguously situated minority in a colonized country—became a conceptual resource for his critical examination of the relation between centers and margins of political, intellectual, and cultural power. Deconstruction, Derrida's most well known philosophical innovation, offers a mode of reading that both recognizes the power of the center—along with the histories and memories that help shore it up and that it helps to shore up in return—and unsettles that power by revealing its reliance on what is only apparently marginal. The margins, in Derrida's thought, become a site for the radical reexamination of what is taken for granted. Such a critical examination from the margins is precisely what is called for and undertaken by the editors and contributors of *The Holocaust and North Africa*.

This volume offers, first and foremost, a rich collection of essays that challenge us to think in new ways about the Nazi genocide and its relation to colonialism, fascism, collaboration, resistance, and military occupation, among other topics. Before returning to the question of how the contributions here might help us unsettle the center and margins of our understanding of the Holocaust, it is important to point out that most of the essays are written in a historicist mode and offer fine-grained analyses of German, French, and Italian policies along with the ways that Jewish and Muslim North Africans experienced and responded to those policies across a remarkably diverse range of national and colonial contexts. In

addition, a smaller number of essays, those by Aomar Boum, Lia Brozgal, and Alma Heckman, along with the editors' introduction, reflect on the cultural representation and memory of the events at stake. Brozgal (Chapter 8) especially draws our attention to the particular resources that literature and film can bring to bear on our understanding of the rich historical and anthropological insights of the other essays. As a literary critic with a special interest in memory, I find myself inspired by the new conceptualizations of history that become possible when we view events and their implications through the lens of cultural texts, including those of a figure such as Derrida.<sup>4</sup>

Because this volume takes up a topic long considered marginal to the understanding of the Nazi genocide, it is not surprising that the thematics of center and margin that are so important for Derrida also appear frequently in these essays. For our contributors, center and margin are spatial categories that they sometimes mobilize in a "literal" fashion. Location can matter enormously in the ways that histories play out: For example, Boum and Mohammed Hatimi point to the specificity of the historical experiences of the southern regions of Morocco in relation to the urban centers (Chapter 5), and the Algerian and Moroccan borderlands are mentioned as sites of porous Jewish identities in Daniel Schroeter's essay (Chapter 1).

Frequently this geography of centers and margins is overlaid with metaphorical meanings that indicate relations of geopolitical power in contexts of colonialism. These are often but not always Manichean relations between colonizers and the colonized. In the context of colonialism and occupation, the center-margin relation is a social and political fact, the outcome of hierarchical power relations. Yet one of the strengths of this volume is the way the contributors repeatedly draw attention to differences within the two sides of that only apparently fixed binary. On the side of the colonizers, for instance, Daniel Lee addresses the struggle that takes place between metropolitan officials in the center and the colonial administrators of the margins over how to define and enact policy towards Jews (Chapter 6). The category of the colonized is similarly shifting and tension-laden in North Africa, as Derrida's own work shows, because indigenous Jews sometimes experienced privileges that were not afforded to their Muslim compatriots, as with the Crémieux Decree; but in the context of fascism indigenous Jews were also exceptionally vulnerable to the loss of rights (and worse).

Some of the essays suggest the need not only to complicate but also to dismantle oppositions such as center and margin. For instance, Alma

Heckman cites Edmond Amran El Maleh's notion of the "game of complex margins" that has always existed in the interstices of the binary dynamics of power (Chapter 9). Although such a contribution is not offered in the philosophical vocabulary of Derrida's texts, it similarly highlights the privilege of the marginal perspective. In Heckman's words, "From each marginal story a clearer picture of the whole emerges."

The relation of (small) part to whole identified by Heckman also suggests the related importance of *scale* in this volume. One of the (many) challenges of writing about the Holocaust—along with other traumatic histories—is the problem of scale: How do we conceptualize or represent racial persecution and the perpetration of mass death as they unfold across vast geographies and over months and years? As a theater of the Holocaust, North Africa is both geographically marginal to the centers of policy making and extermination and also relatively small in terms of the number of Jews affected (though the geographic area is of course imposing). Some of the essays here take this problem of scale as an opportunity to rethink the status of historical evidence. For instance, Ruth Ginio foregrounds the epistemic possibilities of thinking the whole through small numbers in her account of how Vichy officials in the federation of French West Africa sought to expel Jews from certain professions (Chapter 3).

Compared with the horrors that European Jews experienced during World War II, the dismissal of a few Jews seems almost insignificant. But it is precisely the small number of the potential victims of the Vichy laws and the distance of [French West Africa] from the main theaters of World War II that highlight the obsessive nature of the Vichy regime in its persecution of Jews. In a time of severe crisis, when two-thirds of the metropolitan territory was under Nazi occupation, the Vichy authorities were concerned with a Jewish banker in the Ivory Coast and a Jewish lawyer in French Guinea. (p. 90)

Such a shift of scale from the small, minor, distant, and marginal to the preoccupations of the center bears a certain resemblance to Derrida's own strategies in *Monolingualism of the Other*. Derrida starts from a historical peculiarity—the experience of being a "Franco-Maghrebian" Jew—and derives from it certain structural features of language, such as the further paradox, "We only ever speak one language. . . . We never speak only one language."<sup>5</sup> The thrust of Derrida's paradoxical thinking is to move beyond a notion of language as property, as something a speaking subject could "own" or "possess." Can these propositions also shed light on the problems

of memory and history at stake in this volume? Can we think about the Holocaust and North Africa beyond the logic of property and possession?

The dynamics of centers and margins, parts and wholes, small and large scales are indeed central to the question of the Holocaust and North Africa, but the answers they provoke are not necessarily simple or straightforward. That is, the essays here stand on their own as contributions to the understanding of the Nazi period, Vichy, and late colonialism in North Africa, but it remains to determine what "whole" they sketch when taken together. In Derridean deconstruction, two logical moves are necessary: first, a reversal that privileges the marginal concept over the central one; and second, a dispersal that rewrites the entire terrain beyond the terms of the opposition. In approaching a topic as understudied (relatively) as the Holocaust and North Africa, it is natural for the first tendency to predominate: Assert the centrality of what had been marginal, and claim the experience of North African Jews and societies as "proper" to the Holocaust.

The essays in this volume sometimes make such a move, but my sense is that they are ultimately at their best when they shift to another, less singular terrain, that is, when they do not simply try to write their way into the Holocaust narrative but also ask us to reconsider what *other*, less hegemonic frames might be available for thinking about North Africa during World War II. The experience of anti-Semitic policies, the loss of social positions, the harsh realities of forced labor and detention camps, and (in a small number of cases) deportation to Nazi camps are all elements of North African Jewish life and death during the war that should be included in the larger history of the Holocaust. But the most striking aspects of these histories lie, I believe, elsewhere: They reveal a layering of histories that are not "one," that are not singular, but rather, in my terms, multidirectional.<sup>6</sup>

What emerges most powerfully in this volume is not just the addition of new spaces to the history of the Holocaust, though this is also a significant contribution. Instead, what I take away is a more concrete understanding of the interaction of fascism and colonialism and the place of Jewish and Muslim communities within that dynamic.<sup>7</sup> Susan Slyomovics (Chapter 4) captures this interaction powerfully when—drawing on Arendt's genealogy of totalitarianism in colonial bureaucracy and racism—she describes how, in the context of war, "the violence of French military culture in Algeria was intensified by Vichy-era fascism expanded to the overseas North African colonies against those racially classed by the colonial bureaucracy as



*indigènes* or 'natives,' a term perennially applied to the Muslim and temporarily, between 1940 and 1943, to the Jew" (p. 96). Schroeter (Chapter 1) makes a similarly crucial point when he concludes that, "as implemented in North Africa, Vichy's Jewish policy is legible only in the colonial context. Seen on a longer continuum, Vichy's anti-Semitic legislation was integral to French colonialism, embedded in the racial policy toward both Muslims and Jews across North Africa that both predated and followed the war" (p. 48). The unfolding of the war in North Africa, in other words, becomes a point of inflection between different historical trajectories of race and violence that cannot be entirely subsumed in the category "Holocaust."

In drawing our attention to this process of inflection, Slyomovics and Schroeter, along with others in this volume, direct us toward a project that is at once historically rich and intensely *current*. Most crucially, they bring Jews and Muslims into the same frame, describe comparative racial dynamics that are both historically embedded and dramatically malleable, and offer a model of how fascist and imperial politics interact and intensify each other. In a world that continues to be marked by colonial and imperial logics and that is also seeing the rise of movements that can be described as postfascist, the histories recovered here take on great urgency.<sup>8</sup> I do not believe we should attempt to collapse those recovered histories into a singular account of the Holocaust; nor should we read the present straightforwardly out of the experience of Nazi genocide. Rather, reading from the margins reveals an entangled, multidirectional history of fascism and colonialism that is not "one" and cannot be "owned" by any discipline or field but whose legacies nonetheless reach, unevenly and sometimes uncannily, into the present.

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### Intersectional Methodologies in Holocaust Studies

Todd Presner

NEARLY THREE DECADES AGO, Saul Friedländer organized a major conference at UCLA in which he asked a number of historians, philosophers, and literary scholars to reflect on the limits of representing the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Prompted by the controversy over Hayden White's theories of history, which Friedländer and others perceived to erase the boundary between fact and fiction, thereby leading to Holocaust revisionism and negationism, the conference attendees set out to examine how postmodernism challenged "the realities and truths of the Holocaust," or for that matter, any "stable truth as far as this past [the Final Solution] is concerned."<sup>2</sup> For Friedländer and other historians, such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Carlo Ginzburg, the truth and reality of the Holocaust must be upheld so that historians can establish and maintain its factuality. Postmodernism—considered by Friedländer to be the "rejection of the possibility of identifying some stable reality or truth beyond the constant polysemy and self-referentiality of linguistic constructs"<sup>3</sup>—seemed to deny this possibility and therefore opened the door to Holocaust deniers.

For White, however, historical narratives, like literary narratives, are foremost problems of emplotment, and all authors choose various kinds of narrative strategies, tropes, and modes of figuration to construct their objects of study. These narratives, White suggests, gain relative traction, cogency, and sometimes even canonicity in particular times for particular people and in particular situations. Departing from the claim that there is "an inextinguishable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena," White argues that injunctions of "realism" in the representation

state's commitment to maintain the Holocaust as a defining event for all Israelis" (Shandler, "Jewish Culture," 603). This suggests that inclusion of non-European Jews in Holocaust historiography is an Israeli problem, ignoring its meaning for Holocaust studies more generally.

4. The original article was in French: Dan Michman, "Le sort des juifs d'Afrique du Nord pendant la seconde guerre mondiale: fait-il partie de la Shoah?" unpublished manuscript, in my possession.

5. Michman, "Sort des juifs d'Afrique du Nord," 15n34, citing Longerich, *Unwritten Order*, 96.

6. Michman, "Sort des juifs d'Afrique du Nord," 17, citing Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews*, 411.

7. Michman, "Sort des juifs d'Afrique du Nord," 12, quoting Eichmann, who reportedly said, "I realize we made some mistakes in numbers."

8. Michman, "Sort des juifs d'Afrique du Nord," 26–27.

9. The exact title is the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East.

10. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) has taken the lead in assembling a vast and well-organized documentation based on North Africa and the Holocaust. Collections can be consulted online at [collections.ushmm.org/search](http://collections.ushmm.org/search).

11. For a good general introduction to cultural history, see Chartier, "Cultural History," 420–25.

12. Stone, "Holocaust Historiography," 2.

13. On the question of refugees in North Africa, the bibliography is thin. See Tartakower and Grossmann, *Jewish Refugee*, esp. ch. 6, which includes a section on North Africa. Also see Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*; Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles*; Wriggins, *Picking Up the Pieces*; Ben Ya'akov, "European Jewish Refugees"; Baïda, "Réfugiés juifs européens"; and Abitbol, "Afrique du Nord."

14. Here I mention the work of Moroccan-Israeli historian Michel Abitbol. Despite limited access to documents, a generation ago Abitbol collated and interpreted the then existing sources in his *Jews of North Africa* to produce a credible narrative. See also his "Waiting for Vichy." Also noteworthy is a recent book by well-known Israeli Holocaust scholar Hanna Yablonka, *Juifs d'Orient*, a state-of-the-art report covering topics such as Holocaust education, memorialization, and indemnification within the context of the Israeli "Oriental" experience of the Shoah.

15. I mention in regard to this issue Satloff's *Among the Righteous*, which has reverberated beyond its modest intentions, largely because of the absence of more historically factual, archive-based research.

16. Goda, "Hitler's Demand."

### Notes to Chapter 13

1. Eisenbeth, *Pages vécues*.

2. Guez, *Nos martyrs*. Zuares from Libya wrote songs after the liberation of the Glado camp.

3. Sebag, *Communist de Tunisie*.

4. Saoudoun, "Élaboration." Memmi's book was the second critique of the leadership

of the Jewish community to be published after the war. The first was Gaston Guez's *Nos martyrs sous la botte allemande* (Our Martyrs Under the German Boot), published in 1946. Although Memmi's criticism is direct and harsh, Guez's is indirect and focused on victims.

5. Ansky, *Juifs d'Algérie*.

6. Abitbol's *Juifs d'Afrique du Nord* was also published in Hebrew in 1986 and in English in 1989. More than a decade earlier, Dina Farella wrote a master's thesis in French on Vichy rule in Tunis, but the work was not published and hence had no academic or public impact. Similarly, Yves Claude Aouate's doctoral dissertation on Algerian Jews' experience of the war was little circulated. Farella, "Condition des juifs"; Aouate, "Juifs d'Algérie."

7. See the index in Attal, *Juifs d'Afrique du Nord*, 3.

8. Yablonka, *State of Israel*.

9. The French edition was published under the title *Les juifs d'Afrique du Nord sous Vichy*; the Hebrew edition came out in 1986, and an English edition was issued in 1989.

10. *Pe'amim*, vols. 27–29.

11. Edited by Irit Abramski-Bligh and published in 1997.

12. I had the honor of being the initiator and organizer of this workshop as part of my work at the Documentation Center on North African Jewry During World War II.

13. Houri, *Journal of Clément Houri*.

### Notes to Chapter 14

1. Derrida, *Monolingualism*.

2. Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 16.

3. Derrida's account of the assimilation process is not uncommon among Algerian Jews; but historians now present a more complex picture of how Algerian Jews negotiated the French "civilizing mission." See, for instance, Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*.

4. Derrida does not appear in the essays collected here, but he does figure briefly in related work by Susan Slyomovics. See Slyomovics, *German Reparations*, 216, 221.

5. Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 7.

6. See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*. The concept of multidirectionality is an attempt to capture the dynamic relation between histories—in particular, the histories of Nazi genocide and European colonialism—that are usually considered separately. Although in *Multidirectional Memory* I am primarily concerned with interactions between the memories of those histories, I also offer conceptual tools for thinking about the interacting histories themselves.

7. This volume thus contributes to the kind of project outlined in Katz et al., *Colonialism and the Jews*.

8. On postfascism, see Traverso, *Les nouveaux visages du fascisme*.

### Notes to Chapter 15

1. The conference was held at the University of California, Los Angeles, on April 25–29, 1990, under the auspices of the UCLA Department of History and the 1939 Club of Los Angeles. It resulted in the following publication: Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation*.