

Years of Glory: Nelly Benatar and the Pursuit of Justice in Wartime North Africa. Susan Gilson Miller. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022. 230 pp. \$30. Hardcover ISBN: 9781503628458.

Susan Gilson Miller's recent monograph *Years of Glory: Nelly Benatar and the Pursuit of Justice in Wartime North Africa* recounts the exceptional life and times of H  l  ne (Nelly) Benatar n  e Caz  s: lawyer, member of the Moroccan resistance, and advocate of human rights. As a micro-history told in biographical form this volume reconstructs the chaotic and constantly shifting political configuration in which European Jewish refugees found themselves in North Africa during World War II from the vantage point of a pioneer in humanitarian aid work. Through the lived experiences of Benatar, several under-researched areas of modern North African history are brought to the forefront, most notably, North Africa as an escape route for European Jewry during World War II.

So, who was Nelly Benatar? And how did she become a central figure in North African humanitarian aid work? The first chapter sets the stage for the volume by providing a biographical sketch of Benatar and the world in which she lived, up until World War II. Benatar was born into the small Spanish-speaking Jewish elite of Tangier around the turn of the century. She attended the local *Alliance Isra  lite Universelle* school and married another member of her community, Moyses Benatar, upon completing her secondary studies. Up to this point Benatar's story follows the arc of many upper middle-class educated Jewish women of the period, fulfilling her role as wife and mother and active in local associations and societies. However, in the 1930s, Benatar decided to study law through correspondence courses offered by the University of Bordeaux, resulting in Benatar being the first woman admitted to the Moroccan bar.

Benatar's strong moral compass, years of Jewish communal work, and legal training made her the ideal nexus through which to coordinate the arrival of Jewish refugees arriving in Morocco in the period between 1939-1945. Thus, in the ensuing chapters, divided by year, Gilson Miller weaves a story about Morocco and later Algeria during World War II using the activities of Benatar as the thread to tie the different points together. Although the diachronic chapter division is clear and coherent, history rarely is, and the chapters are not completely restricted to single years but tend to jump around covering topics such as the fall of France and the establishment of the Vichy Government and the humanitarian aid organizations that helped provide refugees with food, comfort, healthcare, and legal help to secure visas for onward passage to the Americas.

The book provides tremendous food for thought. Firstly, through Benatar's life we see the changing roles and opportunities open to women (or at least those with an education and social status) and the limits of this agency as demonstrated by an ingrained misogyny in aid relief, which is perhaps the reason Benatar has not received more attention until now. This book also brings to light aspects of Moroccan Jewish life which are underexplored in academic literature, for example, that of established Ashkenazim in Morocco in the first half of the twentieth century and their inclusion in diverse, urban Jewish communities on the eve of World War II. A more specific example is Jules Braunschvig, a Jew of Alsatian origin whose family emigrated to Morocco in the nineteenth century, who would play an important role in bringing the Jewish refugee crisis in

Morocco to the attention of the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), one of the most prominent Jewish humanitarian aid organizations to this day. Examples like this speak to the interconnectivity between North African, European, and North American Jewish networks in the first half of the twentieth century which are all too often overlooked. Another important topic touched upon from the perspective of aid work are “undesirables,” a French classification for those primarily stateless men who found themselves in Vichy-controlled Algerian and Moroccan labor camps. Through Benatar’s actions we learn of the efforts by multiple actors to provide relief and to lobby for the freedom of the interned. However, to learn more about the experiences of the men who found themselves in these camps, I would strongly suggest Aomar Boum and Nadjib Berber’s *Undesirables: A Holocaust Journey to North Africa*, a historically informed graphic novel published in 2023 also by Stanford University Press which pairs beautifully with *Years of Glory*.

From a methodological perspective the book is a remarkable reconstruction of a specific moment in time, to quote Gilson Miller, Benatar was a “sober eyewitness who chose discretion over wordiness” (102). To remedy the dearth of archival material from Benatar herself the volume uses an impressive array of documents spanning three continents. Where conflicting narratives emerge such as how Benatar came to work with refugees or the workings of the Moroccan resistance, the narrative is broken down by perspective, thus providing insight into the archival foundations of the book (49-58). Gilson Miller does not assume historical knowledge on the part of the reader and therefore she provides concise yet complete historical syntheses of Benatar’s world. Special mention should be given to the photographs throughout the book. For example, a picture of a necktie salesman perfectly illustrates the precarious employment situation of European refugees and the constant struggle to make ends meet (88).

In conclusion, the volume is a beautifully written reconstruction of Benatar’s cosmopolitan and peripatetic life of service. *Years of Glory* is written for both scholars of North Africa, Jewish History, and those not familiar with the region and therefore would work well in a variety of classroom settings, particularly paired with the *Undesirables: A Holocaust Journey to North Africa*.

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