

**Narratives of Resistance, Moral Compromise and Perpetration: The testimonies of Julia Brichta, survivor of Ravensbrück**

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# **Narratives of Resistance, Moral Compromise and Perpetration: The testimonies of Julia Brichta, survivor of Ravensbrück**

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## ***Abstract***

Julia Brichta, a Jewish-Hungarian refugee, came to the Channel Island of Guernsey in 1939, a year before the arrival of German occupying forces. The story of what happened to her during the war, when she was sent to Ravensbrück, was given in her own words on a number of occasions between 1945 and 1965, yet the specifics of her trajectory towards Ravensbrück, where she became a camp policewoman, have hitherto been unclear. This paper attempts to untangle the evidence to establish some of the facts behind this ‘grey zone’ survivor of the Holocaust based on the surviving archival documents. It examines Julia’s trajectory towards Ravensbrück, and the ways in which her pre-camp and camp life impacted the ways in which she narrated her story between 1945 and 1965. Whether she was a non-Jewish resistance heroine, or a Jewish perpetrator who lied about her wartime activities, this paper argues that such judgements, in the end, are simplistic and mask the complexity of survivor stories. Instead, seeking to understand changes in testimony over time based on pre-camp and camp experiences and audience offer a more fruitful path of analysis.

***Key words:*** survivor, testimony, ‘privileged’ Jew, grey zone, Ravensbrück, Guernsey

## ***Introduction***

Conflicting accounts exist about Julia Brichta, a Jewish-Hungarian immigrant, who, in 1939 came to the British Channel Island of Guernsey from Budapest at 44 years of age. Her activities

propelled her through a number of Nazi prisons to Ravensbrück concentration camp, which she survived through her role as a camp policewoman – often seen as a perpetrator role as it involved doing the bidding of the SS. She was what Adam Brown calls a ‘privileged’ Jew, i.e. a ‘prisoner who held a position which gave them access to material and other benefits’,<sup>1</sup> the vast majority of whom, he states, left no testimony. Julia, however, left many. After Ravensbrück she was interviewed about her wartime experiences in two newspapers (*The Guernsey Evening Press* and *The News of the World*), by Ravensbrück war crimes investigators, and – twenty years later – gave a final account in her 1965 compensation claims testimony as a British victim of Nazi persecution. Yet her story varies between these accounts. Was she the resistance heroine and protector of prisoners in Ravensbrück, as she claimed to be, or the black marketeer who deliberately misrepresented herself as part of a successful survival mechanism? Can we ever know and does it even matter?

The reliability of the testimony of Julia Brichta is important to establish. She was one of the few ‘privileged Jews’ who left a testimony, and one of the few women claiming a British identity who survived Ravensbrück. She also encountered and provided a record of British women who did not survive. Julia also left a detailed archival record of the camp through her several interviews. She is thus an important witness. If we discredit her, as others have done, assuming that she lied to protect herself, then we rob ourselves of certainty about events in the camp and about the death of Britons in Ravensbrück.

Yet Julia’s testimonies are important beyond issues of reliability. Attention has previously been drawn to the rarity of the perpetrator voice<sup>2</sup> (if we can legitimately include Julia in this category, as I debate later), especially those of ‘privileged’ prisoners.<sup>3</sup> Julia herself describes

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Brown, *Judging Privileged Jews*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Suleiman, “When the Perpetrator becomes a Reliable Witness of the Holocaust: On Jonathan Littell’s *Les bienveillantes*,” *New German Critique* 106, no.1 (2009): 1-19.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Brown, “Witnessing Moral Compromise: ‘Privilege’, judgement and Holocaust testimony,” *Life Writing* 14, no.3 (2017): 327-339; Adam Brown, “Confronting ‘choiceless choices’ in Holocaust videotestimonies:

her position in Ravensbrück as one that afforded her ‘the same privileges as the SS women or men’, something that could not have been the case given the context of her incarceration. Her position did, however, give her the right to go almost anywhere in the camp.<sup>4</sup> She did not take part in roll calls;<sup>5</sup> appeared to have had her own bed, within which she could hide possessions and her notes on the camp life,<sup>6</sup> and she was able to stockpile medicines.<sup>7</sup>

Zoe Waxman has drawn our attention to women whose testimonies have been excluded from history because they deviate from expected norms of female behaviour.<sup>8</sup> As a Jewish member of the *Lager Polizei*, Julia’s testimonies are probably little known for reasons such as these. Her story is rarer still because she claims to have carried out acts of resistance in the camp. Such acts carried out by ‘privileged’ Jews have been paid little attention in the past because, as Adam Brown argues, they are ‘inherently ambiguous’ rather than ‘traditionally heroic’ in nature because of the status of those who carried them out.<sup>9</sup>

As a ‘privileged’ Jew, Julia Brichta inhabited Primo Levi’s morally ambiguous ‘grey zone’ in Ravensbrück.<sup>10</sup> For Levi, the grey zone was that of ‘the prisoners who in some measure, perhaps with good intentions, collaborated with the authority, was not negligible, indeed it constituted a phenomenon of fundamental importance ...’<sup>11</sup> Although the degree to which Julia ‘collaborated’ will be explored later, her inhabitation of the grey zone was certainly a place of ‘moral compromise’. ‘Choosing’ to inhabit the morally ambiguous grey zone (and the actions carried out once there) were what Lawrence Langer has called ‘choiceless choices’. For Langer,

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Judgement, ‘privileged’ Jews, and the role of the interviewer,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no.1 (2010): 79-90.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Barry, “I was condemned to death,” *Guernsey Evening Press*, 18 July 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Barry, “War disclosures of Mrs Julia Barry,” *Guernsey Evening Press*, 20 July 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Barry, “From Ravensbrück [sic] to Guernsey,” *Guernsey Evening Press*, 17 August 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Barry, “Life in camp with German police women,” *Guernsey Evening Press*, 25 July 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Zoe Waxman, “Unheard Testimony, Untold Stories: the representation of women’s Holocaust experiences,” *Women’s History Review* 12, no.4 (2003): 661-677.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Brown, “‘No one will ever know’: the Holocaust, ‘privileged’ Jews and the ‘grey zone,’” *History Australia* 8, no.3 (2011): 95-116.

<sup>10</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (London: Abacus, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

such choices were ‘crucial decisions [that] did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim’s own choosing.’<sup>12</sup> We must, he argues, dispel the idea that ‘choice is purely an internal matter, immune to circumstance and chance.’<sup>13</sup> To better illustrate this, Langer shares the testimony of Chaim E. who was in Sobibor, and who explained that ‘staying alive and the ideal of universal brotherhood were anxious bedfellows in the camp environment, where daily and in fact urgent *immediate* needs effectively crippled such ideals.’<sup>14</sup> Although death for all in Ravensbrück was not the certainty it was in Sobibor, we ultimately cannot know the circumstances in which Julia joined the camp police, and whether the freedom from heavy labour and better provisions were immediate inducements enough, or whether she discovered the advantages – and drawbacks - only after she was given the position.

Brown draws our attention to the problems inherent in morally judging such Jews, suggesting that while it is ‘inappropriate’, it may also be ‘unavoidable’ and ‘inevitable.’<sup>15</sup> Indeed, any such inappropriateness has not put off historians, who have found it difficult to withhold judgement of Julia, especially after discovering that, in her own words, her position in the camp came with a ‘heavy leather belt with instructions to beat the other women prisoners.’<sup>16</sup> Her camp role has done much to influence our readings of her earlier life, which this paper hopes to rectify.

This paper seeks to ask two overarching questions of the data. The first is the extent to which pre-war and pre-deportation life experiences impact those of the camp and narrations made after the war. The second asks the limit to which we can ever know the truth of Julia’s activities

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 72.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), xii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 179, original emphasis preserved.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, ‘Confronting ‘choiceless choices’.

<sup>16</sup> “Woman agent’s death mystery solved,” *News of the World*, 31 March 1946.

in the camp, both ethical and otherwise, when we have only her own narratives from which to draw, both despite their number and length and because of their ambiguity and contradictions. The bulk of this paper assesses the reliability of Julia's testimonies, and explores both her privileged position in Ravensbrück and her claimed acts of resistance, in acknowledgement of their importance. Beyond these aspects, Julia's narratives are analysed for the changes in her story and her self-representation over time for different audiences, in ways that were probably more than merely an attempt to cover her tracks.

Before we can begin her history, then, we will pause to examine how historians have judged her and her life before deportation; this will inform the importance of clarifying the reliability of her narrative. We will also establish her often assumed (by historians), always denied (by Julia), but never before proven Jewish heritage, because it coloured so many of the major steps that Julia took in her life, and impacts many of the ways in which we, as historians, might understand her case as a Jewish Holocaust survivor.

### *The judgement of historians*

(INSERT HERE: Figure 1: Julia Brichta in 1940, courtesy of Island Archives, Guernsey).

Our knowledge of Julia Brichta mostly spans the period 1940 to 1965; only a very little is known outside these dates, and certainly nothing which sheds light on the reality of her wartime and post-war experiences. Her story is complicated by the distribution of original documentary sources about her over at least eight different archives in five different countries.<sup>17</sup> Her Jewish identity, which she denied, was not proved until 2017 by the author, although it has been

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<sup>17</sup> Island Archives, Guernsey; Priaulx Library, Guernsey; Jersey Archives; Imperial War Museum, London; The National Archives, London; ITS records at the Wiener Holocaust Library, London; Family Research Centre, Hungarian Jewish Archives, Budapest; Nordiska Museet, Sweden.

assumed by historians because of unsuccessful attempts to denounce her during the German occupation of the Channel Islands. While her full story has not been pieced together before now, she has not entirely evaded the spotlight of historians and journalists who have written about Ravensbrück.

Julia has enjoyed some notoriety because of her deportation from the Channel Islands, which were the only parts of the British Isles to be occupied. While many inhabitants of this group of five islands close to the coast of north-west France evacuated to the UK just before the arrival of the Germans, many more stayed behind. The occupation was not atypical compared to other western European nations, but a little less harsh in terms of the treatment of the population. Nonetheless, during the period of occupation, nine consecutive antisemitic laws were passed through the Royal Courts of the Channel Islands from October 1940 onwards, facilitated by the local authorities. These primarily impacted Jewish refugees, like Julia, who had come to the Islands in the 1930s. The President of the Controlling Committee (Guernsey's wartime government), Ambrose Sherwill, later wrote that he had 'made such enquiries as I could and learned, accurately, as it turned out, that the few Jews who had settled in Guernsey had all evacuated' and that the legislation would 'harm no one in the island.'<sup>18</sup> This statement makes it clear that the refugees of the 1930s were not included in his enquiries, although none of them had needed to declare their Jewish identity in Guernsey before this point in time.

Julia Brichta first appeared in 1995 in the work of Guernsey local historian William Bell,<sup>19</sup> who was granted access to Guernsey's occupation period police reports. He repeated wartime allegations of Julia's black market activities, assuming that these triggered her deportation – an assumption which I later show to be incorrect. Others who have written about the Jews of the Channel Islands, such as Frederick Cohen and David Fraser, also refer to her assumed

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<sup>18</sup> Ambrose Sherwill, *A Fair and Honest Book* (Lulu.com, 2006), 233.

<sup>19</sup> William Bell, *I Beg to Report: Policing in Guernsey during the German Occupation* (Guernsey Press: Guernsey, 1995), 276.

Jewish identity and deportation for black market offences.<sup>20</sup> More expansive discussions of Julia can be found in the recent works of two authors, who present opposite pictures of her activities in Ravensbrück.

Armed with Bell's assumptions, Peter Hore seems to have been ready to believe the worst about Julia. He described her as a 'blackguard'<sup>21</sup> and 'collaborator'<sup>22</sup> who was fortunate to have escaped trial after the war.<sup>23</sup> He was scathing about her:

Her claim that she had been sent [to Ravensbrück] by the Germans for sabotage of their war effort on Guernsey was a travesty of her actual role as a black-marketeer and collaborator who had been denounced as a Jewess and deported via various prisons in St Malo, Rennes, Paris and Romainville until she reached Germany. There, because she spoke several languages, she soon ingratiated herself with her captors and made herself useful as an interpreter and voluntarily became an enforcer of the camp's bitter discipline.<sup>24</sup>

Not only does Hore claim, on unstated evidence, that Julia took on her role in the camp 'voluntarily', but, more seriously, he attributes actions in Ravensbrück to Julia that she herself attributed to named others in interviews with war crimes investigators seventy years previously. His prejudiced approach to her from the start, because of assumptions about the reasons for her deportation, means that her testimony was, at worst, disregarded and disbelieved and, at best, overlooked. For example, Julia testified that SS guard Hornwarth or Horvart, in charge of the

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<sup>20</sup> Frederick Cohen, *The Jews in the Channel Islands during the German Occupation 1940-1945* (Jersey: Jersey Heritage Trust, 2000); David Fraser, *The Jews of the Channel Islands and the Rule of Law, 1940-1945* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Hore, *Lindell's List: Saving British and American woman at Ravensbrück* (Stroud: The History Press, 2016), 241.

<sup>22</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 196.

<sup>23</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 235-6.

<sup>24</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 196.



gas chamber, pulled exhausted women naked from their beds and piled them on top of one another.<sup>25</sup> Hore decided that Brichta did this work.<sup>26</sup> He also claimed that she was present at the death of the famed British Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents in Ravensbrück, Violette Szabo, Denise Bloch and Lilian Rolfe,<sup>27</sup> yet Julia told war crimes investigators that her Czech colleague had been the witness,<sup>28</sup> as we'll explore later.

Journalist Sarah Helm, who has recently written about the women of Ravensbrück, took a different view of Julia. She stated that she was 'well liked and said by the others to be cheerful' in the camp and was 'immensely patriotic about Guernsey.'<sup>29</sup> She described Julia as 'the only one of the group [of British prisoners] who tried to keep an eye out for the rest' and that she was the only one to have displayed 'British solidarity' and 'tried to follow what happened to them all.'<sup>30</sup> She also wrote that while Julia may have faced accusations of collaboration with the SS, she used her position to get around the camp, gathering vital information as she went. Julia Brichta thus presents us with contradictions: resister and collaborator, perpetrator and victim, heroine and villain. Julia's moral ambiguity is, as we have seen, a feature of those who inhabited Levi's grey zone. And yet Julia was not a passive victim in her fate, and her 'pathway to perpetration', as Hore might label it, shows the degree of agency (such as it existed) that she exhibited along the way.

Original primary sources, most especially those held in the Channel Islands, have been overlooked by previous researchers but are vital to establishing Julia's reliability as a witness in her later newspaper articles. In order to build a better picture of Julia, we must also examine

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<sup>25</sup> Affidavit made by Julia Barry, December 19, 1945. The National Archives ref. WO 235/318.

<sup>26</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 197.

<sup>27</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 197-8.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Squadron Officer Vera Atkins from Julia Barry, March 8, 1946. The National Archives ref. WO 309/417.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Helm, *If This is a Woman: Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler's concentration camp for women* (London: Little, Brown, 2015), 430.

<sup>30</sup> Helm, *If This is a Woman*, 431.

her statements to war crimes investigators in 1945 and 1946, and her later compensation claim testimony from 1964-5. This paper thus moves chronologically between these sources.

### *Julia's experiences in Guernsey, 1939 to 1944*

Julia Brichta was born in Mako, Hungary, on November 28, 1895 to a Jewish family.<sup>31</sup> Her parents were Rudolf Brichta (a factory proprietor) and Amália Iritz. This much is confirmed by Hungarian archives and is important to establish because Julia always denied her Jewish heritage. She later claimed that her mother was Hungarian and that her father was American.<sup>32</sup> We know that three of her older siblings moved to America early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

Julia first came to the UK in 1931 to work as a cook for a Dutch family in London, but when, in 1932, she travelled with a member of the family to Brussels, she was not allowed back in the UK and was placed, instead, on a blacklist of 'undesirable aliens' by the Ministry of Labour. Her lack of a guaranteed position of employment counted against her. It was, in any case, deemed to be 'evident' to the passport control officer that she was an 'undesirable sort of creature'.<sup>34</sup>

Guernsey's logbook of Employed Aliens shows that she came to the island on a one-year permit on July 7, 1939, listing her permanent address in Budapest.<sup>35</sup> At this point in time, the Hungarian Arrow Cross party were intimidating Jews and deporting them to camps, so it seems likely that Julia was fleeing persecution. Recent research shows that the number of Hungarians arriving in Guernsey dramatically increased from just three arrivals in 1937 (with none before this year) to 49 in 1938 and 52 in 1939, overtaking German and Austrian arrivals for this

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<sup>31</sup> My thanks to Anikó Felix of the Tom Lantos Institute in Budapest for establishing this information on at the Family Research Centre of the Hungarian Jewish Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Nazi persecution compensation claim, Julia Chapman. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

<sup>33</sup> Email from RM to author, 25 August 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Labour, Employment and Training Department, note of December 24, 1932. The National Archives ref. LAB2/2081/ETAR9919/1932.

<sup>35</sup> Logbook of Employed Aliens, 1938-1950. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. BA/IND 023j

period.<sup>36</sup> 84.1% of all arrivals to Guernsey in 1939 were female, a slightly lower figure than the overall average of 88.4% for the years 1933 to 1939.<sup>37</sup> Unlike elsewhere in the UK, where the gender balance for arrivals was more even,<sup>38</sup> the statistics for Guernsey reflect the immigration policy (and the perceived employment need) for the island.

Like the majority of aliens who came to the Channel Islands in the 1930s, Julia was employed in domestic service, working originally as a cook. By June 5, 1943, she started work as a teacher at St Martin's school, teaching English and German<sup>39</sup>, thus revealing her to be an educated woman who had previously taken on domestic work out of necessity.

William Bell<sup>40</sup> allows us an insight into how Julia first came to the attention of, first, the Guernsey police and, later, the German occupiers. Two months after her arrival in the island, in September 1939, Julia refused to get out of bed or eat the food provided by her employers after they prevented her from leaving the house and accused her of being a spy.<sup>41</sup> She was taken to hospital briefly and then moved to new employers, finding work as a maid.

All seems to have been well with her new employers, but, in June 1940, they were among 17,000 islanders who evacuated to the UK in advance of the German occupiers. Julia was advised to find a new job.<sup>42</sup> This she did, as a maid at a hotel which was subsequently taken over by the Germans. They vacated it in September 1940, taking a lot of the hotel's furniture with them. Julia was subsequently seen arriving with a German sailor and trying to gain access to the hotel. The two of them were accused of removing 'an accordion, a silver-plated tray, two

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<sup>36</sup> Gilly Carr, "You are requested to ascertain the nationality of Jews residing in Guernsey": An analysis of refugees to the Channel Island of Guernsey, 1933-1940' (submitted journal paper, University of Cambridge, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Tony Kushner, "An Alien Occupation – Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1948," in *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, ed. J. Carlebach, G. Hirschfeld, A. Newman, A. Paucker and P. Pulzer (Tübingen: JCB Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991), 553-578.

<sup>39</sup> Julia's occupation registration form supplementary notes, Island Archives, Guernsey.

<sup>40</sup> Bell, *I Beg to Report*.

<sup>41</sup> Bell, *I Beg to Report*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Bell, *I Beg to Report*, 35.

rugs, a bedspread, and bottles from a cupboard'. Julia left her gas mask behind, which was discovered by the police.<sup>43</sup> It seems that she had now resorted to theft to survive.

### *Julia's Jewish heritage*

Exploring Julia's denial of her Jewish heritage and evasion of further persecution because of it gives us an important insight into Julia's character and willingness to fight. The first of the series of antisemitic laws passed by the Royal Court defined who was Jewish and asked Jews to register. Although Julia was just one of 46 immigrant Hungarians still in the island,<sup>44</sup> she alone was singled out for early investigation. The only apparent reason for this is because she had already come to the attention of the local police in September 1940 for the earlier alleged theft. However, by October 1940 she was now employed as a cook by the German authorities. It seems likely that they investigated the heritage of their employees, especially those with a record of untrustworthiness.

Julia was interviewed at the end of October 1940 by Inspector William Sculphur on the request of Bailiff Victor Carey. Carey had been asked by the Germans to make a list of Jews in the island and he passed on this request for action by Sculphur without protest or undue delay. During the interview, Julia stated that she was a Protestant; her passport did not reveal whether she was 'of pure Aryan birth'. In a second interview a week later, when asked whether she was Jewish, she stated that her mother died when she was a baby and her father, soon after, and that

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<sup>43</sup> Bell, *I Beg to Report*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Forty-six Hungarians are named in a list of foreigners given by William Sculphur to Ambrose Sherwill, first President of the States Controlling Committee, on October 17, 1940. By May 14, 1942, only 34 Hungarians are named in a submitted list of foreigners, handed to John Leale, second President of the States Controlling Committee, and then handed by him to the *Feldkommandantur* the following day. The discrepancy in numbers is likely to be due to a mixture of Hungarian women marrying local people and thereby gaining British citizenship, and confusion over who had managed to evacuate before the occupation. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. CC3/20.

she never knew her grandparents. She was unaware of any Jewish heritage.<sup>45</sup> No further action was taken, indicating that she did not have any incriminating paperwork which might have provoked further questions.

Earlier research has shown that, in Guernsey, Jews could escape deportation if they were prepared to lie convincingly about their heritage and did not have J-stamps on their passports.<sup>46</sup> Although Julia was anonymously twice denounced as Jewish in the autumn of 1943, as we shall see later, no archival evidence has been found to suggest that this was followed up; presumably the earlier investigation sufficed. Nonetheless, Julia took the precaution, on April 27, 1942, of marrying Jeremiah Barry, an Irish citizen 18 years her junior who had come to Guernsey a year earlier than Julia. Just six days before their registry office wedding, three unmarried non-British Jewish women were deported to France. They arrived in Auschwitz that summer; none of them survived.

Julia later admitted that her marriage was one of convenience. The two of them ‘worked together against the Germans’; Jeremiah became her husband ‘for the only reason’ that they could, together, ‘carry out ... underground work’.<sup>47</sup> The subject of that ‘underground work’ is explored below.

We can observe that although Julia’s Jewish identity was something she consistently denied, was never referred to in her testimonies, and – remarkably - did not cause her deportation to Ravensbrück, it nonetheless influenced the choices she made. Whether a marriage of convenience to Jeremiah Barry or the ‘choiceless choice’ of becoming a member of the camp police, both had self-preservation at their root.

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<sup>45</sup> Report of 7 November 1940, submitted by William Sculphur to Ambrose Sherwill, President of the Controlling Committee. This was forwarded the following day to the *Feldkommandant*. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. CC 3/20.

<sup>46</sup> Carr, “You are requested”.

<sup>47</sup> Nazi persecution compensation claim, Julia Chapman. The National Archives ref FO 950/999.

### *The reasons for Julia's deportation*

Bell, Hore, Cohen, and Fraser<sup>48</sup> state that Julia was deported for black market activities, but a return to the primary sources show that, while she was sentenced for such activities a couple of months before her deportation, this was not the reason for her removal from Guernsey. Rather than lying about resistance activities, it appears that Julia was at least partially telling the truth.

Our point of departure is September 16, 1943, when the *Feldkommandantur* in Guernsey received an anonymous letter denouncing Julia as a Jew. Such letters of denunciation of those keeping illegal radios were more common in the Channel Islands, and were usually written by those who wished to settle old scores against neighbours. This particular accusation is worth quoting from at length, and appears to have been sent by an aggrieved shop keeper who was losing custom to Julia and was quite possibly also motivated by antisemitic and anti-foreigner sentiment. At a time when Islanders were extremely hungry, rumours or knowledge of illegal black-marketeering were enough to trigger such letters of jealousy.

Mrs Barry, a Hungarian Jew, just married for a business affair to escape your jurisdiction on Jews, carries on a very large bartering trade at her house ... She sells butter, sugar, white flour, honey, ham, eggs and sausages ... We cannot do all this in our shops and have to pay rent and taxes, but they can hide all in private houses and live off the fat of the land while we hardly live sometimes and get customers who won't come to our shops but go to their houses where they are not seen and pay high prices for things, we cannot because we must put prices in the windows.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bell, *I Beg to Report*, 276; Hore, *Lindell's List*, 146; Cohen, *The Jews in the Channel Islands*, 22; Fraser, *The Jews of the Channel Islands*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous letter denouncing Julia Barry. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

The Germans also received an undated postcard a few days later advising them to ‘keep a watch on the Black Market activities of Mrs Barry née Julia Brichta’.<sup>50</sup> Julia’s flat was searched on September 23, 1943, but nothing was found. On September 30, 1943, the same informer as before (judging from the handwriting) wrote to the Germans again, making accusations that would be sure to get Julia in serious trouble:

Sir, thank you for having acted about Mrs Barry and her Black Marketeering and Barter but now she is bragging she has caught you out. Your men could find nothing – but she gave the Gendarme smokes and other things for himself. Let your men at least do their duty and punish her as well as others – as she really deserves it if ever anybody does. Look under her floorboards and in her piano and you will find sugar – cheese – soap – bacon – German bread – butter ... When she married Barry she paid him £100 for his name ... now she has over £500 in the bank and brags about her good business ... she told us she gets all her things from the OT<sup>51</sup> and German sailors to barter with. She is truly a bad tongued Jew and an awful cheat.<sup>52</sup>

Another anonymous letter to the *Feldgendarmarie*, dated two days earlier on September 28, 1943 and typed in poor German, with the ribbon ink rapidly running out, accused Julia of illegal trading on the black market, of being a ‘half Jew’, and of luring news from the Germans which she then ‘broadcast on the radio to England’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous and undated note. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>51</sup> Organisation Todt, the paramilitary engineering organisation who brought forced and slave labour to the Channel Islands to build the Atlantic Wall.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous letter dated September 30, 1943. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>53</sup> Typed anonymous letter dated September 28, 1943, translated by author. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

These four anonymous letters of denunciation against Julia made multiple allegations, any one of which were enough to get her sent to a concentration camp. By late 1943, the authors of the letters would certainly have known that Julia would be deported for these offences. They would not have been in any doubt about what happened to Jews given that the events of Kristallnacht were covered in Channel Islands newspapers in November 1938. This makes the letter contents all the more shocking to the modern reader.

The letters were investigated by the *Feldgendarmarie* and written up in a report dated October 7, 1943. Here we learn that Julia was watched, and further searches were carried out of her flat that same day. Five bottles of alcohol were found in Julia's flat but she claimed to have acquired these by swapping them for whiskey with German OT men a long time ago. Julia claimed that the other foodstuffs found were for her consumption alone, which was found to be a credible claim. As for the accusations that Julia was Jewish, the matter could not be examined as there were no 'documents of pedigree'. It was noted that Julia denied (again) that she was Jewish.<sup>54</sup> On October 8, 1943 – one day after her flat was searched – Julia herself wrote a signed letter of denunciation about a fellow Hungarian from Budapest, a woman who, it seems, she had known before the war, and who, we can suggest, Julia believed had denounced her. If the women had known each other before arrival in Guernsey, then this might explain the woman's knowledge of Julia's Jewish heritage.

On November 26, 1943, Julia's flat was searched again and controlled foodstuffs were found. Three days later, both Julia and her husband, Jeremiah Barry were interrogated by the *Feldgendarmarie* about black market activities; Jeremiah denied any such dealings.<sup>55</sup> Julia's interrogation report was longer; in it she claimed that she had swapped possessions for food

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<sup>54</sup> Report by the *Feldgendarmarie*, October 7, 1943, translated by author. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>55</sup> *Feldgendarmarie* report of interrogation of Jeremiah Barry translated by author, November 29, 1943. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.



from a German officer for her own consumption.<sup>56</sup> In a court case of *Feldkommandantur* 515 on December 1, 1943, Julia was found guilty of buying black market food.<sup>57</sup>

While still at liberty and waiting for her imprisonment, on January 10, 1944 she was one of three signatories of a letter to the Germans denouncing another Hungarian immigrant of stealing from the Germans.<sup>58</sup> Although it is unclear what Julia was trying to achieve, it seems that she was trying to target all possible denouncers, to bring them down before they caused her further trouble. In this, she was unsuccessful.

*Feldkommandantur* records surviving in Guernsey next show a series of summary penalties for minor infringement of German orders. Next to Julia's name are the dates '12.1.44' and '28.1.44', indicating 16 days in prison.<sup>59</sup> While she was in prison, the accusations made by Julia and her colleagues were found to be malicious.<sup>60</sup> The later spate of denunciations and counter-denunciations seems to have largely taken place between immigrants to Guernsey, throwing accusations and counter-accusations at each other, all perhaps aware of the precariousness of their position as aliens and 'outsiders.'

On January 28, 1944, Julia was sentenced to a fine of 200 RM and two weeks imprisonment (which by this date she had already served), with a probation period of 6 months. She had been found guilty of violating the order against trading in controlled foodstuffs, i.e. black market trading.<sup>61</sup> In what we now see as typical of Julia's spirited style, on February 4, 1944 she wrote to the *Feldkommandantur* to complain that the punishment was not justified because she paid the usual canteen price for the food she received from the German officer. She asked them to re-examine the matter,<sup>62</sup> but this was rejected because she had missed the 48 hour deadline for

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<sup>56</sup> Feldgendarmerie report of interrogation of Julia Barry translated by author, November 29, 1943. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>57</sup> Court of the *Feldgendarmerie* report of December 1, 1943. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of accusation against MG, signed by Julia Barry, JG and EB. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>59</sup> Ordnungsstrafverfahren: bundle of loose papers concerning the execution of summary penalties for minor infringements of FK 515 orders. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/07.

<sup>60</sup> Report of the Feldgendarmerie, January 26, 1944. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>61</sup> Sentence against Julia Barry, January 28, 1944, translated by author. Island Archives, Guernsey. Ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Julia Barry to *Feldkommandantur*, February 4, 1944. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

the submission of complaints.<sup>63</sup> While Julia had found it possible to argue her way out of accusations of having Jewish heritage, she could not escape this sentence or fine.

Julia then vanishes from records in Guernsey; she reappears seven weeks later in Jersey's prison ledger on March 30, 1944.<sup>64</sup> Jersey's political prisoner logbook records her deportation to France the following day.<sup>65</sup> Where had she been in the meantime? We have two sources of information here, both of which were written by Julia 20 years apart and both agree: From a newspaper interview she gave in Guernsey on her return to the island after the war, in her characteristically imperfect English, she said that she was arrested -

early in February ... by the *Feldgendarmarie*. As it was not the first time I didn't think it was so serious as it really was. They kept me six weeks in the local prison, questioning two weeks by FGM [i.e. the *Feldgendarmarie*], the rest by the Gestapo<sup>66</sup> and one evening, just five minutes before the boat left Guernsey, they told me I had to be there in time to leave. They gave me no time to speak with anybody, just stole out from the island. I spent a short time in the Jersey prison ...<sup>67</sup>

This account accords with that in her compensation claim testimony, written in April 1965, that she was 'arrested in Guernsey 10 February 1944 [for] the second time. After 6 weeks in the Guernsey prison I was taken to the Jersey prison.'<sup>68</sup>

The precise reason for Julia's arrest is of primary interest to us here, as it is the point on which previous historians have condemned her and challenged her later testimony in the camp. Julia's

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from *Feldkommandantur* 515 dated February 17, 1944. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

<sup>64</sup> Prison ledger. Jersey Archives ref. D/AG.B1/4.

<sup>65</sup> Political prisoner logbook. Jersey Archives ref. D/AG/B7/7.

<sup>66</sup> This reference to the Gestapo should be read as the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, who were referred to in the Channel Islands as the Gestapo. The real Gestapo only ever came to the Channel Islands once, to sack the Freemasons' temple in Jersey and Guernsey.

<sup>67</sup> Julia Barry, "I was condemned to death", *Guernsey Evening Press*, July 18, 1945.

<sup>68</sup> Nazi persecution compensation claim testimony, Julia Chapman. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

first reference to her offence comes in her fourth and final interview with the *Guernsey Evening Press* in August 1945. She wrote that she was ‘proud of the reason for which they sent me to the camp’;<sup>69</sup> an odd remark to make for somebody deported for dealing on the black market, most especially given that among the readers would have been those who knew Julia’s reputation. In March 1946, in her interview with the *News of the World*, Julia stated that she was ‘sentenced by the Germans for sabotage’<sup>70</sup> – a claim that Peter Hore later called a ‘travesty’. In a sworn affidavit for war crimes investigators, Julia claimed that she had ‘endeavoured to pass messages to the English and to relay news. I was arrested by the Germans and charged for these actions and for being in possession of a wireless set, also for acts of sabotage.’<sup>71</sup>

In her claim for compensation of 1965, Julia wrote that she worked with Jeremiah Barry ‘against the Germans,’<sup>72</sup> and that she was:

working for the Germans and was “friendly” with them and so I had the opportunity to have knowledge of many things which I passed to Mr Barry who became later my husband for the only reason, to carry on our underground work. I never knew to whom did he pass the news. I had my radio and was able to spread the news. I listened and made every sabotage I could. For that two pro-British German soldiers helped me but never betrayed [sic].<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “From Ravensbrück to Guernsey”, interview with Julia Barry, *Guernsey Evening Press*, August 17, 1945.

<sup>70</sup> “Woman agent’s death mystery solved”, interview with Julia Barry, *News of the World*, March 31, 1946.

<sup>71</sup> Affidavit sworn by Julia Barry on December 19, 1945. The National Archives ref. RW 2/7/3.

<sup>72</sup> Letter by Julia Chapman of July 12, 1965, victim of Nazi persecution compensation claim. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

<sup>73</sup> Testimony by Julia Chapman accompanying claim for compensation as a victim of Nazi persecution, dated April 17, 1965. TNA ref. FO 950/999.

At first glance, all of these statements seem like pure fiction. And yet, a reference has been located in the personal archive of Captain Denning, an officer of the intelligence corps who came to Guernsey after the liberation. In a three page document on the history of the *Geheime Feldpolizei* (GFP) in the Channel Islands, written by one of their interrogated number, *Feldwebel* Walter Einert, is a reference to Julia. In a list of case studies of seven people from Guernsey whose cases were investigated by the GFP, he wrote that ‘early in 1943 the Irish subject Mrs Julia Berry [sic] (formerly Hungarian) was arrested on a charge of inciting German troops and distribution of enemy propaganda. Case was transferred to SD ROUEN and Mrs B sent to FRANCE under escort’.<sup>74</sup>

Although the wrong year is quoted, this accords with Julia’s version of events – that German soldiers were involved in passing information with her, and that she was spreading the BBC news. There is yet a third source: the anonymous denouncer – the fellow Hungarian from Budapest who seemed to know Julia well. This woman had accused Julia of luring news from the Germans that she then broadcast on the radio to England. Although no illicit radio broadcasts were made by people in the Channel Islands during the occupation, this accusation matches Julia’s later claim and the GFP’s charge. It seems that Julia was, after all, broadly telling the truth about the reason for her deportation.

All three sources agree that she was listening to the BBC and spreading the news; she was perhaps also extracting information from soldiers and passing this, too, to her husband to be passed on to his sources, whoever they may have been.<sup>75</sup> To put these acts in context, spreading the BBC news after radios were confiscated in June 1942 is seen as one of the more honourable acts of resistance in the Channel Islands - and denunciation of these acts, the most despicable.

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<sup>74</sup> “History of the GFP in the Channel Islands”, *Feldwebel* Walter Einert, *Geheime Feldpolizei* officer. Captain JR Denning files, JRD 9, IWM ref 13409.

<sup>75</sup> We have a single reference to Jeremiah Barry’s work colleague, James Mullane, being arrested at the same time as Barry, but we have no knowledge of what happened to him. The two men worked in Mullane’s mending and tailoring business. Report of the *Feldgendarmarie*, November 29, 1943. Island Archives, Guernsey, ref. FK 11/06.

It was one of the most widespread offences and claimed more lives than any other among islanders deported after conviction for radio offences.<sup>76</sup>

***Julia as ‘perpetrator’, ‘victim’ and ‘heroine’ in Ravensbrück.***

The rest of Julia’s wartime experiences can be learned from her own testimonies. After her deportation from Jersey on March 31, 1944, we pick up her story from her interviews with the *Guernsey Evening Press*. Here she records that she was taken briefly to St Malo Prison, followed by Jacques Cartier Prison in Rennes, which she described as a ‘nice place with plenty of food but no air,’ and where she said that she was fed by the French Red Cross. She was then in Romainville Prison in Paris for two weeks. Then, on May 18, 1944, she was taken from Romainville to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, travelling in a cattle wagon for five days.<sup>77</sup>

600 women, a mixture of French and English, were in her transport.<sup>78</sup>

Julia’s four long newspaper interviews with the *Guernsey Evening Press* are a valuable source of information about the camp, most particularly the experiences of being processed after entering, of quarantine, and the experiences of Britons, among whom Julia counted herself. Our interests here lie in Julia’s varied presentation of herself, labels which we might identify here as ‘British’, ‘Catholic’, ‘victim’, ‘perpetrator’ or ‘heroine’, to her different audiences.

In that first newspaper interview, in July 1945, Julia spoke freely and with pride about her camp police role, framing her actions as something positive, powerful, brave and humanitarian:

As I speak several languages, I was on the Police. My duty was looking after the women  
... My work was the most important job in the camp, and I had the same privileges as

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<sup>76</sup> See Paul Sanders, “Radio Days,” in Carr, Sanders and Willmot, *Protest Defiance and Resistance*, 65-96.

<sup>77</sup> “I was condemned to death”, interview with Julia Barry, *Guernsey Evening Post*, July 18, 1945.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

the SS women or men. Only they had the right to kick me, and I couldn't kick them back! But I'm still living and they are not. My red ribbon on the arm with "L.P." [i.e. *Lager Polizei*] gave me the right to go everywhere, night and day, see everything that was going on in the huts or hospitals, and I had the opportunity of saving many men and women from gas chambers or the furnace, and even those who were burned alive or eaten up by rats knew I tried everything to save them. But as the order was to destroy a certain percentage they had to do so.<sup>79</sup>

In her interview with the *News of the World* eight months later, she said a little more about her police role. Having now signed affidavits for war crimes investigators and acquired an insight into the way that they viewed certain actions in the camp, this newspaper interview was another opportunity to present her heroism in a less ambiguous way than before, while still acknowledging her camp police role:

At Ravensbrück I was made a prison policewoman and given ... a red band with letters on it to indicate my status. I was also handed a heavy leather belt with instructions to beat the other women prisoners ... It was my task to accompany the prison commandant and two doctors as each day they picked the latest batch of candidates for death. Many hours I spent with that brutal trio, translating into the language of the woman or child concerned with the words: *You go to the right, or You go to the left*. To the left meant the gas chamber; to the right a temporary respite. It was a hateful task, but in it I saw my only chance to help some of the condemned women. Altogether, I was able to save the lives of more than 100 – pitifully few, I know. It was only on such occasions that I used the belt, not too heavily, on the shoulders of the condemned. My object was to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

confuse the Germans. With a great show of indignation I made it appear that some of the women had made mistakes. Then, at the right moment, I was able to drive them past the ranks of those condemned.<sup>80</sup>

We might note that neither statement suggests that Julia voluntarily chose to join the camp police. While the first indicates simply that she was ‘on the Police’ because of her linguistic abilities, the second refers only to being ‘made a policewoman’. Both statements, like that in her post-war affidavit, are ambiguous, and both lack indications of either agency and choice on Julia’s part, or coercion. Despite the multiple accounts, gaining an understanding of Julia’s agency or motivation under extreme duress is a fraught affair at best.

Her interview with the *News of the World* was principally to provide information on the fate of SOE agent Violette Szabo for Szabo’s parents, who had received no word from her. She recounted how, when Szabo, Lillian Rolfe and Denise Bloch arrived in the camp in a dreadful state in January 1945, there was nothing she could do to save them. But Julia knew how to play to her audience, and confirmed that the women had a ‘look of contempt for the guards’, had given away no secrets during torture, and that ‘they were British, and the Germans knew it. Nothing could break their spirit ... I saw them in their last hours, and I would like everyone to know that they died true to their cause and themselves.’<sup>81</sup>

It is worth noting here that Peter Hore saw this as the ‘most startling and prejudicial statement’ made by Julia; that she was with them in their last hours and, he suggests had been a witness to their death – that she had ‘accompanied the murder squad but had been turned back when they reached the crematory’. SS Obersturmführer Johan Schwarzhuber, interviewed by Vera Atkins, had not known the woman who was with them and thought that she was Czech. Hore

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<sup>80</sup> “Woman agent’s death mystery solved”, *News of the World*, March 31, 1946.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

suggests that it is likely that this was a mistake and that the woman was Julia,<sup>82</sup> but in Julia's own interviews by Atkins, Julia stated that she was informed by Czech fellow camp policewoman, Sonja Veselik, that the women were shot.<sup>83</sup> Julia also told Atkins that she had asked Veselik to 'lend the girls some food till I can go to my block and give her back. And as I asked her to look after the girls when I'm off duty she always did.'<sup>84</sup>

While the language to describe the proud bearing and heroism of the SOE agents was played up for the newspaper, none of this kind of detail was passed to war crimes investigators, to whom she had written two months earlier. In that account, she reported the arrival of the three women in the camp in such a dirty, ill and ragged state that Julia fetched food and soap and, from another British prisoner, Mary Lindell, medicine, and 'in an hour ... they got everything: food, clothing, pullover, soap etc.'<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that the organisation of these items for the women is attributed to Mary Lindell alone by Peter Hore,<sup>86</sup> who as we've already seen was disinclined to believe Julia's testimony. It is unclear why this comforting information was not passed to the parents, and why the bravery of the women was not passed to the war crimes investigators.

In her interviews with the *Guernsey Evening Press*, Julia related a number of acts of resistance which cast her in a good light. She spoke of how she was involved in helping to hide in a different barrack under different prisoner numbers, 65 Polish 'guinea pigs' who had been experimented upon. She claimed that these women were not found and survived until the end of the war, where she met them again in Malmö, where 'they nearly kissed me to death.'<sup>87</sup> On another occasion, she and three Czechoslovak policewomen were on duty in the Revier (camp hospital), where the physically and mentally sick were awaiting transport to Auschwitz. It is

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<sup>82</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 198.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Julia Barry to Vera Atkins, March 6, 1946. The National Archives ref. WO 309/417.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Vera Atkins from Julia Barry, March 8, 1946. The National Archives ref. WO 309/417.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Julia Barry to war crimes investigators, January 22, 1946. The National Archives ref. WO 309/417.

<sup>86</sup> Hore, *Lindell's List*, 196.

<sup>87</sup> "War disclosures of Mrs Julia Barry", interview with Julia Barry, *Guernsey Evening Press*, July 20, 1945.



unclear how this feat was carried out, but Julia claimed that she saved the life of one person and the other women saved eight, presumably by smuggling them into another block.

In November 1944, a transport of 1700 Hungarian women from Budapest, not all Jews, arrived in terrible condition. ‘Who could see them without crying? We certainly could not’, remembered Julia. This must have been a terrible shock for her, coupled with the realisation of a terrible irony: had she not left Budapest to come to Guernsey, deportation to Ravensbrück may still have awaited her. Julia claimed to have been able to cure many of these women from typhus, spotted fever and typhoid, which raged through the camp, using the medication that many of the camp’s newcomers brought with them.<sup>88</sup> As part of her job involved receiving new arrivals to the camp, she was able to ask for (or, we must assume, take) useful medicines from them.<sup>89</sup>

Julia’s eight months as a camp policewoman<sup>90</sup> came to an end in April 1945, before the liberation of the camp. An SS woman came to her hut and searched her bed, finding ‘five prayerbooks, three rosaries, English and French books, and my notes of the camp life written in shorthand. She was furious when I said that these were German cake recipes in the English language ... I got a good few smacks on the face, left and right, felt her nailed boots on my legs, too and, as usual, everything was taken from me. Fortunately she didn’t look in my pockets, where I still had my 6<sup>th</sup> prayerbook ...’<sup>91</sup>

Julia’s portrayal of herself to a Guernsey audience as a heroine who stockpiled prayer-books and rosaries communicated a Catholic rather than Jewish identity to readers, including her anonymous denouncers. Such stockpiling might also have acted as an insurance mechanism in the camp, should her Jewish identity have been uncovered there. Julia also presented herself to

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<sup>88</sup> “Life in camp with German police women”, interview with Julia Barry, July 25 and 27, 1945, *Guernsey Evening Press*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Affidavit made by Julia Barry, December 19, 1945. The National Archives ref. WO 235/318.

<sup>91</sup> “From Ravenbruch [sic] to Guernsey”, interview with Julia Barry, August 17, 1945 *Guernsey Evening Press*.

Guernsey readers as someone who carried out acts of resistance by saving prisoners in Ravensbrück; however, she presented herself quite differently to war crimes investigators over the following year. Although a number of the same anecdotes and events were discussed, this time her own role in them was absent, perhaps suggesting that she was not the saviour of prisoners that she claimed to be. With regards to the anecdote regarding the Polish ‘guinea pigs’, Julia claimed that she had ‘no direct personal knowledge’ of this. She reported seeing ‘perhaps fifty Polish women who came back from these experiments alive. Some of these I have spoken to’. Although she told the story of these women swapping numbers with others and hiding in barrack blocks, she claimed no role in this other than to say that she knew it was going on and kept it secret.<sup>92</sup> The historian is often left questioning their appraisal of Julia.

Julia was also keen to present herself to a Guernsey audience as British rather than Hungarian or Irish. This gives us an insight into her attitude about being made to feel an outsider and a foreigner during her years in Guernsey before her deportation. Although Julia’s marriage to Jeremiah Barry conferred upon her Irish citizenship, this was not the identity that she embraced or expressed in her newspaper interviews, nor in her compensation claim application, for which only British citizens were eligible. Interestingly, she did not emphasise a ‘British’ identity in her correspondence and interviews with war crimes investigators; there was no need to do so. The emphasis on national identity comes across most strongly in her description of the period of liberation. In April 1945, the white buses of the Swedish Red Cross arrived in Ravensbrück, carrying Red Cross parcels. In an interview to the *Guernsey Evening Press*, Julia tells us that on the first day, these were given to the French, and on the second day, to the Jews and Belgians. ‘On the third day we went to the office and asked ... why we, the English, did not get anything from our own [i.e. British Red Cross] parcels’. Later in the same interview, after recounting how French, Dutch and Belgian women had been removed from the camp, ‘we went to the

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<sup>92</sup> Affidavit sworn by Julia Barry, December 19, 1945. The National Archives ref. WO 235/318.

Commandant and asked him why we, the 12 British, could not be exchanged ...’ Later on, ‘at last on April 25<sup>th</sup>, early in the morning, came the unexpected order: “British and Americans with their bundles are to be in ten minutes at the office.” We were more bewildered than happy. They changed their minds so often that we didn’t believe the order.’ Reporting how the buses carrying prisoners pulled away from the camp, she related that ‘We, the British and Americans, had an extra bus ... we had plenty of room.’ Julia’s presentation of herself and her identity was, once again, clearly tailored to her audience.

Peter Hore provides what may have been another reason for Julia’s professed identity. He states that Julia was not admitted to the circle of Englishwomen in the camp,<sup>93</sup> an argument presumably based on her absence from a list of British and American women made by Mary Lindell in Ravensbrück in April 1945, which enabled women of those nationalities to board one of the white buses leaving the camp.<sup>94</sup> However, Julia’s own testimony and presence on the white bus for Americans and Britons show that she was, indeed, included among their number. In any case, the experience of exclusion led Julia to emphasise the righteousness of her inclusion. Her adopted national identity seems also to have been strongly felt. Upon her arrival in Malmö, Sweden, where she was taken with the other survivors to recuperate, she was described as being a ‘very cheerful lady, pathetically patriotic about the Channel Islands.’<sup>95</sup> The veracity of that patriotism may also have been reflected in her deportation offence: that of spreading the BBC news. We might also note two further observations from Julia’s period in Sweden. The first comes from a report by George Clutton of the British legation, who noted (in his description of British woman) who was considered by other survivors to be a collaborator or renegade. No such black mark is attached to Julia’s name here. Secondly, at least two photos of groups of British prisoners survive, and both show Julia. Although none of

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<sup>93</sup> Hore, *Lindell’s List*, 197.

<sup>94</sup> Hore, *Lindell’s List*, 9, 216-18, 241.

<sup>95</sup> Report of George Clutton, British Legation, Stockholm. The National Archives ref. FO 371/50982.

the women have their arms round each other or show other such signs of affection, neither are any of them displaying negative body language towards, nor distance from, Julia as might have been expected had she held a reputation for being a violent and disliked prisoner functionary.

This much provides us with some indication about the attitude of others towards Julia.

Julia returned to Guernsey on July 5, 1945. She found that her clothing had been given away by the billeting officer, who had seemingly been informed that she would be shot. Her flat had been passed to a 20 year old woman who sold Julia's possessions for a profit. Julia returned to find that she was penniless and without possessions.<sup>96</sup> After a short while, she moved to Kent to begin (another) new life.<sup>97</sup>

Moving forward twenty years, we encounter the final written narrative that Julia made about her experience during the war years. In her compensation claim of 1965, she presents herself as a victim. Indeed, she was seeking compensation as a British victim of Nazi persecution, so such a professed identity is to be expected. Julia made claims for both time spent in a concentration camp and for permanent disability. Now 70 years old, living in London, and married to a Mr Chapman since 1951, Julia's disabilities included 'deafness, diarrhoea since 1944, insomnia', caused 'in Ravensbrück by kicking, beating, torturing' which 'started with the first beating in Guernsey'.<sup>98</sup> This last comment may once have elicited raised eyebrows, but recent research by the author has shown that beatings for male prisoners, especially for the more serious crimes, were not uncommon during interrogations by the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, who took the role of the Gestapo in the Channel Islands.<sup>99</sup> We might also pause to examine these symptoms: insomnia is a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, and

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<sup>96</sup> Letter to States Supervisor by Julia Barry, August 30, 1945; Bell, *I Beg to Report*, 373.

<sup>97</sup> Julia was living in Marden, Kent. See statements of Julia Barry to war crimes investigators, December 1945 and June 1946. The National Archives ref. WO 235/318.

<sup>98</sup> Compensation claim for Nazi persecution, Julia Chapman. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

<sup>99</sup> Gilly Carr, *Nazi Prisons in the British Isles* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2020).

experienced by many Holocaust survivors,<sup>100</sup> although we cannot know whether Julia's trauma was triggered by her experience as a victim, by witnessing the trauma of others,<sup>101</sup> or by any acts of perpetration, in a form of perpetrator trauma or suffering discussed by Sue Vice.<sup>102</sup> Eliciting sympathy from the claims officials in the Foreign Office was clearly Julia's aim in her compensation claim, and it is clear that her testimony was exaggerated in places. She wrote that 'during the war when I lived in Guernsey and worked in the underground movement, after three and a half years they arrested me, tortured and condemned to death and through ten prisons I was 18 months in Ravensbrück concentration camp. The result is that I am deaf on my left ear, I suffer from insomnia and giddiness ...'<sup>103</sup> There had been no 'underground movement' as such in Guernsey, just multiple acts of different forms of protest, defiance or resistance by individuals or very small groups.<sup>104</sup> Archival evidence suggests that she was in five prisons in total, including Guernsey and Jersey, not ten. She was also in Ravensbrück for 11 months rather than 18. Julia also emphasised her loss of personal possessions in Guernsey, although claims for loss of property was not compensated as part of the Anglo-German compensation agreement of 1964.

The Foreign Office told Julia that unless she could prove that she held British citizenship before October 1953, she would not be eligible to claim compensation, given that Jeremiah Barry was Irish and not British. Julia was able to prove that she had married Mr Chapman in 1951<sup>105</sup> and

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<sup>100</sup> E.g. American Psychiatric Association. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (DSM III), (Washington DC: APA, 1987) 236-9; DSM-V, <https://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml> [accessed 24 August 2020]; Klaus Kuch and Brian Cox, "Symptoms of PTSD in 124 survivors of the Holocaust," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 149, no.3 (1992): 337-40.

<sup>101</sup> Laurence Langer has discussed how former victims are pursued not just by their own traumatic moments, but the trauma of others; *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 13.

<sup>102</sup> Sue Vice, "Exploring the fictions of perpetrator suffering," *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* 2, no.1 (2014): 15-25.

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Julia Chapman, June 15, 1964, claim for compensation for Nazi persecution. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

<sup>104</sup> Gilly Carr, Paul Sanders and Louise Willmot, *Protest, Defiance and Resistance in the Channel Islands: German Occupation 1940-1945* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Julia Chapman, July 12, 1965, Nazi persecution compensation claim file. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999.

was duly awarded a high level of compensation – but one which reflected the true length of time she had been imprisoned.

### *Discussion*

Julia's wartime experiences give us an insight into one woman's journey into the grey zone. They allow us to see her life from 1939 as a Jewish refugee and outsider, but also a survivor; she was a woman used to making moral compromises long before she entered Ravensbrück. We should, perhaps, be more surprised had we not seen continuity of her *modus vivendi* in the camp. Once she returned to Guernsey – if only briefly – in the summer 1945, Julia began to narrate her story on her own terms. This may not have been the first time that she had ordered her thoughts on the matter; we already know that she had made her own notes in shorthand while in Ravensbrück, and she may well have been questioned by the British Legation while in Malmö.

Julia's earliest written accounts, comprising an extended series of detailed articles for the *Guernsey Evening Press*, may also have functioned as a way of processing or organising her experiences in order to make sense of them. Zoe Waxman suggests that survivors wrote 'as an act of atonement or even exorcism in an attempt to assimilate overwhelming memories,'<sup>106</sup> and this may be why, in her first article, Julia admitted that she was on the *Lager Polizei* and had the same privileges as the SS.

In their analysis of Holocaust testimony, Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub emphasise the compulsion to bear witness as a need for empathy on the part of the survivor; a desire for acknowledgement of suffering by a 'listening, responsive other'.<sup>107</sup> In a similar vein, Mary Marshall Clark calls this need to testify and be heard as a 'narrative medicine' which has the

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<sup>106</sup> Zoe Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 159.

<sup>107</sup> Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Holocaust Testimony," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no.4 (1990): 452.

power to alleviate suffering by using narrative to resist and overcome indifference in listeners.<sup>108</sup> Laub later wrote that survivors not only needed to survive to tell their story, but needed to tell their story to survive; to ‘tell and thus to come to know one’s story ... One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life.’<sup>109</sup> These may be among the factors behind the large number of newspaper articles that Julia wrote, perhaps also to counter the confiscation of her camp notes and attempts at silencing by the SS guard, and perhaps in the knowledge that the readership may have included those who wrote letters of denunciation against her.

We might also note Julia’s particular focus in one of her articles upon the arrival and experiences of 1,700 Hungarians from Budapest. It is perhaps no coincidence that Julia chose to testify to the death of 1,400 of her onetime fellow citizens. Annette Wieviorka notes that a recurring theme of survivor testimony is to honour the legacy of the dead by telling the world what happened to them, thus saving them from oblivion.<sup>110</sup>

When we come to assess the changes in Julia’s narratives over time, it is possible that these may have reflected the vagaries of memory<sup>111</sup> or, as we have seen, the impact of PTSD, just as much as a deliberate process of editing out of fear of condemnation or imprisonment. Waxman reminds us, after all, that the memories were mediated by both the present and future concerns of each survivor,<sup>112</sup> and Julia would have been aware of the precariousness of her position at the time that she was questioned by war crimes investigators. However, we have seen that, over time, certain anecdotes were revealed, omitted, or even played up for certain audiences for

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<sup>108</sup> Mary Marshall Clark, “Holocaust Video Testimony, Oral History, and Narrative Medicine: The Struggle against Indifference,” *Literature and Medicine* 24, no.2 (2005): 266-82.

<sup>109</sup> Dori Laub, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. S. Felman and D. Laub, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75-92.

<sup>110</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 101.

<sup>111</sup> After being questioned by war crimes investigators, Julia sent them later, additional letters containing information that she had forgotten on the day of questioning.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

reasons of wanting to be accepted, wanting to be helpful, wanting to impress – or just wanting to get compensation.

Julia's testimonies show an acute awareness of audience from the start; while they all reflected her versions of the truth, there were veiled (or unveiled) messages for certain people. She gave different audiences what they wanted to hear, emphasising different aspects of events in ways which showed her in the best light whilst also exposing the camp guards and SS as the real perpetrators.

Julia's Jewish identity was something that she consistently denied. At a time when it might have been most profitable to reveal it, such as to war crimes investigators or compensation claim administrators, Julia kept silent. Having suffered and witnessed antisemitism during her life, Julia had long learned to keep her identity hidden. While the reasons for her denial during the occupation are obvious, we can perhaps explain it afterwards through what Arlene Stein identifies as silence induced by survivors' shame, coupled with a desire not to be identified as a Jewish victim because it was associated with the 'stigma' of 'weakness and vulnerability'.<sup>113</sup> Stein found that, in public, survivors instead told stories that emphasized heroism and resistance, as resisters were held in high esteem – something that certainly resonates with Julia's accounts. Alternatively – and in order to fit in after the war - survivors often created 'entirely new biographies that bore little resemblance to their old ones'; yet others 'adopted a "cover" that emphasized less stigmatized aspects of their identities ...',<sup>114</sup> an observation that holds true for Julia. Partial truths and creating new identities for herself were, for Julia, habitual survival mechanisms. Six years after her release from the camp she secured British citizenship

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<sup>113</sup> Arlene Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, their children, and the rise of Holocaust consciousness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>114</sup> Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses*, 18, 34-5, 40.



through marriage but, upon her death in 1981, aged 85, Julia was able to benefit her Hungarian family, now in exile in America, by leaving her estate to them.<sup>115</sup>

Popular historians have rushed in to pass judgement on Julia, but my goal here has not been to establish definitively her degree of guilt or otherwise; this is ultimately unknowable. Rather, I have had multiple aims in bringing Julia's testimony to a wider audience. In addition to providing us with a rich source of detailed aspects of life and death in Ravensbrück, Julia's testimony as a 'privileged' Jew of the grey zone is a rare one worthy of greater attention. She was, as Sarah Helm has stated, more than willing to describe what she saw and was unusually detailed and frank in her evidence.<sup>116</sup> Julia was an important witness for war crimes investigators to atrocities in the camp.<sup>117</sup> That witnessing included possession of a list of twelve hundred prisoners of all nationalities from Ravensbrück that she offered to war crimes investigators;<sup>118</sup> she could only have removed this from the camp at her departure. She was also able to testify about the last hours of British SOE agents, and the death of a fellow Channel Islander, Jerseywoman Louisa Gould.<sup>119</sup>

I have also sought here to disentangle some of the facts surrounding Julia's pathway to Ravensbrück and pre-camp life in Guernsey, because it allows us to see the complex character of this survivor of the grey zone and her choices in post-war narration. While others have been content to pigeon-hole Julia as a black marketeer, a perpetrator in the camp, a liar and an unreliable witness, we can now see that such labels are simplistic. With Langer, we can see

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<sup>115</sup> Last Will and Testament of Julia Anne Chapman, died 23 February 1981. Government Record Office, UK. The author was contacted by Julia's great-nephew, who was able to verify the family relationship of those to whom Julia left her estate.

<sup>116</sup> Helm, *If This is a Woman*, 466.

<sup>117</sup> 'Names and addresses of witnesses considered important', Ravensbrück concentration camp. The National Archives ref. WO 309/417.

<sup>118</sup> Affidavit sworn by Julia Barry, December 19, 1945. The National Archives ref. WO 235/318. We do not know whether Julia was able to hand over any such list, but no record of it has been found by the author.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from Julia Barry, June 15, 1964, Nazi persecution compensation claim. The National Archives ref. FO 950/999; Annexe 2, German atrocities at the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück. The National Archives ref. FO 371/50982.

that the arbitrary division of people in the camps into heroes and villains is ‘misleading’ as it ignores the ‘even more arbitrary environment that shaped human conduct’<sup>120</sup> in such places.

In wielding a heavy belt, yet apparently using it to save women from the crematoria, Julia provides us with a perfect (yet rare, given her alleged resistance in the camp) example of an inhabitant of the grey zone, a place where ‘compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment.’<sup>121</sup> And yet, even her position within the grey zone is in doubt. With only Julia’s many testimonies to rely upon, we cannot draw firm conclusions about her ethical behaviour. Ultimately we are left without certainty because of the inconsistency of the source material. It seems easier and even appropriate for us, as historians, to place her into the ambiguous ‘grey’ category of the ‘grey zone’.

Julia Brichta ultimately resists the simplified, binary and baggage-laden categories of victim or perpetrator, heroine or villain, and resister or collaborator. Hers is also a story that helps us reject what Brown describes as the ‘stereotypical representation of Jews as passive victims, heroic martyrs or complicit traitors’.<sup>122</sup> Instead, by delving into the detail of Julia’s life in Guernsey, we can begin to understand how her choices before her deportation affected those made – or thrust upon her - afterwards. Her life in Hungary, then Guernsey, and in Ravensbrück itself, deeply marked the ways in which she later narrated her story to different audiences. While Tony Kushner believes that it adds ‘another form to the abuse that began with their persecution’ to ignore the lives of survivors before and after the camps,<sup>123</sup> we can see, through the life of Julia Brichta, that we also rob ourselves of the means to better understand later survivor testimonies if we do so.

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<sup>120</sup> Lawrence Langer, “The dilemma of choice in the death camps”, in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical reflections on a dark time*, ed. A. Rosenberg and G. Myers, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 118-127.

<sup>121</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (London: Abacus, 1989).

<sup>122</sup> Brown, “No one will ever know”, 110.

<sup>123</sup> Tony Kushner, “Holocaust Testimony, Ethics and the Problem of Representation,” *Poetics Today* 27, no.2 (2006): 275-295.

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### ***Figure captions***

Figure 1: Julia Brichta in 1940, courtesy of Island Archives, Guernsey