

GUIDELINES

VOICES FROM THE MAGHREB – THE JEWS OF NORTH AFRICA DURING THE HOLOCAUST



The four children of the Sitbon family- a Jewish family from the city of Ariana, Tunisia, 1942. The Ghetto Fighters' House Archives

RATIONALE

On the eve of World War II, approximately 400,000 Jews lived in North Africa - Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya - having settled in the region in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple. Over centuries, these Jewish communities integrated into local societies, excelling in diverse fields, engaging in trade and politics, and maintaining good relationships with their Muslim neighbors. However, this was disrupted with the advent of French and Italian colonialism in the 18th century, and later, with the rise of Nazi ideology and its reach into North Africa. By 1940, German and Italian forces, along with the Vichy French regime, imposed racial laws and anti-Jewish policies that directly impacted the Jewish population. North African Jews faced forced labor, dismissal from public positions, deportations to concentration camps, and, in the case of Libyan Jews, deportation to German concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen. Despite the experiences of North African Jews during that period, this historical chapter has remained largely marginalized in mainstream Holocaust discourse. After the war, many immigrated to Israel, bringing with them their personal testimonies. However, their stories often met with skepticism and dismissed from the broader narrative of Holocaust remembrance. The "Voices from the Maghreb" workshop seeks to bridge this historical gap by bringing forth stories of Jews from North Africa during the Holocaust. By utilizing technological innovations such as AI, we aim to illuminate their fate, struggles, and resilience, while also addressing their ongoing efforts to integrate their stories into the collective memory of the Holocaust. This initiative is not only about preserving history - it is about recognizing overlooked voices and ensuring that Holocaust education reflects the diversity of Jewish experiences during the war.

GOALS

- 1 Introduce the history and fate of North African Jews during the Holocaust through personal stories. These firsthand accounts provide a human-centered approach to learning about the Jews of the Maghreb during the Holocaust, emphasizing individual experiences within the broader historical context.
- 2 Examine Holocaust memory in relation to the Jews of North Africa and encourage participants to engage in a critical discussion on the terminology and historical framing about how the experiences of North African Jews fit within existing definitions and narratives.
- 3 Recognize the story of North African Jews as an integral part of the broader Jewish narrative during the Holocaust and explore the meaning of remembrance for North African Jews, their descendants, and Israeli society as a whole. By doing so, the program fosters a more inclusive approach to Holocaust education, ensuring that the diverse experiences of Jewish communities are acknowledged and preserved.



Jewish children at Purim celebrations. Benghazi, Libya. 1943

COURSE OF THE ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On the eve of World War II, approximately 400,000 Jews lived in North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. They began arriving in the "Maghreb" countries (the Arabic name for North Africa) in the times following the destruction of the Second Temple. With the invasion of German and Italian military forces during 1940, North African Jews experienced firsthand the racial policies of the Nazis, the Italians, and the French Vichy government.

On the website's main page, you can watch a video providing a brief background on North African Jewry, before and during the war (alternatively, a link to the video can be sent to participants before the activity).

PART ONE

NORTH AFRICAN JEWS - PHOTO ALBUM

Present the "Photo Album" of North African Jewry to the participants. The album includes photographs of Jews from all Maghreb countries, before and during the war. Afterward, ask the participants if any particular photograph spoke to them? Touched their hearts? Aroused curiosity? Surprised them?

The purpose of this activity is to offer a glimpse into the Jewish communities of North Africa, fostering a sense of closeness towards them.

CLOSE | FAR? NORTH AFRICA AND THE HOLOCAUST

Place the placard with the term "Holocaust" in the center of the board (or floor). Each group (2-3 participants) receives a placard with a flag & name of one of the countries.

Their task is to position the country relative to the "Holocaust" placard: that is, how close or far they believe that country was from the event.

The purpose of this exercise is to clarify participants' views regarding the connection between North African countries and the Holocaust, and how they were affected by the events. Afterward, we will hold a group discussion about where they decided to place the various countries.

PRINT THE PLACARDS



Possible Discussion Questions

- What do you know about North African Jewry, particularly during the World War II period?
- Are you familiar with stories about North African Jews from your families? Would you be willing to share them?

PART TWO

VOICES FROM THE MAGHREB - PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

With the invasion of German and Italian military forces during 1940, North African Jews experienced firsthand the racial policies of the Nazis, the Italians, and the French Vichy government. In the next part of the activity, we will get to know several personal testimonies of Jews from North Africa.

We will now watch together a short animated film, that brings together personal stories of Jews from the Maghreb (Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria) during World War II.

FOLLOWING THE VIEWING OF PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

After watching the video, scatter the expressional cards around the room.

PRINT THE CARDS



The participants are asked to:

1. Choose a card that expresses what they took away from the personal testimonies.
2. Choose a card that reflects a central value presented in the testimony.

Afterward, the participants will share with the rest of the group the cards that they chose - and why.

PART THREE

NORTH AFRICAN JEWRY AND ISRAELI SOCIETY

Yosef Dadush, a survivor of the Giado camp and secretary of the Organization of Libyan Jews, began the struggle for compensation for Libyan emigrants in the 1950s. He approached Nahum Goldmann, who was president of the World Zionist Organization at the time, regarding this issue. Goldmann replied:

"Don't ride the coattails of the Holocaust, you weren't part of it."

Possible Discussion Question

Why do you think he responded this way? What does it say about Israeli society's attitude towards North African Jewish immigrants at the time?

Present the following definition of a Holocaust survivor:

A Holocaust survivor is a person persecuted by the Nazi regime and its allies because of their Jewishness during World War II. The definition includes anyone who experienced persecution, deportations, imprisonment in camps, forced labor, or was in hiding under a false identity. In Israel, the law grants rights to Holocaust survivors according to this definition.

Based on what you've learned so far in the activity, in what ways do you think the Jews of North African Jews fit this definition? In what ways do they not?

DESCENDANTS OF NORTH AFRICANS - MEMORY, RECOGNITION

We will now watch a video where several descendants of North African Jews share what this story means to them:

(author Yossi Sucary, musician Kobi Oz, Shimon Dadush- whose parents were in the Giado camp in Libya, and Dr. Rachel Getz-Salomon).

Afterward, access the shared board by scanning the Barcode, and write a quote that particularly surprised/moved/angered you.

Access the shared board via the following link: <https://www.menti.com/alqa42j432zf>

SUMMARY

In this activity, we learned about the story of North African Jews during the Holocaust and the exclusion of their story from Israeli historical memory for many years. We shed light on personal testimonies, bringing the voices of Maghrebi Jews, illustrating the depth of their suffering and pain at that time. Additionally, we learned about the ongoing struggle for the recognition of these Jews' stories as an integral part of the Holocaust, while trying to understand how feelings of rejection and coping with indifference affected them and their descendants.

During the activity, we aimed to view the Holocaust period as a multi-dimensional event whose ripples reached the Jewish communities in North Africa. The stories of North African Jews are not just a reminder of the past but also a call for recognition and inclusion of their experiences in the collective memory of the Holocaust. We must ensure their voices are heard and their heritage becomes an integral part of our shared historical narrative, for the sake of future generations.



Image caption: Jewish survivors from Bergen-Belsen returning home to Tripoli, Libya, after the war. 1945