



McGregor, R. (2014). Discourse and Defiance Under Nazi Occupation: Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1940–1945 by Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, 2013 East Lansing, MI, Michigan State University Pressx + 300 pp., £47.50 (hb). *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 31(3), 322-324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12063>

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Discourse and Defiance Under Nazi Occupation: Guernsey, Channel Islands, 1940-1945

Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, 2013

Michigan State University Press

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Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp's impressive monograph succeeds on at least two levels. First, as intended, it presents a new theory of resistance to military occupation – *rhetorical resistance* – which is derived from the response to the German occupation of Guernsey during the Second World War and applicable to all situations where there is 'an extreme power differential' (p.238) between occupier and occupied. Second, despite the focus on diaries and interviews, the work places the personal narratives of the islanders in the context of the public events in which they participated, providing a history which is perfectly pitched between individual experiences and the overall political picture. Jorgensen-Earp's approach is 'from the perspective of rhetorical theory' (p.147), but her rigour and clarity meet the highest standards of the analytic tradition of philosophy, and every premise of her argument is supported by solid empirical evidence. As such, the study makes a significant contribution to the ethical issues surrounding collaboration and has implications for both the ethics of war and transitional justice.

The introduction outlines each stage of the argument and is followed by six chapters, each of which begins with a historical anecdote that precedes an abstract. The first chapter demonstrates how occupied Guernsey functioned as a Panopticon, the ideal prison designed by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the eighteenth century. Having established this panoptical model of occupation, Jorgensen-Earp identifies two preconditions for resistance in Chapter 2, support in acquiring basic necessities and a counter-ideology to National Socialism. With

these preconditions explained, she makes a case for the key elements of rhetorical resistance – shadow discourse (Chapter 3), narrative facility (Chapter 4), and symbolic action (Chapter 5) – each of which is divided into sub-categories, for example (i) the deconstruction of propaganda, (ii) the propagation of subversive stories and jokes, and (iii) the employment of performed compliance in Chapter 4. The last chapter deals with the final year of the occupation, from D-Day until Liberation on 9th May 1945. This conclusion is a very brief treatment of what is perhaps the most interesting period of the occupation historically, as systematic starvation set in for occupier and occupied alike. In Jorgensen-Earp's defence, however, the final year is probably the least interesting with regard to resistance, with Germany's defeat a *fait accompli*.

The panoptical model of Chapter 1 cuts straight to the essential feature of the occupation for not only Guernsey, but all the Channel Islands: overt resistance was at best futile, at worst suicidal. In anticipation of the German invasion, the islands had been demilitarised and a large proportion of the population – including most of those eligible for military service – had been evacuated to England. The result for Guernsey was that a population of 24 000, living on twenty-four square miles of island, was garrisoned by up to 15 000 German troops, many of whom were billeted in the homes of the islanders. The hopelessness of resistance is aptly illustrated by Jorgensen-Earp: for merely claiming (falsely) that there was an organised resistance in Guernsey in December 1940, John Ingrouille was sentenced to five years in prison, four of which were spent in France and the fifth and fatal year in Brandenburg (p.172); when a telephone cable was cut in March 1941, sixty civilians were taken hostage as insurance against further sabotage (p.181); and in July 1943, Roy Machon was caught wearing a V-badge on his lapel, beaten up, and sent to prison in Germany (p.198). The German chokehold on the unarmed civilian population began with the surprise bombing of

Guernsey Harbour on 28th June 1940 (killing thirty-four civilians) and was never relaxed. The question of whether resistance was even possible in these circumstances is particularly pertinent given the ambiguous place of the Channel Islands in the British history of the war, an ambiguity which began with the conflict over whether to yield British soil to German troops and continued late into the twenty-first century with claims that the islands were examples of collaboration *en masse*. Jorgensen-Earp's answer is in the affirmative, with rhetorical resistance, a method of covert rather than overt resistance practiced by slaves in the Confederacy, former Confederates in the Reconstruction Era, African-Americans under the Jim Crow laws, and Eastern Europeans behind the Iron Curtain.

In his study of the German occupation of Denmark, where – in contrast to the Channel Islands – the occupied population tends to be regarded in an unambiguously favourable light, Ethan Hollander notes that negotiation is ‘institutionally indistinguishable from “collaboration”’, raising doubts as to whether there is actually a distinction between cooperation and collaboration (“The Banality of Goodness: Collaboration and Compromise in the Rescue of Denmark’s Jews,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 6 [2013], 41-66: 42). The issue is further complicated by the fact that individuals on Guernsey appear to have simultaneously collaborated and resisted rhetorically. As deputy editor of the *Guernsey Star*, Frank Falla was responsible for publishing the propaganda of William Joyce, the infamous Lord Haw-Haw, but was also one of those imprisoned for his work on the Guernsey Underground News Service. He thus collaborated by contributing to the German war effort and resisted by distributing illegal news. Jorgensen-Earp does not shy away from the epistemic problem raised: ‘It might fairly be asked when we can know that such deference is a performance and not an expression of wholehearted collaboration’ (p.148). Her answer is that ‘collaborative intent’ (p.150) is the criteria for making such a distinction and her methodology for detecting

rhetorical resistance includes both the use of diaries written when the outcome of the war was uncertain and evidence from the German reactions to such resistance (p.98).

Jorgensen-Earp's argument is convincing and the forms of resistance she advances do indeed distinguish the participants from the German informants and fraternisers on Guernsey. She manages to dispel the image of the majority of islanders as collaborators, but the question remains as to whether the activities she describes – shadow discourse, narrative facility, and symbolic resistance – constitute a form of resistance rather than cooperation. Hollander makes it clear that it was Denmark's *collaboration* in supplying Germany with food, equipment, labourers, and even servicemen which resulted in the autonomy which in turn enabled the rescue of the Jewish population ("The Banality of Goodness," 47). One wonders how many members of the Danish government considered their compliance performed rather than wholehearted and whether they could be considered as practicing rhetorical resistance in Jorgensen-Earp's terms. She succeeds in her aim of redefining resistance to include the covert as well as the overt, but fails to situate rhetorical resistance in the continuum of collaboration-cooperation-resistance. Is there a difference between rhetorical resistance and cooperation (both of which are characterised by performed compliance and an absence of collaborative intent) or is she redefining cooperation (as distinct from collaboration) as rhetorical resistance? The answer is not entirely clear. This is, however, a minor failing in a rich and dense work whose relevance extends well beyond the time and place under scrutiny and which will undoubtedly have a broad appeal, from the disciplines of philosophy and history to English and the author's own field of communication studies.

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