

Private Collection Hélène Benatar, 1936-1953
RG-68.115M

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
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Descriptive summary

Title: Private Collection Hélène Benatar.

Dates: 1936-1953.

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Creator: Hélène Benatar.

Extent: 18 microfilm reels; 35 mm.

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Abstract: This collection documents the activities of Hélène Benatar on behalf of Jewish refugees and internees in Morocco during World War II as founder and head of the Foreign Refugee Assistance Committee in Morocco.

Languages: French, English, Hebrew.

Administrative Information

Access: No Restrictions on Access.

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Acquisition information: A microfilm copy of the collection was provided to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People as collection P 129 in January 2010 through USHMM's International Archives Program.

Custodial history: The collection was donated by its creator to the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in two parts in 1975 and 1977. The latter included some AJDC documents from the 1950s and 1960s which were not accessioned. At CAHJP the collection was rearranged into its present form. In 2009 the collection was microfilmed by USHMM and formally accessioned by the museum in January 2010. It was subsequently digitized.

Existence and location of originals: Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, Israel.

Accruals: Accruals may have been received since this collection was first processed, see archives catalog at collections.ushmm.org for further information.

Processing history: Joel Horowitz, June 2014.

Biographical note

Rachel Hélène (Nelly) Cazès was born on October 27th 1898 in Tangier, Morocco, where she attended the girl's school of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (A.I.U.). Her family moved to Casablanca in 1917, where she attended a girl's high school at which she earned a French *Baccalauréat*, one of the first Moroccan Jews ever to do so. In 1920, she married Moses Benatar; who would later occupy important positions in the local Jewish community, most notably that of President of the *l'Association des anciens élèves de l'A.I.U.* in Morocco. After earning a degree in Bordeaux, she became the first female lawyer in Morocco. She would be active in the legal profession for almost half a century.

Hélène (now Benatar) participated in numerous charitable organizations of the Jewish community of Casablanca including *La Goutte de Lait*, *La Maternelle*, and *l'Aide Scolaire*. She also became involved in the Zionist movement, and helped found the Casablanca section of W.I.Z.O. (The International Association of Zionist Women). She would be its first president. After her husband died in 1939, she worked tirelessly to help Jewish victims of World War II. She volunteered with the Red Cross of Casablanca which was working with the numerous European refugees and worked as a nurse. Under the auspices of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), she organized the Foreign Refugee Assistance Committee (*Comité d'Assistance aux Réfugiés Etrangers*). She thereby became the representative of the ADJC or "Joint" for North Africa while at the same time supporting the Zionist organizations in charge of emigration to Palestine. Upon the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, she was involved in the mass emigration of a great part of the Jewish community of North Africa to Israel. In 1953 and 1954, the Unified Jewish Appeal for Israel sent her on a fund raising tour of the United States.

After the independence of Morocco in 1956, she worked as a lawyer in both Casablanca and Paris, before finally settling in the latter in 1962. The same year she became a member of the *Conseil national du F.S.J.U. (Fonds Social Juif Unifié)*. In 1967, she was named President of *l'Association des Juifs du Maroc à Paris*, despite the opposition of certain members to having a woman at the head of their group. She died in her Paris home on July 7th, 1979.

Scope and content of collection

This collection documents Benatar's activities in the committee she founded to help Jewish refugees in Morocco during World War II. During the war, she worked to ease the suffering of the

Jewish internees or “hébergés,” as they were officially known, in the various camps in Morocco. She worked to have them released and assisted them where possible in emigrating outside Europe. At the end of the war, she also worked under the Joint to help people searching for lost relatives in Morocco, Europe, and the United States.

System of arrangement

The CAHJP arranged the files into 6 series by document type. As some files included material of different types, the numbers of dual listed files described under later series are noted at the start of each series.

Indexing terms

Corporate Name: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee--Africa, North.
Geographic Name: Africa, North--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.
Morocco--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.
Personal Name: Cazes-Benatar, Hélène, 1898-1979.
Topical Term: World War, 1939-1945--Jews--Africa, North.
Refugees, Jewish--History--20th century--Africa, North.
Refugees, Jewish--History--20th century--Morocco.
Jews--Legal status, laws, etc.--Morocco--History--20th century.

CONTAINER LIST

Reel File

General

1 1 Personal Documents of Hélène Benatar (notably her commitment in 1940 to serve England as a civilian) and her activities concerning the Jewish refugees in the North African camps (primarily in Morocco); Interviews with H. Benatar and articles concerning her; 1936-1953, Frames 4-87.

Lists (also 46, 59, 65-66, and 71)

1 2 Authorizations of internment: List sent to the Foreign Refugee Committee by the Civil Region of Casablanca and Correspondence; 1940, Frames 94-101.
1 3 Refugees receiving nutritional assistance (list); Oct. 1940, Frames 103-125.
1 4 Refugees registered in various Moroccan camps; 1940-1942, Undated, Frames 127-149.
1 5 Belgian refugees possessing a foreign identity cards (list); [1940-1943], Frames 151-158.
1 6 Passenger list of People with Visas for Mexico; Nov. 1941, Frames 160-171.
1 7 Unclassified Lists; 1942, Undated, Frames 173-188.
1 8 Lists of Refugees Liberated from the Camps; 1942-1943, Frames 190-215.
1 9 Internees List for the Bou-Arfa Camp by Nationality and Some Letters; 1942-1944, Frames 217-226.
1 10 List of People with American Visas (Photocopy); 1943, Frames 228-230.
1 11 List of People who Left for Palestine and Correspondence (Photocopy); 1943, Frames 232-234.
1 12 Internee Lists of Civilian Foreign Workers in the Camps of Im-Fout, Fhah-Bensalah, Settat, Bou-Arfa, Oued-Akreuch; Mar. 1943, Frames 236-252.

- 1 13 Classification of Internees of Various Camps by Nationality and Religion; Lists of Former Foreign Legion Volunteers in Casablanca; Mar. 1943, Frames 254-280.
- 1 14 Lists of Former Foreign Legion Volunteers in Casablanca, Mar. 29th, 1943; Mar. 1943, Frames 282-302.
- 1 15 Internee Lists by Profession, Mar. 8th, 1943; Mar. 1943, Frames 304-328.
- 1 16 Internee Lists of Civilian Foreign Workers in the Camps of Ain-Guenfouda, Berguent, Bou-Arfa, Djerada, El-Karit, Oued-Akreuch, Sidi-El- Ayachi, (Ain Setea) Mar. 8th 1943 and Mar. 25th 1943; Mar. 1943, Frames 330-408.
- 1 17 List of People in Spain Requesting a Transfer to Casablanca; Aug. 1943, Frames 410-412.
- 1 18 AJDC List of Refugees in Morocco (June 30th 1944); 1943-1944, Frames 414-626.
- 1 19 Miscellaneous Lists Concerning the Liberation of Various Camps; 1943-1945, Frames 628-691.
- 1 20 Lists of People Living in Casablanca; 1944, Frames 693-694.
- 1 21 UNRRA List of Residents of the *Centre Jeanne d'Arc*; [1944], Frames 696-699.
- 1 22 Register of Refugees, Listing Date and Place of Birth, Profession, Address, Residence of Parents, etc.; June 1944, Frames 701-957.
- 2 22 (cont.) Register of Refugees, Listing Date and Place of Birth, Profession, Address, Residence of Parents, etc.; June 1944, Frames 5-390.
- 3 23 Distribution List for Sugar, Soap, and Tissues; 1944-1945, Frames 4-9.
- 3 24 Lists of People Wanting to Return to France to Live There; List of Foreign Refugees Living in Casablanca Requesting Repatriation to France; 1945, Undated, Frames 10-25.
- 3 25 Lists and Records of Refugees Seeking Repatriation to France or Emigration to Foreign Countries; List of Newly Arrived Refugees Noting Age, Religion, and Nationality; 1945, Frames 27-144.
- 3 26 List of Children Who Left for Palestine Coming to Blankenese near Hamburg, Germany, British Zone; 1946, Frames 146-149.
- 3 27 Name List of Heads of Families with Comments (Hammam Street, city name illegible); [1946/1947], Frames 151-163.
- 3 28 Alphabetical List of Refugees Noting Dates and Places of Birth and Nationality; Undated, Frames 165-211.
- 3 29 List of Visitors Going to Safi in C.T.M. (Moroccan Transport Company) Cars; Undated, Frames 213-223.
- 3 30 List of Visitors Going to Marrakech by Train; Undated, Frames 225-236.
- 3 31 List of Visitors Going to Mogador; Undated, Frames 238-243.
- 3 32 List of Deportees Repatriated through Marseilles; Undated, Frames 245-247.
- 3 33 Records of Individual Refugees; 1943-1945, Frames 249-390.
- 3 34 Records of Individual Refugees Listing Name, Nationality, Place and Date of Birth, Place and Date of Liberation, Address, Visa, etc. (no order); Undated, Frames 392-438.
- 4 34(cont.) Records of Individual Refugees Listing Name, Nationality, Place and Date of Birth, Place and Date of Liberation, Address, Visa, etc. (no order); Undated, Frames 5-154.

Individual Files

- 4 35 Files of Refugees in the Camps of Azemour, Marrakech, and Casablanca including Receipts and Certificates; 1940-1943, Frames 156-355.
- 4 36 Files of Refugees from Casablanca; 1940-1943, Frames 357-637.

- 4 37 Files of Candidates for Emigration; 1941, Frames 639-683.
- 4 38 Individual Files Relating to Various Forms of Assistance (Financial Allocations, Medications, Medical Treatments, etc.) to Refugees Interned in Casablanca and Marrakech; 1941-1943, Frames 685-1061.
- 4 39 Individual Files Concerning the Liberation of Refugees from Various Camps; 1941-1944, Frames 1063-1153.
- 5 39(cont.) Individual Files Concerning the Liberation of Refugees from Various Camps; 1941-1944, Frames 5-134.
- 5 40 Files of Refugees from the Camps of Azemour, Berguent, Guenfounda, and Oued-Akreuch; 1941-1943, Frames 136-491.
- 5 41 Files of Refugees from the Camps of Casablanca, Sidi el Ayachi à Azemour, Safi; 1941-1943, Frames 493-923.
- 6 42 Files of Refugees from the Camps of Sidi El Ayachi à Azemour and Casablanca; 1942, Frames 4-117.
- 6 43 Files of Internees in the Camp of Berguent and Some Letters Concerning Refugees; 1942-1943, Frames 119-268.
- 6 44 Files of Internees in Various Camps with Annotations by Benatar; 1942-1943, Frames 270-378.
- 6 45 Individual Files and Correspondence Concerning the Liberation of Refugees from Sidi-El-Ayachi to Casablanca; 1942-1943, Frames 380-497.
- 6 46 Files of Refugees from Libya including a Name List; 1942-1944, Frames 499-559.
- 7 47 Files of Refugees from Various Camps Including Colomb Béchar, Settata, Bou-Arfa, Missouri, Oued-Akreuch, Im-Fout, Berguent, Kasba-Tadla, Djerada and Others; 1942-1944, Frames 5-82.
- 7 48 Individual Files and Partial Name Lists Concerning the Liberation of Refugees from Different Camps and Various Kinds of Assistance to Interned Refugees; 1942-1944, Frames 84-414.
- 7 49 File of Enrico Cohen, a Foreign Worker Liberated from Sidi El-Ayachi; File of Abraham Keitelman, Who Died in Settata; Individual and Liberation Files from Camps with Lists of Names; 1942-1944, Frames 416-567.
- 7 50 Work Certificates for Refugees for Liberation from the Camps, 1943; 1943, Frames 569-689.
- 7 51 Files of Refugees Concerning Post-War Searches for People, Financial Allocations, Payments for Medications, etc.; 1943, Frames 691-771.
- 7 52 Idem; 1945, Frames 772-936.
- 7 53 Individual Files on the Fates and Needs of Refugees and Post-War Searches of Parents for their Children, Letters of Refugees; 1945, Frames 938-1161.
- 8 53(cont.) Individual Files on the Fates and Needs of Refugees and Post-War Searches of Parents for their Children, Letters of Refugees; 1945, Frames 5-90.
- 8 54 Files of Refugees Containing Primarily Receipts and Amounts of Financial Allocations; 1946, Frames 92-207.
- 8 55 Files of Internees of the Camp of Bou-Arfa; Undated, Frames 209-296.
- 8 56 Identification Documents of Refugees from Mogador; Undated, Frames 298-325.
- Correspondence (also 43 and 45)**
- 8 57 Correspondence Concerning Aid to Refugees, Including: Documents from the French Consul in Rhodes Vouching for Refugees Seeking to Return to France (originals and copies); 1928, 1938-1948, 1964, Frames 327-510.

- 8 58 Correspondence with the Refugees Committee of Casablanca (photocopies); 1938-1944, Frames 512-633.
- 8 59 Letters to the Refugees Committee Requesting Help Ensuring that Sick Refugees are not Interned, 1940, Including: Lists of the Sick; 1940-1942, Frames 635-761.
- 8 60 Correspondence with the Lisbon AJDC; 1941, Frames 763-809.
- 8 61 Correspondence with: The Administrations of Customs and Mail, the Controller in Chief of the Civil Region, Municipal Services, the *Comité d'aide aux engagés volontaires dans l'armée française*, the Administrative Police, the Polish Bureau in Morocco, Civil Affairs Officers, *société française de bienfaisance* of Casablanca, *Aide tchécoslovaque*, HICEM in Casablanca; the Minister of the Merchant Marine, HICEM, *Association des Israélites Praticquants*, Unitarians and Quakers in Marseille; the Director of Public Security, the Resident General of France in Maroc, Industrial Production in Rabat; 1941-1942, Frames 811-1111.
- 8 62 General Correspondence with: *Service social d'aide aux émigrants*, KKL, and *Compagnie européenne d'assurance* in Lyon; *Association d'étude d'aide et d'Assistance d'Alger*; the Jewish Communities of Marrakech, Casablanca, Safi, Mogador, and Tanger; *Comité d'assistance italien aux émigrants* in Trieste, Italy; National Refugee Service, HIAS, Concerning the Emigration of Refugees in America and with other Organizations and Personalities in New York City etc.; 1941-1942, Frames 1113-1157.
- 9 62(cont.) General Correspondence with: *Service social d'aide aux émigrants*, KKL, and *Compagnie européenne d'assurance* in Lyon; *Association d'étude d'aide et d'Assistance d'Alger*; the Jewish Communities of Marrakech, Casablanca, Safi, Mogador, and Tanger; *Comité d'assistance italien aux émigrants* in Trieste, Italy; National Refugee Service, HIAS, Concerning the Emigration of Refugees in America and with other Organizations and Personalities in New York City etc.; 1941-1942, Frames 5-382.
- 9 63 Correspondence with HICEM and the National Refugee Service on Refugee Cases; 1941-1942, Frames 384-445.
- 9 64 Correspondence Concerning the Immigration of Refugees; 1941-1943, Frames 447-506.
- 9 65 Files Concerning People Leaving in March 1942: Alphabetical Correspondence, Lists, Telegrams, Authorizations, Receipts, Procurements, Reimbursements, etc.; 1942, Frames 508-1077.
- 9 66 Files Concerning People Leaving from May to September 1942: Correspondence, Lists, Telegrams, Authorizations, Receipts, Procurements, Reimbursements, Drafts, etc. (French, German); 1942, Frames 1079-1157.
- 10 66(cont.) Files Concerning People Leaving from May to September 1942: Correspondence, Lists, Telegrams, Authorizations, Receipts, Procurements, Reimbursements, Drafts, etc. (French, German); 1942, Frames 5-297.
- 10 67 Notes from H. Benatar Requesting the Furnishing of Various Needs to Refugees; 1942-1943, Frames 299-369.
- 10 68 Regulations, Reports, Expense Books for Meals, a Map, and Correspondence on Requests for Aid Concerning the "Luna Park" Internment Center in Ain-Seba, Includes: a Map of "Luna Park"; 1942-1944, Frames 371-534.
- 10 69 Correspondence from the AJDC, the American Friends Service Committee and the Moroccan Sugar Company, and Miscellaneous Correspondence about Aiding Refugees; 1942-1944, Frames 536-711.

- 10 70 Correspondence Concerning Work Contracts of Refugees; Correspondence with North African Omnium about the Recruitment of Laborers; 1943, Frames 713-740.
- 10 71 Telegrams and Correspondence with the *association d'étude d'aide et d'assistance* (Including Lists of Emigres in Palestine, Persons Recruited, Members of the Royal Pioneer Corps of the British Army and Various Notes) and other Aid Committees; 1943-1944, Frames 742-914.
- 10 72 Correspondence with the Red Cross, Municipal Services, the *Hospital Méditerranée-Niger de Bou-Afra*, the Jewish Community of Mogador, and Various Organizations Concerning Refugees, a List of Telegrams Sent to Algeria in Jan. 1943, and Correspondence with Kimberland (no order); 1943-1944, Frames 916-1162.
- 11 73 Correspondence with the Jewish Community of Settat about Refugees; 1943-1944, Frames 4-46.
- 11 74 Letters from Refugees on Various Subjects (French, English); 1943-1944, Frames 48-74.
- 11 75 Letters from the Lisbon AJDC Concerning Searches for People; 1944, Frames 76-121.
- 11 76 Correspondence with the Red Cross, the Civil Region about Searches for People, and with Municipal Services and other Organizations and Communities on Indemnities and Benefits, the Fates and Needs of Refugees, or the Searches of Parents for their Children; 1945, Frames 123-318.
- 11 77 Correspondence Concerning Refugees Benefiting from Monthly Allocations to those Whose Repatriation Would Not Be Immediate, Searches for Family, Requests for Allocations, for Scholarships, and Food Distribution; 1945-1946, Frames 320-540.
- 11 78 Correspondence with Various Organizations Concerning Requests for Financial Allocations, Searches of Parents and Family Reunifications, Receipts, Camps, and Emigration (partly annotated by Benatar); 1945-1948, Frames 542-1081.
- 11 79 Correspondence with: *Crédit Lyonnais*; *Association d'étude d'aide et d'Assistance Alger*; *Service social d'aide aux émigrants*, Casablanca; Railway Company, Rabat; AJDC (including telegrams); 1946, Frames 1083-1172.
- 12 80 Correspondence with the American Friends Service Committee; 1946, Frames 4-12.
- 12 81 Correspondence with AJDC New York; 1946, Frames 14-44.
- 12 82 Correspondence with AJDC; 1946-1947, Frames 46-162.
- 12 83 Financial Correspondence with: *l'Aide aux Israélites victimes de la guerre*; AJDC, Brussels and Paris; COJASOR; *l'Aide scolaire*; *l'Hôpital civil*, Algeria; Insurance Companies; The Red Cross; Summer Camps in Tanger (copies); 1946-1947, Frames 164-302.
- 12 84 Correspondence with Various Organizations about Former Refugees; 1947, Frames 304-562.
- Accounting (also 66, 68, 78, and 83)**
- 12 85 Tables and Lists Established from Various Criteria of Expenses, Receipts and Related Documents; 1940-1945, Frames 564-754.
- 12 86 Contracts with the Moroccan Society of Water, Gas, and Electricity from the Committee; 1941-1943, Frames 756-782.
- 12 87a Cash Vouchers; Jan.-Mar. 1942, Frames 784-1071.
- 13 87b Cash Vouchers; April.-June 1942, Frames 4-453.
- 13 87c Cash Vouchers; July-Dec. 1942, Frames 455-932.
- 13 87d Receipts Serpa-Pinto; June 1942, Frames 934-984.
- 13 87e Receipts Guine; May 20th, 1942, Frames 986-1060.

- 13 87f Customs Receipts; May-June 1942, Frames 1062-1092.
- 13 87g Receipts for Sent Telegrams; Mar. 1942, Frames 1094-1155.
- 14 87g(cont.) Receipts for Sent Telegrams; Mar. 1942, Frames 5-103.
- 14 87h Receipts from Deposits Made in Marsailles; Mar. 1942, Frames 105-168.
- 14 87i Postal Vouchers Guine; May 20th, 1942, Frames 170-179.
- 14 87j Postal Vouchers, Serpapinto; June 7th, 1942, Frames 181-186.
- 14 87k Letter Explaining these Documents; 1942, Frames 188-194.
- 14 88 Account Book; 1941, Frames 196-332.
- 14 89 Account Book and Receipt Book; 1942, Frames 334-527.
- 14 90 Account Book; 1943, Frames 529-563.
- 14 91 2 Account Books and Receipts; 1943-1944, Frames 565-679.
- 14 92 Cash Vouchers; June-Nov. 1941, Frames 681-950.
- 14 93 Idem; 1943, Frames 952-1152.
- 15 93(cont.) Idem; 1943, Frames 5-138.
- 15 95a Prescriptions and Pharmacy Receipts; 1941-1946, Frames 139-430.
- 15 94 Pièces de caisses; 1944, Frames 432-778.
- 15 95(b) Benatar's Receipt Book of Sums Provided to Refugees Feb. 2nd, 1942-June 29th, 1944; Benatar's Receipt Book for Various Kinds of Assistance Feb.-Sept. 1943; 2 Receipt Books for Reference, Dec. 1940-Feb. 1941, Undated; 1940-1944, Frames 780-1148.
- 16 96 Receipt Books of the Refugee Committee Concerning Financial Allocations to Refugees; Aug. 1941-July 1942, Frames 4-422.
- 16 97 Some Receipt Books of the Foreign Refugee Assistance Committee; 1943-1944, Frames 424-475.
- 16 98 Receipt Books of the Foreign Refugee Assistance Committee Concerning Financial Allocations to Refugees; Nov. 1944-July 1948, Frames 477-870.
- 16 99 Account Details, Including: a Summary Table; 1942, Frames 872-989.
- 16 100 Card Index of Individual Refugee Budgets; 1942, Frames 991-1073.
- 16 101 Idem; 1945-1946, Frames 1075-1099.
- 17 101(cont.) Idem (cont.); 1945-1946, Frames 5-149.
- 17 102 Individual Receipts and Account Statements from HICEM and "Dorsa;" Individual Records; Lists of Purchases; 1941-1942, Frames 151-234.
- 17 103 Receipts of the HICEM (UGIF) to Refugees Bearing the Note "transit par Casablanca"; June 1942, Frames 236-334.
- 17 104 Receipts for Food in the Camp "Luna Park;" 1944, Frames 336-367.
- 17 105 AJDC Accounting; 1945, Frames 368-519.
- 17 106 Idem; 1946-1948, Frames 521-854.
- 17 107 Statements from the State Bank of Morocco, Various Accounting Records; Statements and Notices from *Crédit Lyonnais*; 1944-1947, Frames 856-1011.
- 17 108 Statements from the State Bank of Morocco; 1946, Frames 1013-1037.
- 17 109 Correspondence and Receipts of the State Bank of Morocco; 1946, Frames 1039-1163.
- 18 110 Register of Correspondence; 1942-1945, Frames 4-84.
- 18 111 Cash Vouchers from the Post Office; Undated, Frames 86-175.
- 18 112 Empty Envelopes from the Customs Service and the Authorities of Casablanca Labeled with Names and Amounts Paid; Undated, Frames 177-241.

Miscellaneous

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|----|-----|--|
| 18 | 113 | Unclassified Files Including: Correspondence with the Joint etc., Camps for Hebrew Education, Statements of Transfers of Funds; Lists of Financial Allocations to Refugees; Camp of Ben-Smines (1946); the Planning of Luna Park; 1941-1947, Frames 243-469. |
| 18 | 114 | Damage from the Djerata Pogrom; 1948, Frames 471-522. |
| 18 | 115 | Blank Forms; Undated, Frames 524-536. |