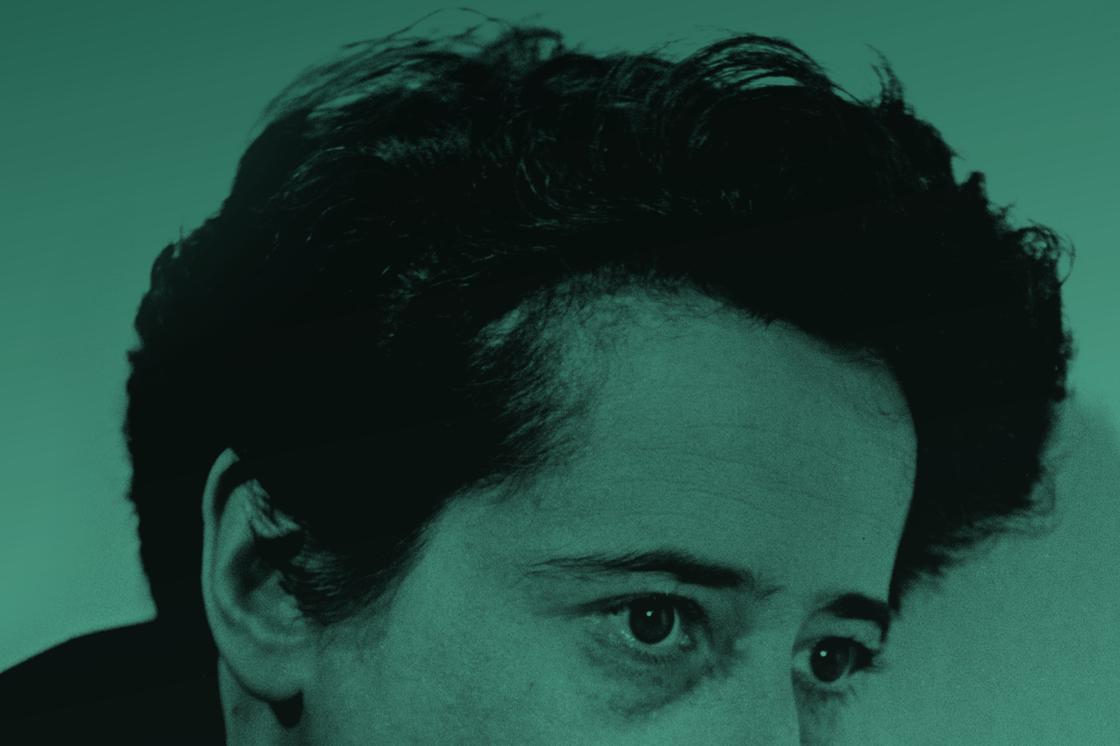


Tuija Parvikko

# Arendt, Eichmann

and the  
Politics of the Past



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Pro et Contra  
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Tuija Parvikko

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the Politics of the Past**

Pro et Contra 2

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## FOREWORD

*Arendt, Eichmann and the Politics of the Past*, originally published by the Finnish Political Science Association in 2008, is one of the most sought-after titles of its book series in English. In 2017, the board of the Association decided to renew its book series as an open access publication. The new series was titled *Pro et Contra. Books from the Finnish Political Science Association*, and its first publication appeared in December 2020 in collaboration with the Helsinki University Press.

In the context of the reform, the new title reflected the profile change of the book series. While the board's decision to turn the series into open access format was made to reach new audiences globally, it also aimed to promote original high-quality scholarship in political studies beyond the borders of the discipline and the national context. In this respect, the title *Pro et Contra* highlights the effort to engage in debate about political studies, especially in the global context.

After the launch of the *Pro et Contra* series, the first edition of Tuija Parvikko's *Arendt, Eichmann and the Politics of the Past* had been out of print for some time. Over the years, the board of the Finnish Political Science Association had received numerous inquiries about it from booksellers as well as researchers, teachers and students of political theory in Finland. Internationally, the first edition reached only a handful of readers. Against this background, this edition being in open access format will make the book accessible to a wider audience and will allow its highly original contribution in the field of political theory to become more known.

The decision to republish the book with a new prologue was taken not only due to the high demand in the national context but also because of the re-emerging controversy surrounding Arendt's *Eich-*

*mann in Jerusalem* internationally. While Parvikko's book engages in the original American debate over Arendt's report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, it also argues that the debate over the report, illustrating the incapacity to understand the unprecedented political evil of the Nazi crimes, had a decisive impact on further developments in Holocaust studies, contributing to their redirection of focus from perpetrators to victims. Parvikko's book shows that debates surrounding Arendt's report have never really calmed down but have taken a number of new directions. Furthermore, it illustrates that, around the turn of the century, readings and debates over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* became disengaged and displaced from their original context. With the recurring interest about Arendt's pamphlet and subsequent public debates, Tuija Parvikko's political reading remains a timely contribution.

The difference between the original edition and this one is that, along with this foreword, explaining the republication context and the continued relevance of the original version, this edition contains Tuija Parvikko's new prologue, entitled 'On Recent Interpretations of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*'. In the prologue, Parvikko reflects on her own political reading, which was arguably one of the first, in connection to recent scholarly contributions and developments of the controversy. Regarding the original manuscript, we have corrected typographical errors and spelling inconsistencies. However, no additional language editing has been undertaken. The manuscript has been typeset by Helsinki University Press so that the page numbers of this new version match the original publication, which allows readers to follow up citations to the original volume.

We would like to warmly thank, first of all, Tuija Parvikko, who generously put her time and effort into delivering the new prologue for the republication. We would also like to offer our thanks to the peer-reviewers of the new prologue, who offered constructive feedback, as well as Anna-Mari Vesterinen and Leena Kaakinen from the Helsinki University Press for their assistance, support and expert

advice during the preparation of the manuscript. Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the financial support of the Finnish Association for Scholarly Publishing, whose funding was crucial in renewing the book series into open access format in the first place, and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, which provided funding to publish this book.

Madrid and Turku, 28 November 2021

Taru Haapala and Anna Kronlund  
Pro et Contra series editors



## PROLOGUE: ON RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF HANNAH ARENDT'S *EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM*

During the Second World War, the idea of “collective guilt” or the “collective responsibility” of all Germans for war crimes and genocides of enormous groups of peoples prevailed among the Allied leadership. Winston Churchill, for instance, spoke for a permanent weakening and even of the dissolution of Germany in order to prevent future catastrophes in Europe. For Hannah Arendt, the problem was more complicated. Immediately after the war, she argued that the problem in postwar Germany was how to bear the burden of confronting a people among whom the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, had been so completely effaced that nobody would be able to tell whether they were dealing with a secret hero or with a former mass murderer. Most Germans had become “irresponsible corresponsibles”, supporting the Nazi regime by following orders and acting as cogs in a machine of mass murder. In trying to understand what made people support the Nazis, Arendt focused her attention on the person who boasted of being the organising spirit of the murder. This man was Heinrich Himmler. Arendt argued that Himmler was neither a Bohemian like Goebbels, nor a sex criminal like Streicher, nor a perverted fanatic like Hitler, nor an adventurer like Göring. He was, instead, a good *pater familias*, with all the outer signs of respectability, incapable of betraying his wife and anxious to seek a secure and decent future for his children. (Arendt 1945)

For Arendt, the real horror lay in the fact that this kind of a good family man had become the greatest criminal of the century. More precisely, the trouble with the Nazi perpetrators and their fellow travellers and followers was that they were not composed of a group of perverted criminals with their heads full of evil motives. They were, instead, apparently normal family men who attempted to conform to

and obey the rules and practices of the society, to act decently, pursuing a successful career and good standard of living for their families.

These reflections during the immediate postwar period show that Arendt had formed her view of the character of the Nazi criminal well before Israeli intelligence captured Adolf Eichmann in Argentina in 1960. However, she had not by then seen a Nazi criminal alive. Therefore, she wanted to attend his trial in Jerusalem. This book deals with the immense debate provoked by the report that Arendt wrote of the trial. One of the conspicuous characteristics of the debate that continues to re-emerge every now and then is that, until recently, these early reflections of Arendt have been systematically dismissed. While the contributors do believe that Arendt had formed her view of Eichmann's character well in advance of the trial, they claim that she did so only based on the newspaper coverage of his capture in 1960.

The immediate postwar period from the 1940s to the trial of Adolf Eichmann in the beginning of the 1960s in Jerusalem witnessed a relatively quick turn, both in defeated Germany and other European countries, from the mourning of victims of war and general devastation and suffering caused by the war to looking forward to economic recovery and restoration. Even if the postwar period is not simply characterised by silence and lack of debate over the questions of guilt and responsibility and the fate of the victims of the Nazi terror – as a number of historians have tried to prove – it is fair to argue that, in general, people were more interested in rebuilding Europe and their own lives than mourning the victims and arguing over guilt and responsibility for war crimes and genocides.<sup>1</sup>

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1. In Germany, one of the few who attempted to analytically and critically discuss the guilt of Germans was the philosopher Karl Jaspers, who not only had an intensive correspondence with Arendt as to how to deal with the guilt and responsibility of Germans and the legacy of the entire Nazi period but also tried to awake public debate by publishing a volume entitled *Die Schuldfrage. Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946). Abbreviated English edition *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Dial Press, 1947).

Having concluded the Nuremberg and other major war crimes trials, the Western powers were also not interested in hunting Nazi criminals. Moreover, the postwar period was characterised by a lack of exact knowledge of the volume of Nazi crimes as the first studies on these were only just emerging. In this respect, the beginning of the 1960s marked a turning point. The first serious studies over the fate of the victims of the Nazi crimes appeared, such as Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of European Jews* (1963). Along with the capture of Adolf Eichmann, a new interest in the Nazi "hunt" and convicting Nazi criminals arose. Some historians, such as Annette Wieviorka (1998), have argued that the Eichmann trial marked the end of the period of silence and the beginning of the era of the witness. More precisely, the Eichmann trial was the first great public event in which the voices of witnesses and listening to the stories of victims of the Holocaust were given a significant role. Other historians have recently argued that the Eichmann trial alone did not usher in an era of the witness. For instance, Henry Rousso (2017) has pointed out that mass testimonies following episodes of extreme violence first appeared during and after the First World War, in particular in the writings of officers and soldiers. This was a new phenomenon resulting from the thresholds crossed by the conflict's cruelty. A small number of Shoah testimonies emerged as soon as the Second World War ended. These brought up another set of questions, extensively debated for 30 years, about their reception and assimilation, a process that cannot be reduced to merely counting the writings published before the 1960s (Rousso 2017, 35–36).

Hannah Arendt covered the Eichmann trial for *The New Yorker*. Her report first appeared in five articles published in consecutive issues only two years later, in 1963. It immediately caused an immense debate among American Jewish intellectuals, which soon extended to other intellectual circles as well. The debate became international as the report appeared in book form, especially after the German

translation appeared in 1964. The debate has continued ever since, almost uninterrupted.

Relatively peaceful moments have been followed by furious and heated wars of words. The original American debate focused mostly on the themes of Jewish responsibility and cooperation with the Nazis in Jewish councils (*Judenräte*), Eichmann's evil motivations, the character of the accused and the meaning of the banality of evil. In comparison, the German and other European debates focused on (the lack of) resistance at large, voluntary collaboration with the Nazis and the position of former Nazis and fascists in postwar European societies. The American and European debates overlapped only partly, and this distinction between the US-centric and Eurocentric debates has been largely recognisable until today.

This book was originally published in 2008. First and foremost, it focused on the original American debate over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) and discussed the question of why American Jewish intellectuals took Arendt's arguably controversial arguments so personally, as if she had written a pamphlet on the moral mindset of American Jewish intellectuals, instead of a report of the trial of a major Nazi criminal and a political judgement of his crimes. Firstly, I tried to draw a careful picture of Arendt's own mindset and the context of writing her book. I analysed her early studies of Zionism and critique of the Jewish state and discussed her conception of and relation with Zionism, arguing that her critical Zionist background constituted the most important part of her personal stance on the Eichmann trial. Secondly, I dealt with the general background of the trial, telling the story of the capture of Eichmann and discussing the public debate caused by it. Thirdly, I analysed the original controversy and its basic arguments, revealing how badly Arendt's book was misread, showing how easily even critical intellectuals may succumb to the temptation of *ad hominem* argumentation. Fourthly, I showed how important a role irony as a trope played in Arendt's argumentative style. Indeed, on the one hand, I argued that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was badly

received in the United States because hardly anybody understood Arendt's ironic style of argumentation. Instead, readers took her text literally, believing that her book was meant to be an impudent and arrogant attack against both the wartime and the postwar Jewish establishment and intellectuals. On the other hand, I claimed that the readership could not bear the sharpness of her argumentation in so far as it mercilessly revealed the political weakness, conformism, inclination to wishful thinking, and lack of political judgement of not only the Jewish leadership and American Jewish intellectuals but also the Western political elite at large. Finally, I discussed the latest developments of the Arendt controversy at the beginning of the 21st century. I argued that the Eichmann trial marked an important turning point in the conceptual revolution of witness and victim, and that Arendt's report had a decisive impact on causing this turn. More importantly, I argued that, around the turn of the century, the readings and debates over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* were disengaged and displaced from the original context of the book and included in the debates surrounding the singularity of the Holocaust and European politics of the past in general.

Hannah Arendt's book itself was by no means about the victims' voices. On the contrary, Arendt harshly criticised the attorney general, Gideon Hausner, for focusing the attention of the court on the sufferings of the victims instead of the crimes of the accused. Furthermore, Arendt maintained that the statements of witnesses were not reliable evidence, either for the court or for the historians, as human memory is treacherous, even more so when traumatic experiences are in question. Even if people do not purposefully lie to the court, they can remember badly or only a part of an experience, or even adopt other people's memories as their own.<sup>2</sup> Three other themes prevailed in the first debate: the Jewish responsibility, the Jewish councils and

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2. For example, Primo Levi has dealt with the fickleness of memory from the victim's point of view. See *I sommersi e i salvati* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), and the English translation, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

cooperation with the Nazis, the nature of Eichmann's evil, and the meaning of Arendt's thesis of the banality of his evil. I showed in my book that, underlying all these three themes of the American debate, there was a hidden layer that dealt with the identity of American Jews and their responsibility for what happened to their European brethren. In addition, intertwined with this hidden layer was the question of the fate of the Jewish state and its right to represent world Jewry. Behind the question of why "they" did not rebel, there was the question of why "we" did not do anything in order to help them. While American Jewish intellectuals were wondering why European Jews did not organise resistance and self-defence against Nazi discrimination and violence, they were ashamed of not having done anything to encourage and help their European brethren. Similarly, behind the question of why "they" cooperated with their perpetrators, there was the question of what "we" would have done in a similar situation. It was easy to criticise the behaviour of European Jews from the other side of the ocean. Hardly anybody understood Arendt's thesis of the banality of evil and what she really meant when she argued that the deeds of the criminal did not correspond to the doer. Even today, Arendt's critics have trouble understanding what her thesis really means. Most critics try to find an explanation of it in Eichmann's perverted morality and his wicked character and end up claiming that there is something wrong with Arendt's own conception of the relationship between morality and politics (of mass murder). In my book, I argue, instead, that the core of the banality of evil was that wickedness was not inscribed in the intrinsic or true nature of human being but in her/his deeds and their consequences. What made these deeds astounding was not their exceptional or devilish nature but their seeming and apparent normality. More precisely, Eichmann did not do evil by personally torturing or murdering somebody but, instead, by first leading the organisation of Jews' expulsion from the Reich and then of their deportation to camps, being one of the principal executioners of the project of annihilation.

In 2008, I concluded the book by discussing then-recent studies of the Eichmann trial and Arendt's report of it. I first dealt with David Cesarani's biography of Adolf Eichmann (2004), according to which the birth of the field of Holocaust studies owes more to the controversy surrounding Arendt's pamphlet than to the trial itself or the role of the victims' testimonies in it, and it was not the trial but the controversy that brought the Final Solution home to millions of people. Cesarani's main argument is that it is Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Adolf Eichmann and his trial that has most decisively shaped our understanding of the Nazi criminal, making Eichmann an icon of the 20th century, of the Nazi regime, and of the genocide of the Jews. In his view, Eichmann has become a metonym for the entire history of the Nazi persecution, the mass murder of the Jews, and its legacy.

I found Cesarani's interpretation somewhat exaggerated but, admittedly, the beginning of the 21st century witnessed a revival of rereading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In these new readings, there was clearly a very different emphasis as compared to the earlier debates surrounding the book. This time, the controversy was not about Arendt's interpretation of Jewish politics, or Eichmann's personality, but on the trial itself, Arendt's interpretation and critique of it, and her impact on the dispute over the singularity of the Holocaust. One of the most passionate advocates of the great significance of the Eichmann trial was Shoshana Felman (2000), who argued that the most important result of the trial was that it inverted our understanding of monumentality and greatness. In the Eichmann trial, the real hero was not the accused; instead, the trial succeeded in showing the greatness of the victims. Felman argued that Arendt failed to see that the Eichmann trial historically created the victim. It was the first time in history that a new legal language and space had been created through the first-hand narratives of victims. Felman's point, in accordance with most Holocaust historians, is that what we refer to as the Holocaust did not exist as a collective story prior to the Eich-

mann trial. Over the course of the trial, the victims recovered the language and acquired the semantic and historical authority of the story of their destruction. The result was an international discussion that defined the experience of the victims and referred to the crime against the Jewish people independently of the political and military history of the Second World War.

Whereas Felman focuses on the greatness of victims and the importance of their stories, Leora Bilsky (2004) approaches the Eichmann trial as one in a chain of political trials held in Israel. For her, the main characteristic of a political trial is that political authorities seek to advance a political agenda through criminal prosecution. As I discuss in this book, in the case of the Eichmann trial, the agenda and aim of the Israeli government were to determine the content of collective memory and the Israeli collective identity as to the Holocaust. Until the trial, the Israeli collective identity had been based on Zionist heroism in terms of which Jewish victimhood of the Holocaust was not appreciated. However, among younger Israeli generations, the memory and appreciation of militant Zionism and years of illegal terrorist fight were fading, and new elements of national identity were urgently needed.

Bilsky (2004) argues that the Eichmann trial played a central role in giving authority to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and making them reliable witnesses in terms of the formation of a legal judgement and the writing of history. Indeed, the Eichmann trial contributed to source materials for historians: a new approach of writing history based on victims' testimonies was born. However, it seems to me that Bilsky's interpretation takes it for granted that in the political trial both parties are treated equally and can present their case equally forcefully. In practice, this is not always the case. It is enough to think of the Moscow trials of the 1930s to understand that the political trial very easily turns into a show trial in which the prosecutor really sets the stage. As to the trial of Adolf Eichmann, neither Felman nor Bilsky really deals with the fact that several wit-

nesses on the defender's side were not able to enter Israel because they were wanted. This did not, of course, affect the result of the trial, but it may weaken Bilsky's argument of the greatness of political trial as transformative event.

The Eichmann trial – or, in broader terms, the Holocaust – did not remain the only context of the politics of victims and victimisation discourses. On the contrary, during the past 20 years, the victimisation discourse has spread globally and been adopted in different kinds of local and national contexts. Jie-Hyun Lim (2014) has argued that victimhood discourses have not remained exclusively related to the Holocaust; instead, victimhood has become a transnational theme that dominates the emergence of memories of mass dictatorship. Lim argues that the rise of a global public sphere has created a space for the contestation of conflicting national memories. For instance, the cosmopolitanisation of Holocaust memories has resulted in the re-territorialisation or re-nationalisation of memories as non-European victims of colonialism begin to equate themselves with Holocaust victims in the processes of decolonisation and nation-building. To many postcolonial regimes, Israel has become a reference point as “a little Great Power”. Most importantly, given that the global public sphere tends to be sympathetic to innocent victims, nations have been increasingly engaged in “a distasteful competition over who suffered the most”.<sup>3</sup> A global confessional culture has emerged in which victimhood narratives can promote national identification that cannot be achieved in other ways. As a result, an international competition for victimhood gives birth to victimhood nationalism, which is based on the dichotomy of victimising nation/victimised nation (Lim 2014, 35–36).

While the first two decades of the 21st century have witnessed a global process in which victimisation discourses have spread everywhere and the reference to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust is

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3. Lim borrows this expression from Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (2004).

weakening and fading,<sup>4</sup> in Arendt studies, several new developments have taken place. Some of these are more or less direct continuations of the Eichmann – or Arendt – controversy, while some others draw from Arendt’s early writings and the Eichmann report in order to focus on new themes often connected with burning political problems of the contemporary world. The most interesting developments have, probably, taken place in legal studies, political theory and human rights discourse (Birmingham 2006; Hayden 2009; Sznajder 2011; Gündoğdu 2015; see also Parvikko 2014).<sup>5</sup> It seems to me that, since almost all of Arendt’s early writings, including her Jewish writings and reflections on responsibility and judgement,<sup>6</sup> have appeared, Arendt scholars have adopted more comprehensive strategies of reading and interpretation, paying growing attention to changes and differences between Arendt’s early and later writings. In the following, I will discuss a few of the most important new approaches to the Eichmann/Arendt controversy. In addition, I will introduce a few approaches that instead draw from the Eichmann report, aiming at developing Arendt’s ideas further. In other words, I will have a look at contributions attempting to think with Arendt to go beyond her thinking.

While global debates over victimhood nationalism mostly deal with entire nations or national groups and their fate under totalitarian

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4. In fact, the spread of victimisation discourses also covers such fields as individual psychology, confessional autobiography, the film industry, and fiction, to mention a few. Not surprisingly, in politics, new populist movements have successfully used victimisation strategies for their own purposes.
  5. There are, of course, also those branches of Arendt studies that draw from her political and philosophical writings, such as *The Human Condition* (1958), *On Revolution* (1963), *Between Past and Future* (1961), *Crisis of the Republic* (1972), *The Life of the Mind* (1978) and *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (1982), without paying particular attention to the Eichmann controversy.
  6. Most importantly, see Arendt (2003 and 2007). A number of Arendt’s correspondences have also been published. As to the Eichmann controversy, probably the most important among these are Hannah Arendt and Kurt Blumenfeld (1995) and Hannah Arendt and Gerschom Scholem (2017).

rule or in the great conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries, leaving the reference to the Eichmann trial and Arendt's interpretation of it to the position of a footnote, a branch of the contemporary Eichmann controversy continues in terms surprisingly similar to the first debate in the 1960s (see e.g. Golsan & Misemer 2017). It is characteristic of these contributions that in one way or another they revolve around Eichmann's personality. One of the most praised contributions of this genre is Bettina Stangneth's *Eichmann Before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (2014),<sup>7</sup> which re-examines Eichmann's life before the Jerusalem trial in the light of archive materials that only surfaced well after the 1960s. Stangneth's interpretation leans heavily on the so-called Argentine Papers, including the "Sassen interviews", which have now surfaced in several archives.<sup>8</sup> None of these materials had been available, either for Arendt or for the court in Jerusalem. On several occasions, Stangneth recognises our debt to Arendt's insights of Nazi totalitarianism and her report of the Jerusalem trial. However, in her reading strategy, there is a highly problematic bias concerning both the criminal and Arendt's interpretation of him. Stangneth depicts Eichmann as a fanatical National Socialist and anti-Semite who never ceased to fight his pro-Nazi war and to seek personal fame and recognition. In Stangneth's view, Eichmann's zeal to annihilate Jews stemmed precisely from his ideological fanaticism and his profoundly anti-Semitic worldview. Further, in her interpretation, Eichmann was an extremely calculating person who never showed in public his inner feelings or motives, but instead always kept a close eye on the impact he was having, try-

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7. The German original was published in 2011 with the title *Eichmann vor Jerusalem. Das unbehelligte Leben eines Massenmörders* (Hamburg: Arche Verlag).

8. The Argentine Papers consist of several hundred pages of Eichmann's own notes in exile. The "Sassen interviews" are transcripts of tapes that were recorded during often "wet" sessions of discussion made by a Dutch journalist and a member of the Waffen-SS, Willen Sassen, Eichmann, and a few of their friends in Buenos Aires in the 1950s. In the 1960s, only tiny parts of these interviews were published in *Life* magazine.

ing to make every situation work in his favour. This may be very true. However, it does not follow, as Stangneth argues, that in Jerusalem Arendt fell into Eichmann's trap, believing that the calm and dry bureaucrat in the glass booth was the real and the only Eichmann that ever existed. Stangneth claims that Arendt was unable to resist Eichmann's cunning strategy of defence of representing himself as an unlucky loser, without really being able to show how exactly her "novel" interpretation of Eichmann's personality differs from Arendt's argumentation. On a careful reading of Arendt's pamphlet, it is clear that she did not cherish any fantasies of the personality of the Nazi criminal, and she avoided the trap of describing him as somehow essentially inhuman, devilish, or monstrous by birth. Instead, she described him as an entirely normal, ordinary man with a strong propensity to self-important boasting, bragging, and bossing about. In addition, Arendt described Eichmann as a devoted careerist whose principal aim was to climb as high up in the Nazi hierarchy as possible. Even if Stangneth's contribution does not markedly differ from Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann, there is a fundamental difference in their approaches. While Stangneth focuses on the person of the criminal, arguing that his evil deeds originated from his evil personality, Arendt focused on his deeds, arguing that evil motives alone do not commit crimes. Stangneth risks being obsessed with the idea that an evildoer must be evil by their nature, and that the wickedness of the deeds of the criminal can be derived and measured by their inner nature or personal character. Arendt simply argued that what appeared before the court in Jerusalem was not Eichmann's inner nature or hidden motives but, instead, his deeds. This is because, for Arendt, it is the deeds that matter, judicially, politically, and ethically. Even more importantly, the Western judicial system has been constructed in such a way that it can deliver justice only based on the deeds of the accused.

Stangneth's (2014) account, which became widely reviewed and commented on, contributed significantly to redirecting the debate

back to its original starting point, focusing on Eichmann's "wicked" personality, the evil nature of his actions and his anti-Semitism. It is noteworthy that, again, the controversy was split in two. While American debaters once again enthusiastically focused on Eichmann's person, German discussions of Stangneth's book centred around the neo-Nazi circle of sympathisers who gathered in Argentina, their connections to post-war Germany, their hopes to influence political events there, and the claim that successive German governments resisted bringing Adolf Eichmann to trial. As Seyla Benhabib (2018, 64–65) has argued, these aspects of Stangneth's book, which directly address the culture of silence and repression in postwar Germany's failing to work through the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) have all been neglected by American commentators. Instead, the trial of Adolf Eichmann has been turned once more into a trial of Hannah Arendt.

Benhabib herself got also involved in this quite repetitive debate over Eichmann's personality, attempting to redirect it in ethical and political terms. Seyla Benhabib and Richard Wolin debated over where Arendt's notion of thoughtlessness originated. This debate took place on the pages of the *New York Times* and the *Jewish Review of Books*, where both authors assessed Stangneth's book, ending up debating Arendt's philosophical background and premises.<sup>9</sup> The debate started when Wolin (4 September 2014) first argued that, by depicting Eichmann as a colourless bureaucratic desk-killer, Arendt sought to downplay the German specificity of the Final Solution and to safeguard the honour of the highly educated German cultural milieu from which she herself hailed. He argued that Arendt had her own intellectual agenda, and – perhaps out of her misplaced loyalty to her former mentor and lover, Martin Heidegger – insisted on applying the Freiburg philosopher's concept of thoughtlessness

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9. The following discussion is based on Benhabib, 21 September 2014; Benhabib, 14 October 2014; Wolin, 4 September 2014; Wolin, 30 September 2014; Wolin, 14 October 2014.

(*Gedankenlosigkeit*) to Eichmann. In so doing, on the one hand, she drastically underestimated the fanatical conviction that infused his actions and, on the other hand, attempted to absolve the German intellectual traditions. Wolin further argued that Benhabib's view, according to which Kant's moral philosophy plays a systematic role in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, is unsustainable because Arendt refers to Kant's theory of judgement only in one meagre passage. To Wolin's knowledge, Arendt only developed these Kantian precepts in earnest in her later writings in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> For Wolin, who maintained that Eichmann's murderous actions were motivated by his evil and anti-Semitic nature, Eichmann's inability to think was essentially a ruse, a conscious tactic that Eichmann employed in Jerusalem to lead the court astray, and had nothing to do with Eichmann's incapacity to think from another's point of view. Benhabib returns to this debate in a collection of articles published a few years later, elaborating on her reflections of the Kantian traits in Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's wickedness. She argues that Arendt's reflections on Kant's moral philosophy are especially relevant to understanding Arendt's use of the term "thoughtlessness" (Benhabib 2018, 70). In order to make proper judgements, Arendt drew from Kant's notion of a different way of thinking, for which it would not be enough to be in agreement with one's own self but which consisted in being able to think in the place of everybody else, and which he therefore called enlarged mentality. Arendt emphasised that the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability in exactly the sense denoted by Kant, namely the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view

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10. Wolin dismisses the fact that Arendt started to read Kant at the age of 15. While her attitude towards Heideggerian philosophy went through a significant change after having learnt about Heidegger's connections to the Nazi Party and its ideology, Kantian philosophy constituted a firm basis for her thinking. At an advanced age, she once noted that, when writing, she always had a sensation that Kant was standing behind her, dictating what she ought to write.

but from the perspective of all those who happen to be present.<sup>11</sup> This is not only something that Eichmann was incapable of; it also was very different from Heidegger's *Gedankenlosigkeit*, to which Wolin attempted to reduce Arendt's concept of thoughtlessness. Benhabib (2018, 72) explains that, in the 1950s, Heidegger complained that what is most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking. However, Heidegger was not referring to the lack of thinking from the standpoint of others; his complaint was that the thing itself that must be thought about turns away from man. The modern man is all too beholden to what others may think and to turning away from Being itself.

Benhabib reminds us that, when Arendt presented her provocative thesis of the banality of evil, she was fully aware of going counter to the tradition of Western thought, which saw evil in metaphysical terms as ultimate depravity, corruption, and sinfulness. In fact, Arendt never stopped pondering the nature of political evil (which Benhabib, unfortunately, continues to confuse with ethical evil). In the first volume of her posthumously published *The Life of the Mind* (1978), Arendt asked again whether the problem of good and evil, our faculty of telling right from wrong, might be connected with the faculty of thought, being convinced that enlarged thought or mentality and taking the standpoint of others was crucial for political and public judgements.

Soon after the heated exchange of arguments between Wolin and Benhabib, Corey Robin's account (2015) of the recent developments of the American Arendt controversy was published in *The Nation*, arguing that one of the reasons Arendt's argument about the banality of evil is so threatening is that it undercuts the ability of political theorists and public moralists to regard the Holocaust as something other than a historical event. He pointed out that the fate of Arendt's

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11. Here, Benhabib quoted from Arendt's essay "Crisis in Culture", published in 1961, in *Between Past and Future*.

book was closely tied to the evolving political and historical sensibilities of diasporic and particularly American Judaism. He argued that the controversialists had moved on to focus on Arendt's treatment of Eichmann's anti-Semitism, the fate of the state of Israel, and the relation of world Jewry to the Jewish state. In accordance with Benhabib, he then suggested that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is the most Jewish of Arendt's texts, filled with a modernist sense of Jewish irony (Robin 2015). While a non-Jewish reader is not necessarily able to grasp why an attempt to create new political morals and banisters for political judgement in the post-Holocaust world – for which Robin praises Arendt's book – were particularly Jewish qualities, it is a fact that recent years have witnessed an appearance of a wave of accounts in which the focus once more is on Jewish identity and on an individual Jew's relation to the state of Israel. In other words, the novelty is not in the theme of Jewish identity, which was at stake right from the beginning of the first controversy in the 1960s, but, instead, in the political quality of at least some of these new approaches. While most accounts in this genre remain faithful to the traditional way of relating or connecting Jewish identity to the existence and fate of the Jewish state and find anti-Semitism in any criticism of the state of Israel, there are also new types of account that attempt to leave the traditional trenches and frontlines of debate and find new ways of thinking about and reading politically the question of Israel/Palestine based on the idea of sharing the world (particularly Palestine) in terms of cohabitation, which is not based on traditional criteria of birth, ethnicity, nationality, or language.

Undoubtedly, one of the most interesting – and for some people also controversial – recent accounts is Judith Butler's *Parting Ways*, published in 2014, which draws significantly from Arendt's critique of the nation state and her discussion of Eichmann's unwillingness to share the world with Jews. Butler (2014) aims to take distance from a traditional Zionist approach to Israel/Palestine and to defend a possibility of a non-Zionist Jewish identity and existence, which

does not consider Israel as a self-evident pre-given Jewish point of reference.<sup>12</sup> She argues that contemporary Jewishness should not exclusively be based on the identification and support of the Jewish state. She attempts to understand how the exilic or diasporic existence of the Jews is historically built into the idea of the Jewish and how, in this sense, to be a Jew is to be departing from oneself, cast out in a world of the non-Jew in order to try to think together the possibilities of the post-exilic cohabitation in Palestine. In more empirical terms, Butler attempts to delineate ways out of the identitarian impasse caused by an exclusive commitment to the Jewish state irrespective of its highly discriminative and colonialist treatment of Palestinian population (Butler 2014, 14-15).

In this context, Butler (2014, 151-180) discusses Arendt's critique of the Jewish state and her ideas of cohabitation – or, in Arendt's term, sharing the world – with other people. She analyses the judgement and verdict made by Arendt in the epilogue of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, according to which Eichmann's greatest crime, in ethical and political terms, was his unwillingness to share the world with the Jewish people. Butler comes very close in understanding that, in Arendt's view, the greatest crime of Eichmann and other Nazis was political by nature: believing that they could decide on who had the right to live on earth, they violated the political principles of sharing and cohabitation that constitute the basic "law" of the human condition (Butler 2014, 162). However, her highly intelligent and inspiring reading of Arendt's judgement fails to grasp two points. Firstly, Butler (2014, 165, 168) seems unable to understand who speaks in the epilogue, arguing that it is as if Arendt were splitting herself in different positions and fighting against her inner rage and contempt to make an objective judgement of the perpetrator. In my view, the entire judgement becomes intelligible only if one realises that the rhetorical

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12. Because of this, she has also received furious attacks from Zionist scholars. See e.g. Berman (2017).

“we” who speaks in the epilogue is the whole of humankind. Arendt’s point is that, politically speaking, by refusing to share the world with the Jewish people, Eichmann committed a crime against the whole of humankind, going against the conditions of worldliness and plurality on which human life and cohabitation on earth is based. Secondly, Butler (2014, 173–175) argues that, paradoxically, in pronouncing her own verdict upon Eichmann, Arendt unintentionally posits herself as a sovereign, almost in a Schmittian (or Agambenian) sense of the term, as someone who has the power to decide over life and death. In Butler’s view, this unintentional sovereignty postulated by Arendt somehow spoils her account of cohabitation. In my view, this is not necessarily the case if one understands that the speaking subject of the epilogue postulated by Arendt is humankind. If one wants to locate a Schmittian/Agambenian sovereign somewhere in Arendt’s text, the proper location would be Eichmann, together with other Nazis, in so far as they believed themselves to have the right to decide on who is allowed to live on earth. In the final analysis, Butler fails to read Arendt’s account politically and understand that Eichmann’s greatest crime, the refusal to share the world with Jews, Roma, communists, and some other groups of people, was political by its very nature, going against the human condition of plurality. Butler (2014, 168) comes close to this understanding by suggesting that the epilogue of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is an exercise of judgement, but then she fails to see that Arendt is exercising political judgement in a post-totalitarian situation characterised by a lack of relevant positive law by means of which to judge entirely new types of crimes such as genocide and the violation of the principle of cohabitation. She fails to see, however, that here Arendt is making a political diagnosis of the post-totalitarian situation as an entirely new and unprecedented situation in which we are not able to lean on pre-given rules or patterns of thought and cannot but judge without banisters.

Nevertheless, there is a problem in Arendt’s verdict, no matter whose voice it is that speaks in the final paragraph of the epilogue:

her own or that of the whole of humankind. This problem is, indeed, connected to the problem of sovereignty, although Butler fails to formulate and locate it correctly: how is it possible that Arendt's "we" assumes the right to pronounce a death sentence? Arendt concludes her verdict as follows:

For politics is not like the nursery: in politics obedience and support are the same. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world – we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang. (Arendt 1963/1965, 279)

It seems that here, indeed, Arendt herself goes against the basic principles of cohabitation and human plurality. Does not the human condition of plurality and cohabitation refuse the possibility of killing anybody as far as killing means going against this condition? Butler dealt with this problem in an earlier article, but, for some reason, leaves the discussion of it out of *Parting Ways*. In a 2011 article, she first argued that Eichmann's crime was that he failed to think; he failed to judge; he failed to make use of practical reason, in the Kantian sense of the word (Butler 2011, 283). However, as Russell A. Berman (2017, 142) has argued, these are rather the conditions of Eichmann's crimes. Butler (2011) elaborates on her argument and claims that Eichmann's final crime was that he, together with others, took as their own right the decision over whom to share the earth with. In other words, Butler also claims that Eichmann's final crime was the crime of not sharing. Here we come again to the problem of capital punishment. Butler (2011, 287) correctly asks: according to what law, norm, or principle is the decision in favour of capital punishment justified in this case? She points out that Arendt's verdict gives a convincing account of why no one really wants Eichmann alive, but it does not explain whether that is a sufficient condition for the justification of the death penalty.

In fact, in this matter Arendt disagreed even with Karl Jaspers, with whom she had a lively correspondence about the Eichmann case right from his kidnapping to the years of controversy (see Arendt & Jaspers 1992). According to Jaspers, it would have been better, at least in Israel, to leave Eichmann without a punishment proper. He wrote to Arendt that it would have been wonderful to do without the trial altogether and make it instead into a process of examination and clarification (Arendt & Jaspers 1992, 413). The goal would have been the best possible objectification of the historical facts. Israel would then have placed the evidence and the criminal, hopefully, at the disposal of the United Nations, although it is probable that nobody would have wanted to have anything to do with the case. Then Jaspers made an extremely interesting remark about the relationship of the Eichmann case with the political realm. He pointed out that the political realm is of an importance that cannot be captured in legal terms, although the Anglo-Saxons self-deceptively attempt to do so. However, in Jaspers' view, being "political" has dignity, which is larger than law, and which the case of Eichmann does not have. It has no dignity, but it is for the sake of truth and clarity that it must be lifted out of the merely legal framework.

In my view, Butler comes very close to Jaspers' viewpoint. She notes that the political point of Arendt's rejoinder to Eichmann is that one must make clear that there exists no such right as the right to choose with whom to cohabit the earth. From this, it follows that to exercise such a right is to invoke a genocidal prerogative; it is only for those who have implemented genocide that the death penalty is apparently justified. In addition to the paradox included in this set-up, Butler correctly points out that we do not receive on these pages a justification for why that penalty, rather than some other form of punishment, is appropriate (Butler 2011, 291–292).

The question of capital punishment in the cases of crimes against humankind has puzzled jurists, even since the capture of Adolf Eichmann, and it remains one of the themes that arouse interest and

debate among scholars of law, while other scholars and participants in the Arendt controversy have more often than not almost completely ignored it.<sup>13</sup> In the field of legal theory, there is an interesting recent account by Peter Burdon (2018, 103), which acknowledges that, as a political theorist, Arendt writes unbounded by the law and the rules of precedent. Consequently, she is also free to connect crime, punishment, and forgiving together in a way uncommon in the ordinary practice of law. Instead of law, she relies on a pre-legal understanding of responsibility and practical reason to ground her judgement. She asks us to consider human judgement not as bound by existing law or norms but as something that produces its own virtue through the act itself. Burdon (2018, 105) argues that it is possible to reconcile Arendt's instantiation of the death penalty with reference to her earlier writings on punishment and forgiveness. More precisely, in some earlier writings, Arendt argues that you can only punish what you can forgive because forgiving represents a beginning again. If an event is unforgivable then you cannot punish it, and thus the death sentence comes into play. Burdon finds this reasoning austere and ultimately unacceptable because it leaves unclear how it distinguishes itself from other kinds of violence. In addition, Arendt did not critically examine her support for the death penalty or connect Eichmann's death with her critique of the political aims of the trial. However, Burdon points out that it is likely that she intended her commitment on the unforgivability of thoughtless evil to apply only with respect to mass crimes like genocide or crimes against humanity. Thus, for Arendt, when people knowingly or thoughtlessly engage in genocidal acts, they take leave from human plurality and put themselves outside the bounds of forgiveness (Burdon 2018, 106–107). And yet, I would add, the question remains whether any human being can assume the right to decide on any other human being's life and existence.

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13. I also previously ignored the problem of capital punishment in Parvikko (2000), which gives an account of the pre-trial debate of positivists and moralists in international law.

Despite this critique, Burdon (2018, 110) claims that Arendt's ability to hold a place in her mind for the unprecedented and her refusal to collapse new events into traditional concepts or recognisable tendencies is valuable and also of utmost importance for us when we try to analyse and judge contemporary phenomena. He argues that the failure to confront the unprecedented and draw distinctions was most powerfully expressed in the reflexive way Donald Trump has been labelled a fascist or the way intellectuals have sought to understand Trump through Max Weber's description of charismatic leadership. This tendency to substitute and shuffle ideas, or assimilate conventional categories, destroys the boundaries between discrete objects and is something that the historically minded should resist. Here, Burdon goes with Arendt against the tradition of law and legal theory of searching for precedents in order to judge present-day phenomena. In this way, he comes very close to my argument in this book that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* ought to be read as a political judgement of unprecedented crimes of a new type of criminal.

More importantly, Burdon (2018, 111–112) suggests that we should not ape Arendt's account of Nazi totalitarianism in our attempts to understand novel political developments of contemporary democracies but, instead, go beyond it and try to assess and judge new phenomena without pre-given norms and patterns. Instead of prophesying historical repetition of former phenomena, we would do better to attempt something like Sheldon Wolin's (2008, xvii) characterisation of contemporary politics as "inverted totalitarianism", a political hybrid where economic and state powers are conjoined. According to him, it is not a political party but, instead, neo-liberal capitalism that seeks total power and gives rise to its own unique pathologies. The corporate interests driving inverted totalitarianism speak in the language of freedom and democracy, representing themselves in a manner that suggests a deep respect for democratic institutions and the rule of law. However, these same forces corrupt and manipu-

late democracies, shifting them away from democratic principles towards a situation where governance is directed by private interests and democratic values saturated with market values (Wolin 2008, xxi).

Another extremely interesting and inspiring account on recent political developments, drawing from Arendt, is Michael Rothberg's (2019) notion of the implicated subject that approaches responsibility and commitment of posterity in relation to past atrocities. He picks up the term "implicated" from Arendt's article *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship* (1964), in which she writes: "Whoever participates in public life at all, regardless of party membership or membership in the elite formations of the regime, is implicated in one way or another in the deeds of the regime as a whole." (Arendt 2003, 33)

While Arendt's reference is to Nazi Germany, Rothberg takes as his task the recontextualisation of the term for wider usage, drawing from another of Arendt's texts published in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial. He quotes Arendt from her article *Collective Responsibility* (1968), in which Arendt approached the question of political responsibility for things we have not done. She concluded her reflections as follows:

This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community. (Arendt 2003, 157–158)

Rothberg (2019, 46) suggests that, in these articles, Arendt went beyond the immediate context of Nazi totalitarianism and opened up a more general issue that has a diachronic, or historical, dimension as well. She was not only thinking about everyday life in Nazi Germany but also simultaneously confronting questions of respon-

sibility in the aftermath of political violence. In this sense, political responsibility not only encompasses those implicated at the time of the events without directly participating in them but also political communities that are transgenerational in nature. Although not guilty of what precedes us, we remain captive to communal or political responsibility by virtue of our participation in a collective way of life.

Rothberg (2019, 1) suggests that Arendt's concept of implication can be helpful when we try to find adequate concepts for describing the manifold indirect, structural, and collective forms of agency that enable injury, exploitation, and domination but that frequently remain in the shadows. In order to describe such relations of indirect responsibility, he proposes the category of the "implicated subject" and the related notion of implication. Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm. They contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control those regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generates the position of victim and perpetrator.

Rothberg (2019, 13) points out that the term closest, both semantically and etymologically, to "implication" is "complicity", which refers to partnership in an evil action, i.e. operating in proximity to the notion of criminal guilt. Complicity presupposes implication, but implication does not always involve complicity. Complicity works best as a term linked to unfolding processes and completed actions (such as the perpetration of a crime) but it works less well for describing the relationship of the past with the present. Rothberg argues that we are implicated in the past but we cannot be complicit in crimes that took place before our birth. Indeed, neither the concept of complicity nor that of collective responsibility accurately captures the unevenness of our relations to the past and present. For example, the racial hierarchies that define the contemporary US mean that even people

fleeing from traumatic histories may find themselves implicated in the distant crimes of slavery and genocide, especially if they are able to benefit from inclusion in the category of whiteness.

Rothberg's (2019, 20) fundamental argument is that the wicked things we are experiencing are still possible because most people deny, look away from, or simply accept the benefit of evil in its extreme and everyday forms. He points out that implicated subjects are often versions of the obedient and complacent mediocre subjects theorised by the philosopher Simona Forti in *New Demons*. Forti (2014, 179) argues that passivity, consent to authority, and the "normativity of nonjudgement", which are aspects of obedience, serve as the carriers of political evil, as its effective transmission belt. Even worse, the things we are experiencing are also still possible because most people refuse to see how they are implicated in historical injustices.

In conclusion, I would like to argue that the past ten or 20 years have witnessed a revival of debates around *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. While a section of these new contributions continues to repeat old arguments, new approaches have also emerged that attempt to establish distance from old interpretations and viewpoints, and think with Arendt beyond Arendt. In my view, among the most promising accounts in this field are Peter Burdon's suggestion of approaching new political phenomena from the viewpoint of Arendt's concept of unprecedentedness and Michael Rothberg's notion of the implicated subject, which help and encourage us not to remain trapped in old debates but, instead, to understand that diachronic and synchronic political analyses are not mutually exclusive but instead presuppose each other.

It is precisely in this context that my account of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the controversy aroused by it continues to offer a contribution to the scholarly discussion. Having been one of the first *political* readings of Arendt's pamphlet, my aim was to intervene in the debates surrounding it by pointing out the political value of the book. In my interpretation, Arendt made a strong political argument according

to which one of the most important reasons that made Hitler's rise to power and his policy of genocide possible was the tendency of European political elites – Jewish elites included – to wishful thinking based on lack of political judgement. Despite the entire European continent falling into the hands of dictators (Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, Metaxás in Greece, etc.), European power elites refused to face the truth and ponder the political consequences of these developments. Or, even worse, they greeted new dictators almost admiringly as counterweights against Stalin's communist empire, and they did not raise a finger when communists and other forces of opposition were put in jail in these countries. The reverse side of the elites' wishful thinking and lack of political judgement was the conformism of large masses of people. In her book, Arendt was interested in pointing fingers not so much at the moral or legal guilt of the Nazi criminals – which is all too evident – but at the political responsibility for the Nazi crimes, arguing that what we all share are not the crimes but the political responsibility for the circumstances that allowed them to happen. The decisive character of these circumstances was the willingness of ordinary people not only to conform and acquiesce but also to actively support any form of power. In this general frame, Adolf Eichmann belonged to those who actively climbed up the Nazi ladder and co-participated in the production of genocide.

In a political reading, Eichmann's greatest crime also appears in a different light from those interpretations that focus simply on the wicked personality of the mass murder. More precisely, one of the originalities of Arendt's view on Eichmann's crimes is looking at them in the context of the common world of humankind, which, according to her, ought to be shared fairly between everybody in freedom and equality. The intention and aim of liquidation of a certain group of people from the earth means that, politically thinking, the greatest crime of the Nazis – Eichmann included – was that they did not want to share the common world with other people but, instead,

attempted to assume the privilege of deciding who is allowed to live on the earth in the first place. For Arendt, this was the only reason other people could not share the world with Adolf Eichmann.

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Jyväskylä, summer 2008

Tuija Parvikko



## INTRODUCTION

This is a study of Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which caused a furious uproar immediately after its appearance in 1963, especially in the American Jewish community. The level of controversy it caused remains unparalleled in political thought; once it broke out it really never calmed down. On the contrary, the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed the appearance of a number of new readings of the Eichmann trial and Arendt's impact on our understanding of both the character of the Nazi criminal and the historical and political significance of his trial.

In this book, I will re-examine both the "original" controversy and its background and some of the recent analyses of the Eichmann trial. I will ask why it was precisely Arendt's report of the Eichmann trial that caused such a heated debate given that she did not say much more in it than many others had said before her elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> I argue that Arendt's book was badly misread or misunderstood for several reasons. A significant portion of these misreadings were intentional and based on the fact that Arendt touched upon issues that were provocative and sensitive to the American Jewish establishment and the state of Israel. These quarters were politicking with the past in

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1. In the Netherlands, for instance, Harry Mulisch's depiction of Eichmann as "the calm, dutiful civil servant" was received without much protest (cf. Mulisch 1961/2005) while Arendt's argument of Eichmann's ordinariness was immediately counter attacked. Harry Mulisch covered the Eichmann trial for the Dutch weekly *Elseviers Weekblad*. Similarly to Arendt, he later published his reports in book form revising and adding to his original accounts.

terms of their attempt to control the conceptions of wartime Jewish politics and the significance of Auschwitz for future generations. They attempted to suppress critical assessments of their own wartime policy. Nevertheless, most independent American Jewish intellectuals were also offended by Arendt's report. They found in it accusations of their own political passivity and irresponsibility with regard to the fate of European Jews during the war years.

I argue that these heated reactions can be explained by rereading the pamphlet in its proper context and analysing the debate in the light of this context. I claim that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a political judgement of the trial and deeds of the accused, and should be read as such. In addition, I argue that from a broader perspective, the book may be read as a political judgement of the entire European wartime political culture, both Jewish and gentile. These claims apply to both the interpretations of those who were involved in the controversy and Arendt's own understanding of her intentions in the book. I challenge the participants in the controversy by arguing that their fundamental mistake was – and still is – to argue in line with those who started the defamation campaign against Arendt. I challenge Arendt's own understanding by stating that she actually went much further than simply "reporting" on the trial, as she maintains in the book. She also made her own political judgements not only on the trial and the actions of the accused, but also on Jewish wartime policy and the entire European political tradition and field of thought. Consequently, I argue that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* should be read not as a theoretical treatise of political judgement (in the Kantian spirit), but, rather, as a concrete judgement of specific empirical case and situation.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that Arendt underestimated the possibilities of controversies and protests. As the present study shows, Arendt's "report" is full of accounts that were apt to give rise to vigorous protests. Among other things, Arendt was selective as to the themes she chose to deal with out of the totality of the

trial. For instance, she blatantly ignored the victims' testimony while dwelling heavily on Eichmann's personality and the tactics of the Israeli government. She focused on the normative setting of the Nazi Reich (obeying is accepting) and the political analysis of the wartime situation, suggesting that it could have unfolded differently. Furthermore, Arendt's conception of history as based on the contingency of human action and her rhetorical and narrative strategies based on the systematic use of irony and synecdoche were unusual and provocative. All of these themes were so controversial that it is not at all surprising that they provoked debate. What is surprising, however, is the sheer volume of the debate. While most corresponding provocative textual interventions are passed over in silence, Arendt's book provoked one of the most intense "literary wars" in world history. It is this fact that makes rereading the debate interesting.

Moreover, I argue that the book and the controversy surrounding it are not only related to political judgement. In retrospect, it is easy to see that Arendt's book and the reaction to it were also about politicking with the past. Irrespective of the fact that nobody talked in the 1960s about the "politics of memory," the "politics of the past," "Holocaust studies," or "victim studies," the decisive impetus for the public debate was the hidden controversy over exactly how the politically and ethically ambivalent and controversial war years ought to be remembered and the actions of the Jewish leaders judged.

In order to fully understand what *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is about, we should ask what and how Arendt judged, as it is only through these questions that we can reach the book's core and its gift to future generations. This gift is Arendt's uncompromising stance according to which political meaning – on the basis of which we may be able to distinguish right from wrong in political terms – appears in deeds and not in the essences behind them. In doing so, we are able to see that Arendt was indeed way ahead of her time. She courageously linked and openly stated things that everybody

knew but very few dared to say aloud, thus bringing their political meaning to light.

I will illustrate here that Arendt's critique of the Jewish establishment and Jewish wartime politics in general only become intelligible and clearly visible when related to her early writings on Jewish politics and Zionism, which were published in the 1940s and 1950s. I challenge the widely adopted way of reading the book as a quasi-philosophical treatise inspired by Kantian philosophy. For me, the book is a *political* judgement, which means that its arguments make sense only *in concrete*. The guiding principle of my reading strategy is the Arendtian conviction that political meaning can never be deduced from universal and timeless categories or imperatives but, rather, always emerges from individual events and phenomena.

One possible way of defining judgement is to distinguish it from thinking, which is not situated in a temporal or spatial sense. The act of judging is thinking in a given time and space. Whereas thinking is a profoundly solitary and inherently endless enterprise which does not necessarily require expression, judging always requires being heard and appearing in front of others. This is what connects it to rhetoric: political judgement cannot be expressed, i.e. actualised, without speech acts. It is always expressed in rhetorical form, and it always uses rhetorical skills. Political judgement, along with some other modes of political action, is an activity which takes place, either directly or indirectly, in public.

As a political judgement, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, too, ought to be read as a public speech act. This means that attention should not only be paid to *what* Arendt says but also to *how* she says it and how she presents her arguments. I argue that the book has mainly been misread as regards its rhetorical style and strategy. The most common misreading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is the result of readers taking everything Arendt writes literally. This kind of literal reading strategy has prevented readers from seeing and understanding one of the most important aspects of Arendt's rhetorical style, which is

based on the systematic and even extreme use of synecdoche and irony, based very much on the Burkean model. It is virtually impossible, for example, to understand Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's personality and deeds or her critique of Rabbi Leo Baeck without seeing them as full of ironic remarks that are not intended to be taken literally.

Nevertheless, Arendt's use of irony is a central aspect of her political critique and judgement. In other words, for Arendt, irony is a stylistic tool of political analysis and judgement and should be seen as a constitutive element of her textual strategy. More precisely, Arendt constructs dialectical ironies by means of synecdoche, which she understands as a representative anecdote in the Burkean sense. Arendt highlights this irony by putting opposing representative anecdotes against each other or drawing parallels between them. It is by drawing out and highlighting such ironies that she manages to politicise the phenomenon under scrutiny. Things which initially seem self-evident, such as, for example, Rabbi Baeck's wisdom as a Jewish leader, begin to appear ambivalent, doubtful and contradictory when viewed in this way. It is precisely by means of these politicising ironies that Arendt pinpoints the ambivalent and questionable aspects of Jewish leaders and their politics.

A number of Arendt's most important arguments in the book are built upon ironies and paradoxes that are not only sharp but also rather extreme, and quite intentionally so. In my view, her intention was to push certain characteristics of the phenomenon under scrutiny to the extreme in order to illuminate her own point as effectively as possible. The problem with extreme ironies is that most people seem to be unable to face them and admit their politicising effect. Instead, extreme ironies tend to paralyse people's sense of humour and their ability to judge. I suggest in this book that if our goal is to carry out an adequate and well-grounded analysis of politically extreme situations – such as the destruction of the European Jews – we cannot do so without pointing out the paradoxes and ironies related to them, as there are simply too many of them to ignore. I will also

argue that the inability to understand and conceptualise extreme ironies can be interpreted as a sign of political illiteracy and the poorly developed capacity to make political judgements. It is possible that our political literacy and ability to judge can be improved and potentially grow to transgress a certain limit of sentimentality only if we learn to face and read extreme ironies.

In the subsequent chapters I will reread *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the debates surrounding it in the spirit of a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. This means three things. First, I will not provide a general account of the contents of the book, as my assumption is that the reader is acquainted with it. Second, my intentional and unavoidable perspective on the book and the events dealt with in it is that of a scholar who belongs to a later generation and thus has no personal memory of the original context of the Holocaust or the Eichmann trial. More precisely, I approach the Eichmann controversy from the spatial and temporal distance of a scholar who comes from a country in which the number of the Jews has been quite limited and the political status of the Jews has been marginal. This kind of peripheral position provides me with a perspective that allows me to pose and deal with questions that have not been widely discussed so far. Third, I will approach *Eichmann in Jerusalem* from the context of its background, aiming to prove that Arendt's arguments only become intelligible when viewed through it. In other words, I attempt to shape the most relevant characteristics of Arendt's own intellectual, historical, political and personal context, i.e. what she had in mind when she wrote the book. In doing so, I am able to avoid drawing my own conclusions prior to presenting my empirical analysis of the context and debates, presenting my own interpretation only in the final three chapters of this book. Even then, I will not attempt to present an interpretation of everything Arendt wrote, focusing only on the most important arguments of the book in the context of the present study.

My analysis in the subsequent chapters will begin with Arendt's relationship to Zionism. Any reader of the present study should be aware and informed about both Arendt's early writings on Zionism and her personal yet often critical commitment to the Zionist movement. These writings indicate that Arendt was never actually an anti-Zionist, as some of her critics have claimed. Rather, she was a passionate critic of Zionist politics whose greatest dream was that one day the Jews would be able to think politically and create a community of their own in political terms – a community which would allow them to share the world with other groups of free and equal people. During the 1930s and 1940s, Arendt developed a political critique of the Zionist movement and Jewish politics in general. The cornerstone of this critique was the notion that the principal mistake made by European Zionist and Jewish political leaders was that they applied the same general policy of concessions for centuries despite the significant changes which took place in the political situations. The Jewish politics of concessions was based on an understanding of the nature of antisemitism as a permanent, unchangeable, and “eternal” phenomenon. In the context of this understanding, it was impossible to distinguish between different kinds of enemies. It never dawned on the Jewish leadership that the Nazi enemy was entirely different from their earlier enemies and that the application of the same policy of concessions they had used in the past would not work with the Nazis and would ultimately prove fateful for the entire European Jewish population. I argue that it was in the light of this critique of Jewish politics that Arendt also judged the wartime politics of the European and American Jewish leadership.

In Chapter Two, I will review the empirical context of Eichmann's capture and the pre-trial discussion of it in the American press. This is crucial if we hope to reach an understanding of what really happened, as so many untrue or biased versions of this story have been told and continue to persist to this day in the literature on

the subject. It is also important to keep in mind that Eichmann's trial was profoundly political by nature, as Israel's Premier David Ben-Gurion deliberately attempted to use it for his own political purposes. In addition, this chapter points to the fact that most of Arendt's arguments about the trial and the accused had already been presented by journalists and intellectuals before the trial even began. In other words, a fair amount of Arendt's evaluations and arguments may be seen as a kind of summary of the general public discussion before and during the trial. The odd thing is that they were only received as scandalous and controversial when she presented them.

Chapter Three will begin with a description of how Arendt's own stance towards the trial developed step-by-step from the days immediately after the kidnapping to the first days of the trial. Contrary to Karl Jaspers, with whom she actively corresponded during the pre-trial months, Arendt defended Israel's right to indict Eichmann. It was only during the trial itself that she grew critical of many of its aspects. I will continue by presenting the most important aspects of the beginning of the defamation campaign against her trial report and analyse how the "front lines" of the controversy began to take shape. I will also demonstrate that the very first reactions to Arendt's report were by no means exclusively negative and that a campaign had to be organised in order to turn the entire body of American Jewish intellectuals against her. This campaign was based on a very selective and distorted reading of the book. I will argue that the campaign against her was a clear case of political persecution which would stigmatise Arendt for the rest of her life. Hannah Arendt became a victim of the attempt of the leading Jewish organisations to conceal and hide certain unpleasant characteristics of their own wartime policy.

In Chapter Four, I will analyse the first phases of the controversy proper and demonstrate how it originally took shape on the pages of the German Jewish immigrants' weekly *Aufbau*. I will also point

to the fact that Arendt's position in the American Jewish community would probably never have become so threatened without her public excommunication by the highly esteemed Jewish philosopher Gershom Scholem. I will show that the two major themes of the controversy surrounding Arendt's report concerned Jewish cooperation on the one hand and the nature of Eichmann's evil on the other. The debaters were not able to get past this empirical level of the book and really fully grasp what Arendt was trying to say. This becomes most clear when viewed in the light of the analysis of the debate among intellectuals. Because it was less directed and shaped by the Jewish organisations than the debate which took place in the newspapers and weeklies, it provides a good context in which to approach the question of why the entire Jewish intelligentsia became so enraged over Arendt's book. In other words, the debate which took place within the intelligentsia is interesting and important because it was not motivated by direct political or power interests; something else was at stake here. What was at stake was the question surrounding the personal responsibility of American Jewish intellectuals for what had happened to European Jews in particular and what was going to happen to the Jews of the world in general. The Jewish intelligentsia read Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership as an accusation of its own political ignorance and irresponsibility, which was shaped by self-deception. This is why much of the debate was about what people should and could have known during the 1940s. In addition, it was characteristic of the American Jewish intellectuals that they were seemingly unable to separate Arendt's book from their then ongoing debate over modern Jewish identity, reading it instead as a contribution to it.

In Chapter Five, I will deal with Arendt's ironies and how she used them in her book. I will begin by discussing irony as trope in Burkean terms in order to clarify what I mean by synecdoche and irony in the context of this book. I suggest that Arendt's way of approaching and understanding reality and its events might be

characterised as what Burke refers to as “poetic realism”. This poetic realism is very much built upon synecdoche and irony in such a way that it allows the political meaning of the phenomenon under scrutiny to emerge. I will continue by rereading Arendt’s ironies in terms of Burkean tropes. I will carry out a closer examination of the three themes in Arendt’s book that caused the most controversy. They are the themes of Jewish cooperation and the role of the Jewish leadership, Arendt’s thesis of the collapse of political judgement and the character of Eichmann’s evil. Finally, I will reread Arendt’s own judgement of Adolf Eichmann and his crimes, which she presented in the final chapters of her report. In fact, she judged not only Eichmann the man but also the trial of the man, discussing the lacunae of Western international law. As to Eichmann, she characterised his evil as a particular kind of thoughtlessness that grew into the extensive and pervasive political irresponsibility also exhibited by most other Nazis. In other words, Eichmann’s callousness was in no way exceptional amongst high-ranking Nazi officials, but was rather almost too typical an example of the organised irresponsibility upon which Nazi politics was based. The fidelity to Hitler was the reverse side of this very same phenomenon, as the understanding of Hitler’s words as law meant that one did not have to take personal responsibility for his or her own actions.

In Chapter Six, I will examine the newfound interest in Arendt’s book in the beginning of the 21st century, which is related to various new readings of the Eichmann trial on the one hand and the debate surrounding the singularity of the Holocaust on the other. One of the main characteristics of these new readings is that they tend to exaggerate the impact of Arendt’s pamphlet on our conception of the Nazi criminal in particular and the Holocaust in general. I will begin this chapter by introducing some of the periodisations of the phases of remembering the Holocaust carried out by some Holocaust historians. I will then discuss a recently presented thesis according to which Arendt’s interpretation of Eichmann has cast a

dark shadow over all attempts to engage in historical research on Eichmann and his trial for decades. Next, I will take up a few of the new readings of the trial, in which Arendt's book is used as a kind of buffer text against which the authors introduce their own readings of the themes dealt with by Arendt. Finally, I argue that Arendt's book has been included in the debate surrounding the singularity of the Holocaust over the past 20 or so years. In my view, recent readings of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* become comprehensible if they are situated in this context.

I will conclude by arguing that in recent decades, Arendt's report of the Eichmann trial has been displaced from its original context of political judgement to that of the dispute over the singularity of the Holocaust and the politics of the past. Attention is not often paid to the fact that Arendt's thesis of the unprecedented nature of the Nazi totalitarianism and the uniqueness of the Holocaust comes very close to the singularity thesis. Nevertheless, what decisively distinguishes these notions from one another is the fact that Arendt never understood uniqueness in absolute terms, which is how the thesis of the singularity of the Holocaust has often been presented in the recent debates amongst historians and other scholars. Arendt's conception of the uniqueness and unprecedentedness of the Holocaust stems from her understanding of the character of political phenomena in general. It is characteristic of the events and phenomena of the human world that they take place only once and without pre-determination. Given the contingent character of human action and its outcomes, the events and phenomena of the human world should be assessed and judged in terms of their uniqueness without confusing it with absoluteness, which tends to mystify and depoliticise the events under scrutiny.

I will also argue that many scholars often fail to recognise that Arendt was one of the first critics of the postwar "silence" about Auschwitz. She wrote a number of articles from Germany over the course of the 1950s based on her own impressions of her first

visits to Europe after the collapse of the Nazi Reich. In retrospect, it is easy to see that these accounts were strikingly “ahead of their time”. In them, Arendt not only criticised the widespread and widely accepted notion of “collective guilt” of the Germans but also pointed to the pervasive unwillingness to take political and personal responsibility for what had taken place. She belonged to those very few who determinately spoke out on the importance of both remembering what had happened and of passing these memories on to future generations without confusing memory with experience. She knew it would not be possible to actually transmit the experience of annihilation, but suggested that it was possible to tell the story of what had happened; only by telling and retelling not only the story of the Holocaust but of the entire Third Reich it would be possible to really grasp the political meaning of these events and pass them down to future generations.

Finally, I will suggest that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* can be understood as one of the first attempts to read the Holocaust politically. In contrast to the present-day scholars of the Holocaust, Arendt emphasised the importance of reading the Holocaust in the general European political context as opposed to separately and immanently in its own terms. While Holocaust studies tend to absolutise and depoliticise the Holocaust by claiming it was an indecipherable and incomparable phenomenon, Arendt invites us to approach it in political terms as an historical and political phenomenon that can be understood only by looking at it in its general context. I will argue that Arendt’s book remains controversial to this day because it goes against the prevailing trend in Holocaust studies of mystifying victims and putting them on a pedestal as heroes of survival, thus refusing to see them as active contributors to their own history.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that none of this actually makes Arendt the “mother” of Holocaust studies and “victimology”. Instead, Arendt’s writings might best be understood as attempts to go against the general currents of her time. These

attempts did not give birth to the field of “political Holocaust studies”, as Arendt might have hoped. Arendt’s insights into how the Holocaust in particular and the entire European political history of the 20th century in general might be read politically remain primarily unused. This provides present-day scholars of political theory and the Holocaust with a valuable source of research material and methodology.



## 1. HANNAH ARENDT AND ZIONISM

In sharp contrast to their eastern comrades, these western Zionists were no revolutionaries at all; they neither criticized nor rebelled against the social and political conditions of their time; on the contrary, they wanted only to establish the same set of conditions for their own people. Herzl dreamt of a kind of huge transfer-enterprise by which 'the people without a country' was to be transported into 'the country without a people'; but the people themselves were to him poor, uneducated and irresponsible masses (an 'ignorant child' as Bernard Lazare put it in his critique of Herzl), which had to be led and governed from above. Of a real popular movement Herzl spoke but once – when he wanted to frighten the Rothschilds and other philanthropists into supporting them. (Arendt 1945a, 357)

As odd as it may sound today, not only for Theodor Herzl but for most Zionists, the area of "Eretz-Israel" was, indeed, a country without a people, an open and empty space waiting for the Jews to return from diaspora. In Herzlian terms, however, the question was not about the old religious tradition according to which only the remnant will return, the remnant being the elite of the Jewish people upon whom Jewish survival exclusively depended. It was, rather, about finding a refuge from the eternal antisemitism that was intended to lead to the persecution of the Jews for as long as they lived dispersed all over the world. Herzl, in fact, even considered the possibility of establishing a Jewish state somewhere other than Palestine. For him, Argentina or Uganda would have also been acceptable, although it turned out that neither place appealed to the majority of Jews (Herzl 1896; Herzl 1922/1956).

When Hannah Arendt wrote the above quoted words in 1945, "the remigration" of the Jews to Palestine had already been in full progress for quite a while. Its main impetus had been neither the Zionist dream of a Jewish homeland nor the Messianic dream of a return to the Holy Land, but rather the cruel reality of the

destruction of Jews that was taking place in Europe. In Arendt's view, however, standing by and watching the events taking place on the world political stage was not sufficient in order to understand Jewish politics in Palestine and "the genesis" of the new national Jewish state. It was also necessary to become acquainted with Jewish tradition and the history of the Zionist movement.

Scholars are not in agreement in their assessments of whether Arendt really ever was a Zionist or not. I think it is possible to argue that she was inspired by Zionism at least for a certain period in her own way. Nevertheless, it is also possible to add that she was never a faithful member of any Zionist branch. She did not enthusiastically celebrate the redemptive notion of the return to the Promised Land as the natural and historically justified right of the Jewish people. For her, Zionism was a form of political self-defence for the Jews and was to be judged and justified as such. As to her personal engagement with Judaism, she was far from a traditionalist. For her, having been born a Jewess was merely one of the basic facts of her life and as such simultaneously self-evident and inescapable, something that shaped and conditioned her life in the contingency of the human world (Arendt 1965, 6; cf. Young-Bruehl 1982, 102–110).

Although it has frequently been pointed out that Arendt never received a thorough religious education but was raised instead in the spirit of German romanticism and its ideas of *Bildung*, it is important to remember that this did not mean that her parents necessarily wanted to conceal the fact that they were Jews. Rather, in the secularised and revolutionary atmosphere of the beginning of the 20th century, the notion of being Jews did not seem to be among the most important and binding facts of life for Bundists like Arendt's parents. They – especially Arendt's mother Martha – were looking forward to the start of a socialist revolution that would resolve the Jewish question by abandoning any kind of national discrimination. A seed of militant political consciousness was, however, sowed into little Hannah's heart by her mother. This

seed was Martha Arendt's conviction that if one was attacked as a Jew, one had to defend oneself as a Jew. Without exaggeration, one can argue that this simple notion of the duty to defend oneself would later constitute the core of Arendt's understanding of Zionist politics as a form of pariah politics stemming from the political need for self-defence and the desire to share a political community with other people in freedom and equality (Arendt 1965, 7–8).

Despite Martha Arendt's passionate attitude towards revolutionary politics – she was a great admirer of Rosa Luxemburg and succeeded in passing down this admiration and respect to her daughter (see Young-Bruehl 1982, 239; Arendt 1968c) – Hannah Arendt's youth was characterised by an apolitical immersion into Greek and German philosophy. It was only when she first met Kurt Blumenfeld, the executive secretary and chief spokesman of the Zionist Organisation of Germany, at the end of 1920s that she began to approach the situation of the Jews in a political context. Rather than considering Zionism a systematic doctrine, Blumenfeld maintained that it was a matter of personal revelation. This did not, however, lead him to see it as a mystical movement, but rather to emphasise its entirely secular and political nature. He was particularly interested in finding an approach to Zionism that would attract his own kind of emancipated and assimilated middle-class Jews. And he did just that in the notion of post-assimilatory Zionism, which was based on the harsh critique of "philanthropic Zionism". He believed that Western European Zionism could not be limited to the return to Palestine through the aid and financing of the great philanthropists without making any changes to the Jewish conception of justice by means of charity and without introducing the conception of authentic political freedom (Young-Bruehl 1982, 70–73; cf. Blumenfeld 1962).

These were, as we have seen in retrospect, the years during which the political antisemitism that began to take shape during the last decade of the 19th century began to intensify in earnest. Blumenfeld

succeeded in convincing Arendt of both the importance and the threat of the emerging national socialist movement to the point that she decided it was time to take action when the Nazis seized power in 1933. The Zionists seemed to be the only ones who were actively interested in the political fate of the Jews, and Arendt mobilised herself to collect proof of antisemitism for the Zionists. This did not last long, however, as Arendt was soon arrested and forced to leave the country upon her release.

It was during her exile in Paris that she really began to throw herself into the Zionist cause in a concrete way. She earned her living by working in the Youth Aliyah of the Jewish Agency, which was engaged in emigrating Jewish children to Palestine. Simultaneously, she embarked on her study of the history of Zionism and lectured about it in the meetings of the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO). It was around this time that she began to delve into the writings of Bernard Lazare. It is likely that Blumenfeld had already introduced her to Lazare's writings in Germany, but she was only able to study them systematically once she was living in Paris, where she found all the original works. It was in Lazare's writings that Arendt re-encountered the notion of the duty to defend oneself as a Jew (Young-Bruehl 1982, 121–122; cf. Parvikko 1996, 114–156). Bernard Lazare was a contemporary of Theodor Herzl, and a significant number of his ideas concerning the Jews and their political fate and future were born out of his critique of Herzlian politics. This is why it is important to briefly examine the cornerstones of Herzlian Zionism prior to turning to Bernard Lazare's highly original critique of it.

### **1.1. THE CORNERSTONES OF HERZLIAN ZIONISM**

In textbook history, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) remains the founding father of the Zionist movement. This is, however, not an entirely accurate assessment. It would be more accurate to say that it

was he who both organised the Western branch of the very divided Jewish national movement into the World Zionist Organization and secularised the ancient Jewish dream of a return to Palestine into a national vision in his book *Der Judenstaat* (1896). In addition, however, it is also accurate to say that the Zionist movement is a movement that was born simultaneously in two areas and in two separate branches.

On the one hand, there was the Eastern social revolutionary branch, which spoke emphatically in favour of emigration to Palestine in order to establish a Jewish homeland that would be based on freedom and justice. Out of these social ideals grew the *chalutz* and *kibbutz* movements, which aimed at the creation of a new type of Jew by combining hard work and contempt for material wealth and bourgeois life (see e.g. Sachar 1976/1996; Sokolow 1919; Vital 1975). In Arendt's view, the problem with this social revolutionary branch of Zionism was its entirely unpolitical nature. Once settled in Palestine, its members formed their own small circles, to the point of being completely unaware of the general destiny of their people. They remained outside the sphere of any appreciable political influence, gladly leaving politics to the politicians. They even tended to view the events of 1933 as a God-sent opportunity for the wave of immigration to Palestine they had only dreamt of until then (Arendt 1945a, 349–350). In other words, instead of making itself the political vanguard of the Jewish people as a whole, the Palestine Jewry developed a spirit of self-centredness which was veiled by its readiness to welcome refugees who would help it become a stronger factor in Palestine (Arendt 1945a, 361).

On the other hand, there was the Western branch of “political Zionism,” which grew out of an extremely strong wave of political antisemitism. The novelty of this new type of political antisemitism was that it was far more organised in terms of its leadership and programme than the traditional religious hatred of the Jews, which never aimed at the complete annihilation of the entire Jewish

population. In addition, it was based on a strongly racist and nationalist ideology that considered the Jews to be inferior human beings who had to be destroyed one way or another. Political Zionism did not, however, remain a mere counter attack against antisemitism. Drawing on socialist and nationalist ideas, it developed its own Jewish nationalistic ideals and goals. Thus, paradoxically enough, an organised Zionist movement as the first political response of the Jews to their plight of oppression and discrimination would probably never have been born in the form in which it was without the emergence of European nationalism, which contained a strongly anti-Jewish element in its belief that every people on earth had its own proper geographical location and should not live anywhere else. In other words, it follows from the nationalistic principle that every people has a proper place on earth and that no dispersed European Jew lived in the right place. From the antisemitic viewpoint, it was essential to force the Jews leave Europe – regardless of where they went and how – whereas from the Zionist viewpoint, it was essential to remigrate to the correct place, which was Palestine (cf. Sachar 1976/1996; Vital 1975).

For Theodor Herzl, the immediate impetus to be awakened “to acknowledge the new situation” was the Dreyfus affair, which drew his attention to the persecution of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> It was in this context that he adopted the specific understanding of the nature of antisemitism that would shape his own branch of Zionism. This understanding stemmed from the adoption of a nationalistic worldview. Herzl shared with the antisemites the conviction that

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2. Herzl was an Austro-Hungarian journalist who worked as a correspondent for the *Neue Freie Presse* in Paris during the Dreyfus trial. The general assumption is that it was precisely this event that turned his attention to the plight of the European Jews. His early work did not focus on Jews but rather on politics and literature in general terms. His early works include *Das Palais-Bourbon* (Leipzig: Duncker u. Humblot, 1895), which is a piece on parliamentary journalism.

all peoples should inhabit their proper place on earth, and that as long as this correct order was not realised conflicts between different peoples and nations were unavoidable. From all this, Herzl concluded that antisemitism was “eternal,” i.e. would never end and could not be fought against on European soil. The only lasting solution was to escape Europe. Religiously, Herzl was far from being an orthodox Jew and was not anticipating the coming of Messianic times and redemption. This is what first led him to conclude that it would be possible to establish a Jewish state somewhere other than in Palestine. However, he soon realised that most Jews, no matter how secularised they were, supported the traditional pattern of a return to Palestine (see Herzl 1896).

In Arendt’s view, one of the decisive mistakes made by Herzl and most other “political” Zionists was their failure to fully comprehend the political nature of the new antisemitism. Instead of searching for an authentically political solution to the plight of the Jews by organising themselves to fight back, their political ignorance led the Zionist leaders to dream of salvation through an escape to Palestine. More precisely, since antisemitism was taken to be a natural corollary of nationalism, it could not be fomented against a world-Jewry that was established as a nation. Palestine was considered to be the only place where Jews could escape the hatred of their people. By the same token, the Jews did not really comprehend how dangerous a movement the new antisemitism actually was, but instead sincerely believed that the antisemites would turn out to be their best friends in their shared desire to purify European soil of the Jews. In Arendt’s view, at the core of this hope and conception was the belief that it does not pay for enslaved peoples to fight back and that one must dodge and escape in order to survive persecution (Arendt 1945a, 360–361; cf. Herzl 1896).

For Arendt, another decisive mistake made by the political Zionists was their inherent elitism. They never even dreamt of mobilising a social revolutionary mass movement of the people

simply because they despised poor masses, regardless of whether they were Jewish or gentile. Thus the Herzlian dream of a Jewish state in Palestine did not contain the idea of a new, more democratic political order but was based instead on the idea of transferring the European political structure to Palestine. Instead of mobilising and organising the Jewish masses into a group that could and would fight against gentile oppressors and the Jewish bourgeoisie, Herzl preferred high diplomacy. He negotiated with the Sultan of Turkey and high-ranking British officials, believing that a piece of Palestinian land could be bought with Jewish money (see Herzl 1922/1956).

In sum, Arendt identifies a highly isolationist and essentially German-inspired version of nationalism as lying at the very core of the Zionist misconceptions. According to this version, a nation is an eternal body and the product of the inevitable natural growth of inherent qualities. It does not explain peoples in terms of political organisations, but rather in terms of organic superhuman personalities. In this conception, the French notion of the sovereignty of the people is perverted into nationalist claims of autarkical existence (Arendt 1945a, 366–367).

## **1.2. THE LAZAREAN-ARENDRIAN CRITIQUE OF THE UNWORLDLY HIERARCHIES OF JEWISH TRADITION**

Bernard Lazare (1865–1903) belonged to those Jews who never dreamt of an escape to Palestine, opting instead to search for a solution to the Jewish question on European soil. Similarly to Herzl, he viewed the Dreyfus affair as a concrete event by means of which it was possible to consider and discuss the situation of the Jews. During the first Zionist Congress in 1897, Lazare was too busy with the affair to attend, spending most of his time attempting to help the Dreyfus family. At the second congress the following year, he was hailed as a hero of the Zionist movement for his role

in the affair. It soon became clear, however, that he was not willing to accept the cornerstones of Herzlian Zionism, as he preferred a more mass-based and democratically inspired version of it that was in keeping with the European context. From this perspective, he identified a major problem of the Jewish condition as based on the very structure of the community. In his view, the external discrimination of the Jews by gentiles was only one side of the coin. On the reverse side, there was the self-prolonged condition of exclusion based on self-chosen isolation and the profoundly hierarchical structure within the Jewish community (Lazare 1901, 135; cf. Arendt 1944a; 1948a).

In other words, the situation of the Jews was characterised by a kind of dualistic exclusion. On the one hand, wherever they went, the Jews were excluded from the society and polity of their host peoples. On the other hand, the exclusion of the Jews was also sustained by their own people. The desire to stand apart from their host peoples mainly stemmed from an ancient Jewish tradition according to which the diaspora was only a provisional period to be followed by a return to the Promised Land. In this situation of double exclusion, the Jews failed to develop any political thinking and tradition of their own, which in turn led to a lack of political ability and judgement. Within the framework of diaspora history, the Jews conceived of themselves as sufferers of history. This conception left no room for the notion of the Jewish people as an active political agent that should unite its forces to fight against oppression and for shared political goals (see Arendt 1948b).

This structure of the traditional Jewish community stemmed, of course, from religious tradition, which did not distinguish between religious and secular leadership. According to tradition, the rabbinical leadership was unquestionable and perpetual. However, over the course of history, another strong Jewish factor emerged alongside this one, namely the role of Jewish money in the European economy. Many Jewish bankers and businessmen were not only successful

in economic terms but also became indispensable to the entire European economy. Although these businessmen did not always remain faithful to the religious tradition, there were many among them who upheld the ancient duty to help their poor brethren. And so the Jewish tradition of philanthropy developed (in detail, see Arendt 1951/1979).

In Lazare's view, the problem of this fairly systematically developed philanthropic practice was that it did not aim at abolishing social disparity and inequality. In other words, it accepted poverty as an inevitable and perpetual fact to be alleviated by the generosity and magnanimity of the plutocracy. What this kind of practice produced was endless and hierarchical chains of gratitude. Instead of finding the charity structures unfair and socially and politically deformed, the average Jew learnt to feel grateful to his or her benefactors. On the basis of his criticism of the hierarchical nature of Jewish power and charity structures, Lazare developed a distinction between the parvenu and the conscious pariah as alternative responses to the peculiar situation of the double slavery of ordinary Jews. The strategy of the parvenu was based on the acceptance of the prevailing situation. In the eyes of the parvenu, the only possible way to avoid the curse of poverty and ignorance was to search for a purely individual solution to it by climbing up the social ladder and becoming assimilated into gentile culture and society. The price to be paid for assimilation was the denial of one's own religious, cultural and social roots, as the gentile society was prepared to include only those who accepted and adopted its habits and beliefs (Lazare 1901, 134; 1928, 41–44; cf. Arendt 1944a).

Lazare believed that the only possible alternative to this false and dishonest strategy of assimilation was the rebellion of the conscious pariah. First and foremost, the conscious pariah rejected the strategy of assimilation, considering it a politically false solution to the plight of the Jews. Assimilation created a self-deceptive belief that the misery of the Jews could be overcome by abandoning one's

personal background and ignoring the fact that assimilation was entirely based upon the benevolence of the gentiles: once this benevolence dried up, discrimination reappeared. In this context, rebellion against gentiles alone was not enough, as parvenuism was also upheld by the philanthropic social practice of the Jews. Lazare saw the conscious pariah as a figure who was not content with merely attacking the gentile society, but who also wanted to fight against the hierarchical power structures within Jewish communities (Lazare 1898, 10; Arendt 1944a).<sup>3</sup>

This Lazarean-Arendtian critique did not, of course, mean that the Jews were not organised at all. Arendt argues that the Jews were not entirely without a polity of their own, but that the problem, rather, was that this polity was politically ignorant and ineffective by nature. The extreme political events of the 20th century have shown that its structures have included a frightening degree of backwardness. According to Arendt, the Jewish quasi-polity of this century was comprised of three elements that constituted the world-Jewry as a single community that belonged together. Firstly, there was the “tribal element,” or the family, which bound the Jews together into living communities and hereditary lines. Secondly, there were business connections that bound families together across international borders. And thirdly, there was charity, a remnant of the once autonomous Jewish communities: “Whereas family and business connections sufficed to keep the Jewry of each country a closely knit social body, Jewish charity had come very near to organize world-Jewry into a curious sort of body politic.” (Arendt 1945a, 356)

Politically speaking, there were two essential problems in this kind of organisation. Most importantly, it was profoundly hierarchical and determined a person’s status either as benefactor or a receiver.

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3. I have analysed in detail Arendt’s conception of Jewish pariahdom in Parvikko 1996.

As Arendt put it, “in this great and truly international organization one had to be either on the receiving or on the giving end in order to be accounted for as a Jew.” (Arendt 1945a, 356) By the same token, it constituted immense hierarchies of gratitude in which the benefactors bought the fidelity of the poor masses with their money. Secondly, together with traditional religious hierarchies, the hierarchical structure of charity replaced the egalitarian political structure in which the members of Jewish communities could have gathered to decide about communal matters in terms of justice and freedom. As far as I can see, this second characteristic of the Jewish quasi-polity is even more important than Arendt seems to realise. It highlights the specific Jewish understanding of justice as a hierarchical and thus non-egalitarian relationship between people. It reveals that in the Jewish tradition, justice is not an impartial and neutral political relationship for which one need not be grateful, but, rather, requires gratitude and recompensation. It was precisely this hierarchical power structure of the traditional Jewish community that Bernard Lazare fiercely criticised in his writings at the end of the 19th century, which later illuminated Arendt’s approach to Jewish politics.

In Arendt’s view, the hierarchical structure of the Jewish quasi-polity also strengthened and perpetuated the tradition of keeping aloof from gentiles. In this sense, the Jewish people maintained the ancient attitude of dividing mankind between themselves and “foreigners,” the Jews and the *Goyim*, as the Greeks had divided the world between themselves and the *barbaroi*. Because of this attitude, the Jews, Zionists included, were willing to accept a highly apolitical and ahistorical explanation of the hostility against them as fortifying “the dangerous, time-honoured, deep-seated distrust of the Jews for Gentiles” (Arendt 1945a, 359). In terms of European political history, this attitude led to irresponsibility: it ignored the role played by the European Jewry in the construction and functioning of the national state (for more on this role, see Arendt 1951/1979).

In addition to the hierarchical charity structures of the Jewish plutocracy, there was, of course, the traditional religious structure, which determined the status of an individual within the family and the community. Whereas the economic plutocracy was reluctant to devote itself to a political revolution because of its economic interests in the existing economic order, the religious plutocracy had no need to devote itself to earthly matters prior to the arrival of the Messiah. In Arendt's analysis, both economic and religious plutocracy were characterised by equally unworldly attitudes, which rendered the Jewish tradition entirely unpolitical and "other-worldly". Within the confines of its profound otherworldliness, the Jewry had learnt over time to cope with the gentiles up to a certain point. This point was the survival of the traditional political order and structure in Europe. The traditional Jewish survival strategies did not, however, provide any tools whatsoever with which to cope with unprecedented and extreme political situations, such as the rise of Nazi totalitarianism (Arendt 1948a, 303–311).

### 1.3. THE CRISIS OF ZIONISM

When Germany occupied France in 1940, Arendt had no choice but to continue her escape to America. Unlike in Paris, where she was unable to get any of her work published, once she settled in New York and joined the local German Jewish intellectual community, she began to contribute to Jewish politics in earnest by publishing articles on Jewish history, the contemporary situation of European Jews and Zionism. These articles clearly indicate that, although Arendt was not a militant Zionist engaged in concrete politicking in Zionist organisations, she was committed to Jewish politics and the fate of European Jews, both intellectually and practically, in her own way. And her way was to observe and analyse Zionist politics from a critical distance. She never became a *homo politicus à la* Blumenfeld, devoted whole-heartedly to a single cause, but preferred instead

to remain a kind of “Socrates” of sorts, evaluating the events and phenomena of the human world from the sidelines.

During the war, Arendt published a large number of her critiques of Jewish and Zionist politics in the columns she wrote for the German Jewish weekly, *Aufbau-Reconstruction*. Arendt scholars have tended to ignore these columns, maintaining that in them, Arendt did little more than reiterate her call for the establishment of a Jewish army. It is rarely pointed out that it was precisely in these columns that she began to develop and mould her systematic critique of Zionist politics.<sup>4</sup> It is for precisely this reason that a few of these columns deserve closer attention in the context of the present study.

In 1942, the participants of the annual congress of the American Zionist Organization were to define which issues they thought should be emphasised in Jewish politics. Arendt was deeply disappointed with the resolutions made during the congress and saw them as a sign of crisis within the Zionist movement and politics. Instead of formulating explicit political claims about the situation at hand, they focused on dreaming about the postwar situation and formulating the Jewish position in future peace negotiations (Arendt 1942a).

In 1942, there was no indication at all that the Jews would have been included as a party to these peace negotiations if they took no steps to ensure their own participation. In Arendt’s view, the reason for the spinelessness and weakness of Zionist politics was all too clear. It stemmed from the unwillingness and incapability to acknowledge the priority of a single programmatic goal in times of war. The Zionists’ main goal should have been the acknowledgement of their right to join the war as a political community or body.

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4. Nevertheless, it may be that Arendt’s early writings may gain more interest among scholars in future as a large number of her Jewish writings are finally being republished in a volume edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Felman. See Arendt 2007.

This principle should have been manifested in practice by the establishment of a Jewish army. It is important to point out that for Arendt, this principle had nothing at all to do with the right to fight against the Nazis, as participation in the war as such did not presuppose a separate army. Single Jews could and certainly did join other national armies (Arendt 1942a).

For Arendt, the grounds for establishing a Jewish army were political rather than military. She identified two reasons why a Jewish army should be created, one being tactical and the other based on principle. The tactical reason stemmed from the need to be able to anticipate the postwar situation and ensure the participation of the Jews in peace negotiations. In order to be able to sit at the table as equal partners, the Jews had to be recognised as an independent party that had waged its own war against Hitler. This would only have been possible by establishing a national Jewish army that would have declared war upon Germany (Arendt 1942a).

The second reason, based on principle, was related to Arendt's conception of politics. According to her, a political community is born by gathering together to begin something new that is related to the common world between people. In this action, freedom becomes actualised as the most important and characteristically political relationship between people. Founding and establishing an enduring political community requires the continuous creation of free relationships. However, in a politically extreme situation such as war, freedom cannot be actualised as an internal fight for power shares within the community, but is actualised instead by the act of fighting against a common enemy. Thus, for Arendt, a Jewish army was not only a military necessity but also a means of self-defence and the realisation of the principle of equal participation and the relationship of freedom in the extreme situation of war and under the threat of mass destruction.

Arendt argued that the first step towards a lasting solution to the situation facing the Jews was to recognise the crisis of traditional

Herzlian Zionism. In her view, there were two standpoints that needed revision. Firstly, the Zionists should have revised their view of who had the right to govern Palestine. After 1500 years of Arab settlement in the area, the Jews could no longer appeal to their natural and historical right to occupy the land. A credible political right to occupy a certain geographic region could only be acquired by cultivating it, by concretely working for the establishment of a cultural and political regime. More precisely, the labour of the land alone was not enough. It was also necessary to establish a tangible common world that people would share with each other. The Jews had only been working towards this end for 40 years (Arendt 1942a; 1942c).

Secondly, the Zionists should have revised their relationship with and policy towards Britain. The Balfour Declaration and the mandate system on which it was based were no longer relevant political alternatives.<sup>5</sup> It no longer made sense to believe, in Herzlian terms, that a Jewish state could have been established as the result of high-level diplomatic negotiations and the mere purchase of a large enough piece of land in Palestine (Arendt 1942a).

According to Arendt, these two elements of the crisis of Zionism revealed a fundamental failure of the movement. It had never developed into a mass movement of the Jewish people. The Zionist leaders had been acting for their people but not been empowered

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5. Here, Arendt had in mind the first Balfour Declaration of 1917, which was an official letter written by Arthur Balfour, the UK's Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, who was seen as the representative of the Jewish people. The letter stated that the British government viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. The second Balfour Declaration of 1926 recognised the self-governing Dominions of the British Empire as fully autonomous states. The British Mandate for Palestine (1920–1948) was a League of Nations Mandate created after the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire was split by the Treaty of Sèvres. The objective of the mandate system was to administer the area of Palestine until it was able to stand alone.

by them. The European Zionist movement had never succeeded in resolving the fundamental contradiction between the revolutionary Jewish mass movement and traditional Jewish plutocracy. It had refused to face the fact that the interests of these two elements were not identical, choosing instead to camouflage the political conflict between them into a national ideological conflict as to whether the Jews constituted a people or not (Arendt 1942b).

Arendt had hoped for much more from the American Zionists, as they had learnt how to engage in politics in a country with a long democratic tradition. This tradition provided them with valuable insights into the revision of Zionist politics. In Arendt's view, the American Zionists had two main tasks. On the one hand, because of their experience with democratic politics, it was their task to democratise the Zionist movement by turning it into a mass movement. On the other hand, they needed to clarify the significance of Palestine in relation to their own political existence. In the American context, it was obvious that the Herzlian dream of the establishment of a Jewish state would not be a solution for all the Jews of the world. Most American Jews did not want to emigrate anywhere. They did not think in terms of the Herzlian conception of antisemitism, according to which antisemitism would plague the Jews for as long as they were dispersed among other peoples in the world. The American tradition of democracy had taught them something about sharing the world with other people: the national basis was not the only possible solution for the peaceful political organisation of people (Arendt 1942b).

But the American Zionists, too, had their own weak point, namely the influence of philanthropic elements in the Jewish community. Instead of thinking in democratic and horizontal terms, American Jews had also learnt to think in hierarchical terms typical of traditional philanthropic practice. The American Zionists were not overly eager to attack and revolt against the traditional plutocratic power structures of their own community, but preferred instead to

conceal their internal conflicts by making politically indefinite and ineffective compromises (Arendt 1942b).

### 1.3.1. The Ironies of Zionist Politics

It is important to remember that in addition to the numerous aspects of substantial criticism of Zionism which are in Arendt's early columns, another characteristic of her political criticism begins to take shape here, too. This characteristic is her style of writing, which caused much of the debate over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The book was said to be full of overstatements and poorly formed ironies which blurred the distinctions between Nazi criminals and their victims. It is true that Arendt clearly favoured an emphatically ironic style when writing the Eichmann book, although I think it is important to note that this stylistic choice was not limited to the context of the Eichmann report. On the contrary, the columns she wrote for *Aufbau* show that it was already part of her early stylistic repertoire. I will give three examples.

The first example concerns Nahum Goldmann's (the then President of both the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization) speech at the American Zionist Conference, in which he suggested that the plight of European Jews would best be resolved through the mass transportation of European Jews to Palestine after the war. Arendt treats this claim as a kind of return to the Herzlian conception of the solution of the Jewish question. She observed that it was no coincidence that another leading American Zionist and member of the congress, Stephen S. Wise, reacted to Goldmann's speech by pointing out a resemblance between the words "transportation" and "deportation" (Arendt 1942a). The irony lies, of course, in the parallel between the national-socialist goal of making Europe *Judenrein* by deporting the Jews out of Europe and the Zionist goal of transporting the Jews to Palestine. It is a well known fact – and one of which Arendt was perfectly aware – that

there were many Zionist leaders in Europe who sincerely believed that these two goals could have been intertwined in such a way that both the Nazis and the Zionists would have been at least somewhat satisfied with the outcome. Aside from the irony of the situation, which only really becomes clear when viewed in retrospect, as we know the outcome of the Nazi Jewish policy, the main point Arendt aimed at making with this ironic observation was her argument that Herzlian politics from above had become entirely obsolete. Instead of playing diplomatic games with large European powers, those who wanted to support the Jewish fight for freedom should have joined their ranks.

The second irony is related to philanthropic politics. Arendt argued that the Jews would not be able to shed their own mistrust of the Palestinian experiment as long as it was presented to them in first class hotels by elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen as an expanded shelter for homeless people. Here, the irony lies in the fact that nobody knew how many homeless people in need of a roof there would actually be after the war (Arendt 1942b). Arendt hints at the possibility that traditional Jewish philanthropy might die a “natural” death through the execution of the Nazi Jewish policy.

Thirdly, she observed that if the circumstances were not so sad and serious, there could hardly be a more absurd spectacle than that of the Jews’ continuous belief that the postwar solution of the Jewish question could be based on the status quo, as if the bestial version of Hitler’s antisemitism could be modified into a milder form, such as that represented by some members of the Polish government in exile, and the problem of Arabic antisemitism could be resolved within the traditional colonial structure (Arendt 1942c). The irony lies in the fact that the Jewish mandate in Palestine would be guaranteed by states that no longer existed and applied to a dead people. Even in its milder form, the status quo would mean that the world would be divided into countries that wanted the Jews to leave and countries to which they were not allowed entry (Arendt 1942c).

These three examples illustrate that playing with ironies was indeed a very early aspect of Arendt's textual strategy. As I pointed out in the introduction, her aim was to push certain characteristics of a phenomenon to the extreme in order to illuminate her own point as clearly as possible. Often this endeavour led her to identify parallels between the actions of the Jews and their enemies. This may well be one of the reasons why her Eichmann book caused such a furious controversy, as most people tend to refuse to face extreme ironies and are unable to see anything amusing in them. More often than not they are received as intentional offences committed against innocent victims.

#### **1.4. ARENDT'S CRITIQUE OF THE JEWISH STATE**

For Arendt, the emergence and later collapse of Nazi totalitarianism was the same as the final collapse of the European national state system, which in practice had been an imperialistic and colonial enterprise of certain great European powers rather than the happy coexistence of nations that were politically organised on a national basis. The outcome of the First World War, including the enormous problems related to minorities and stateless people, had already shown that in reality Europe was a multiethnic continent in which the Jews were not the only people who lived dispersed amongst other peoples (Arendt 1944b; 1945b). The mythical and power political nature of European nationalism was only emphasised by the fact that the great European powers had never been satisfied with any "natural" borders between nations, but had instead always greedily attempted to conquer new lands regardless of who "originally" lived there. This greediness culminated in the imperialistic era, during which the European powers were able to enjoy and exploit the new riches they found on new continents. The First World War was a kind of "swan song" of this deeply rooted desire to control as large a portion of the world as possible while simultaneously abiding by

the terms of the established international political order, in which the European colonial countries had a clear-cut hegemony over the entire globe (Arendt 1945a; 1945b).

Arendt firmly believed that the postwar political organisation in Europe could no longer be based on national states, but should instead be established on a federal basis. The emergence of Nazism had shown only too concretely that the ideological basis of the national state system was politically dangerous with its intrinsic racism and national chauvinism; when Hitler made his first territorial claims, the leaders of other European countries could only nod their heads in agreement that he was, after all, only demanding the return of that which rightfully belonged to the German people. After the war, Arendt, together with Karl Jaspers (see Jaspers 1967), advocated the creation of a European Federation. She did not see the suitability of the federal principle as limited to Europe, but rather conceived of it as a general model for the postwar and postcolonial political organisation of all human communities. As a great admirer of the political system of the United States, she believed that the American Constitution would provide both Europe and the Near East with a concrete model upon which to base their own constitution.

For Arendt, the problem never was the Jewish presence in the Near East as such. In her view, the voluntary immigration of the Jews to Palestine and their concrete way of living there had already historically justified it by the 1930s. The problem was the mode and conditions of the Jewish presence. As we have already seen, she never accepted the Herzlian notion of a country without a people, but instead tirelessly reiterated that the Arabs had an equal right to form a political presence in the region. From this viewpoint, she found the idea of a Jewish national state very problematic and dangerous in political terms. Even more importantly, she found the entire notion of a national state politically anachronistic.

It is within this framework that she spoke about the need to establish a Jewish “homeland” in Palestine. The choice of the term

homeland already reveals that what she had in mind was neither a Jewish nor any other national state but rather an organisational mode which would include all those who lived in the area. Bearing in mind the colonial history of the Arab countries, she believed that the establishment of a national state system was not a feasible solution for them either. Arab-Jewish cooperation would be needed in order to establish a federated state, which would be a stepping stone for the establishment of a later and greater federated structure in the Near East and the Mediterranean area and which would eliminate the Jewish fear of being outnumbered by Arabs (Arendt 1948a, 191; 1950, 218). This federated structure, for its own part, could serve as a model for all formerly and presently oppressed people in their efforts to find a way to live their own political existence while avoiding developing nationalist superiority complexes (Arendt 1948a, 186).

For Arendt, federal did not mean binational. Although in practice she supported Judah Magnes'<sup>6</sup> efforts to speak in favour of a binational state of Jews and Arabs, to which the Jews had historical rights and the Arabs a natural right (Arendt 1950, 211), the guiding principle behind her thinking was the dream of a world in which a person could freely choose to which polity she or he wanted to belong:

What I would like to see and what cannot be achieved today would be such a change in circumstances that everyone could freely choose where he would like to exercise his political rights and responsibilities and in which cultural tradition he feels most comfortable. So that there will finally be an end to genealogical investigations both here and in Europe. (Arendt 1985/1992, 91)

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6. Judah Magnes was one of the founders of the American Jewish Committee and later the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His views as a Reform rabbi were not in the mainstream. Since the First World War to the day of his death in October 1948, he was the premiere spokesman for Arab-Jewish understanding in Palestine. He advocated a binational state in which equal rights would be enjoyed by all. He advanced this view in the groups Brit Shalom and Ihud.

As this quote shows, Arendt was not overly optimistic about the possibility of doing away with the national state structure in the political organisation of people, although in 1948 she still hoped that the “balkanisation” of the entire Near East region could be avoided by moving towards federal structures. By balkanisation she was referring to the possibility that the Near East would become transformed into a battlefield of the conflicting interests of the great powers to the detriment of all authentic national interests (Arendt 1950, 217). At the same time, she feared that if the extreme elements of Zionism were allowed to determine the course of development in Palestine, the result would be the enforcement of aggressive national chauvinism:

Chauvinism of the Balkan type could use the religious concept of the chosen people and allow its meaning to degenerate into hopeless vulgarity. The birth of a nation in the midst of our century may be a great event; it certainly is a dangerous event. National sovereignty which so long had been the very symbol of free national development has become the greatest danger to national survival for small nations. (Arendt 1950, 222)

As we know in retrospect, Arendt anticipated the coming problems. She correctly feared that the birth of Jewish state could and would lead to extreme national chauvinism by Jewish people against the Palestinian people and their right to live in the area and share it freely and equally with the other people living there.

#### **1.4.1. The Artificial Community in the Shadow of Natural Justification**

What makes Arendt’s arguments relevant even today is that she does not approach the political situation in the Near East from the viewpoint of the immediate interests of the Jews, which could easily lead to the unfounded justification of Jewish terrorism as the only effective means of reaching the goal of the establishment of a national state. Nor does she approach it from the viewpoint of the Holocaust,

from which the foundation of a Jewish state would appear as the least that could be done to compensate for such cruel destruction. Rather, she approaches it in broader political terms by asking: What kinds of polities should be established following the collapse of the national state system, and what kinds of political principles should guide the foundation of these polities? In this context, she shows how extreme nationalism, together with some other self-centred political interests, may lead astray even the justified struggle of a persecuted people to establish a polity of their own, causing them to adopt a policy which comes paradoxically and frighteningly close to the policies of its worst enemies, as has happened in the case of Israel.

As a new polity, Arendt conceives of Israel as being a unique case, arguing that what happened in Palestine was extraordinarily different from anything that had happened in the past (Arendt 1950, 205). She identifies four specific factors that define its extraordinary status. Firstly, the building of a Jewish national home was not a colonial enterprise in which Europeans came to exploit foreign riches with the help of and at the expense of native labour. Secondly, the exploitation characteristic of the “original accumulation” of imperialist enterprises was completely absent. The American and European capital that flooded the country came in the form of charitable contributions, which the recipients could use as they pleased. Thirdly, charitable funds were used to build an economy with a distinctly socialist physiognomy. And fourthly, collective rural settlements in Palestine were not inspired by any kind of utilitarian reasoning. (Arendt 1950, 205–206)

All four of these factors are clearly intertwined with one another and thus make the Palestinian experiment unique in its extraordinary artificiality. Arendt points out that it is precisely this artificiality which should be understood in a new light. Unlike both the Zionists and anti-Zionists, who believed that the artificial character of the enterprise was to be reproached rather than praised and who tried to explain the building of a Jewish national home in terms of its

being an historically necessary answer to eternal antisemitism, Arendt thought that the artificial character of the country should be greeted in terms of its human and, as such, political value and significance. More precisely, none of the responses of immigrants to the challenges they had to face in Palestine were “natural”. There was nothing inevitable or necessary in them at all, as they were entirely human, i.e. political. Thus, the biggest mistake made by the Zionists was their attempt to naturalise something that was entirely unnatural and their refusal to acknowledge the political uniqueness of their own enterprise in its artificiality.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that all Zionists made bad politicians. They were often quite skilful and clever in the art of political bargaining and tactics. The point, rather, is that their tendency to unquestionably accept the supremacy of the established great powers hindered the development of their political imagination and judgement, thus preventing them from foreseeing the possible changes in the political scene in Europe and the Near East. In other words, Zionist politicians were most skilful in quasi-diplomatic negotiations, in which the negotiating parties were given and “recognised” each other as such. It could be argued that their sense of *Realpolitik* overshadowed and restricted their capacity to play with the contingency of the situation. They concentrated on figuring out what seemed to be the most realistic, and thus the most attainable alternative in a given situation without realising that this realism did not necessarily help them to identify all the possible alternatives in unprecedented and extreme situations.

Yet another mistake was their poor choice of rhetoric. They did not understand that it made no sense to try to convince gentiles to acknowledge that Palestine had “originally” belonged to the Jews and that as such they had a religious-historical right to inhabit it. It would have made more sense to try to convince as many quarters as possible to see the novelty of the Jewish enterprise, to win the support of gentiles by showing the genesis of a new polity in practice –

a new polity which based its political justification entirely on concrete action in Palestine. Thus, Arendt observed, neither the Jewish workers “nor their leaders realized articulately the chief features of the new experiment. The Zionist leadership could go on for decades talking about the natural coincidence between Jewish interests and British imperialism, showing how little they understood themselves.” (Arendt 1950, 207–208)

What was lost by this political blindness of both Zionist leaders and Jewish workers and farmers was the seed of the new political body that the Jews managed to erect under the watchful eye of the British trustee. In Arendt’s view, this unofficial Jewish government was neither the Jewish Agency, the recognised political body of world Zionism, nor the Vaad Leumi, the official representative of the Palestinian Jewry, but rather the Histadruth, i.e. the Palestinian trade unions (Arendt 1950, 207). This argument may come as somewhat of a surprise to Arendt scholars, many of whom have come to believe that Arendt’s thinking is so entirely political that there is no room in it for trade unionism. Arendt’s purpose is not, however, to praise trade unions as such. Rather she saw the Histadruth as a new and characteristically Jewish political element within the Palestinian reality of the 1940s. Unlike the Jewish Agency and Vaad Leumi, which attempted to negotiate with the great powers in the context of the established political order, the Histadruth concentrated on establishing concrete structures of the Jewish public realm in Palestine. Instead of limiting itself to acting according to the lines dictated by the British trustee, it acted and established something new despite the limiting pressures of *Realpolitik*. It moved into all those areas which are usually regulated by municipal or national government. According to Arendt, this explains the miraculous fact that a mere proclamation of Jewish self-government eventually sufficed to bring a state machine into being (Arendt 1950, 207).

In sum, Arendt stresses the uniqueness of Israel as a new political experiment by illustrating that it came surprisingly close to her

dream of the existence of freely chosen polities. She stresses that there was nothing at all natural in the genesis of Israel, but that its political uniqueness lay rather in its total artificiality (Arendt 1950, 220). In Arendt's view, as a unique political artefact, the future of Israel depended on the political choice between a national state structure and a federation. The choice of a national state would lead to the political ossification and militarisation of the entire people in self-defence against its hostile neighbours, accompanied by an increase in national-chauvinist claims aimed at conquering more *Lebensraum*. A federation, on the other hand, would mean the consolidation and appreciation of the artificial political nature of the Israeli polity.

In this chapter I have dealt with Arendt's early writings on Jewish politics and Zionism in order to show that her critique of wartime Jewish and Zionist politics in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was very much based on these early reflections and critiques. On the basis of the reading I have carried out in this chapter, it is possible to single out a few ideas or guiding principles that would shape virtually all of her later reflections on Jewish politics. First and foremost, there was the notion of the duty to defend oneself as a Jew, which she originally inherited from her mother and which was later politicised by her reading of Lazare's work. Second, there was the critique of the Herzlian type of nationalistic Zionism, which Arendt wanted to see replaced by a new type of democratic and federalist thinking. Third, there was the critique of the traditional plutocratic Jewish political tradition, which lacked democratic (not to mention parliamentary) structures and institutions and was based instead on the hierarchical status structures of Jewish communities. Instead of creating equalitarian political structures and procedures, Jewish community politics was based on the traditional religious structure of the *Judenräte*, the assemblies of Rabbis. Fourth, there was the critique of the Jewish wartime policy in Europe, Palestine and

America. While Arendt criticised the Jewish Agency for its highly restrictive and selective rescue policy in Europe, she maintained that the American Zionists did not want to commit themselves in any way with determining the fate of European Jews. And finally, there was the element of irony, which constituted the basis for the development of the sharp textual and rhetorical strategy that Arendt had already adopted in her early writings, well before the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In the subsequent chapters I will show that Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial becomes intelligible only in the context of these guiding principles: it is possible to understand that what is really at stake in her trial report is the critique of European political tradition. In her understanding, Jewish politics should be approached as both a part of this tradition and one of its anomalies.

## 2. THE CAPTURE OF ADOLF EICHMANN

Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962) was one of the “experts” on the Jewish question in the Third Reich. He first worked towards speeding up Jewish emigration and then on facilitating and managing the logistics of the mass deportation to the ghettos and concentration and extermination camps. In 1942, Reinhard Heydrich ordered him to serve as a recording secretary at the Wannsee Conference, which is where Germany’s antisemitic measures were turned into an official policy of genocide. Eichmann was put in charge of all the trains that would transport the Jews to the death camps in occupied Poland.

In 1944, Eichmann was sent to Hungary to deport the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, after which he gained notoriety for defying Himmler’s order to halt the extermination of the Jews and for destroying evidence of the Final Solution. Nevertheless, it is rarely pointed out that he probably did so in order to avoid having to participate in the last ditch German military effort, since the year before he had been commissioned as a Reserve *Untersturmführer* in the *Waffen-SS* and was now being called up for active combat duty.

Eichmann fled Hungary in 1945 just as the Soviets were beginning to arrive. He was captured by the US Army at the end of the war, but managed to escape early in 1946 and spent the next few years in hiding in Germany. In 1950, he went to Italy, where he obtained – with the help of a Franciscan friar – an International Committee of the Red Cross humanitarian passport in Geneva and an Argentinian visa, both issued to “Riccardo Klement”. He travelled to Argentina in July 1950 and spent the next ten years there working in several jobs in the Buenos Aires area. He also managed to bring his family to Argentina.

## 2.1. THE CAPTURE AND DIPLOMATIC CONFLICT

Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped by the Israeli Secret Services on 11 May 1960. The Mossad kept him in a “safe house” in Buenos Aires for nine days. On 20 May 1960, he was transported to Israel on a special El Al flight which had been used to bring an Israeli delegation, including the Minister Abba Eban, to Argentina for the 150th anniversary of the country’s independence. On 23 May, the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion told “the world” that Eichmann was being held in an Israeli prison. Newspapers around the world reported the news of Eichmann’s capture and rumours abounded as to where and how Eichmann had been captured. The West German government announced that it would not demand his extradition to Germany. Even the Soviet Union announced that Israel was entitled and indeed obliged to try Eichmann (*New York Times*, May 24, 1960).

However, a diplomatic conflict with the Argentine government was inevitable. Argentina requested official proof of the authenticity of the information it had received that an Israeli commando unit had penetrated Argentine territory and kidnapped Adolf Eichmann, explaining that if this turned out to be true Argentina would be compelled to take measures against Israel (*New York Times*, June 2, 1960; Sachar 1976/1996, 555; Ben-Gurion 1972, 576). Israel replied with a diplomatic note followed by a personal letter from Ben-Gurion to President Arturo Frondizi (*New York Times*, June 7; June 10, 1960).

The most striking feature of the note, personally delivered to Argentine Foreign Minister Diogenes Taboada by Arielevi, the Israeli ambassador in Buenos Aires, was incomprehensible effort on the part of the Israeli government to disclaim all responsibility for Eichmann’s capture. It boldly claimed that “the government of Israel had no knowledge whatsoever that Eichmann came to Israel from Argentina, as the Israeli Security Services did not inform it of this”

(cit. Ben-Gurion 1972, 577; cf. Aharoni 1996, 168–189). It further explained that “the group of volunteer searchers made contact with Eichmann and asked him if he was prepared to come for trial to Israel” (cit. Ben-Gurion 1972, 577; *New York Times*, June 7, 1960). The note called into question the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s ability to judge and evaluate the kind of stories that the international community would believe to be true. Zvi Aharoni, one of the protagonists of Eichmann’s capture, put it harshly: “In fact, it was so naïve and far from the actual events, that it is difficult to understand how anyone in the Israeli Foreign Ministry could have hoped to end the delicate affair in such a way.” (Aharoni 1996, 168)

Argentina was not, of course, satisfied with this, and proceeded to submit a note to the president of the United Nations’ Security Council stating that the manner of Eichmann’s removal had created a climate of insecurity and distrust that was incompatible with the preservation of international peace, and asking the Council to pass a resolution that would restore Argentina’s rights (*New York Times*, June 16, 1960; Sachar 1996, 555; Ben-Gurion 1972, 580).

A heated debate broke out on 22 June, when Golda Meir, Israel’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, repeated the same arguments presented previously by Ben-Gurion. She argued that “the State of Israel has not violated the sovereignty of Argentina in any manner whatsoever [...] with the greatest respect for the distinguished representative of the Argentine, I think that he is in complete error, as a basic legal proposition, in confusing the illegal actions of individuals [...] with a non-existent intentional violation of the sovereignty of one member-State by another” (*Eichmann in the World Press* 1960, v; cf. *New York Times*, June 23, 1960). This is a clear case of Israel’s refusal to take any governmental responsibility for Eichmann’s kidnapping. Meir was not, however, satisfied with merely trying to conceal the Israeli government’s role in the episode, but instead proceeded to put the blame on “those who pursued him [Eichmann] for over fifteen years and finally seized him” (*Eichmann in the World Press* 1960, v; cf. *New*

*York Times*, June 23, 1960). As we will soon see below, in reality, the unhappy fate of these tenacious volunteers was to remain totally outside the sphere of these decisive events.

After the debate, a resolution was passed condemning Eichmann's abduction as a violation of Argentine sovereignty and recognising Argentina's right to demand compensation. However, Argentina resolutely rejected Israel's offer of the public expressions of its sincere regrets and declared the Israeli ambassador in Buenos Aires a *persona non grata* (*New York Times*, July 23, 1960; Sachar 1976/1996, 555). It took several weeks of negotiations and correspondence between the two governments to reach a compromise that was acceptable to the Argentine government. On 3 August, the Argentine and Israeli governments released a joint statement in which they assured each other of their mutual regret and condemnation of the actions of the citizens of Israel, which had violated the fundamental rights of the state of Argentina (Sachar 1976/1996, 555; cf. Aharoni 1996, 170). In this way, the Israeli government actually condemned the actions of its own secret services, and as such it is not surprising that the then Mossad Chief Isser Harel remained incensed about the political manoeuvres at the time. He had acted under direct orders of the Prime Minister and could not possibly have anticipated that the private acknowledgements of his actions would be followed by public condemnation (Aharoni 1996, 170).

Right from the beginning it was clear that once in Israel, no power on earth could have persuaded Israel to extradite Eichmann to any other country, nor did any country ask her to do so. Israel and Argentina had signed an extradition treaty just prior to Eichmann's kidnapping on 9 May 1960, although in reality this treaty only gave Israel more reasons not to attempt to enforce it in Eichmann's case. According to the treaty, extradition was permitted only when the crime involved was punishable in both countries by prison sentences of three years or more. However, in the event that more than one country requested a person's extradition, he would be delivered to

the country in which the most serious crime was committed. Thus, despite the fact that Germany and Argentina had no extradition treaty, in theory it was possible that Eichmann would not have been extradited to Israel but rather to one of the countries in which he committed his crimes. Even more importantly from the Israeli point of view, the treaty stipulated that extradition was forbidden in cases of military, political or related crimes. It was only too obvious that Eichmann's crimes were precisely of this kind, and as such Argentina could have cited its duty to provide political refuge (*New York Times*, June 9, 1960). This argument was, in fact, used by Argentina during the diplomatic conflict. On more than one occasion it cited the South American tradition of providing anyone in need with political refuge (*New York Times*, June 9; June 16; June 23, 1960). Nevertheless, in our context here and, in fact, in the context of world politics as well, the significance of the diplomatic crisis between Argentina and Israel should not be exaggerated. It is more important to attempt to pinpoint the kind of inner power struggles to which the kidnapping and trial were related.

## **2.2. THE MOSSAD OPERATION**

Although historically Adolf Eichmann is seen as one of the biggest Nazi criminals, he was by no means unanimously considered so during the 1950s. In fact, hardly anybody was interested in capturing and trying Eichmann in the 1950s. The Cold War was dominating world politics at the time, and the German and Austrian governments were desperately trying to bring an end to denazification and war crime issues. In Germany, this was accomplished by enforcing a twenty-year statute of limitations, which stated that war criminals could only be prosecuted up until 1965. According to the German penal code of 1871, under which Nazi criminals were prosecuted and punished, the statute of limitations applied to all crimes. The Bundestag's conservative majority had rejected the extension of

the statute in 1960 in cases of manslaughter. Thus, it seemed likely that after May 1965, Nazi criminals who had successfully evaded detection and indictment would be able to avoid further prosecution (Shafir 1999, 232).

Despite the launch of a campaign aimed at extending the statute of limitations in cases of murder, the number of Germans who were in favour of ending the further prosecution of Nazi criminals grew during the first half of the 1960s, particularly during the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt in 1964. In the early 1960s, there was a partial purge in the West German judiciary system, and a number of state prosecutors who had been involved in cases resulting in illegitimate and severe sentences during the Nazi dictatorship voluntarily retired. Nevertheless, there was also a growing tendency to hand down verdicts of complicity in murder rather than murder itself, despite the sharp public criticism of and debate surrounding the issue. Because of Israel's dependency on German financial and military aid, Ben-Gurion was careful not to raise the issue of Bonn's handling of Nazi criminals after the Eichmann trial. The West German government finally extended the statute until 1969, and it was extended again in 1969 until ultimately being abolished in 1979 (Shafir 1999, 233–237).

Israel was also busy handling more urgent matters than the hunt for Nazi criminals. The massive influx of refugees arriving in the country had to be absorbed and a powerful military apparatus built in order to deter the Arab enemy. Moreover, there was a widely held view in Israel that the victims of the Holocaust had gone to their slaughter blindly; that they could and should have resisted more forcefully (Pick 1996, 139–140; Segev 1991/1993, 325). In addition, more and more people simply believed that it no longer made sense to hunt Eichmann because he was most likely already dead. In 1956, even *Haaretz*, a prestigious and respected Israeli newspaper, began to embrace this opinion (*Life*, February 24, 1961, 92).

In those days, only a few persistent and determined Nazi-hunters, most notably Tuvia Friedman and Simon Wiesenthal, continued

to attempt to track down those responsible for the destruction of the Jews. As to Tuviah Friedman, he was originally a lieutenant in the Polish Security Service after the German defeat and continued to vigilantly call for Eichmann's capture via a small and almost peniless documentation centre for Nazi war criminals, which was first established in Vienna and then in Haifa under the auspices of Yad Vashem and eventually the World Jewish Congress. In 1959, when it finally became clear that Eichmann was in all probability in Buenos Aires, Friedman received an invitation to speak at an election campaign rally of Ben-Gurion's Mapai Party. He accepted the invitation and gave a speech in which he begged Ben-Gurion to go on the hunt for Eichmann, after which he was told he had made an impression on the Prime Minister (*Life*, February 24, 1961, 99–100; Friedman 1961, 251–252). After a long period of silence, Friedman's Argentine correspondent reported that a "Mr. Schurman" had visited him and that they had had a long talk. After that, however, Friedman was informed that the Prime Minister no longer required his services. Friedman commented in *Life Magazine*: "What happened after that I have never discovered. To this day I do not know how this information was used – or even if it was important in Eichmann's capture. Others captured Eichmann." (*Life*, February 24, 1961, 100; Friedman 1961, 251–258)

Simon Wiesenthal's life followed a path quite similar to Friedman's. As the director of his own small documentation centre, first in Linz and then in Vienna, he had been working for years to catch as many Nazi criminals as possible, Adolf Eichmann included. He was not, however, involved in the Mossad operation in Argentina. Wiesenthal's biographer, Hella Pick, points out that there are a number of murky areas regarding who did what and when in the Eichmann case. One of the most contentious issues concerns the dossier of evidence, including the clues to Eichmann's presence in Argentina, which Wiesenthal had accumulated and subsequently sent to Nahum Goldman, President of the World Jewish Congress

in 1954, upon his request. Goldmann never directly acknowledged receipt of this correspondence, nor did any of his followers in the WJC (Pick 1996, no). So if it was not on the initiative of these resolute and dedicated Nazi-hunters that Eichmann was captured, who gave the orders and what actually transpired?

Tom Segev's excellent book on the Israelis and the Holocaust was probably the first study in which the origin of the events leading up to the Eichmann trial was traced in Germany. He reports that in September of 1957, Fritz Bauer, then the chief prosecutor for the West German state of Hessen, contacted Eliezer Shinar, Israel's representative in Bonn, in order to personally pass on the news that Eichmann was in Buenos Aires. He wanted to provide Israel with the information because he feared that someone in Germany would make sure that Eichmann was not extradited, or might even warn him that his whereabouts had been revealed (Segev 1991/1993, 325).

It was at this point that the Mossad first came on to the scene, although it did not achieve much at first. This was, however, due to the fact that the Mossad was not actually interested in the matter at that time and was thus quite slow to take action. According to General (Res.) Meir Amit, who directed the Mossad after Isser Harel from 1963 to 1968, the entire operation to capture Eichmann in Argentina was regarded with mixed feelings by the Israeli intelligence community, as they felt that the Mossad was not fulfilling its proper mandate as the initiator of the struggle against Israel's hostile Arab neighbours. Once it began, "Operation Eichmann" did indeed consume much of the Mossad's capacity, leaving other operations in the background. However, Amit also points out that in retrospect, it is clear that it was precisely because of this operation that the Mossad gained immense international attention and recognition, which thus facilitated its future success (Amit in Aharoni 1996, 7).

Only four months after he had obtained the information about Eichmann, Isser Harel sent a Mossad operative to Argentina to confirm its validity. The operative was, however, unable to locate

Eichmann within the space of two weeks, whereupon he returned home and the Mossad decided not to pursue the matter further (Aharoni 1996, 80). Bauer refused to give up, however, and he contacted the Mossad again in 1959, this time with Eichmann's name and address. Bauer went with attorney general Haim Cohen to see Ben-Gurion, telling him that there was no time to spare as he planned to pass the information on to his government and demand that Eichmann be extradited if Israel was unwilling to act. As a result, Ben-Gurion ordered the Mossad to conduct a covert operation aimed at capturing Eichmann (Segev 1991/1993, 325).

There is no doubt or disagreement about the fact that Isser Harel personally directed the mission. However, there has been heated dispute among Mossad agents as to who the decisive actors in Argentina actually were. The dispute stems, at least partly, from the two-fold organisation of the operation. It involved the participation of both those responsible for its planning in Israel and those who were sent to Argentina to carry it out. Basically, the dispute comes down to those who supported Harel's policy and those who criticised it (Aharoni 1996; Harel 1975; Malchin 1990).

One of Harel's staunchest critics was Zvi Aharoni, who was sent to Buenos Aires in February 1960 to prepare the operation on site. Long before Harel decided to take the Eichmann case seriously, Aharoni had criticised the Mossad for moving too slowly on the matter. Once in Buenos Aires, Aharoni was happy to proceed and transmitted as much information as he was able to gather, safe in the knowledge that Harel could no longer control his every move (Aharoni 1996, 89). It took him several weeks to locate Eichmann and gather sufficiently clear photographs of him to send back to Israel. Immediately after he had left the film in a photo shop to be developed, he received a cable ordering him back home to report to his superiors. It was only on his way home, when he coincidentally encountered Harel on the aeroplane from Paris to Tel Aviv, that he learnt that he was also expected to participate in the next phase of

the operation (Aharoni 1996,123–126). He was sent back to Buenos Aires in April 1960 as a member of the four-man advance guard sent to assess the situation on site and determine whether or not the conditions for carrying out the main operation were favourable (Aharoni 1996, 126).

In the meantime, others had been preparing the tactical aspects of the operation in Israel. One such person was Zvi Malchin, a man faithful to Harel and a stooge who was supposed to literally grab Eichmann on the street. He was also the man who would come to contest Aharoni's decisive role in the operation after the fact (see Malchin 1990). For reasons doomed to remain a mystery to outsiders, these men did not get along well with each other, not to mention the disagreements within the rest of the group. In Aharoni's report, these disputes culminated into a rather heated quarrel over who was supposed to drive the first car of the group sent to capture Eichmann. Harel, who was present at the time, decided it should be Aharoni (Aharoni 1996, 133).

Unlike the rather insignificant dispute over the driver of the car, the question of who would act as Eichmann's main interrogator following his capture was obviously of utmost importance. Once again, it was Harel who made this decision. He had already ordered that Aharoni would be the only man to speak with the prisoner, as he spoke German and was an experienced interrogator. In addition, he was also well acquainted with all the details of Eichmann's life (Aharoni 1996, 140–141; cf. Harel 1975).

Zvi Malchin, who played only a minor role in this phase of the capture as one of Eichmann's guards, was quite dissatisfied with this solution. This is reflected in his version of the events of the capture and everything which followed, in which he attempts to minimise and disparage Aharoni's role as much as possible. Aharoni complained that all kinds of fantastic stories were being told about the interrogation, and, in his view, the main person responsible for them was Malchin:

In this [in his book *Eichmann in my Hands*] he describes his alleged conversations with the prisoner Eichmann in detail. Malchin was a member of the five-man guard team. Had he really talked with Eichmann at length, then this would have been a direct breach of Isser Harel's orders. It would not surprise me, because Malchin was the one member of the team for whom the word discipline had always been without meaning. One could not depend upon his reports. It was always more important to him to tell a good story and crack jokes than to adhere to the bare facts. (Aharoni 1996,141)

These internal disputes within the Mossad would not hold much significance in the context of this work if they did not constitute a part of the inner power struggles of the Mossad. As is the case with all intelligence services, it was characteristic of the Mossad to keep the actual aim and reasons behind a mission a secret from the majority of those involved. Nor did the agents know what other agents were doing at the same time, or who was at the end of the chain of command giving the orders. Thus, it was very easy and tempting for agents to overestimate the importance of their role in a given operation. Virtually all the versions later given by Mossad men as to what actually happened during the Eichmann Operation are characterised by the tendency to overemphasise their own role in the course of events while simultaneously underestimating the contributions of their colleagues (Harel 1975; Malchin 1990; Aharoni 1996). Politically speaking, however, there is one particular accusation made by Aharoni that is of more importance to us than any other. It is this direct attack against Harel himself:

What I find particularly absurd and hard to understand is that in his detailed report on the Eichmann operation, even Isser Harel was not above putting the most crazy words into the man's mouth. This is inexcusable, because Isser – unlike other authors – questioned all the participants in the operation personally and had access to all secret files. His version should actually have been the true, official history of this operation. It is not. (Aharoni 1996,142)

There is no doubt this is a harsh judgement. Why is it that Aharoni so fiercely attacks Harel and those faithful to him? Part of the answer

could simply be masculine pride and honour, not to mention the unavoidable vanity in cases in which people are listing their personal achievements to others (cf. Weber 1919). Obviously, everybody wanted to stand out as having been a decisive figure in the operation, hoping that their role in Eichmann's capture would go down in history. There is, however, more to it than mere masculine vanity, as this is also a case of power struggles and political games.

As we have seen above, the Israeli government was reluctant to publicly assume any responsibility for Eichmann's capture. The question of how many people in Israel actually knew about the operation in advance is still unclear to this day, and in all likelihood will remain so. Two people, however, knew for sure: Mossad Chief Isser Harel and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. As to the former, it seems most probable that he did not know and was not interested in knowing too much about the general political framework in which the operation took place. Both his original reluctance to initiate the entire enterprise and his later bitterness of it supports this view. From his perspective as a professional intelligence officer, the capture of a former Nazi criminal was of minor importance in a situation in which Israel lacked a sufficient defence machinery against her Arab neighbours. He was, however, faithful to his Prime Minister and obediently followed his orders, only to learn after the fact that his achievements would go publicly unnoticed. Nevertheless, it is impossible to paint a clear portrait of the political aspects of the case without including Ben-Gurion's role in it.

### **2.3. BEN-GURION'S MISSION**

During the Second World War this man Eichmann was the person directly responsible for the execution of Hitler's orders for the 'final solution' of the Jewish problem in Europe, i.e. the murder of every single Jew on whom the Nazis could lay their hands throughout the territories of Europe which they had occupied at that time. Six million of our people were murdered in

Europe, and it was Eichmann who organized this mass murder, on a gigantic and unprecedented scale, throughout Europe. (*Eichmann in the World Press* 1960, 1)

Although Ben-Gurion was reluctant to admit to Argentina and the United Nations that it was the Mossad who had captured Eichmann and transported him to Israel, he was by no means unwilling to publicly express and explain his motives for bringing Eichmann to trial in Israel. Ben-Gurion had two explicit goals. One was to remind the countries of the world that the fact that the Holocaust was allowed to happen obligated them to support the only Jewish state on earth. The second was to imprint the lesson of the Holocaust on the people of Israel, particularly the younger generation (Segev 1991/1993, 327). Thus, he was not interested in Adolf Eichmann the man, but was instead concerned with the historic importance and impact of the trial on future generations. In an open letter to a friend, published in *Davar* on 27 May 1960, he explained:

In my opinion the importance of Eichmann's capture and trial in Israel lies not in the resourcefulness demonstrated by the Security Services (though it would be hard to exaggerate the praise due to them) but in the fact that the entire episode of the Holocaust can now be laid bare in an Israeli court so that the youth in this country – which grew up after the Holocaust and has heard only faint echoes of this atrocity unparalleled in history, and world opinion as well – will know and remember [...] Public opinion in the world must be reminded whose disciples are those now planning Israel's destruction, and just who is aiding them, knowingly or unknowingly. (cit. Ben-Gurion 1972, 574)

It was not only the gentile world to whom Ben-Gurion had to explain the motives behind Eichmann's capture. Although the news of the capture of an important Nazi criminal was welcomed by Jewish quarters, there was no unanimity whatsoever as to where and by whom he should be tried. One of the first to express his doubts about a trial in Israel was Nahum Goldmann. He suggested to the Israeli government that it permit Eichmann to be tried by an international tribunal, because it seemed to him to be the right thing

to do to invite those countries whose people suffered most severely under the Nazis to participate in the trial (*New York Times*, June 1, 1960). A few days later Ben-Gurion's reply to Nahum Goldmann was released to the press. In it he expressed his view as follows:

It is not the penalty to be inflicted on the criminal that is the main thing – no penalty can match the magnitude of the offence – but the full exposure of the Nazi regime's infamous crimes against our people. Eichmann's acts alone are not the main point in this trial. Historic justice and the honour of Jewish people demand this trial. Historic justice and the honour of the Jewish people demand that this should be done only by an Israeli court in the sovereign Jewish State. (cit. Ben-Gurion 1972, 575)

As the quotations above show, Ben-Gurion was not concerned with being consistent in expressing his opinion, but rather chose his words and tone according to the situation and audience with which he was faced. However, it is hard to believe that his inconsistency was entirely the result of conscious and sharp political calculation, but rather also indicates an astonishing amount of naivety. How could he possibly believe that Argentina would take his comments on Eichmann's capture as being carried out by volunteers seriously when he simultaneously spoke quite openly about the Mossad's role elsewhere? He could not possibly assume that the Argentine government did not follow the world press, which almost immediately revealed the real actors behind the kidnapping, based mainly on Israeli information regarding the event. The day after Ben-Gurion's announcement in the Knesset, the head of Israel's Security Service called a news conference where he announced that Eichmann had been tracked down and captured through the sole efforts of his agents (*New York Times*, May 24, 1960). On 27 May, the *New York Times* reported that two "cloak and dagger" organisations had participated in the capture. According to the article, these organisations were the Central Security and Intelligence Agency, which conducted clandestine operations outside Israel, and the Security Services,

which were specialised in counter espionage and security details within Israel.

Despite this incomprehensible diplomatic naivety, it is clear that Ben-Gurion's motives were political as opposed to moral. His aim was to organise a great show trial which would teach "the world" the lesson he wanted it to learn. And he made no attempt to hide his motives, instead defending them openly and publicly on several occasions. He was, however, about to find out that the world Jewry was in no way prepared to back him without voicing its objections to this enterprise.

It soon became clear that the American Jews in particular were by no means convinced of the justification for holding the trial in Israel. In December 1960, Ben-Gurion gave an interview to the *New York Times* (December 18, 1960) in which he attempted to clarify his stance by identifying three motives behind his determination to see Eichmann tried in Israel. Firstly, he wanted to teach the world about the ramifications of the hatred of the Jews; he wanted the world to feel ashamed of itself. In the 15 years since the end of the war the world had already begun to forget why the Jews had an inherent right to govern Palestine and dictate who was allowed to live there and under what conditions. He wanted to remind the world that it was because of the eternal nature of antisemitism that the Jews needed a permanent country of their own.

Secondly, in Ben-Gurion's understanding, the fight against eternal antisemitism could not be distinguished from the fight against the Arabs. The almost literal equation of the Arabs with the Nazis was not a new concept. In the *New York Times* interview, he claimed that the anti-Zionist propaganda coming out of Egypt at the time was antisemitic and inspired by the Nazis (cf. Segev 1991/1993, 327). Thus, although the Arabs and the Nazis were not quite seen as entirely interchangeable, they were seen as at least cooperating with each other in their mutual desire to exterminate the Jews from

the face of earth. He was not willing to admit – at least not publicly – that the Arab countries might have actually had power political and tactical reasons for supporting anti-Zionist politics. He did not mention the fact that the anti-Zionist and pro-Nazi politics of the Arab countries was originally part of their fight for independence from the colonial control of the Near East by the European great powers (cf. Morris 1999).

Thirdly, he wanted to teach the Jews themselves that Israel was their real homeland. He considered this to be extremely important, as the future of the state was not guaranteed. Most Jews throughout the world had not come to live in Israel; the country had not become the centre of the Jewish people. In addition, the younger generation was losing its pioneer spirit, and their centre of gravity tended increasingly to lie somewhere between Tel Aviv and New York. In other words, the trial was crucial in order to revive the Jews' sense of national sentiment and pride, which was clearly beginning to dwindle. In order to legitimise the existence of the state of Israel, it was necessary to persuade the Jews that there was only one country in the world for them – only one country capable of guaranteeing their security (cf. Segev 1991/1993, 328).

The interview caused a wave of protests among American Jews, but Ben-Gurion did not give up. When the World Zionist Organization gathered to hold its 25th congress in Jerusalem at the end of December 1960, he once again took up the issue in his address. The dispute was intensified by the fact that the original story published in the *New York Times* partly distorted Ben-Gurion's words by reporting them selectively. The debate revolved around two main citations. Firstly, the *New York Times* reported Ben-Gurion as having said that "since the day when the Jewish state was established and the gates of Israel were flung open, every Jew who wanted to come, every religious Jew had daily violated the precepts of Judaism and the Torah of Israel by remaining in the Diaspora". Secondly, Ben-Gurion was reported having had claimed that "whoever dwells outside

the land of Israel is considered to have no God" (*New York Times*, December 29, 1960).

The novelty of this attack lay in the fact that this time Ben-Gurion did not limit himself to expressing his scorn for Zionists living in other countries who refused to migrate to Israel, but also addressed religious Jews by binding the "correct" way of practising Judaism with their concrete presence in Israel. As a non-religious Jew, Ben-Gurion had long been at odds with religious Jews, considering the Jewish state as Zionist as opposed to religious enterprise. Correspondingly, he had not been as concerned with the emigration of religious Jews as that of militant Zionists, preferably those belonging to its labour branch (*New York Times*, December 29, 1960).

Against this backdrop, it is not at all surprising that the first groups to criticise his speech were non-Zionist American Jewish organisations, the very first being the American Jewish Committee. It accused Ben-Gurion of having violated an understanding reached ten years earlier regarding the relationship between Israel and Jews outside Israel. According to this understanding, the government and people of Israel fully respected the rights and integrity of the Jewish communities in other countries to develop their own way of life and their own indigenous social, economic, and cultural institutions in accordance with their own needs and aspirations (*New York Times*, December 30, 1960).

The statement of the American Jewish Committee was followed by statements from, amongst others, the American Council for Judaism, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the parent body of Reform Judaism in the United States), the New York Board of Rabbis, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The tone of these reactions is well encapsulated in the following statement made by Clarence L. Coleman, the president of the American Council for Judaism, who explained that "our nationality is American, our religion is Judaism. Our homeland is the United States of America, and we reject the concept that all Jews outside of Israel are in exile" (*New York Times*, December 30, 1960).

The American Zionists soon joined these condemnations of religious Jews. Abraham Goodman, the chairman of the National Administrative Committee of the Zionist Organization, sarcastically remarked: "It seems ironic that this denunciation should come from one who, to the best of knowledge, has most of his life not been practicing religion and is now taking upon himself in addition to his heavy burdens as Premier to usurp the functions of the rabbinate." (*New York Times*, December 30, 1960)

However, Ben-Gurion also had a number of faithful supporters, and the first to spring to his defence was the delegation of Hadassah, the women's Zionist organisation in America, which expressed its surprise that his words had caused such excitement and misunderstanding. According to the *New York Times* (January 1, 1961), the Hadassah delegation's view reflected the general feeling in the congress, which had anticipated a much harsher speech by Ben-Gurion. He had been expected to once again attack the Jewish Agency, which represented the World Zionist Organization in Israel and which Ben-Gurion considered a competitor in the establishment of a Jewish state within a state. Thus, many delegates were relieved that on this occasion the impulsive Premier mainly directed his fury against religious Jews instead of Zionist bodies.

In any event, the outcries against Ben-Gurion were so strong that he was compelled to defend himself. He gave an interview in which he clarified his speech. He explained that his words had been distorted, as he had been addressing himself specifically to the minority of Orthodox Jews who believed that every word in the Talmud was obligatory to them who lived their lives according to the Talmud:

I reminded them that according to the Talmud some of the commandments of the Jewish religion are linked with the land of Israel. As an example of this I quoted the Talmud which says at one point that whosoever dwells outside the land of Israel is likened to one who has no God. (*New York Times*, January 2, 1961)

At this point, surprisingly enough, also Nahum Goldmann, who at the time was engaged in a fierce power struggle with Ben-Gurion, sprang to his defence by asserting that his speech had been distorted by the *New York Times*. He explained that these distortions were not the result of a misquotation, but rather of making one phrase selected from a lengthy speech appear as the main point of the address (*New York Times*, January 2, 1961).

The entire debate was sparked in part by the simple fact that Ben-Gurion gave his speech in Hebrew, and an English translation was not immediately available. In fact, a translation issued by the World Zionist Organization was not published until the 8 January 1961 edition of the *New York Times*. It appears from the text that Ben-Gurion did not actually mean that all the Jews of the world should migrate to Israel, but rather that it was the duty of every single Jew to help Israel:

A personal bond with Israel – if only by a visit from time to time – is the elementary duty of those who inscribe the name of Zion on their banner. It could also take the form of investing capital in Israel. And it is the duty of those who are unable to come to Israel because of their age or economic situation to send their young sons and daughters to study in Israel, in a secondary school or university, even without personal obligation to remain here for the rest of their lives. (*New York Times*, January 8, 1961)

However, Ben-Gurion's plea for support for Israel was highly binding and ultra-nationalistic:

The State of Israel is an end in itself, because the independence of every people is a great and sacred aim, and it is certainly a precious goal to a people that has been dependent on the mercy of strangers for some 2000 years [...]

In several totalitarian and Moslem countries, Judaism is in danger of death by strangulation: in the free and prosperous countries it faces the kiss of death, a slow and imperceptible decline into the abyss of assimilation.

This congress must issue a warning and gird its strength for action: not only must it intensify immigration and impose the obligation of personal ties with Israel by visits, capital investments and sending children to study in

Israel, but movement must concentrate on Hebrew education for the younger generation. (*New York Times*, January 8, 1961)

The vanishing national sentiment was intertwined in Ben-Gurion's mind with another characteristic of Israeli domestic policy. For the first time since the mass immigration from the Arab countries began, there seemed to be a threat to the hegemony of the Ashkenazi establishment led by Mapai. One reason for this was that the Holocaust was simply a foreign concept to the Sephardim immigrants, who were of Asian and African descent. As such, the notion of Jews as a European people was also alien to them (Segev 1991/1993, 328; Yablonka 2004, 184–192). Ben-Gurion even mentioned this problem in his letter to the President of Argentina: "Not only were millions murdered [...] but the cultural and spiritual centre of our people, which until World War II had its seat in Europe, was extirpated. There is hardly a Jew in the world who does not have a member of his family among the victims of the Nazis." (*Eichmann in the World Press* 1960, II) At the same time, after the Kastner trial,<sup>7</sup> Mapai's control over the heritage of the Holocaust was far from self-evident. The Kastner trial had attached an unpleasant sense of historical guilt to

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7. Rudolf Kastner, who during the 1950s was employed as the public relations director of the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry, had served as chairman of the Jewish Rescue Committee in Budapest during the war. When the mass deportations of Hungarian Jews began, Kastner bargained for time with Eichmann, who permitted a limited number of Jews to migrate to Switzerland. Kastner himself was given the task of providing the SS with a list of 200 families who were to be spared. Kastner came up with the names of 1685 Jews. Eichmann kept his promise and they were saved.

In January 1954, a trial commenced in Jerusalem in which Malkiel Greenwald was accused of having committed libel against a member of the government. Over the course of the trial, it came to light that out of the 1685 Jews rescued by Kastner, 388 had been either friends or family. He was convicted of having sold his soul to the devil by collaborating in the fullest sense of the word. The cabinet appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court. In March 1957, Kastner was ambushed outside his home and shot at close range by three young men (Sachar 1976/1996, 373–376).

the Mapai leadership, and it was losing its hegemony to Herut and the leftist parties. In this situation, Ben-Gurion desperately needed a reunifying, gripping, purifying and patriotic collective experience that would reaffirm the supremacy of the Ashkenazi establishment over other groups in the country (Segev 1991/1993, 328).

It was impossible to separate the problems in domestic policy from the status of Israel in the Jewish world community. It was particularly difficult for the American Jewry to accept Ben-Gurion's tendency to grant Israel the right to speak in the name of the world Jewry. Neither Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress nor Joseph M. Proskauer, a New York judge and honorary president of the American Jewish Committee, could accept Israel's right to bring Eichmann to trial. The former suggested that he be tried by an international court (*New York Times*, June 1, 1960), whereas the latter wanted him to be handed over to West Germany. There was, however, a significant difference between the attitudes of these two influential men. Goldmann tried to avoid conflict, even when Ben-Gurion referred to him as a "wandering Jew" (Segev 1991/1993, 329), but Proskauer was openly antagonistic. He sent Ben-Gurion a letter to which he attached an editorial from the *Washington Post* arguing that Israel was not authorised to speak in the name of Jews from other countries. Even more importantly, he warned that the Eichmann trial would hurt Israel's image in the United States and make it difficult for Israel's friends to persuade the administration to supply military aid (Segev 1991/1993, 330).

This was not good news for Ben-Gurion, who was busy sorting out other foreign relations, namely the process of rapprochement between the West German and Israeli governments. Ben-Gurion had long enjoyed amicable relations with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and it was the semi-official cooperation between these two men that gradually led to the expansion of German-Israeli economic relations in all spheres of life. In the sphere of "practical cooperation," Israel regarded German weapons as equally important as German funds. In Ben-Gurion's view, it was better that Israel did

not rely exclusively upon one or two sources of financial and military aid. German weapons began flowing into Israel in early 1959. With the arrangements kept secret, the arms deliveries frequently took on the character of smuggling. The standard practice was for the cargo to be shipped first to another country, where it would be unloaded and redirected to Israel (Sachar 1976/1996, 559–562).

In the beginning of the 1960s, this peaceful and friendly development was disturbed by two unhappy events, the first being the role played by German scientists in developing Egypt's military capabilities. Since the 1950s, a number of German technicians and engineers had been hired to serve as instructors in the Egyptian Army and to build up an Egyptian arms industry. In 1960, a National Research Centre was established to develop a space rocket, the official use of which was said to be meteorological, while in reality, of course, it was intended for military use. The Mossad got wind of this and called the plan to Bonn's attention. Although the Federal Government was embarrassed, it took no steps towards recalling the German scientists working in Egypt. Without Ben-Gurion's permission, the Mossad began killing people involved in this German-Egyptian cooperation. At a certain point, two Israeli agents were discovered and brought to trial in Switzerland. The Israeli, German and Egyptian role in the affair became public, and the episode left a distinct residue of distrust in Israel (Sachar 1976/1996, 564–565).

Meanwhile, another issue exacerbated the relations between the two countries, namely the aforementioned German legal procedures in dealing with Nazi war criminals. Throughout the 1950s, West Germany had been lax in dealing with Nazi atrocities. The trial of Eichmann suddenly caused a revival of arrests and prosecutions in the Federal Republic. Seven months after Eichmann's arrival in Jerusalem, Richard Baer, Rudolf Höss' successor as Commandant of Auschwitz, was arrested. In rapid succession, most of the members of the so-called Eichmann Commando (Franz Novak, Otto Hunsche, Hermann Krumej, Gustav Richter, Willi Zöpf) were also arrested.

Hannah Arendt pointed out that not one of them had even found it necessary to live under an assumed name in West Germany (Arendt 1963/1965, 14).

The factors described above illustrate that the end of the 1950s was a turbulent time in Israeli foreign and domestic politics. It was only natural that Ben-Gurion was looking forward to an event which he felt sure would direct the attention of the Israelis away from these politically delicate issues, and indeed the Israeli Prime Minister enjoyed almost unanimous public and political support on the Eichmann question. Ben-Gurion did not even have to speculate on the outcome of the impending verdict. The newspapers immediately ruled that Eichmann should be sentenced to death. They called Eichmann “an arch-cannibal”, “a two-legged beast of prey”, “Satan”, “the devil”, “a scourge”, “a hangman” and “a monster” (Segev 1991/1993, 332).

There has been a tendency in recent research to underestimate Ben-Gurion’s role and the significance of his politicking on the trial. For instance, David Cesarani argues that it is a myth that Ben-Gurion called for the capture of Eichmann with the intention of using his trial to teach the world a lesson about Jewish suffering and the reasons behind it for the need to establish a Jewish state. He claims that the Israeli scholar Hannah Yablonka (2004) has discovered that Ben-Gurion only really realised the full potential of the trial once Eichmann had been brought to Israel and the international controversy surrounding his abduction had erupted (Cesarani 2004, 14). However, the question of why Ben-Gurion commanded the capture at all remains unclear: “When Ben Gurion heard from Cohen that Eichmann was probably living in Argentina, he told him that Israel should not seek an extradition warrant but should act covertly to bring Eichmann to Israel and put him on trial. Ben Gurion noted in his diary on 6 December 1959, ‘If it turns out that he is there, we will catch him and bring him here. Isser will take care of it.’” (Cesarani 2004, 225)

Here, without even realising it, Cesarani actually indicates that Ben-Gurion was the father of the idea of kidnapping Eichmann as opposed to requesting his extradition to Israel. Is it plausible that he would have wanted Eichmann to be kidnapped without having given any thought to why Eichmann should be brought to trial in that particular political situation? Why did he decide not to wait for the Germans to request his extradition, as Fritz Bauer had already become very impatient with the Israelis' hesitation and passivity and might have returned to the authorities of the Federal Republic and asked them to request Eichmann's extradition (cf. Yablonka 2004, 15–16)?

Hannah Yablonka is probably right when she argues that Ben-Gurion's feelings about Eichmann and his trial developed and changed over time (Yablonka 2004, 50), as is common with politicians. There is nothing exceptional or regrettable about the fact that politicians tend to follow events and make decisions and choices on the basis of concrete situations.

It seems to me that the biggest myth in this case is Ben-Gurion's assumed capacity to predict the future and decide on the fate of Jews. Yablonka ends a chapter on Ben-Gurion's role in the Eichmann case by claiming that Ben-Gurion's attitude towards the Eichmann trial was that it was essentially a means to an end. It helped make known to the world that, as a sovereign Jewish state, Israel was now able to protect its citizens and was qualified to try and punish anyone who acted against the Jewish people. In her view, it was only later that he actually fully grasped the significance of the trial within Israel, which indicates that Ben-Gurion could no longer be seen as the architect of the future of Israel (Yablonka 2004, 54). In other words, there was a myth about David Ben-Gurion as being a god-like leader of Jewish people who was able to predict future events. In this context, the Eichmann trial was seen as the first event in decades whose outcome Ben-Gurion had not been able to predict in advance. It turned out that he was ultimately just a politician who

was trying to play with the situation and use it to his own advantage without actually knowing whether he would succeed or not.

More often than not, political goals or aims are not ultimately realised in their originally intended form. Either they change into something else or are only partially realised. As far as I can see, Ben-Gurion's case followed the latter pattern: the Eichmann case affected Israeli society in ways that nobody could have anticipated. Inadvertently, the trial hastened the process by which the diaspora began to colonise the state. Ultimately, the trial sharpened the sense that Israelis, as Jews, stood alone in the world and could not rely on anyone. By the 1980s, "the Holocaust" was a monumental complex of historical narratives and commemorative rituals. It is not "thanks to Eichmann", as Cesarani (2004, 332) puts it, but rather thanks to Ben-Gurion that "the Holocaust" became part of the civil religion of Israelis and the Western people in general (for America, cf. Novick 1999, and for Europe, Wieviorka 1998; Traverso 2004).

#### **2.4. THE JUDICIAL PRE-TRIAL DEBATE**

The formal legal basis for trying Eichmann had to be based on the combination of retroactive national legislation with a set of precedents provided by earlier Nazi war criminal trials. In Israel, the national legal basis for the Eichmann trial, or that of any other Nazi criminal for that matter, had been laid out ten years earlier in 1950 in the "Law against Genocide and the Nazi and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law," while the available set of precedents and rules of international jurisdiction were defective and thus open to interpretation. Together with the dubious character of the manner in which Eichmann was extradited to Israel, the rules and precedents in existence at the time did not form an entirely plausible basis for the trial. Consequently, it is not surprising that the debate over the legal basis and justification of the trial began almost immediately after Eichmann's capture.

The judicial debate over the Eichmann trial did not take place only in the professional journals of legal scholars but was also a popular topic of letters to the editor in daily newspapers as well as articles in journals and periodicals in a number of fields. The debate was not dominated by critics of Israel's conduct, as one might have assumed on the basis of the first contributions in the *New York Times*. On the contrary, Ben-Gurion and the Israeli government made sure that their supporters were also heard. The first to voice his support of Israel was Jacob Robinson, who had been a special consultant on Jewish affairs to Justice Robert Jackson during the Nuremberg trials, and who had served for ten years as legal advisor to the Israeli delegation at the United Nations.

After news of Eichmann's capture was published and the public debate over the issue began to heat up, Robinson sent a letter to the *New York Times* (June 6, 1960) and soon after an extended version of it to *Commentary*, the notorious monthly of the moderate American Jewish Committee. His letter was published in the July issue at the height of the debate in the United Nations over Eichmann's capture. Both versions focused on the legal legitimisation of Israel's right to try Eichmann and completely disregarded the legally questionable aspects of the capture itself. Robinson argued that he saw nothing in international penal law that would deny jurisdiction to a state simply because regular extradition procedures had not been followed. In other words, the fact that Eichmann had been forcibly removed from Argentina in itself had no bearing on Israel's right to bring him to trial (Robinson 1960a; 1960b, 1).

Robinson's principal aim was to legitimate Israel's conduct by illustrating that there was a sound legal basis upon which Israel could claim the right to try Eichmann. He did not hesitate to manipulate the rules of international law in such a way that his defence of Israel was – paradoxically enough – based both on the weaknesses and strengths of international principles. He identified three grounds on the basis of which Israel's right to try Eichmann

seemed incontestable, without paying attention to the fact that each of them was open to various interpretations.

Firstly, he pointed out that there were no accepted rules of international law governing the penal competence of national courts, from which he deduced that, as long as there was no international criminal jurisdiction, defendants could be prosecuted and tried in any country. This argument was obviously meant to back Israel's right to try Eichmann in a situation in which generally accepted international norms were lacking (Robinson 1960a; 1960b). At the same time, however, Robinson disregarded the fact that Israel's right to try Eichmann could have been rejected on the basis of the very same argument: as there were no accepted international rules on the penal competence of national courts, no national court could be awarded such competence. In addition, it could have been argued that, as long as there were no general principles on jurisdiction and tribunals in international law, no state could claim the self-evident right to try Eichmann.

Secondly, Robinson argued that territoriality and nationality principles could be applied in this case despite the fact that Eichmann's crimes did not take place in Israel and he was not an Israeli citizen. Usually, the territoriality principle has been interpreted in such a way that a trial must take place in the country in which the crime was committed. Correspondingly, the nationality principle has been understood to mean that a defendant must be tried by his own national government. Some states distinguish between active and passive nationality principles in such a way that the former refers to cases in which courts are competent to deal with defendants who are citizens of their own countries regardless of where the crime in question was committed. In the latter case, on the other hand, the principle is applied to cover cases in which a country's nationals are the victims of a crime. In Robinson's interpretation, the rationale behind the territoriality principle should have been established by considering the best location for the trial. The common assumption

is that the best place to hold a trial is the country in which the crime was committed, because it offers the most comprehensive possibility to investigate the crime: the *corpus delicti*, the witnesses, and the evidence are all there. In Robinson's reasoning, Israel best fulfilled all these criteria: "There are in Israel no less than 300,000 survivors of the Nazi extermination policy, the greatest concentration of potential witnesses anywhere. The most extensive documentation of the Nazi extermination policy is also to be found in Israel, where at least three different research institutes have been collecting and organising the relevant material for years." (Robinson 1960b, 2) In addition, in his view, Israel could also appeal to the substance of the passive nationality principle on the ground that it sheltered more surviving victims of Nazi terror than any other country. (Robinson 1960a; 1960b, 2)

In order to strengthen his argument that Eichmann's crimes were universal rather than particular, Robinson paralleled them to piracy. Thus, just as the crimes of pirates are not crimes against a particular nation or a group of people, but are perpetrated by *hostes humani generis*, genocide is a crime against humanity as opposed to a crime against a specific group of people (Robinson 1960b, 2). This parallel did not, however, prevent Robinson from arguing that Eichmann committed his crimes specifically against the Jews and not against people or humanity in general: "Eichmann had nothing to do with the persecution of non-Jews: his specialty was the extermination of the Jewish people." (Robinson 1960b, 3) In this way, his argumentation painted a portrait of an arch-executioner who was simultaneously a *hostis humani generis* and a *hostis judaeorum*.

In addition, Robinson took up the argument according to which Israel could not have a legal right to try Eichmann because it did not exist at the time the crimes were committed. As a lawyer, he did not allow himself to resort to applying any extra-legal moral arguments on Israel's behalf. Instead, he preferred to attempt to construct an historical-juridical basis for the existence of the state of Israel,

which would then justify its right to try Eichmann. He argued that Israel's legal continuity stemmed from the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine under the League of Nations (Robinson 1960a; Robinson 1960b, 4). Even if such legal continuity had existed, he disregarded the fact that it could not have been used as a judicial principle by virtue of which Israel's existence as a juridical person or body could have been declared, because such a definition would have awarded Israel a precedent for jurisdiction over a number of other matters prior to its independence.

It was at this point that the *New York Times* decided to take a stand. In its editorial on 8 June, it went directly to the heart of the matter by pointing out that Eichmann's trial was a juridical paradox because "an adequate punishment for him would actually be beyond reach of the hand of man," but "Eichmann must and should be tried." Appealing to the opinion widely held outside of Israel, it argued that Israel was not the right place for Eichmann to be tried because of the nature of his crimes: they were committed against humanity and in Europe, not in or even against Israel. Consequently, the editorial suggested that the ideal means of handling Eichmann's case would have been to reconstitute an international tribunal representing the conscience of the entire international community. Trying Eichmann in an international court – or a German court if it turned out to be impossible to reorganise an international one – would be a sufficiently impressive demonstration of retributive justice to the world at large. Thus, although the *New York Times* recognised Israel's competence to organise a fair trial, it disputed its competence to represent the conscience of all humankind. In addition, it was quite unwilling to grant Israel the right to teach the rest of the world a lesson about the eternal nature of antisemitism. Obviously, the American pro-Israel circles were less than pleased with this editorial. The biggest bombshell for the pro-Israelites, however, dropped just a few days later when Erich Fromm's letter from Mexico City was published.

Erich Fromm was much more than just loyal reader of the *New York Times* to the American Jewish community. He was not only the well-known author of a number of psychoanalytically oriented social studies, but was “widely hailed and accepted as a ‘spiritual leader’ of our time; not merely a scholar but a man of great ethical values, one who probes the depths of the human soul today, leads us to self-understanding and also points the way we should go if we are to rid ourselves of much of the evil that lurks within us,” as Shlomo Katz characterised him in the summer issue of *Midstream*, a quarterly published by the Theodor Herzl Foundation (Katz 1960, 84).

Fromm wrote his letter as a reply to the editorial of the *New York Times*, welcoming its suggestion of reconstituting an international court. At the same time, however, he criticised the editorial’s choice to remain silent on other important aspects of the case. Among these aspects was the fact that Eichmann’s kidnapping was an act of lawlessness of precisely the same type as that of which the Nazis themselves had been guilty. He argued that “it is one of the most tragic consequences of acts of brutality like those committed by the Nazis that they tend to brutalize the rest of the world, including their own victims. The State of Israel has failed to conquer the Nazi spirit by not rising to a higher moral attitude than that of lawless revenge” (Fromm 1960). Moreover, Fromm severely questioned Israel’s right to represent “Jewish people,” arguing that “Israel cannot represent anybody except her own citizens, the majority of whom are Jews, albeit a fraction of the Jews living in the world. Many of these resent the attempt of a state to which they have no allegiance whatsoever to speak – and render judgments – in their name” (Fromm 1960).

This was a powerful statement, and it is not surprising that it did not go unnoticed by American Jews. The strong feelings it aroused are reflected in Katz’s account. He lamented: “Since it is Erich Fromm who says this, and not some Arab propagandist or unreconstructed German, one feels like screaming: How can you say this, Dr. Fromm? What ‘revenge’?” (Katz 1960, 84) In a desperate attempt

to find some kind of explanation by reading between the lines, he suggested that the Eichmann case had opened a wound that had yet to begin to heal in Fromm's and many others' hearts. For Katz, this unhealed wound was the unresolved problem of feeling guilty over the fate of the European Jewry. Fromm's attack against Israel was to be read as an attempt to once again repress this problem; it was far easier to externalise his sense of guilt by criticising Israel's handling of the Eichmann case than it was to face it personally by admitting that he belonged to the group of potential victims who survived by chance because the Nazis had not managed to finish the Final Solution (Katz 1960, 85).

Katz hinted that the problem with Fromm's stance was that he refused to assume the position of a potential victim of the Nazis, which would, of course, also have included an inevitable sense of shame for being dehumanised in such a brutal manner by the Nazi atrocities. Even though Katz never actually said so, one is inclined to think that he believed Fromm was a victim of "Jewish self-hatred," which led him to make a desperate attempt to dissociate himself from this group of miserable human beings who had been unable to defend themselves.

This is a clear case of misinterpretation. Although Katz acknowledged Fromm's reputation as a man of great ethical values, he failed to read his letter as an ethical plea, which is how it should have been read in my view. Fromm's letter was not the result of repressed psychological processes which led him to make outrageous claims comparing Israeli and Nazi policies, as Katz had argued. Fromm hoped that Israel would ethically rise above other nations by recognising the international nature of the Nazi's crimes. At the same time, he wanted it to repress its understandable desire for revenge. Moreover, he wished that the young Jewish state would prove itself to be ethically and politically above its worst enemies. However, this would have required breaking the chain of illegal measures in its interaction with the rest of the world. Unfortunately,

Eichmann's kidnapping was only one example in a long list of such illegal measures.

In the meantime, the diplomatic conflict was about to proceed to the United Nations, and the *New York Times* decided once again to take a stand. In its editorial on 18 June, it argued that Israel's position was at the heart of the problem so far, as it affected international law and the orderly relations between governments. Towards the end of the editorial, this general remark was further developed into a direct plea to Israel and eventually into a direct attack against Ben-Gurion. The editorial argued that it would have been in Israel's own best interest to turn Eichmann over to an international tribunal, as it often made reference to the existence of a "transcendent moral force"; Israel had a special responsibility to the rest of the world because of the way in which Eichmann had been captured. Contrary to Ben-Gurion's beliefs, this transcendent moral force did not provide Israel with "supreme moral justification" for engaging in the illegal act of kidnapping and violating international law: "He is wrong. No immoral or illegal act justifies another. The rule of law must protect the most depraved of criminals if it is also to stand as bulwark against the victimization of the innocent."

The debate continued in *Commentary*, which published a reply by Oscar Handlin, a Professor of History at Harvard, to the previously published apology for Israel's conduct by Jacob Robinson. Together with Erich Fromm's immediate reaction to the ethically dubious aspects of the kidnapping and trial, it offers a good example of how the juridical discussion became immediately intertwined with ethical and moral aspects.

Handlin complained that Robinson had made his case by defining the problem in narrow legal terms. Had he also taken into account the ethical aspect of the problem, he could not have avoided questions related to Eichmann's capture. Unlike Robinson, who considered the manner of the capture to be both ethically and juridically insignificant, Handlin argued that an ethically solid

consideration of the case had to start precisely from the point of the capture. What made Eichmann's capture both legally and ethically precarious in Handlin's view was that it was both a clear case of espionage and an invasion of another state's sovereignty. Handlin went on to argue that Israel's stance included two inherently suspect aspects. Firstly, repeating Fromm's earlier argument, he pointed out that Israel's right to speak in the name of the world Jewry was profoundly questionable and by no means generally accepted amongst the world's Jews. Secondly, as to the historical legitimacy of Israel's existence, Robinson's construction of legal continuity from the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine was simply unfounded because their purpose was not to establish the foundations of a future Jewish state (Handlin 1960, 161).

In Handlin's view, the problem with Robinson's line of argumentation was that by disregarding the ethical aspects of Israel's actions, he was not really able to grasp the central issue of the case as a whole, namely "historic justice". He argued that justice involved more than the mere punishment and retribution of the wrongdoer, since, according to the Western conception of justice, an offence is never committed only against the individual who suffered but against the entire community. Analogically, in the case of Eichmann's capture, Israel had not only violated Argentina's sovereignty but had also violated two important generally accepted principles of justice. Firstly, the kidnapping went against the right of refuge, which for more than a century had been the subject of attempts to establish it as an international principle of protecting individuals from political and other forms of persecution and guaranteeing them a fair trial. Secondly, Israel had abandoned the principle of crimes against humanity. The destruction of the European Jewry was a clear case of a crime against humanity, and Eichmann's crimes should have been approached in the light of this principle (Handlin 1960, 161–162).

Handlin read these two violations of international principles as expressions of both Israel's tendency to ethically view itself as

superior to other countries and its general unwillingness to be a part of the international community and respect its rules and norms. What makes Handlin's conclusion significant for us here is that this argument took him from an ethical to a political level. Politically speaking, it was the terms of sharing the world with other people that was really at the heart of the Eichmann's trial. Handlin suggested that there was a certain parallel between Eichmann's conduct and that of Israel. Whereas one of Eichmann's main crimes was his unwillingness to share the world with the Jews (cf. Arendt 1963/1965, 279), it turned out that Israel was becoming a political criminal of sorts by refusing to share the world equally with other nations, preferring instead to exempt itself from respecting and following generally accepted international rules and norms.

Handlin found it profoundly sad that as soon as the Jews regained an independent position among nations by refounding a state of their own, the divinely inspired ethical principles of Zionism were forgotten in a very hypocritical way by producing a distinction between "we" and "they" according to which the Jews' deeds were judged. More precisely, Israel's deeds were measured and judged with different criteria from those generally valid in the interaction between nations: "It is sad, from this point of view, to find Jews who are pacifists in general but justify a defensive war when it comes to Israel, who are against capital punishment in general but seek the execution of those who have wronged their co-religionists, who profess interests in an international moral code, but defend the right of a Jewish nation to take the law into its own hands. This tragic turn of events certainly calls for self-examination." (Handlin 1960, 162)

What followed was not so much a period of self-examination, but the fierce defence of the right of Israel to try Eichmann by Marie Syrkin, the editor-in-chief of the labour *Zionist Jewish Frontier*. In its sheer outspokenness, her account paints a clear picture of the American Zionist stance on the debate. Syrkin saw the capture and trial of Eichmann simply as an expression of poetic and historic

justice. She firmly refused Handlin's accusation that Israel was animated by a gross desire for vengeance in the spirit of Old Testament justice. Instead, she maintained that the trial was a mechanism through which Israel insisted on confronting the single greatest sin of our time. In her view, the great *j'accuse* heard in Jerusalem was not directed primarily at the puny figure of Eichmann the man, but at the social forces which facilitated his existence and which might make him possible again. Thus, Israel's intent was in the deepest sense pedagogic and therapeutic. It wanted to cure the world of its amnesia concerning the issue of guilt for allowing the Nazi crimes to happen (Syrkin 1961, 8–9).

In other words, Syrkin quite correctly pointed to the fact that what was on trial in Jerusalem was not so much Eichmann the man, but the entire world, which had sat back and allowed the destruction of the European Jews to take place without lifting a finger to stop it. Syrkin also observed that soon after the war the world had been struck with a curious case of amnesia which kept it from "remembering" what had happened. She failed, however, to realise that Israel was not necessarily the best possible choice of who should teach the world this lesson. In addition, she failed to see that a trial, even that of a remarkable Nazi criminal, was not necessarily the best possible forum for this re-education, as judicial proceedings tend to turn all the great principles of the Western conception of justice upside down. One such principle is that it is not the victim's task to try his or her perpetrator, because the victim of a crime can never be sufficiently impartial and always has a thirst for revenge. Victims should also not be raised to the position of judges, even in cases as obvious as Eichmann's; if the result of the trial is declared or determined in advance, and if the judges are even only formally partial, the entire proceeding becomes a travesty and loses sight of its basic function of distinguishing between right and wrong.

Syrkin's contribution clearly exemplifies the fact that the argumentative strategies and ultimate justifications chosen by the participants

of the debate were not determined along clearly defined lines. As a secular Zionist, Syrkin did not hesitate to fall back on old religious lore in the defence of Israel and its right to try Eichmann.

Meanwhile, Telford Taylor, a prominent lawyer who had been an intelligence officer during the war and later served as chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, made a desperate attempt to get the debate and the trial back on a firm juridical track. Taylor's contribution, which appeared in the *New York Times* on 22 January 1961, was a reply to Ben-Gurion's aforementioned speech at the conference of the World Jewish Congress. Taylor did not even attempt to mitigate his aversion to the Israeli policy on the matter.

His point of departure was that the Eichmann trial was by no means a unique event, but rather had to be approached in the context of its precedents, i.e. previous war crime trials. In this context, "[t]he great goal of Nuremberg was the amplification and clarification of international criminal law, to strengthen the foundations of world peace and order for the future." (Taylor 1961, 11)

Taylor reminded his readers that despite the profound political implications of international law and its dependence on the general global political climate, the essence of law should not be ignored, even in the Eichmann case. The essence to which he was referring is that a crime is not committed only against the victims but against the entire community whose laws have been violated. In Taylor's view, the problem in the Eichmann case was that Ben-Gurion was doing his best to ignore this by proclaiming that the murder of the European Jews was a "crime against Jews" everywhere. This claim carried the inherently dangerous implication that the murder of Jews was not a crime against non-Jews. Taylor paralleled such a stance to Teutonic law, which could not provide a basis for an enlightened system of law in the modern world (Taylor 1961, 22).

Similarly to Fromm, he argued that it was a bitter irony that arguments once used by Hitler were now echoed by those who claimed to speak for the people he sought to exterminate. The main

problem with Israel's stance was that it was blinded by absolute nationalism, which was irreconcilable with the very idea of international law. Thus, what really disturbed Taylor was Israel's goal of binding the Eichmann trial to its nationalistic war against the rest of the world. Doing so would mean that the trial would become a travesty of international law and all justice systems and, as such, would hinder as opposed to contributing to the development of international law (Taylor 1961, 22).

It is now clear that there were two main lines of argumentation in the public debate over the Eichmann trial. On the one hand, there were the mostly pro-Israel nationalistic "moralists," who built their argumentation on the notion of the victim's ethical right to try and punish – at least in this particular case, in which the enormity of the crime went beyond normal human comprehension. On the other hand, there were positivist lawyers, who approached the trial as an episode in the development of international law and defended the rule of law despite the specific nature of the case. More precisely, on the meta-theoretical level, the principal controversy was between legal positivists, who attempted to keep the Eichmann case in the realm of the rule of law, and nationalistic "moralists," who challenged them, arguing that there should be moral and ethical justification for trying the case. The former were primarily interested in respecting and developing international law while the latter focused on saving the existence of Israel as a Jewish national state at all costs.

## **2.5. EICHMANN IN THE WORLD PRESS**

Segev has pointed out that in the beginning of the 1960s, the Israelis had an almost mystical faith in the power of the international media to either harm or help Israel. When Argentina protested the violation of its sovereignty and brought the matter up for discussion in the United Nations' Security Council, the Israeli press responded with a real sense of having been hurt. The Israelis were not satisfied with

just having gotten their hands on Eichmann, but also demanded that “the world” recognise their moral and historic right to kidnap and try him. (Segev 1991/1993, 333) It is not surprising, then, that the Israeli press also vehemently defended Israel’s right to organise the trial as it saw fit. It carefully followed what was written in other countries and often replied quite emotionally.

At the same time, however, the press was under heavy governmental censorship: it was not always given adequate information or allowed to publish whatever it pleased. Obviously, the foreign press also suffered as a result of the situation, but it definitely had the most significant effect on the Israeli press, which was obliged to follow the foreign press in order to keep up with its own government’s policies. Thus, although there is no doubt that the Israeli press backed its government’s policy voluntarily, it should not be forgotten that it sometimes did so based upon incomplete or even false information (cf. Rubinstein 1961).

### **2.5.1. The Pro-Israel Defence**

The capture of Adolf Eichmann grabbed the world’s attention. News of Ben-Gurion’s announcement of the capture in the Knesset broke immediately, and in the days and weeks that followed, the world press tried to paint a coherent picture of the events. Wild rumours of the conditions of the apprehension were inevitable, as the Israeli government refused to reveal all the details of Eichmann’s capture. The Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs tried to steer world opinion by publishing a collection of excerpts from the world press in July 1960 entitled *Eichmann in the World Press*. It is not at all surprising that this selection is conspicuously pro-Israel and fails to paint an accurate portrait of the tone of reporting at the time.

Israeli newspapers and magazines did not hesitate to join the international debate, and openly supported and defended every aspect of the Israeli policy on the matter. Their primary emphasis

was on the distinction between international and domestic law, and they pointed out that there were no generally accepted and shared rules of international law in existence limiting the penal competence of national courts. Thus, international law did not deny jurisdiction to a state because it had violated the domestic laws of another state in the process of apprehending a suspect. In addition, many states accepted that the manner in which a criminal suspect was brought before a court had no bearing on the right to try him (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1961, 205; *Eichmann in the World Press*, 1960).

Those who defended Israel's actions suggested an analogy between Eichmann's crimes and the crime of piracy, over which, according to international law, all national courts had jurisdiction. By this standard, Israel could claim jurisdiction on the basis of its being a member of the international community. The Israelis also defended the passive nationality principle, which they considered to be applicable to Israel because the majority of surviving witnesses and evidence were currently residing there (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1961, 205–206).

In the Israelis' view, the assertion that Eichmann should be tried in an international tribunal was unrealistic, because the jurisdiction of the present International Court of Justice was limited only to disputes between states. In fact, at the time, there was no court in the world that could take the case, because the Nuremberg tribunals had been disbanded a decade earlier and the proposals to establish a new permanent international criminal court had made no headway (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1961, 206; *Eichmann in the World Press*, 1960).

As to the moral question, Israel's supporters pointed out that the country had every right to act on behalf of the six million murdered Jews and the survivors. The fact was that no other nation had shown any particular interest in apprehending and trying Eichmann. Finally, the Israelis asserted that their main objective was not to punish Eichmann, as no human punishment would be great enough to make up for his deeds, but to use his trial to broaden the historical

record of the authentic history of the Nazi crimes against the Jews in all their magnitude and horror (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1961, 207).

Israel's supporters vehemently defended Israel against every critical view presented of its policy in the Eichmann question. The American press, which was not usually considered to be particularly "anti-Israel," also got its share of criticism. In order to both illustrate how the American newspapers and magazines reported on Eichmann and judge whether the pro-Israel critique was fair, I have chosen two representative examples. The first is *Life Magazine*, which is one of the most widely circulated weeklies in America. The second example is the *New York Times*, perhaps the leading newspaper in the world, which was already under mainly Jewish control in the 1960s.

### **2.5.2. The Tale of Adolf Eichmann in *Life Magazine***

Over the course of the 1950s, the world's leading weekly publications had rekindled the theme of the hunt for Nazi criminals, and in 1960, they were suddenly faced with having to report on Eichmann's kidnapping. Many of them made the most of it and wrote everything they were able to uncover about who Eichmann was as person. *Life Magazine* first reported the story on 6 June 1960 (p. 41) with a one-page story on the Israeli reaction to the capture, in which it called Eichmann "the most bloodthirsty killer of all". Two weeks later, it published photos of Eichmann's house and neighbourhood in Argentina, giving a short account of his capture under the title "Tale of Epic Capture" (*Life*, June 20, 1960, 44). The real scoop was not published until November, however, when the editors of *Life* claimed to be able to "present a major historical document" related to the case in an article entitled "Eichmann Tells His Own Damning Story". This story was published in two parts, the first at the end of November and the second in the beginning of December (*Life*, November 28 and December 6, 1960), and made no reference to the fact that the German weekly *Stern* had already published its own version of the same story.

*Life Magazine's* story was based on the so-called "Sassen interview" given by Eichmann in Argentina in 1955. Willen Sassen was a Dutch journalist who had joined the SS during the war and had been sentenced to death *in absentia* in Belgium as a war criminal. He turned up during the 1950s in Buenos Aires, where he was seen mingling with members of the German Nazi colony. He managed to convince Eichmann to give him a virtually book-length account of his life and deeds. The shortened and edited version of Sassen's Eichmann interview was never published anywhere, although he tried to sell parts of it to the *Time-Life* correspondent in Buenos Aires in 1956 (Pick 1996, 148). A more extensive yet still heavily edited version was published in 1980 by the right-wing lawyer Rudolf Aschenauer in *Ich, Adolf Eichmann. Ein historischer Zeugenbericht*. The original tapes and manuscripts have never been released to the public and are currently housed at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, Germany (Cesarani 2004, 425).

The second part of the *Life* story was published alongside an editorial which dealt with the theme of responsibility. The quite scandalous tone of the earlier story is clearly missing from this account. The editorial states that "[the] depressing fact is that Eichmann is basically a rather un-extraordinary man [...] It was chiefly for lack of better goals that Adolf was an easy convert to the shabby romanticism of the early SS [...] Apart from an excessive 'German patriotism,' his personality had no sharp edges and his psyche no obvious traumas. What he did with himself could have been done by anyone with an equal talent for keeping his place, 'doing his duty,' taking his orders, and turning his conscience over to the care of the State" (*Life*, November 5, 1960, 46).

In the editorial's view, the moral of the Eichmann story, however, went further than that. It lay in the fact that anyone's wilful blindness to injustice anywhere made him a conspirator with evil. The point was that nobody could deny responsibility for the human community at large: "That all men are responsible for each other's crimes is a theological proposition. Its political corollary is less

sweeping but nonetheless true: every citizen is responsible for all the injustice in his own community. When a man is so purblind to this human responsibility as Eichmann, his crimes properly summon him to special punishment. But let no citizen of any community use Eichmann as a scapegoat for his own sins of neglect or unconcern." (*Life*, December 5, 1960, 46)

It is worth noting that *Life Magazine* never interfered in the debate over the justification of Eichmann's capture and Israel's right to try him, focusing instead on Eichmann's personal life story. If there was a message or an expression of a particular attitude in its tone of writing, it was related precisely to this. *Life* never tried to turn Eichmann into the personification of evil, nor did it or any other journal or magazine adopt the notion that Eichmann's evil justified Israel's actions. As to the journals' internal motives, they were simply out to get headlines that would sell, as always. As we know all too well, this endeavour often leads to mean spirited and biased writing which lacks any ideological or political foundation.

### 2.5.3. "Leader of World Opinion": *The New York Times*

The headlines about Eichmann's capture were not as large as one would assume in retrospect (cf. e.g. Friedman 1961, 256). This was probably due in part to the hesitation surrounding the way in which the news was released. On the basis of Ben-Gurion's announcement in the Knesset, the circumstances and details of the capture itself remained ambiguous. This was well manifested in the story the *New York Times* published on the event. In a column written by Jerusalem correspondent Lawrence Fellows, who wrote most of the pieces published on the event, it was lamented that the Israeli Premier had made the announcement with dramatic understatement. After directly quoting Ben-Gurion's speech, the piece criticised the fact that the Israelis had declined to reveal where or when Eichmann had been found, or whether any other country had assisted in his

capture (*New York Times*, May 24, 1960). Eichmann's photo was published on page 18, where the piece continued in two columns. However, this very first piece of news did reveal, through a direct quote from Ben-Gurion, that Eichmann was captured by the Israeli intelligence services:

I have to inform the Knesset that a short time ago one of greatest of the Nazi war criminals, Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible together with the Nazi leaders for what they called the final solution of the Jewish question, that is the extermination of 6,000,000 of the Jews of Europe, was discovered by the Israel security services. (*New York Times*, May 24, 1960)

The next day, Fellows was able to report that the head of Israel's Security Service (his name was not revealed in the piece, but apparently it was Amos Manor, the then director of Shin Bet, see Aharoni 1996, 167) had stated that Eichmann had been tracked down and captured through the efforts of his agents alone (*New York Times*, May 25, 1960). Because of the reticence of the Israeli government, the rest of the news was based on speculations surrounding the details of the capture. The first expression of the attitudes of Western diplomats appeared on 26 May, when the debate over Israel's right to try Eichmann really began to heat up. If there ever was an undeniably questionable aspect in the *New York Times'* reporting on the case, it appeared on this day. Next to the piece reporting the capture was a two-column item on Eichmann's personal history and Nazi career, in which he was not only described as the "greatest living enemy of the Jewish people" but also as having "effeminate features," "a cynical smile," as being "the most evil monster of humanity," "baby faced," and "a cynical drunkard who kept mistresses and horses". The purpose of the piece was probably to further illuminate the news that appeared in other newspapers and journals, but it was written in such a way that one can only wonder whether these details are actually just editorialisations or actual facts.

Eichmann's capture and the debate surrounding the trial remained in the headlines until July 1960, although most of the reports were

brief and their tone tended to be restrained as opposed to scandalous. In spite of this, the Israeli Government Press Office found cause on 30 May to protest a number of reports published a couple of days earlier. In them, Lawrence Fellows had reported on the doubts and fears raised by the case in Israel. Among these doubts and fears, he mentioned the possible international repercussions of the trial, as well as the potentially damaging details about the actions of certain Jews during the escape operations of European Jews during the Second World War. What infuriated the Press Office most, however, was the following excerpt:

It would be embarrassing to the country in which Eichmann was captured to have it known that its people can be smuggled out by Israeli agents with or without its consent of cooperation [...] It will be painful for the Israelis if it turns out that Eichmann's wife and three sons were murdered to prevent their revealing the country in which Eichmann was captured. (*New York Times*, May 28, 1960)

The Press Office promptly released a statement which characterised these words as “shocking suggestions” that were examples of the many baseless fabrications which had appeared in the press (*New York Times*, May 31, 1960). It is true that nobody had harmed Eichmann's family, nor did anyone intend to in all likelihood. However, it seems as though it never occurred to the Israelis that their own choice not to reveal all the details of the capture would create an environment that was conducive to the spreading of rumours and speculation.

In addition, the information released by the Israeli government was not always a faithful account of what had really happened. A good example of this is an Israeli note to Argentina dated 6 June, in which it was calmly stated that Eichmann had voluntarily fled Argentina and gone to Israel, adding that it was not until Argentina sought information on the case from Israel that the Israeli government suspected that Eichmann had been apprehended in Argentina (*New York Times*, June 7, 1960). Who could possibly have believed this –

especially following the news that the Israeli Intelligence Services had carried out Eichmann's capture? At this point, as we have already seen above, the Israelis had also begun to speak about a volunteer group which had gone to Argentina to find and apprehend Eichmann. Thus, it is not surprising that foreign diplomats in Israel expressed their astonishment over Israel's official explanation of the events and said that they failed to understand its repeated reference to this "group of volunteers" (*New York Times*, June 8, 1960). It simply contradicted both Ben-Gurion's initial announcement in the Knesset and information given in the first press conferences on the event.

In keeping line with the *New York Times'* often reticent style, the first editorial on the topic did not appear until 8 June. It began by confirming the generally adopted view according to which an adequate punishment for Eichmann was actually beyond the reach of the hand of man. After this, it went on to point out that the enormity of his crime did not, however, negate the necessity to try, convict and punish him. The editorial also acknowledged Israel's right and ability to organise a fair trial. Following this, however, it claimed that despite all the factors speaking in favour of Israel, it was not the proper place to try Eichmann for two main reasons. Firstly, Eichmann's crimes were committed against humanity, and secondly, they were committed on European soil. Thus, it was in the interest of all civilisation that Eichmann be tried, and not in the interest of Israel alone (*New York Times*, June 8, 1960).

The editorial went on to suggest that the ideal method of handling the case would have been through constituting an international tribunal representing the conscience of the entire international community. Eichmann's trial and judgement would thus reflect the opinion of the entire civilised world. As the editorial did not see this as realistic at that particular time, it suggested that the trial would be organised in Germany, where Eichmann had committed his crimes. In this way, his trial would be both a far more impressive demonstration of retributive justice and a far more effective reminder

of the Nazi crimes than a trial held in Israel could ever be (*New York Times*, June 8, 1960).

This was simply too much for the Israeli government, which repeatedly insisted, both in the United Nations and elsewhere, on Israel's right to try Eichmann (*New York Times*, June 18; June 19; June 20; June 23; June 25, 1960). However, it is important to note that the *Times* editorial was not so much an expression of anti-Israelism as a reflection of the disagreement between the U.S. government and Israel over this particular matter. As far as I can see, the second (and last) editorial published by the *New York Times* on 18 June should be read precisely in this light.

This editorial began by repeating the arguments presented in the earlier piece. It went on, however, to take a step further by directly attacking the Israeli Premier, Ben-Gurion. Behind this attack was Ben-Gurion's statement in Paris on 17 June, in which he forcefully defended Israel's moral right to try Eichmann despite the illegal manner of his capture (*New York Times*, June 18, 1960). Contrary to this, the *New York Times'* second editorial did not approach Israel's action in terms of rights but in terms of duty:

Because of the way in which Eichmann was captured and kidnapped, Israel has a special responsibility before the world. A clear violation of Argentine sovereignty and of international law was carried out at least with connivance of the Israeli government, a violation that cannot be condoned irrespective of the heinousness of Eichmann's crimes. Premier Ben-Gurion refers to the 'supreme moral justification' of this act. He is wrong. No immoral or illegal act justifies another. The rule of law must protect the most depraved of criminals if it is also to stand as a bulwark against the victimization of the innocent. (*New York Times*, June 18, 1960)

At first sight, this is, of course, a clear statement against Ben-Gurion's policy on the matter. Nevertheless, it can also be read in another light. Instead of accusing the Israeli government of literally lying about its role in the kidnapping, it discretely refers to the connivance of the Israeli government.

On the basis of what has been said above, it can be concluded that the *New York Times* by no means exaggerated the importance of the Eichmann case in its reporting. This is well manifested in the size of the pieces and the space given to the case in general. Instead of being anti-Israel, the *New York Times* chose a pro-government line, which in practice meant that it refused to fuel the debate over the matter. It delayed publishing an editorial on the topic and allowed relatively little space for letters to the editor, publishing only five of them (*New York Times*, June 6; June 9; June 17; July 4, 1960). Although the Israeli government accused the foreign press of rendering the case of the Eichmann trial a merely juridical matter, the *New York Times* did not overemphasise the legal aspects of the matter, choosing instead to report on the main features of the debate in Israel and the United Nations.

Much of the public debate over the Eichmann case was related to the status of the state of Israel in relation to the world Jewry. Israel claimed to have a natural and historical right to speak in the name of all the Jews in the world, not only in the case of the Eichmann trial but also in general. As we have seen above, according to the Israeli opinion, led by Ben-Gurion, the diaspora Jewry was doomed to extinction through integration, and only those who returned to Israel would be able to survive the pressure of assimilation. This prophecy was most staunchly rejected by American Jews. Although they did engage in a heated debate over their own identity and prospects of survival, they did not accept the Zionist notion that they had a moral duty to return to Israel. Most of the American Jews felt as though they were as much American citizens as they were Jews. Jewishness was not the only defining trait of their identity. They found the prospect of granting Israel the right to speak on behalf of the world Jewry inconceivable. It is important to bear in mind that in America, this view was not only held by Reform Jews, who refused the idea of returning to Israel on a religious basis, but was also shared by most mildly religious middleclass Jews.

#### 2.5.4. Monster or Bureaucrat?

On the basis of the discussion above, it is clear that until the trial that began on 11 April 1961, Eichmann was mainly described in the world press as a monster and arch-killer, i.e. as one of the cruellest Nazi criminals to ever live. Nevertheless, a careful chronological analysis of the reporting of the Eichmann case reveals that this initial impression soon began to change. This is important in the context of this book, since Hannah Arendt was a member of the reading public. Although we cannot know how intensely she followed the public debate surrounding the Eichmann case, we have good reasons to believe that she paid quite a bit of attention to it. Her correspondence with Karl Jaspers reveals that by October 1960 she had already agreed to cover the trial for the *New Yorker* (Arendt 1985/1992, 402). More importantly, in December 1960, she told Jaspers that she would never be able to forgive herself if she did not go and “look at this walking disaster face to face in all his bizarre vacuousness, without the mediation of the printed word” (Arendt 1985/1992, 409). She must have noticed that not all newspapers actually referred to Eichmann as an inhumane monster. There were some, like *Life Magazine*, which chose to paint a portrait of Eichmann as an ordinary man. This is an important fact, because it reveals that Arendt was by no means the first person to publicly present the idea of Eichmann’s normalcy. In this subchapter, I will briefly examine a few of the most remarkable features of the public reception of Eichmann as a person and how it changed over time.

Given that the Jewish press tended to paint a deeply negative picture of Eichmann in its pre-trial reporting, the embarrassment caused by his appearance in court is noteworthy. There was something about Eichmann’s physical appearance that did not correspond to the pre-trial image depicted of him. The figure of the man simply did not seem to fit the crimes he had committed. *Hadassah Magazine* (41:9, May 1961, 3, 23), published by the Women’s International Zionist

Organization, reported that he “slipped into Court, out of the mystery and legend of his imprisonment, almost unnoticed,” looking “dignified enough and almost proud.” The Anti-Defamation League’s *ADL-Bulletin*, one of the most passionate promoters of the notion of Eichmann as a bloodthirsty monster, described the initial impressions of the members of the press present at the trial as follows:

Eichmann, the visible object of discussion, is still an enigma and, in the dramatic sense, somewhat of a disappointment. He has been described by reporters as looking like everything from a window-washer to a vacuum cleaner salesman. He shows virtually no expression. (*ADL-Bulletin*, May 1961, 5)

A mysterious vagueness about Eichmann was also noted in the labour Zionist *Jewish Frontier*. Its Israeli correspondent, Moshe Bar-Natan, described “Eichmann in captivity” as a “miserable figure,” “verbose,” “evasive,” and “obsequious” (*Jewish Frontier* 28:6, June 1961, 5). Haim Gouri, who attended the trial for the Israeli leftist labour-wing newspaper *Lamerhav*, was also perplexed by the figure of accused and wondered whether Eichmann represented “an iron will to remain silent or the obtuseness of a man who does not realize who he is” (Gouri 2004, 1). These descriptions clearly reflect the fact that both the press and the audience expected that Eichmann’s evil would be manifested in his physical appearance. They expected and perhaps even wanted him to actually look like an executioner and not an ordinary officer, “tall, thin, dressed in a dark suit, a well pressed white shirt, and a tie” (Gouri 2004, 1). These expectations were encapsulated by the *New York Times* correspondent Lawrence Fellows after the first three weeks of the trial:

Yet Eichmann is a disappointment to the people who are trying to understand something of his strange character. For their sake he should have been an insect or some antediluvian monster, but he is neither. His face is utterly empty. Observers have tried hard to find something sinister in it – the twisted mouth, the sly look, the inferno in each of his eyes – but the truth is that he is quite ordinary looking [...] Even his voice was a disappointment.

He did not have the shrill, hysterical voice of an SS man. (*New York Times*, April 30, 1961)

This initial perplexity in front of the figure of Eichmann in captivity did not change the general attitude of the Jewish press towards him. This is well reflected in the post-trial reviews. *The American Zionist* (September 1961, 3) emphasised that his air of confidence and efficiency were likely the result of careful rehearsals with Dr. Servatius, i.e. they were not authentic character traits. *The Jewish Vanguard* (December 22, 1961) called Eichmann “the twentieth century Haman,” a “war criminal,” and an “enemy of mankind”. The *ADL-Bulletin* (September 1961, 6) even swiftly carried out an extensive assessment of the press’ reaction to the case over the course of the trial, concluding that favourable press reaction to the conduct of the trial had largely dispelled earlier criticism of its circumstances and legality. It also pointed out that as the trial got underway, there began to be fewer and fewer negative editorials: “Not a single negative editorial could be found in the American press in the months of June and July.”

It is possible to distinguish two clearly different attitudes towards Eichmann’s persona which began to take shape already before the trial and were enforced over the course of its duration. There were those who chose to see him as a monster and those who admitted that despite everything, he was still a human being. It is noteworthy that this distinction was drawn and delineated largely between the Jewish and gentile press. While the former almost desperately reiterated the same arguments about Eichmann’s sheer monstrosity before, during and after the trial, the latter’s view of Eichmann as a human being was slowly but surely enforced over the course of 1961.

Those who most clearly expressed their reservations about the trial very early on were members of the British left. This general attitude also included the image of Eichmann the man. In March 1961, the *New Statesman* published an article by the Labour MP

R. H. S. Crossman which anticipated and encapsulated the stance of those who ended up viewing Eichmann primarily as a bureaucrat. On the basis of the Eichmann literature published at the time, Crossman concluded:

The only arresting feature of Eichmann's personality appears to be his complete featurelessness. He belongs to that army of faceless bureaucrats who conscientiously kept the Third Reich going long after defeat was inevitable. Unlike Himmler, who was not only an earnest racist but a nature-fadist, opposed to blood sports, Eichmann, from what is so far known about him, *had no convictions of any kind* – and no ambition except to climb the ladder of promotion. We cannot even discover *any special wickedness or perverse tastes* which would qualify him for becoming the arch criminal, responsible for the destruction of four million Jews. (Crossman 1961a, 504, my italics)

In our context here, it is important to note that the expressions in italics in the above quotation were repeated almost verbatim by Arendt in her trial report. In a post-trial account of the Eichmann case and sentencing, Crossman pointed to another aspect in Eichmann's conduct that was later decisive also in Arendt's trial account. He argued that the attorney general had failed to break Eichmann down and make him beg for mercy or to expose him as an arch-criminal capable of initiating genocide:

There before us stood not the raving anti-Semite who sent millions to the gas chamber because he was convinced that the *Herrenvolk* was being poisoned with Jewish blood, but a creature of the Nazi machine, an *Untertan*, with all the vices of the underling, a bureaucrat who made his career in the SS hierarchy by obeying any directive, however inhuman, yet always cunningly careful to cover his tracks by lies and, where possible, by anonymity. (Crossman, 1961b, 949)

As we will see more in detail in the following chapters, the conception of Eichmann as a bureaucrat, a desk-killer whose actions were based on the principle of following the orders of his superiors, was one of the cornerstones of Arendt's frame of interpretation. It is important to be aware of the fact that Arendt did not conceive of

her understanding of the bureaucrat and the good family man as the most dangerous criminal of the 20th century in connection with the Eichmann trial, but had actually been developing it since the end of the Second World War (see Arendt 1951/1979 and 1994). As to the Jewish press, what is clear in its reception and interpretation of Eichmann is that it approached him as if it had never heard any of Arendt's reflections, although she had published many of them in a number of Jewish periodicals. As far as the Jewish press was concerned, Eichmann was and remained a monster.

### 3. THE CAMPAIGN AND ITS BACKGROUND

Eichmann's trial began on 11 April 1961 and ended on 14 August after 14 weeks of testimony with more than 1,500 documents and 100 prosecution witnesses (90 of whom were Nazi concentration camp survivors). He was indicted on 15 criminal charges, including crimes against humanity and crimes against the Jewish people. The trial was interpreted into Hebrew, English, French, and German. It can be characterised as the world's first "media trial," as the Israeli government allowed news crews from all over the world to broadcast the trial live with few restrictions. Paradoxically, the trial was not broadcast in Israel, because there was no functioning television broadcasting system in the country at the time. It certainly was a political trial, as there was much more at stake than punishing the crimes of a single individual. Eichmann was convicted on all 15 counts and was sentenced to death on 15 December. He was hanged a few minutes past midnight on 1 June 1962. His body was cremated and his ashes were scattered at sea over the Mediterranean.

#### 3.1. HANNAH ARENDT IN JERUSALEM

Hannah Arendt attended the Eichmann trial as a reporter for the *New Yorker*. Her decision to attend was not based on a whim, but had begun to develop immediately after Eichmann's capture. In the course of her prewar studies on Zionism and the years it took her to complete *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt had acquired considerable knowledge of both the fate of the Jews in general and the political impact of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust in particular. She had already begun reflecting on the character and significance of the Nazi crimes long before Eichmann's trial (see

e.g. Arendt 1945c; Arendt 1994), and she had discussed the matter in her close circle of friends with such intensity that, for example, Karl Jaspers had a strong sense that she would react negatively to the trial. In October 1960, he warned Arendt: “The Eichmann trial will be no pleasure for you. I’m afraid it cannot go well. I fear your criticism and think you will keep as much of it as possible to yourself.” (Arendt 1985/1992, 404)

Despite Jaspers’ warnings, Arendt was resolute. In December 1960, she explained to her *Lieber Verehrtester* that she would never be able to forgive herself if she did not go and see Eichmann with her own eyes without the mediation of the printed word. She pointed out that as she had left Germany so early (in 1933), she had never really come face-to-face with any Nazi criminals (Arendt 1985/1992, 410). Later commentators (see e.g. Young-Bruehl 1982; Barnouw 1990; Ring 1997) have interpreted Arendt’s words to mean that for her, the Eichmann trial was first and foremost a chance for personal redemption. In retrospect, she herself admitted that it was indeed a *cura posterior* (Young-Bruehl 1982, 329).

Nevertheless, one should not dismiss the political aspects of Arendt’s stance, as the presence of an undeniable aspect of personal reconciliation does not necessarily contradict with the desire to analyse and understand a phenomenon from a political point of view. In this respect, Arendt owed a great intellectual debt to both Heinrich Blücher and Karl Jaspers, as many of her thoughts about the case matured in discussions with her husband on the one hand, and in correspondence and personal discussions with her revered intellectual tutor on the other. This intellectual interaction was by no means one-sided, as Jaspers’ views were also shaped in their mutual exchange of opinions and ideas. It seems clear that it was precisely Jaspers who encouraged and challenged her to pay more attention to the political significance of the case. He wrote: “Just as actions like Eichmann’s [...] stand outside the pale of what is comprehensible in human and moral terms, so the legal basis of this trial is dubious.

Something other than law is at issue here – and to address it in legal terms is a mistake [...] Its significance is not in its being a legal trial but in its establishing of historical facts and serving as a reminder of those facts for humanity. The hearing of witnesses to history and the collecting of documents on such a scale and with such thoroughness would not be possible for any researcher. That this is being done in the guise of a trial is, granted, unavoidable, but it is shot through with incorrect attitudes, because of everything connected with it.” (Arendt 1985/1992, 410–411)

In his following letter, Jaspers went on to explain what he meant by his claim that the actual significance of Eichmann’s trial was not in its being a trial as such: “The political realm is of an importance that cannot be captured in legal terms [...] In the case of Eichmann this dimension is not involved; a dimension that in being ‘political’ has, as it were, dignity, is larger than law, and is woven into the fabric of fate. Something else is at issue here, something less important but still something of genuine concern to humanity. It has no dignity, but for the sake of truth and clarity it too has to be lifted out of the merely legal framework.” (Arendt 1985/1992, 413)

In other words, in Jaspers’ view, the trials of Eichmann and other Nazi criminals could not be compared or paralleled with previous war crime trials. Prior to the Second World War, the judgements passed by the victors on the vanquished had been regarded as political actions and as such were seen as distinct from legal actions. More precisely, earlier war crime trials had been political acts in a dualistic sense. On the one hand, they had given the victors the chance to reestablish their political dignity by punishing the vanquished, and, on the other hand, they had given the vanquished the chance to make a fresh political start by enduring a punishment. This principle could not be applied to the Nazi crimes. The trouble with Eichmann and the other Nazi criminals was that their crimes were irreconcilable and yet the only available means of dealing with them was through criminal trials. Jaspers was also convinced that passing sentence

on Nazi criminals lay beyond the scope of any individual state's legal jurisdiction. In his view, the establishment of an international tribunal was needed in order to guarantee the maximum impartiality of the court. He even toyed with the idea of not organising a formal trial at all, but rather a process of examination and clarification that would be followed by a declaration of Eichmann's guilt without punishment (Arendt 1985/1992, 413, 424–425).

Arendt acknowledged the problems related to the trials of Nazi criminals, but at the same time she was adamant that the organisation of a legal procedure was the only possible way of dealing with the Eichmann case. It is important to note that by this time she had already begun to deal with certain conclusions repeated in the trial report, although she seems to have failed to fully grasp what Jaspers meant when he referred to the political problems of the case. Firstly, Arendt did not dispute Israel's right to kidnap and try Eichmann. Instead, she viewed the problem as centring on the fact that there was no international criminal court in existence that was competent to try individuals regardless of their nationality, and she also connected the moral aspect of the case to this fact. Politically speaking, the problem lay in the fact that humankind had no tools other than legal ones with which to judge and pass sentence on those who had carried out acts that were so heinous that they could not even be adequately described either in legal or political terms. This situation brought Arendt back to her consideration of the juridical capacity to respond to similar problems in the future. She asked whether things would have been different had there been a law against *hostis humani generis*. In her view, the Eichmann case illustrated the need for the establishment of an international criminal court in The Hague (Arendt 1985/1992, 417–418).

Here we can see the early stages of Arendt's distinction between crimes against humanness and crimes against humanity, which she would later systematically apply to her judgement of Eichmann's conduct and guilt. Her correspondence with Jaspers reveals how it

matured slowly through their exchange of opinions regarding the nature of Eichmann's crimes. During the autumn of 1960, Arendt slowly began to move from the view according to which Eichmann's crimes had been committed primarily against the Jews towards the idea that they were actually crimes against humankind. In February 1961, she wrote: "The concept of *hostis humani generis* – however one translates it, but not: crime against humanness; but, rather, against humanity – is more or less indispensable to the trial. The crucial point is that although the crime at issue was committed primarily against the Jews, it is in no way limited to the Jews or the Jewish question." (Arendt 1985/1992, 423)

At first glance, it may appear as if Arendt simply adopted the distinction from Jaspers, who in January 1961 had pointed out that "what was done to the Jews was done not only to the Jews but essentially to humankind" (Arendt 1985/1992, 420). However, a subsequent letter from Jaspers to Arendt reveals that he only actually realised what he had written when Arendt applied the distinction in a more systematic fashion, after which he included it in his own conceptual sphere as Arendt's invention. Referring to an interview given by him, he wrote that he had taken "the liberty of using [Arendt's] distinction between 'crimes against humanity' and 'crimes against humanness.'" (Arendt 1985/1992, 431)

Once developed, this distinction constituted one of the basic conceptual tools with which both Jaspers and Arendt approached and analysed the problem of Nazi crimes. Although its conceptual roots lie in the terminology of international criminal law developed during the 20th century in general and in the terminology adopted since the Nuremberg trials in particular, it surpassed the latter in one essential way that has yet to be fully understood. In fact, the English translation of the Arendt-Jaspers correspondence is an extremely clear reflection of the fact that this distinction has yet to find its way into the English-speaking world in general and the discourse of lawyers in particular. Neither the English language

nor juridical jargon clearly distinguishes between humanity and humaneness. The terms are occasionally even used synonymously to refer to the quality of being human, although the former is also sometimes used to refer to humankind and the latter to the quality of being human. Jaspers tackled this problem in a 1966 interview in *Commentary*:

But it fails to recognize the radical difference between war crimes and crimes against mankind (*Menschheit*). War crimes are crimes against humaneness (*Menschlichkeit*) – all those atrocities which are perpetrated against the enemy. A crime against mankind is the claim to the decision as to which groups of people are permitted or not permitted to live on earth, and to execute this claim through the deed of wholesale murder. Today one calls it genocide.

Basically, genocide signifies the execution of a judgment that another group of men, a people, is not to live on the earth. Anyone who makes a claim to this judgment and executes it, is a criminal against mankind. Such actions were taken against Jews, gypsies, and the mentally ill. All who have grasped this (Hannah Arendt first of all) today declare with express conviction: no man has the right to judge that a people should not exist. Anyone who on the basis of such a judgment plans the organized slaughter of a people and participates in it, does something that is fundamentally different from all crimes that have existed in the past. He acts against a principle inherent in being human as such, in the acknowledgement of what it means to be human. Mankind cannot live together with human beings who engage in something like this. (Jaspers 1966, 35)

In other words, what must be distinguished from each other are two radically different types of crime: crimes against humaneness and crimes against humankind. This distinction is of vital importance in order to be able to grasp the nature of the crimes involved in Eichmann's case. They have two essential aspects. On the one hand, they were committed against humankind as a whole because they offend the inviolable human right of every human being to inhabit the earth. On the other hand, it is precisely because they offend this right that they are political in nature. As we will see later, Arendt formulated her judgement of Eichmann on the basis of this very idea:

she argued that Eichmann's greatest crime was his unwillingness to share the earth with the Jews.

Secondly, Arendt already presented her argument that the Jews had been partially responsible for their own destruction in this pre-trial exchange of ideas with Jaspers: "I'm afraid that Eichmann will be able to prove, first of all, that no country wanted the Jews [...] and will demonstrate, second, to what a huge degree the Jews helped organize their own destruction. That is, of course, the naked truth, but this truth, if it is not really explained, could stir up more anti-Semitism than ten kidnappings. It is unfortunately a fact that Mr. Eichmann personally never harmed a hair on a single Jew's head, indeed, that neither he nor his accomplices even took part in selecting those who were sent to their deaths." (Arendt 1985/1992, 417)

This quote shows that Arendt did not invent her thesis of Jewish collaboration during the Eichmann trial and that it had actually constituted one of the basic components of her interpretive frame of Jewish history and politics far earlier. She originally adopted the notion of the Jews' partial responsibility for their own political fate from Bernard Lazare during the 1930s. She never abandoned this notion, but instead linked it with her criticism of Zionism, which also constituted an important aspect of her interpretive frame of the Eichmann trial (cf. Chapter One; Parvikko 1996).

Later, she became acquainted with the ambiguities of Jewish politics in the Third Reich while carrying out her research on the origins of totalitarianism (see Arendt 1951/1979). By the time it was published in the beginning of the 1950s, a number of other scholars had also pointed to the questionable role of the Jewish leadership in general and the Jewish Councils in particular under Nazi rule. One such scholar was the French Jewish historian, Léon Poliakov. In 1952, he published a study on the Third Reich and the Jews (*Bréviaire de la Haine: Le IIIe Reich et les Juifs*), which Arendt reviewed for *Commentary*. This review shows that Arendt had indeed formed her critical stance towards the role of the *Judenräte*

well before Eichmann's trial, and that she was not the only Jewish scholar who also wanted to highlight the less honourable aspects of Jewish conduct. In her review, she praised Poliakov for his integrity and objectivity precisely because of his account of the ghettos and the role of their *Judenräte*:

He neither accuses nor excuses, but reports fully and faithfully what the sources tell him – the growing apathy of the victims as well as their occasional heroism, the terrible dilemma of the *Judenräte*, their despair as well as their confusion, their complicity and their sometimes pathetically ludicrous ambitions. In the famous and very influential *Reichsvertretung* of German Jews, which functioned smoothly until the last German Jew had been deported, he sees the forerunner of the *Judenräte* of the Polish ghettos; he makes it clear that the German Jews, in this respect too, served the Nazis as guinea pigs in their investigation of the problem of how to get people to help carry out their own death sentences, the last turn of the screw in the totalitarian scheme of total domination. (Arendt 1952, 458–459)

The massive amount of evidence presented by the prosecution did not cause Arendt to change her mind, but, rather, confirmed her conviction that the Jewish leadership had indeed cooperated with the Nazis. In addition, this cooperation was well known in Israel, and the 1950 Law of Punishment of the Nazis and Their Collaborators included an article on the basis of which Jewish collaborators could be convicted. The situation became delicate precisely because of the fact that a number of former collaborators were living in Israel and trying desperately to hide their role in the destruction of the Jews, and now the Eichmann trial threatened to reveal them and reopen the debate over collaboration.

Hannah Arendt was to learn that, for example, the case of Rudolf Kastner, which she mentioned in her report, was more serious than she had initially realised. During the war years, Kastner had been the vice president of the Hungarian Zionist Organisation, and when Eichmann arrived with his men in 1944 “to resolve the Hungarian Jewish problem,” he was the man with whom the latter negotiated. The ambiguous result of these negotiations was that Kastner

managed to save a number of his relatives and friends while the rest of the Hungarian Jews were shipped to Auschwitz. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Kastner from rising to a high government position in Israel until a journalist revealed his past, publicly accusing him of having collaborated with the Nazis. Kastner responded by suing for libel. In the first proceedings, Judge Benjamin Halevi, who later became one of the three judges in the Eichmann trial, found that Kastner had “sold his soul to the devil” and cleared the journalist of libel. Kastner appealed the case and declared that he would “spill the beans” unless he was vindicated. By “spilling the beans” he meant that he would have publicly revealed the links between the Nazis, the Jewish Agency, and the Palestinian party leaders. At this point he was murdered, and it remains unclear to this day whether the murder was executed by Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust or the Israeli secret police. Both had good reason to do the job (Arendt 1985/1992, 510; for more details, see Segev 1991/1993, 255–320; Bilsky 2004, 19–82).

It is rarely pointed out that Arendt already had a strong preconception of Eichmann’s persona before the start of the trial, and it did not really change over its course, eventually culminating in her thesis of the banality of evil. For years, Arendt and her husband had been considering the possibility that evil was a superfluous phenomenon (Young-Bruehl 1982, 330). These considerations had already penetrated Arendt’s interpretation of evil in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In it, she argued that “radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous” (Arendt 1951/1979, 459). The connection of radical evil to superfluousness was Arendt’s first step away from the traditional understanding of evil, although she did not yet utilise the notion of banal evil. She made this connection by asking where evil comes from. Through pondering this question she realised that “it is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a ‘radical evil,’ and this is true both for Christian theology, which conceded

even to the Devil himself a celestial origin, as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a 'perverted ill will' that could be explained by comprehensible motives." (Arendt 1951/1979, 459)

In other words, the main problem with the Western philosophical tradition was that it had tried to *understand* evil. This attempt to understand evil had led both philosophers and theologians to search for the origin and cause of evil outside of itself, in its conceptual opposite, which is, of course, goodness. Consequently, evil could not be conceived of as an autonomous phenomenon which could be explained only in its unprecedentedness and radicality. Rather, it was conceived of as a perverted version of goodness. Evil men became fallen angels who had somehow been seduced to commit evil deeds.

In Arendt's view, this kind of tradition could not provide any help in the attempt to explain totalitarian evil: "Therefore, we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know." (Arendt 1951/1979, 459) In other words, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt wanted to cut the tie between goodness and evil and approach evil in its own terms. Only in this way was it possible to see that there was nothing celestial, God-given or inherent in the character of evil. Evil deeds were neither unavoidable nor predetermined. Conversely, they were radically new phenomena and as such superfluous, belonging to those matters which could also have been otherwise, i.e. belonging to the sphere of things which could have had an alternative outcome.

However, the term radical evil refers to the fact that at this point Arendt still believed that evil deeds were somehow profound and deeply rooted. More precisely, she distinguished between the "normal evil" of normal political regimes and the absolute evil of totalitarian regimes:

[t]otalitarian regimes have discovered without knowing it that there are crimes which men can neither punish nor forgive. When the impossible was made possible it became the unpunishable, unforgivable absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice; and which therefore anger could not revenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive. Just as the victims in the death factories or the holes of oblivion are no longer 'human' in the eyes of their executioners, so this newest species of criminals is beyond the pale even of solidarity in human sinfulness. (Arendt 1951/1979, 459)

It seems obvious that at this point Arendt still believed that evil deeds were somehow connected to the evil nature of their doer. Conversely to the Christian tradition, however, this nature or essence should not be traced back to its own opposite, to goodness, but should instead be conceived of in its novelty. She still had quite a way to go until she was able to link superfluousness with banality, however. Here, Heinrich Blücher's impact on her thought was decisive. As a passionate theoretician of the military strategies of the Nazi regime, he had pointed to the fact that the Nazi programme of the Final Solution was totally superfluous in military terms; the Nazis simply did not need the destruction of Jews in order to win the war and conquer the world. On the contrary, they wasted an incomprehensibly large amount of their military resources on this operation, which disrupted rather than benefited the *Wehrmacht* (Young-Bruehl 1982, 222).

As far as I can see, it was Eichmann's personal presence as he stood in his glass booth over the course of the trial that made Arendt change her mind. There seemed to be nothing essentially evil in Eichmann's character: despite the evil nature of his deeds, he was not a devil. And despite their evil nature, there was nothing inherently superhuman or devilish in his deeds. In fact, they were strikingly banal. This view is well expressed in Arendt's first letter to Jaspers after the beginning of the trial: "Eichmann is no eagle; rather, a ghost who has a cold on top of that and minute by minute

fades in substance, as it were, in his glass box.” (Arendt 1985/1992, 434) Compared with traditional interpretations of evil in European philosophy, here was the novelty of Arendt’s interpretation of Eichmann’s evil. Nevertheless, as I showed in Chapter Two, Arendt was not alone in noting that Eichmann’s concrete figure did not correspond to the image painted of him prior to the trial. On the contrary, Eichmann’s shallowness was noted by a number of journalists who reported their observations to their readership. In all probability, Arendt’s stance was also influenced by other reporters and journalists who attended the trial.

### 3.2. “DECLARATION OF WAR”<sup>8</sup>

Arendt had a very flexible contract with the *New Yorker*. She had no deadlines and could write as much as she pleased. Five pieces were published in the February and March 1963 issues of the *New Yorker*, and a slightly extended version of them was published in book form in the spring of 1963. An expanded version of the first book was published in 1965.

The storm surrounding Arendt’s report already began to stir before all five of the initial articles were printed. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1982, 328–378) has presented a very comprehensive and detailed account of the uproar they caused, and there is no need to repeat every single detail of it here. In the following, I will focus on some of the most important and noteworthy features of the public campaign against Arendt, all of which are relevant in the context of the present study.

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8. In this subchapter I have chosen to imitate the American political language in terms of its abundant usage of military vocabulary and metaphors. Both the contemporary debate surrounding Arendt’s book and the past assessments and descriptions of it have taken this jargon for granted without questioning whether it is sensible to deal with a literary debate in such warlike terms.

The first published accounts of Arendt's report indicate that the controversy did not arise spontaneously among the magazine's general readership. Rather, the central American Jewish organisations waged a deliberate campaign against Arendt. Among the initial reactions to Arendt's articles were also a number of contributions which openly and deliberately took Arendt's side and praised her courage in pointing out the weaknesses and shortcomings of Jewish politics. In retrospect, it may seem strange that such powerful Jewish organisations even bothered to waste their time attacking a single report on the trial. In order to fully understand their conduct, one must bear in mind that their deliberate aim was to control the public image of Eichmann and his role in the Final Solution. In order to achieve this goal, they cooperated with the Israeli authorities to a certain extent and also drew on their own line of argumentation in an attempt to conceal certain unpleasant traits of their own history and policy during the Nazi regime.

More precisely, together with the Israeli authorities, these organisations wanted to portray Eichmann as an inhuman and devilish monster, although at the same time they tried to conceal the fact that the rescue operations put together by the American Jewish organisations during the war were not as efficient as they could have been. More importantly, the rescue efforts followed a certain selective pattern that had an unhappy parallel with the Nazi selection of the Jews; the American Jewish organisations never campaigned for the organisation of a rescue operation to save all Jews regardless of their social status and wealth, but instead gave preference to socially, economically or artistically prosperous individuals who would be able to enrich American social and artistic life. Hannah Arendt herself was someone who fit these criteria. In America, Günther Stern, Arendt's former husband, was able to speak on her behalf, and in Europe she could appeal to her former position as an official of the Youth Aliyah in Paris (for more details see Young-Bruehl 1982, 158–159).

Jewish organisations' desire to control both the public image of Eichmann and wartime Jewish politics was not, however, a direct result of the publication of Arendt's report, but had guided their entire postwar policy. This was reflected in the fact that they were never satisfied with the contributions of independent scholars on the Holocaust, choosing instead to produce their own material. An important part of this strategy was to systematically attack any and all contributions that did not support the image portrayed by them. Hence, Arendt was by no means the only victim of the public offensive by Jewish organisations. However, what distinguishes the campaign organised against her from all the others was its immensity, perseverance, and obscenity. Not even Raul Hilberg, whose book on *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) was fiercely criticised by authoritative Jewish quarters, received as many personal insults and disproportioned distortions as Arendt (cf. Hilberg 1996).

In 1961, the World Jewish Congress did not trust the image of Eichmann portrayed in the press (see Section 2.5.) and decided instead to widely distribute its own pamphlet designed to show that Eichmann had indeed been the person responsible for carrying out the Final Solution. The portrait painted in the pamphlet depicted Eichmann as an inhuman monster and was intended to enlighten the public about the motivations and actions of this "mass liquidator" of the Jews, thus putting it in a better position to follow the proceedings (Young-Bruehl 1982, 342). Thus, it is no wonder that the Jewish organisations became suspicious when they noticed that Arendt did not accept their image of Eichmann, not to mention her criticism concerning the trial proceedings, Israeli politics and the role of the Jewish establishment in the destruction of the European Jews.

But why was it that the Jewish organisations needed an image of Eichmann as a monster? Peter Novick has pointed out that until the trial there was widespread reluctance in America to see Jews portrayed as victims, fuelled by the fear that parading the Nazi

atrocities might spark antisemitic incidents. The Israelis mainly agreed with this view, and the state of Israel, too, painted an image of the courageous and self-reliant Jew as standing up for his rights and fighting against all odds (Novick 1999, 131).

The Eichmann trial and its “exhibition” and parading of the victims and their suffering, which was organised by Gideon Hausner, compelled these organisations to change their strategy and the tone of their propaganda. They attempted to find a way to represent the Nazi evil as an irresistible and unbeatable evil by using Eichmann as its incarnation. This change in propagandistic tone was difficult enough to master without having to battle external critical voices. Arendt became a victim of this situation because her remarks about Eichmann as being an ordinary man and her doubts about the dedication of the Jewish resistance and rescue operations aroused a great deal of anxiety within leading Jewish circles.<sup>9</sup>

The Jewish organisations’ desire to control the public reception not only of the Eichmann case but also the Holocaust was also reflected in the way in which the campaign against Arendt was initiated. The first step was taken in March 1963 when Siegfried Moses, the president of the Leo Baeck Institute and an old acquaintance of Arendt’s, sent her a letter on behalf of the Council of Jews from Germany. In it, he warned that the Council was preparing to “wage a war” against Arendt, the historian Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), and the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim’s *Freedom from Ghetto Thinking* (1962).

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9. Novick has also pointed out that the backlash that the Jewish agencies had anticipated never actually took place. What happened instead was that the Eichmann trial broke 15 years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse. Moreover, there was a shift in focus from the German perpetrators to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime (Novick 1999, 144). I will come back to this shift in the two final chapters of this book.

Meanwhile, another quarter also was sharpening its battle-axes. On 8 March, the *Reconstructionist*<sup>10</sup> published a scathing review of Hilberg's book, arguing against his thesis that the European Jews had contributed to their own destruction by cooperating with the Nazis. In the *Reconstructionist's* view, the Jewish cooperation was actually an expression of Jewish passive heroism, which was a higher form of heroism than fighting on the battlefield (Goodman 1963, 30).

This same line of argumentation was repeated on 22 March in an editorial that fiercely attacked Arendt's *New Yorker* articles. It claimed that Arendt's interpretation of the events was "tasteless," "vicious," "beyond decency," and "insensitive". It was focused primarily against Arendt's view of the role of the Jewish leadership, basing its argumentation on the notion that Arendt's conception of the task of judgement was entirely erroneous:

To sit in judgment on those who lived during the period of Nazi terror while we enjoy the security of another age is to besmirch the men and women whose memories are most dear and precious to our people. Many of them were unwilling martyrs, many others were unsung heroes. From this distance, honor and human sympathy demand that we do not use the measuring rod of judgment in such a punctilious and unsympathetic fashion. (Cahn<sup>11</sup> 1963, 6)

In this way, together with other Jewish quarters, the *Reconstructionist* preferred to hide all the ambiguous and questionable aspects of the Jewish conduct during the war years and offer a heroic story instead.

I mentioned earlier that the campaign and controversy over Arendt's book was preceded by attacks against Hilberg and Bettel-

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10. *Reconstructionist* was published by the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, which claimed to be dedicated to the advancement of Judaism as an evolving religious civilisation, to the upbuilding of Eretz Israel as the spiritual centre of the Jewish people, and to the furtherance of universal freedom, justice, and peace (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1964, 371).

11. Rabbi Judah Cahn, who wrote the editorial, was the spiritual leader of New York's Metropolitan Synagogue.

heim. Although these texts did indeed become a permanent part of the controversy, they remained quite marginal compared with the storm caused by Arendt's book. Jennifer Ring (1997) has presented the interesting argument that Arendt's enemies were too highly influenced by a traditional masculine way of thinking to really offend two distinguished male scholars, whereas Arendt was an impudent female who had forgotten her status and deserved to be taught a lesson. Ring's argument is supported by certain accusations which were attacks on Arendt's personal characteristics as opposed to her book. A prime example of this kind of argumentative style is William Gutman's contribution in *Aufbau-Reconstruction*:

It seems that the main characteristic of Dr. Arendt's writings is to avoid the heart of the matter in favor of peripheral points, no matter how accurate, thus turning peripheral points into the heart of the matter. The motivating source of such procedure, within the framework of great erudition and logic, may usually be found in the desire to be different – a mark of originality. Such attitude grows out of what Alfred Adler has called 'the masculine protest' in a woman, the striving to equal the male intellect or to surpass it. Jung has called it the woman's 'animus', her masculine component which, under provocation, operates in the form of contradiction for its own sake resulting in opinionated views instead of balanced judgment. (Gutman 1963, 14)

Following these initial steps, the main battlefield of the war was established on the pages of *Aufbau-Reconstruction*, which published the condemning statement of the Council of Jews from Germany together with three other condemning accounts on 29 March. Meanwhile, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith<sup>12</sup> joined the war by sending out a memorandum to all its regional

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12. B'nai B'rith is a Jewish service organisation founded in 1843, which is engaged in educational and philanthropic programmes in such fields as youth work, community relations, adult Jewish education, aid to Israel, international affairs, service to veterans, and citizenship and civic projects. In 1913, it founded an anti-defamation league, which seeks to combat antisemitism and secure justice for all citizens alike (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1964, 363, 379).

offices, national commissions, and national committees alerting them to Arendt's defamatory conception of Jewish participation in the Nazi Holocaust. The ADL's fear was that antisemites would point to Arendt's report as evidence that Jews were no less guilty than anyone else for what had happened in Europe. It continued to go on the attack by issuing another bulletin which included an outline of the book, a superficial summary of its most controversial points, a copy of the Council's statement and an excerpt from a piece published in the *Jewish Floridian*. The ADL did not hesitate to provide this information to book reviewers when the volume did appear. As Young-Bruehl points out, many reviewers accepted the advice, as the bulletin's phrases reappeared with monotonous regularity until supplanted by others made available in the July 1963 issue of another B'nai B'rith journal, *Facts* (Young-Bruehl 1982, 348).

While the campaign was being organised in America, Siegfried Moses flew from Israel to Switzerland to try to persuade Arendt to halt the publication of the book in order to quell the storm. When Arendt refused, he suggested that she sharpen the distinction between the later Jewish Councils and the aid work they did prior to the war (Arendt 1985/1992, 564). Although Arendt accepted this suggestion, it was already too late. The New York Jewish community was already up in arms, as Hans Morgenthau wrote to Arendt (Young-Bruehl 1982, 349), and her report was being discussed and debated throughout Manhattan.

Perhaps the most dramatic and certainly one of the most influential events took place right around the time Arendt's book was published by Viking Press. The Israeli prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, Gideon Hausner, flew to New York to address a meeting of the Bergen-Belsen Survivors' Association. Present at the meeting was also Nahum Goldmann, the president of both the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress. Together, these two men vehemently attacked Arendt's account, which they

included among the attempts which had been made to minimise the responsibility of the Allies for what happened and to transfer the responsibility to the victims instead. Goldmann preached that “others [than Jews] must share the blame, too. And among these are the leaders and peoples of the Allied countries during World War II, who stood witness to this great tragedy of which they were informed and, under the pretext of the need to concentrate solely on the winning of the war, rejected all pleas and proposals to take concrete actions, which, if taken, would have resulted in the rescue of many Jewish lives.” (*New York Times*, May 20, 1963) Thus, Goldmann tried to give the impression that the Jewish organisations could not have done anything more and that it was the Allied countries’ fault that an efficient rescue of the Jews was not organised.

In this context, Goldmann situated Arendt among those “who engage today in throwing stones at the victims of the Nazis, charging them with cowardice and lack of will to resist. Those who engage in this practice – such as Hannah Arendt – are devoid of any psychological understanding and perspective of those terrible days, as well as all reverence for the unparalleled suffering and tragedy of the 6,000,000 who perished.” (*New York Times*, May 20, 1963)

During the trial, one of Gideon Hausner’s main legal strategies had been to portray Eichmann and the Nazis in general as such an indefatigable enemy that resistance would have been impossible. He always asked the survivors the same question: “Why didn’t you resist?” This did not, however, prevent him from speaking about Jewish heroism in New York and sharply rejecting the thesis that the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime had acted passively. Hausner also attacked those historians “who for one reason or another cruelly and falsely blame the Jews and their leaders for letting themselves be slaughtered,” arguing that they blatantly distorted facts and evidence (*New York Times*, May 20, 1963). Here, he obviously referred to Raul Hilberg.

### 3.3. WRITING AGAINST THE CURRENT

One can only speculate about the question of how Arendt's book would have been received without this powerful campaign, which was organised and promoted on a number of fronts and which was started even before the book came out, thus denying the reading public the opportunity to form a first impression of it freely and without public pressure and propaganda. However, although the Jewish organisations did not dawdle in initiating their reaction, it is noteworthy that all of the very first reactions in the Jewish quarters to the report were by no means negative. Among those who first sympathised with Arendt was the *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, which published a pro-Arendtian editorial on 8 March. It correctly predicted that Arendt's report would raise a furore which could leave a more lasting impression on the Jews of the United States and the world than either Eichmann's apprehension or the testimony in the Israeli court (*National Jewish Post and Opinion*, March 8, 1963).

Like the others, the *National Jewish Post and Opinion* also focused on Arendt's thesis of Jewish cooperation. However, unlike contra-Arendtian warriors, it was not satisfied with Jewish conduct and policy under Nazi rule. It argued that Arendt managed to show that the slaughter of six million Jews could not have occurred without the cooperation of the Jews and concluded:

Although the medicine is strong, we feel it is important that what Miss Arendt has written receive as wide a circulation in the Jewish community as possible. It is necessary for the diaspora to know to what extent refusal to fight to the last breath, even against all odds, was a factor in the wiping out of European Jewry [...] Jewish leadership failed. Some sold out their brother Jews by the thousands in order to save their own skins [...] We are all blameworthy. But we will be tragically unfitted to carry on the tasks before us if we do not accept our share of the blame, and if we do not learn the lesson Miss Arendt's insights has prepared for us. (*National Jewish Post and Opinion*, March 8, 1963)

For the *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, the Eichmann case was one single episode in a long list of mistakes made by the Jewish

leadership. The unhappy side of the event was the fact that, as long as the role and responsibility of the Jewish leadership was concealed, it was impossible to learn anything of its mistakes. Worse still was that very soon after the Eichmann trial it turned out that nothing had changed, but the leading Jewish organisations continued their chaotic and ineffective policy caused by an inherent lack of unity and shared policies in urgent matters.

In April, the *National Jewish Post and Opinion* turned to the role of Jewish leadership in the context of the fate of Russian Jews. It claimed that the most urgent matter at hand was the discrimination against Russian Jews which the American Jewish organisations handled as helplessly and with as little unity as before. Each organisation acted on its own without keeping in contact with other organisations. The editorial asked: "What is so much at stake that Nahum Goldman (World Jewish Congress), Label Katz (B'nai B'rith), Mr. Sonnabend (American Jewish Committee) and the heads of other national Jewish organisations cannot sit together across a table and discuss the situation in depth?" It admitted that this was not another Nazi situation, but it also recalled that American Jewish organisations were unable to unite even under the impact of the Nazi Holocaust. To prove this argument, it took up the case of the Hungarian Jews, whom the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee failed to save despite the fact that it already had connections that were fronting for it in Hungary. (*National Jewish Post and Opinion*, April 12, 1963)

Thus, according to the *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, Arendt's argument about Jewish collaboration with the Nazis and the lack of united resistance was merely more sad proof of the political impotence and incompetence of the Jewish organisations and the Jewish political tradition. This view was put even more succinctly in the editorial letter of Burton Halpern in the 3 May issue of the newspaper. He argued that the Jews of Europe were hopelessly incapacitated and emasculated by the organisations which should

have galvanised them to collective action. What resistance took place did so despite, not because, of the Jewish hierarchy. The Jewish defence, escape, and retaliation failed to materialise simply because the Jewish leadership decreed against it (*National Jewish Post and Opinion*, May 3, 1963).

Despite its overall contra-Arendtian tone, also *Aufbau-Reconstruction* allowed room for an account sympathetic to Arendt at the beginning of the controversy.<sup>13</sup> On 10 May, it published a comment on the statement of the Council of Jews from Germany by Martin Lederman, who strongly refuted the Council's right to speak on behalf of all German Jews. He disapproved of the Council's self-righteous defence of the leadership of Jewish organisations and institutions "as if they had been of one single kind, composition and quality, and had acted with dignity, self-respect and good judgement always and at all times. They were not and they did not." Lederman pointed out that he was not alone in his opinion, but that a number of his friends (i.e. other German Jewish immigrants) agreed with him. (Lederman 1963, 5) This, of course, supports the fact that not all the readers of Arendt's report initially condemned it as a false representation of the events, but rather saw in it an original attempt to discuss events which had been dismissed for 20 years. Lederman concluded his account with a question which excellently encapsulates the question of what the entire controversy was about: "Shall we not give Hannah Arendt the right to voice doubts as to the wisdom of Jewish men in leading positions?" (Lederman 1963, 5)

In June 1963, there still were a number of Jews who sympathised with Arendt. This is reflected in the fact that Michael Musmanno's ultra-critical and almost libellous review in the *New York Times Book*

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13. However, it should not be forgotten, on the other hand, that this single pro-Arendtian piece did not change the general contra-Arendtian tone and strategy of the *Aufbau*. This strategy included the fact that it refused to print Arendt's own statement (see Arendt 1985/1992, 515).

*Review* caused a reaction of more than 100 letters from readers. A clear majority of these letters was favourable to Arendt, and of these favourable accounts a significant number were written by Jews. Nevertheless, as the contra-Arendtian campaign proceeded on every possible front, less and less people dared to come to Arendt's defence in public. Thus, in general, on the Jewish side, the attempts to defend Arendt remained sporadic and scattered compared with the efficiency of the organised campaign against her which succeeded step by step in turning the general opinion of the American Jewry against her.

The New York reporter from the London based *Observer*, Irving Kristol, explained the storm caused by Arendt's book to his readers by the simple fact that "a book that touches Jewish sensibilities does not go ignored; and Miss Arendt's book grated against Jewish sensibilities that are most particularly inflammable. The reaction has been instantaneous, massive and frequently vicious." (Kristol 1963, 20) He went on explaining that the sensibility touched by her was by no means insignificant. On the contrary, she managed to touch one of the bleeding wounds of the American Jewish community:

What did, however, cause the most outrage, and with some justice, is Miss Arendt's attack on the official leadership of European Jewry, who – she asserts with undue belligerency – unwittingly assisted in the extermination of their flock by negotiating with the Nazis over the 'orderly' enforcement of their savage decrees. (Kristol 1963, 20)

One of the sad consequences of the campaign was that many people got carried away with it without ever really reading either the *New Yorker* report or the book. At the end of June, Kristol reported to his London readers that, although hysteria was diminishing and sobriety was gaining ground, "it is still not extraordinary to hear a voice at the party exclaim: 'How *could* that awful Arendt woman dare to write such a book? Of course, I haven't read it myself, but [...]" (Kristol 1963, 20) This kind of social conversation created an atmosphere in which it was extremely difficult to defend Arendt. As most people seemed to condemn her book, one easily began to doubt one's

own impression of it and was tempted to adopt the view shared by others. Thus, as most Jews were turning against Arendt, those Jews who were in favour of her did not dare to open their mouths in order to avoid indignation and social exclusion.

In retrospect, it is easy to see a conspicuous parallel to the debate over Eichmann's trial in 1960–61. While in 1961 the majority of Jewish side promoted an image of Eichmann as a monster and defended Israel's right to organise the trial, this same group now campaigned against Arendt's book even without properly reading it. Correspondingly, whereas the gentile side in 1961 preferred to take Eichmann as a human being and criticise a number of aspects related to the trial, it now sympathised with Arendt's critical report. In sum, in both cases the main frontline delineated between the Jewish and gentile quarters and particularly in the Jewish side it was almost impossible to publicly sympathise with Arendt. (cf. McCarthy 1964; Barnouw 1990, 247)

### 3.4. ARENDT'S RESPONSE

Having completed her manuscript for the Viking Press, Arendt flew to Europe, where she spent the entire spring of 1963. Hence, she followed the initial phases of the smear campaign against her from a distance and did not fully realise the magnitude the controversy was beginning to reach. Her disinterest in the public reaction to her book stemmed in part from her general attitude towards her intellectual work and public life; she never flattered the reading public, but instead promptly wrote what she believed to be correct and true. Her relatives and friends knew from experience that she would have to pay for this from time to time. Arendt's closest friend, Anne Weil, expressed this thought as follows in a letter to Jaspers: "[I]t's always been that way with Hannah. She says something. People are shocked and start to inveigh against her. And she responds either

with astonishment or horror: But that's the way things really are!" (Arendt 1985/1992, 531)

Arendt's friends were inclined to see this character trait as an expression of her naivety. Jaspers agreed with Anne Weil: "And then I think with Anne Weil: how infinitely naïve not to notice that the act of putting a book like this into the world is an act of aggression against 'life-sustaining lies'. Where those lies are exposed and the names of the people who live those lies are named, the meaning of those people's existence itself is at stake. They react by becoming deadly enemies." (Arendt 1985/1992, 531)

Jaspers was certainly correct in his assessment of people's reactions to Arendt's work. However, he and Weil were probably wrong in their explanation of Arendt's attitude as a simple manifestation of her naivety. Arendt's reply speaks against this explanation: "Annchen's remark – yes, she is probably right; that's essentially the way it's always been. Except that in the public context things are significantly different. And of course I'm 'naïve' – as I was writing, I really didn't think of anything else but presenting things as correctly and as fully supported by facts as I could." (Arendt 1985/1992, 537)

As opposed to having been naïve, Arendt could be characterised as having been uncompromising in her attitude towards presenting things as correctly and accurately as possible. She certainly could not have foreseen that her trial report would turn all the most important and powerful Jewish organisations against her. This was not, however, because she was naïve but because she had a sense of personal modesty which prevented her from megalomaniacally believing that her book would blow the world away. In other words, she did understand that not everyone would like what she had written, but she did not predict that her report would be considered to be of such great importance. The course of events compelled her to consider why it was that she was chosen as the target of such a fierce hate campaign.

When she returned to New York in June, she had no choice but to concretely face the situation, as her apartment was literally filled with unopened mail. Having gone through all the mail she was able to explain the uproar in Jewish circles to Jaspers:

The explanation is so simple that I should have understood it myself. Without realizing it, I dragged out a part of the Jewish past that has not been laid to rest; former members of Jewish Councils occupy high positions and sometimes the highest positions in governments everywhere, but particularly in Israel. (Arendt 1985/1992, 510)

Arendt continued by describing the main characteristics of the smear campaign, after which she paralleled it with the Dreyfus affair:

It is quite instructive to see what can be achieved by manipulating public opinion and how many people, often on a high intellectual level, can be manipulated [...] the reactions have taken such a turn [...] that a friend said it's like the time of the Dreyfus affair. Families are split down the middle! [...] If I had known this would happen, I probably would have done precisely what I did do. And in the long run it's perhaps beneficial to sweep out a little of that uniquely Jewish rubbish. (Arendt 1985/1992, 511)

As these quotations show, Arendt immediately understood that the “hot potato” in the controversy was her thesis of Jewish cooperation. Jaspers hurried to reply, immediately agreeing that the campaign had been caused by the fact that Arendt had touched an extremely sore nerve for many people by illustrating that their lives had been guided by a lie. In Jaspers' view, the paradox of the reaction was that what Arendt had communicated was in large part already known (Arendt 1985/1992, 511). In other words, Arendt was not attacked for disclosing previously unknown facts but because she insisted on dealing with certain unpleasant facts about which the Jewish establishment preferred to keep silent.

Jaspers also pointed to the fact that the reverse side of Jewish cooperation was also involved. This was the question of the resistance movement, which was intended to cause a louder uproar in Germany than the question of the Jewish Councils. Arendt admitted this,

although she was far more critical towards the role of the German resistance than Jaspers:

[R]esistance to the regime itself never became a principle for them [the Germans]. As far as the question of how much they knew is concerned, the answer would probably be different for each individual. But in general we can probably say that the majority of them were themselves so very much involved in the regime, or at least had such close ties to important functionaries, that one can assume they knew what was, on the Eastern Front at least, common knowledge. Whether they wanted to admit to themselves that they knew what they knew is another question [...] What I mean is that everyone who had a political role – even if he was against the regime and even if he was secretly preparing an assassination attempt on Hitler – was infected by the plague in both word and deed. In this sense, the demoralization of the country was complete [...]. (Arendt 1985/1992, 518)

While Arendt and Jaspers enthusiastically agreed upon the reasons for and consequences of the smear campaign, the scandal was growing to fantastic proportions in Manhattan. Arendt accepted a few invitations to participate in public debates on the book, but she was to learn that anything she did would inevitably be used against her. For example, a successful lecture given to the students of Columbia University, arranged by Albert Friedlander of the CCAR,<sup>14</sup> turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory in the sense that it caused the Israeli government and the Jewish organisations dominated by it to significantly increase their efforts. This was reflected by the fact that the functionaries behind the campaign no longer limited themselves to merely speaking against Arendt in purely Jewish quarters, but instead sent Ernst Simon on a special mission to a number of universities to campaign against Arendt in gatherings organised by Hillel societies.<sup>15</sup> (Arendt 1985/1992, 522) Arendt concluded:

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14. Central Conference of American Rabbis, founded in 1889, which seeks to conserve and promote Judaism and to disseminate its teachings in a liberal spirit.

15. Hillel is a worldwide Jewish campus organisation that provides opportunities for Jewish students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity.

Everything proves, in retrospect, to have been a trap [...] There is hardly anything I can do, at any rate nothing that would be effective. These people know very well I can't take them to court, because it would ruin me financially and because with their massive financial and organizational resources they would win the case easily [...] If I wanted to refute every lie, I could spend all my time at it and would need a research staff and secretaries to help me out. (Arendt 1985/1992, 523)

Simultaneously, Arendt grew to be increasingly confident as to the reason for the entire campaign:

Finally, the question remains as to why the Jewish "establishment" is taking such an extraordinary interest in this matter and going to such massive expense. The answer seems to be that the Jewish leadership (Jewish Agency before the state of Israel was founded) has much more dirty laundry to hide than anyone had ever guessed [...] Well, they won't murder me, because I don't have any beans to spill. They just want to make an example of me to show what happens to people who take the liberty of being interested in such matters. (Arendt 1985/1992, 524)

However, Jaspers did not believe that the explanation was quite that simple. In his view, something within the "Jewry" itself had been struck a blow, and the organisation behind the moulding of public opinion was connected to this. In other words, in his view, the campaign was effective because it had struck a responsive chord in people. (Arendt 1985/1992, 527) Arendt admitted this and reported that the Israeli consul himself had accused her of betraying her people by saying certain things "in a hostile environment". Arendt concluded that "because of Hitler and Auschwitz two things have become virulent again, the ancient *odium humani generis* and the terrible ancient fear." (Arendt 1985/1992, 536)

It is obvious that both "real political" factors and deep national sentiments were at stake in the smear campaign. Hannah Arendt was not just "anybody" to the American Jewish community, and despite her independence as a thinker and theoretician, she was definitely considered to be a member of the Jewish community of Manhattan.

This is reflected by the fact that the public smear campaign was complemented by a personal campaign of persuasion and pressure. The aforementioned contacts by Siegfried Moses and the Israeli consul were by no means the only personal contacts made with Arendt during the campaign. The very same people who publicly attacked Arendt on the pages of *Aufbau* – people who personally knew her – repeatedly approached her in private. What made these attempts at contacting her most off-putting in Arendt's view was the fact that these people attempted to wash their hands of the situation by explaining that their profoundly two-faced behaviour had been in the best interest of the entire Jewish community:

This taking out of both sides of one's mouth is characteristic of this whole business to an incredible degree. The cynicism of the functionaries is beyond belief. They take it as a matter of course and think there's nothing wrong with it. They assure me of how much they 'admire' me and my Eichmann book in particular! And when I say: Well, then how is this possible, they say: But really now, you must understand [...]. (Arendt 1985/1992, 536)

Arendt concluded that the entire business was a classic case of character assassination (Arendt 1985/1992, 522), and it turned out that she could not have been more right. The day Jaspers optimistically awaited never came:

A time will come that you will not live to see, when the Jews will erect a monument to you in Israel, as they are doing now for Spinoza in Israel, and they will proudly claim you as their own [...]. (1985/1992, 527)

In sum, it is not an exaggeration to argue that the general public opinion amongst Jews was forcefully turned against Arendt by a deliberate campaign that was based on a very selective and distorted reading of her book. The basic method of this reading was to detach Arendt's arguments from their original context and represent them as if her primary motive had been to insult and compromise her fellow Jews as opposed to simply reporting on a trial. In my view, this is a clear case of political persecution, and one which would

stigmatise Arendt for the rest of her life. The profoundly political character of the contra-Arendtian campaign was particular in that it was caused by a deliberate attempt by the leading Jewish organisations to conceal certain unpleasant traits of their own policy during the 1930s and 1940s. Hannah Arendt became a victim of this endeavour simply because she was an easy target: as an independent scholar, she had no powerful allies who could have come to her aide. Nevertheless, what Arendt experienced is far from extraordinary. On the contrary, it is common practice in public political debates to destroy an individual's reputation instead of defending oneself by means of sufficiently persuasive argumentation. More precisely, when unpleasant and politically dangerous themes and events threaten to penetrate the public debate, they are often refuted and suppressed by those to whom they pose the greatest threat by condemning whoever attempts to deal with them in a new light. This mechanism of political battle works on two levels. On the one hand, unpleasant themes and events are turned into the personal defects of a single individual. Matter-of-fact argumentations are replaced by *ad personam* accusations. On the other hand, unpleasant facts are inverted in order to prove that one's political enemy is wrong. Both of these styles were used in the argumentation against Arendt.

I claim that the campaign against Arendt was not organised because of Arendt's arguments as such, but rather because of what she said between the lines about the most powerful American Jewish organisations and the state of Israel. More precisely, the reverse side of her critique of the Jewish leadership in Europe was the claim according to which the most important American Jewish organisations had not done everything in their power to organise the mass escape of the Jews from Europe.<sup>16</sup> Instead of trying to rescue as

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16. Later some scholars have argued that these organisations could not have accomplished much more they did even if they had tried to, because the idea of rescue did not get much support among gentiles and because of this lack there were not many shelters available. See e.g. Shafir 1999.

many Jews as possible regardless of their fame and social status, the American Jewish organisations chose to rescue “prominent Jews”. In addition, what was at stake was the reputation of certain American and Israelite Jewish politicians who were still living. Not able to prove her thesis with historical documents, Arendt pointed to the fact that the wartime laundry of the Jewish Agency was apparently far dirtier than anybody was willing to admit in public. Between the lines, she pointed to two extremely uncomfortable facts from the viewpoint of the Jewish establishment. First, she referred to the fact that the state of Israel was protecting a number of Jewish Nazi collaborators. Second, she referred to the wartime connections between the Jewish organisations and the Nazis. These remarks alone would have sufficed to alarm the entire Jewish establishment.

At the same time, she provided the Jewish organisations with a relatively harmless and powerless target. It was unlikely that such an independent and disengaged scholar would have been able to win any war against them. On the contrary, she could be used to channel the debate in such a way that critical approaches to Jewish politics both during and after the World War II could be efficiently silenced. Hannah Arendt’s case became a public example of what would happen to anybody who tried to take up the dark side of Jewish politics.

What really was at stake in the Eichmann controversy was Arendt’s critique of the contemporary Jewish establishment and the traditional despotic power structures of the American Jewish community. Between the lines of her report of the Eichmann trial, there is, in fact, another analysis of Jewish politics. More precisely, between the lines of the trial report Arendt carried out political reading of the Jewish political culture and pointed to some of its best-known characteristics about which nobody in the Jewish community wanted to talk – and even less so in the gentile public realm. Among these characteristics, Arendt uncovered a traditional hierarchical power structure that did not want to open itself to modern democratic

practices, the ruthless politics of individual interests, an astonishing amount of hypocrisy, vanity, and conformism. The Jewish leaders were more interested in maintaining their own power shares and fame than improving the living conditions of the members of the Jewish community. On the other hand, less powerful, ordinary members of Jewish communities felt betrayed and did not want to admit that their lives were based on lies and dishonesty. Consequently, the Jewish establishment attacked Arendt because it wanted to protect itself and Israel's reputation, and the ordinary Jews turned against Arendt because they felt that her pamphlet had somehow threatened their Jewish identity.

The saddest part of this whole sad story is the fact that only a handful of intellectuals were able to understand what it was really all about (see e.g. Bergen 1998). Even most of the people who did sympathise with Arendt were not really able to see how strong the argumentation in her book was in terms of the duality of Jewish politics. Arendt not only focused on the Jewish leadership during the war but also on contemporary Jewish organisations and establishments and their hierarchical elitism. Mostly they preferred to ignore this side of the book and focus on all kinds of moral and ethical speculations. On the whole, this part of the debate does not give a very encouraging impression of the capacity of the political judgement of intellectuals at large. Rather, it speaks in favour of Arendt's understanding of the fate of the conscious pariah as a lonely and exceptional figure of political courage and judgement.

## 4. THE ARENDT CONTROVERSY

In this chapter, I will analyse the public controversy surrounding Arendt's book. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1982) has provided an excellent account of the controversy (see also Barnouw 1990; Cohen 1991; Ring 1997; Novick 1999), its background and aftermath, there is no need to meticulously scrutinise every single comment made about the book. Instead, it is sufficient to select a few representative and authoritative contributions and analyse the most important features of them in order to gain a general understanding of the character of the entire controversy.

I will begin by focusing on the first contributions published in *Aufbau-Reconstruction*, since this was the site and context in which the public controversy really began to take shape. *Aufbau* did not even wait for the book to be released as it published its first accounts immediately after Arendt's *New Yorker* series. Moreover, *Aufbau* was in no hurry to end the debate either, and it indeed dragged on until the end of 1963. In fact, no other journal published as many contributions on the theme, and a number of *Aufbau* pieces were later translated into English and republished in other publications. In addition, the debate initiated in *Aufbau* later became intertwined with the British and German debates; the latter reached its peak when the German translation of Arendt's book appeared in 1964. *Aufbau* also closely followed the debate in other fora and published short reports on it. Although this German Jewish weekly pretended to be impartial and objective, almost all the articles published in it were contra-Arendtian. Indeed, it may be argued that *Aufbau* was not only the initial site of the controversy but also one of the most important sites of the smear campaign against Arendt. Had *Aufbau* been published in English, it in all likelihood would have become one of the leading media of the controversy. However, the fact that it was published mainly in German inevitably

diminished and restricted its readership. This restriction was partly compensated by the fact that the arguments originally published on its pages were used and repeated elsewhere.

Other newspapers and journals mostly waited for the appearance of the book in May and then almost simultaneously published reviews of it. As I have already indicated in the previous chapter, not all of them were condemning. However, from the very beginning of the controversy, it was characterised by a conspicuous distinction between Jewish and gentile contributions. Whereas the gentiles embraced Arendt's analysis as a highly original and refreshing account, the Jewish reviewers approached it with a profound sense of suspicion. The first and most authoritative review that was published after the appearance of the book was Michael Musmanno's review in the *New York Times Book Review*. It can be characterised as having been one of the most systematic misreadings of Arendt's book published in a widely spread newspaper or journal, and it caused heated reactions amongst Arendt's readers. It soon became clear that Musmanno did, indeed, belong to those functionaries who held nothing back in their smear campaign of Arendt's book and reputation.

In this chapter, I will compare Musmanno's piece with another important contribution which appeared almost simultaneously, namely Eugene Rostow's review in the *Herald Tribune*, which may be read as a sincere attempt to evaluate the juridical and ethical significance of Arendt's book. More importantly, had the Jewish campaign against Arendt's book not been so immense and furious, making calm and dispassionate discussion virtually impossible, Rostow's piece could have decisively led the debate to take an entirely different shape. In other words, had this piece gained an instrumental and authoritative role, the entire debate could have focused on the role and future of international law on the one hand, and political judgement and the possibilities of independent individual action in politically extreme situations on the other.

An overview of the most important pieces of the initial phases of the controversy would not be complete without an analysis of Jacob Robinson's account in the July-August issue of the Anti-Defamation League's bulletin *Facts*. In fact, this piece is not just another book review, but instead provides the programmatic guidelines which should have been followed in the public accounts of Arendt's book. This publication was used, for example, by Nehemiah Robinson in a pamphlet distributed by the World Jewish Congress, by Marie Syrkin in an article in *Dissent*, by Norman Podhoretz in *Commentary*, by Gertrud Ezorsky in *New Politics*, by Morris Schappes in *Jewish Currents*, and by Louis Harap in *Science and Society* (Young-Bruehl 1982, 356).

In the following, I will discuss a piece which surpassed all others in its authoritativeness, sealing Arendt's excommunication from the Jewish intelligentsia and rendering her not only an intellectual but also a political pariah for the rest of her life. This piece was a letter written by Gerschom Scholem, one of the most esteemed Jewish philosophers and spiritual leaders, which was deliberately republished several times both in America and Europe. The fateful effect of this letter was due to the fact that it was written in an apparently sincere and sympathetic tone which turned out to be one of the most cunning traps into which Arendt would be led. Once the ramifications of the correspondence between Scholem and Arendt began to become clear, Arendt wrote to Jaspers:

You said it was as if I had stumbled into an ambush. And that is absolutely true. Everything proves, in retrospect, to have been a trap. Like the exchange of letters with Scholem, to whom I responded in good faith – and who then went out to shout this whole sordid story from the rooftops in *Neue Züricher Zeitung* and *Encounter*. Which accomplished nothing else, it seems to me, than to infect those segments of the population that had not yet been stricken by the epidemic of lies. And everybody goes along. I can't do anything about it. Scholem was determined to publish, and I assumed he would in the Tel Aviv *Mitteilungsblatt*, which seemed harmless to me. And he did that first, but then used all his connections to broadcast the letters to the world. (Arendt 1985/1992, 523)

My aim in discussing these early contributions to the debate is to construct a thematic frame in order to identify its most important points and characteristics. This is important because it was precisely in these early contributions that the entire controversy took shape. Once the controversy became established, the very same arguments were repeated and circulated everywhere with astonishing monotony and to such a degree that the reception of Arendt's Eichmann report was never really capable of liberating itself from them. On the contrary, the majority of the later rereadings of Arendt's book have been overshadowed by a preconception created by this debate (Young-Bruehl 1982, 348–349; cf. Barnouw 1990 and Ring 1997).

Finally, I will examine a few of the “constant” themes of the debate, including the responsibility of the intellectuals, Arendt's right to judge wartime Jewish politics, Arendt's “Jewish revisionism,” and the attempt of the young Jewish leftist radicals to counter argue against Arendt's critics and read Arendt's book in the context of the new left of the 1960s.

#### 4.1. *AUFBAU*, 29 MARCH

The proper starting point of the public campaign against Arendt and the controversy surrounding her trial report was the aforementioned issue of *Aufbau-Reconstruction*, which was published on 29 March 1963, and in which *The Statement by the Council of Jews from Germany* was published with three other critiques of Arendt's series. These other critiques were *So war Rabbiner Leo Baeck* by Adolf Leschnitser, *Der Jude wird verbrannt* by Hugo Hahn and *Ein Meisterwerk ohne Seele* by Frederic R. Lachman.

It is no coincidence that the Council's statement, entitled *Jewish Dignity and Self-Respect*, was published in English despite the fact that *Aufbau* appeared almost exclusively in German. Its aim was to gain the largest possible amount of publicity, also among those Jews who had not mastered the German language. It was based on

the argument that Arendt had badly distorted the role of the Jewish leadership in the destruction of the European Jews. The Council condemned Arendt's argument, according to which the Jewish leaders had played an active role in the annihilation of their own people and that this cooperation was of decisive importance in the execution of the Final Solution. It argued that the salvation of more than 250,000 Jews was due to the work of Jewish organisations and communities. The statement maintained that Arendt's mistake was to interpret this work as "cooperation," whereas in reality it was a mark of integrity and self-sacrifice. It admitted that Jewish communities were forced to provide technical assistance in the execution of the orders given to the communities, but in its view this assistance should not have been seen as cooperation. It concluded: "[T]he German Jews by straining their moral and material resources to the utmost, organized themselves to assist each other and to maintain under the most trying circumstances their dignity and self-respect." Ultimately, it identified Arendt's gravest mistake as her impudence to pass judgement without personal experience: "It does not become those who were not there to pass moral judgements on this grim chapter. The allegation that the Nazi regime could not have achieved its Satanic aim without using Jews must appear absurd to any sensible person." (*Aufbau*, 29 March 1963)

The statement behind these lofty words was not only inspired by moral indignation but also by a mystifying reverence of the community leaders, which stemmed from hierarchical thinking characteristic of the Jewish tradition. The respect and adoration of rabbis and other community leaders was unquestionable – at least in public and in hostile gentile environments and environments to which gentiles had access. In the Council's view, there was no question that both the rabbis and secular Jewish leaders were selfless and righteous persons under all circumstances. Without making reference to this mystifying reverence, it would be difficult if not impossible to understand the importance given to the figure of Leo

Baek, who was one of the most reverend Jewish rabbis in Germany and whose name the institute behind the Council carried.<sup>17</sup> The fact that an entire institute had been founded in his memory implied that he had been hailed as a symbol of incomparable Jewish integrity and self-sacrifice, and any criticism of his memory was considered blasphemy. As such, Baek deserved to be raised above all the other Jewish figures mentioned in Arendt's report and issued a separate apology in the pages of *Aufbau*.

Rabbi Baek had been the president of the German Rabbis' Association since 1924. In addition to this, he was grand master of the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith in Germany, co-chairman of the Keren Hayesod, and a member of the board of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. During the Nazi period, he became the head of the National Association of German Jews. Although he was constantly harassed and arrested by the Gestapo on the one hand, and received numerous requests to leave Germany on the other, he considered it his duty to stay and continue his work on behalf of the German Jewry to the end (Boehm 1985 [1949], 282–283).

Until 1943, Leo Baek was spared deportation precisely because of his work as head of the National Association of German Jews; he belonged to the group of Jewish leaders with whom the Nazis negotiated about Jewish matters. He was eventually deported to Theresienstadt, where he immediately became a member of the Jewish Council. Arendt refers in her book to the following moment in August 1943. A fellow inmate of Baek's from Czechoslovakia approached him and told him about the gassings in Auschwitz. Baek decided not to tell anybody about this horrible news, and he would later explain his decision to remain silent as follows:

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17. The Leo Baek Institute was founded in 1955 and engages in historical research, the presentation and publication of the history of the German speaking Jewry, and the collection of books and manuscripts in this field (*American Jewish Yearbook* 1964, 367).

So it was not just a rumor or, as I had hoped, the illusion of a diseased imagination. I went through a hard struggle debating whether it was my duty to convince Grünberg that he must repeat what he had heard before the Council of Elders, of which I was an honorary member. I finally decided that no one should know it. If the Council of Elders were informed the whole camp would know within a few hours. *Living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder*<sup>18</sup>. And this death was not certain for all: there was selection for slave labor; perhaps not all transports went to Auschwitz. So I came to the grave decision to tell to no one. (Baeck 1949, 293)

In *Aufbau*, Adolf Leschnitzer was assigned the task of explaining how great a person Rabbi Baeck really was. He had three main objections to Arendt's work, and they were related to the role of the Jewish officials in the execution of deportations, the fact that Baeck did not tell the deportees what was awaiting them at Auschwitz, and the ironic parallel drawn by Arendt between Baeck and Hitler.

Leschnitzer argued that Baeck's attempt was not to make death easier for the members of his community by hiding the truth about their impending execution, but rather his decision to keep silent about their fate was part of a deliberate strategy based on the firm conviction that the national-socialist empire would not last long. Expecting the collapse of the Third Reich to occur any day, he attempted to minimise the suffering of the Jews by not telling them about the reality of the death camps. As to the cooperation with the Nazis, in Leschnitzer's view, Baeck did not cooperate *per se*, but rather complied when left with no other choice and attempted to maintain decorum among the Jews in order to avoid more suffering caused by the chaos of the situation. Nor was he a *Führer* simply because *Reichsvereinigung*, where all the decisions concerning the Jewish communities were made, acted according to the collegial principle: all important decisions were made through a vote.

Leschnitzer argued that all this pointed to the fact that Baeck was a political realist with a supreme capacity for judgement. He proved his

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18. My italics. This was the phrase Arendt quoted. See Arendt 1963/1965, 119.

integrity and capacity to sacrifice himself for his people by remaining in Germany among the Jews, although he was repeatedly offered the chance to escape and work abroad. He was not a simpleminded humanist who did not know what he was really doing. He was a profoundly righteous man whose greatness was reflected in the fact that he never thought about himself, always putting the best interests of his people ahead of his own. Because of the magnitude of the circumstances he was facing, Baeck was compelled to adopt the policy of lesser evil, which really was the only possible way of dealing with this impossible situation.

While Leschnitzer focused mainly on Leo Baeck's personality and actions, there was another contribution which attempted to judge Arendt's account of Jewish cooperation and the lack of resistance in a broader frame. Hugo Hahn's piece introduced a classification of the critical – and hence false – attitudes towards Jewish policy in the Third Reich. He distinguished between the passive Gandhian attitude on the one hand, and the militant Bettelheimian attitude on the other. His basic argument was that, paradoxically enough, Arendt simultaneously represented both of these attitudes.

The reference to the Gandhian attitude was more concrete than one might expect. During the 1930s, Gandhi did indeed intervene in Zionist policy by writing an open letter in which he suggested that German Jews should have been sacrificed in order to make the rest of the world understand what was awaiting all the Jews if the Nazis were left to act as they pleased. More precisely, in his view, the German Jews should have adopted a strategy of passive resistance which, although it would not have saved them, would have caused the world to fight the Nazis through their heroic conduct in the face of destruction. There were no illusions about Hitler behind his lofty idea. Instead, he believed that the self-sacrifice of the German Jews was necessary in order to awaken the world to their plight:

The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities.

But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For the God-fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep. (Gandhi 1938/1942, 186)

He went on to write:

I am convinced that, if someone with courage and vision can arise among them to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into the summer of hope. And what has today become a degrading man-hunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah. It will be then a truly religious resistance offered against the godless fury of dehumanized man. The German Jews will score a lasting victory over the German gentiles in the sense that they will have converted the latter to an appreciation of human dignity. (Gandhi 1938/1942, 187)

These quotations show that Gandhi did not see anything inherently good or politically wise in the politics of lesser evil. On the contrary, the most important principle of his politics was (also in India) based on personal and political courage. The German Jews should have been told the truth of the situation so that they could have organised themselves in resistance. In his mind, this self-chosen and courageous self-sacrifice could have contributed to Hitler's defeat. Even more importantly, it could have helped prevent Hitler from carrying out the Final Solution. In this way, the case of the European Jews would have become an example of a courageous political fight even under seemingly hopeless circumstances.

As for Bruno Bettelheim, he published an article in 1962 entitled *Freedom from Ghetto Thinking*. He also saw the main problem as being the lack of resistance, although he approached it in the context of Jewish mental and political history. In his view, the basic problem of the Jewish conduct under Nazi rule was that very few resisted. The Jews' reluctance to resist did not stem from a lack of courage or

the impossibility of resisting in front of a superior enemy. Rather, it was the result of a certain pattern of thought and inactivity developed over centuries of exile. Bettelheim referred to this pattern as the “ghetto mentality”. It had developed as a response to the Jews’ existence in or outside of the ghetto, which lacked human dignity. In this situation, Jews provided themselves with the psychological excuses that enabled them to bear a situation that was basically intolerable, to live under conditions that were basically unliveable (Bettelheim 1962, 18).

In Bettelheim’s view, the basic survival strategy in a ghetto situation, which was shaped by an undignified existence, was to avoid knowing, thinking, and acting:

A certain type of ghetto thinking has as its purpose to avoid taking action. It is a type of deadening of the senses and emotions [...] To believe that one can ingratiate oneself with a mortal enemy by denying that his lashes sting, to deny one’s own degradation in return for a moment’s respite, to support one’s enemy who will only use his strength the better to destroy one. (Bettelheim 1962, 20)

This pattern of thought would ultimately prove fateful under Nazi rule. Instead of efficiently finding out what was really going on and organising an escape while there was still time, the Jews procrastinated, did not want to know and did not take action. This gave the Nazis time to develop a comprehensive policy of physical annihilation:

This was not callous self-interest; it was deliberate ignorance both of what might be in store for the Jews left behind and of the fact that their personal fortunes, so hard won, would now be lost. Thus, doubly ignorant for themselves and for those who would have to stay, they became inhuman, not because they were evil, but because they permitted themselves not to know. (Bettelheim 1962, 21)

From all this, Bettelheim concluded that the basic problem with the ghetto mentality was that it caused an inability to act in self-defence, as a Jew. This inability was dramatically contrasted by the

fact that the very same persons were capable of acting violently and aggressively when ordered to do so by the authority of a state. The reason the Jews did not fight back lay in their inner feelings of resignation, in their careful eradication over the centuries of their tendency to rebel, based on the ingrained belief that those who bend do not break (Bettelheim 1962, 21–22).

Hahn argued that Arendt became, on the one hand, Gandhian by admiring the solution of Adam Czerniakov, the Jewish leader of the Warsaw Ghetto, who committed suicide in the midst of a politically impossible situation in which there was no chance for successful self-defence. On the other hand, she represented the Bettelheimian attitude by complaining about the scarcity of Jewish resistance and accusing the Jews of having refused to face the facts. This Gandhian-Bettelheimian stance meant that Arendt judged the Jewish leadership completely unfairly. She did not understand that the Jewish leaders were forced to act under impossible circumstances, and those who were not in the same situation ought not judge their actions at all. What he considered even worse was that Arendt blurred the distinction between victims and perpetrators, arguing that the victims participated in their own destruction by cooperating with the enemy. In this way, she approached an interpretation according to which the victims were solely to blame for their own fate.

Hahn did not understand Bettelheim's main argument, which was not focused on the wartime German Jewish leadership at all, but, rather, aimed at the American Jewry. In the very beginning of his article, Bettelheim argued that the American debate surrounding the Eichmann trial was, by implication, about what the American Jews did and did not do, about the cruel fact that the Jews outside of Germany did not stand up and fight, thus rendering themselves guilty of non-participation, guilty of not having done all they could have done (Bettelheim 1962, 17). Had Hahn admitted this, he would have also recognised that there was a decisive difference between Bettelheim's and Arendt's reasoning. Whereas the former

argued that the Jews' principal problem was their lack of action, the latter maintained that the Jews' actions followed an odd track. The odd and erroneous track to which Arendt was referring was the cooperation of the Jewish leadership with the Nazis.

Hence, there was a significant difference between Bettelheim and Arendt in terms of their schemes of interpretation, as the former offered a mass-psychological explanation which was unable to distinguish between different groups of Jews, arguing instead in favour of a general Jewish attitude which ultimately proved fateful. Arendt, for her part, argued in favour of a political explanation which focused on the deeds and acts of individual Jews. As a result, whereas Bettelheim's psychological explanation rendered all Jews equally guilty of inaction, Arendt's political explanation was able to distinguish between different Jewish and non-Jewish strategies. In this framework, inaction was not a specifically Jewish problem, whereas Jewish cooperation pointed to a peculiar survival strategy of the Jews, which had been based for centuries on a policy of compliance with gentiles.

Of the four contributions published in the 29 March issue of *Aufbau*, the most favourable to Arendt was apparently Frederick R. Lachman's piece, in which he called Arendt's series "a masterpiece". In reality, this characterisation was an ironic compliment rather than a sincere appraisal, as he also highlighted a number of major problems in it. Firstly, he argued that Arendt's text was too difficult for the average reader, who was incapable of judging a phenomenon of such enormous proportions as the destruction of the Jews. The tragedy of millions of people seemed to be simply incomprehensible to the majority of readers. This was, of course, a very elitist assessment, as it contained a conception of "ordinary people" as lacking the capacity for judgement. Secondly, in Lachman's view, there was something inherently wrong with Arendt's attitude towards the annihilation of the Jews, as she compared it with the destruction caused by an atom bomb, arguing that in this light Hitler's gas chambers were

merely toys. Here, Lachman approached a stance that would later be widely adopted and according to which the Holocaust is incomparable to any other horrors ever perpetrated in the human world and throughout history.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Lachman argued that Arendt's articles were "a masterpiece without a soul". Similarly to Hahn, he argued that she was incapable of approaching the phenomenon from the victims' point of view, and because of this she failed to grasp the full truth of the situation. In Lachman's view, the whole truth could only be grasped by a suffering soul who could sympathise with the victims, no matter how many mistakes they had made. As long as a considerable number of Hitler's victims were still alive, the time was not right for the kind of cool, matter-of-fact account presented by Arendt. In other words, Lachman did not understand the role of political judgement as an essential part of the political action that is supposed to take place between existing actors and spectators in the form of dialogue and debate as opposed to a kind of eulogy in which the memory of the departed has to be respected. As we will see below, Lachman's argument of Arendt's heartlessness came very close to Scholem's view, which saw her callousness as an indication that she was a traitor to her people. In addition, Lachman implicitly argued in favour of the view according to which the victim's view was somehow more truly correct than other possible views and standpoints.

In Chapter Six we will see that this understanding has significantly and steadily strengthened since the emergence of so-called "victim studies" in the 1980s. Over the past three decades or so we have seen how the survivor-Jews in particular but also Jews in general have become what might be described as privileged victims who presume to have the inherent privilege of being the truth-tellers in questions concerning the Holocaust and its political and moral judgement.

According to *Aufbau*, the four pieces discussed above were meant to provide the readers of Arendt's series with a critical yardstick with

which to judge her arguments. They were probably more successful than the editors of *Aufbau* had ever expected. In addition to the circular letters from Jewish organisations and a few special issues of their magazines dedicated to Arendt's book, they set the tone of the entire debate. The questions of the role of the Jewish leadership in the destruction of the European Jewry and Jewish resistance were to remain central throughout the debate.

#### 4.2. *PRO DOMO*

Simultaneously with the debate raging on the pages of *Aufbau*, another major branch of public controversy over Arendt's book broke out in the *New York Times Book Review* as a result of Michael Musmanno's review, which was published immediately after the publication of the book on 19 May. Whereas the *Aufbau* debate was mainly concerned with the role of the Jewish leadership, Musmanno focused on Eichmann's person and his role in the destruction of the European Jews.

Musmanno's review was undoubtedly one of the most important contributions to the Arendt controversy for at least three reasons. Firstly, it was one of the very first to appear and thus gained a lot of attention. Secondly, it was published in one of the most prominent American newspapers with a large readership. Thirdly, being one of the Nuremberg lawyers,<sup>19</sup> Musmanno was formally competent to review a report on the trial of a Nazi criminal. However, in practice his review proved to be one of the most outstanding examples of a systematic misreading of Arendt's book.

Musmanno argued that the book was a strange defence of Eichmann and his "unspotted conscience":

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19. Justice Musmanno had interviewed Goering, Ribbentrop, Kaltenbrunner and Hans Frank and served as judge in the US-run trials. In addition, he presided over the *Einsatzgruppen* case (Cesarani 2004, 267).

There will be those who will wonder how Miss Arendt [...] could announce, as she solemnly does in this book, that Eichmann was not really a Nazi at heart, that he did not know Hitler's program when he joined the Nazi party, that the Gestapo were helpful to the Jews in Palestinian immigration, that Himmler (Himmler!) had a sense of pity, that the Jewish gas-killing program grew out of Hitler's euthanasia program and that, all in all, Eichmann was really a modest man. (Musmanno 1963a, 1)

He went on to argue that "the author believes that Eichmann was misjudged in Jerusalem," that she is "sympathizing with Eichmann," "defends Eichmann against his own words," and "says that Eichmann was a Zionist and helped Jews to get to Palestine." (Musmanno 1963a, 1)

All these charges reflect Musmanno's reading strategy, which can be characterised by two main traits. Firstly, he read Arendt's arguments literally without understanding the ironic language games and rhetorical play inscribed in them. Secondly, he was neither able nor willing to read them in the right context. The above quotation shows that this strategy caused him to believe that Arendt was arguing that Eichmann actually was not a Nazi at heart, but rather a Zionist. As I will show in the following chapter, this kind of interpretation can only be based either on the complete inability to distinguish and identify different stylistic solutions and choices of text or the deliberate intention to misread every single sentence and expression written. Given that Musmanno was a highly educated person equipped with an extensive amount of knowledge about the Holocaust and war crime trials, one is inclined to conclude that the distortions made by him were intentional.

As to the nature of Eichmann's evil, it is possible that Musmanno's critique was based on substantial disagreement with Arendt, as his conception of evil certainly differed significantly from hers. He sincerely seemed to believe that a person needed to have a certain kind of nature or essence in order to become a Nazi at all. Consequently, he argued that Arendt failed to understand Eichmann's real nature;

here we had in many ways a thoroughly evil man who was able to commit his crimes precisely because of his evil nature.

Throughout his review, Musmanno accused Arendt of sympathising with Eichmann, even defending him against his own words, and trying to portray him as a less important figure in the massacre of the Jews than he actually was. In addition, he did not see anything arguable either in the way the trial was organised or the propaganda strategy of its main promoters. On the contrary, he accused Arendt of attacking the state of Israel, its Prime Minister and attorney general, Gideon Hausner. In Musmanno's understanding, these quarters really seemed to possess unspotted consciences.

Hannah Arendt was flabbergasted by Musmanno's review for several reasons, and she not only substantially refuted his account but also the choice of reviewer. Although Musmanno was a technically competent reviewer, there were two factors which compromised his capacity to do the job. First, his impartiality was compromised by the fact that he had been a witness at the Eichmann trial, and second, Arendt mentioned him several times in her book in a critical light. She decided not to keep silent about these facts and wrote a statement on Musmanno's review which was published in the *New York Times Book Review* on 23 June. This statement was not only a reply to the reviewer but also a charge against the newspaper.

Arendt argued that the choice of reviewer was bizarre because she had characterised Musmanno's views on totalitarian government in general and on Eichmann's role in it in particular as "dangerous nonsense". She pointed out that he chose not to mention that he was writing *pro domo*. Although this was no secret, Arendt found it hard to understand why the *New York Times* did not publish this information:

You mention yourself that the reviewer was 'a witness at the Eichmann trial', hence he was likely to be mentioned in a report on it. The book's index could have shown you in a few minutes all you needed to know. If, on the other hand, you chose your reviewer in full *connaissance de cause*, this would

constitute such a flagrant break with normal editorial procedures as to make it much more interesting than the review itself.

I shall assume that you were ignorant of the pertinent facts in your choice. Still, I find it hard to understand that the review itself did not surprise you. Obviously, you never read the book and therefore could not be aware of the over-all misrepresentation.

The core of Arendt's argument was simply that Musmanno should have been disqualified from writing a review of a book in which his own name was mentioned. Neither the *New York Times* nor Musmanno understood this. The *New York Times* replied to Arendt in two responses published with her statement, the first of which referred to Musmanno's reply to Arendt, in which the reasons for his selection were outlined. The second note refuted Arendt's accusation that nobody had even read the book before it was handed over to Musmanno to review. Strangely enough, it was Musmanno himself – and not the editors of the newspaper – who wrote a lengthy explanation as to why he had been selected to review the book. It was included in his response to Arendt that was published in the same issue of the *New York Times Book Review* as Arendt's statement:

There was nothing 'bizarre' about the *New York Times Book Review* asking me to write the review on 'Eichmann in Jerusalem'. Everyone knows that the *Book Review* endeavours to select as reviewers those individuals who are, because of profession or experience, more generally familiar than others with the subject of the book to be reviewed. The editors assumed that I qualified in this respect because I was a judge at three of the war crimes trials in Nuremberg. I testified at the Eichmann trial, have been a judge for 32 years, and for 18 years have studied the documentation on war crimes and crimes against humanity. (Musmanno 1963b, 4)

After this explanation as to why he was a competent reviewer, Musmanno proceeded to directly attack Arendt's reply. He claimed that Arendt was not aware of the actual content of her own book, implying that because of her lack of expert knowledge she had made a number of unintentional factual errors. In addition, he defended

himself, arguing that his “review was not *pro domo*. It was *pro bono publico*. It was imperative that the public know of Miss Arendt’s many misstatements of facts in the Eichmann case, because that case has taken an important place in the history of the world and the human spirit.” (Musmanno 1963b, 4)

As we saw in Chapter Two, Arendt’s contention that Eichmann’s personality was characterised by ordinariness rather than inhuman monstrosity was generally shared by a considerable number of journalists and other attendees of the trial and had been repeated countless times in the press. However, while nobody attempted to correct the portrayal of Eichmann in the daily press, Arendt’s argument of Eichmann’s ordinariness was immediately attacked as completely false. Belonging to those who fiercely attacked Arendt’s depiction of Eichmann, Musmanno claimed in the September issue of the *National Jewish Monthly* that her book was a “disservice to Jewry” and that there was nothing trivial or ordinary about Eichmann:

For devilry at its peak, criminal deception at its worst, cruel cynicism at its ultimate, inhumanity at its murkiest depth, and for brutality of spirit without compare, Adolf Eichmann must stand out as the very antithesis of ordinariness. His crime rears up like a colossus of iniquity at the apex of a pyramid of skeletons. No word can be found to mitigate the totality of his guilt, even though Hannah Arendt tries hard to do so. (Musmanno 1963c, 54)

Another influential personality who adopted a similar line of argumentation to Musmanno was Max Nussbaum, the President of the Zionist Organization of America. He declared in the *American Zionist* that in his view, “the superficiality of Professor Arendt’s interpretation is nowhere as disturbing as in her glib and invidious comments on the submission to death of our helpless brothers and sisters, and her effrontery in depicting Eichmann as a small cog in the large wheel of the Nazi machine”. He went on to assure his readers that “those of us who had the doubtful privilege of knowing him and his activities in Berlin did not have to wait for the Eichmann

trial [...] to disclose the primary responsibility of Eichmann for saturating a whole continent with the blood of our people". Then he concluded his outburst by declaring: "Our Prophets warned us once that some of the greatest enemies we will encounter will come from the inside [...] I am afraid Professor Arendt has done a great disservice to the Jewish people and most of all to the cause of truth." (Nussbaum 1963, 4)

Joachim Prinz, who attacked Arendt on behalf of the World Jewish Congress in *Congress Bi-weekly*, did not even bother to spell Arendt's name correctly, as he systematically referred to her as "Ahrendt", repeating Musmanno's and Nussbaum's arguments in other words:

By some weird turn of the imagination, Dr. Ahrendt has managed the incredible trick of humanizing Eichmann. Indeed, of all the people she writes of, Eichmann, that 'leaf in the whirlwind of time', is the only human being with whom she sympathizes. According to her, he was a Nazi 'without conviction', a timid soul, a mere cog in the Nazi machine which he found dreadful (All this must be true; he said so himself!). (Prinz 1963, 9)

What all these critiques have in common is their failure to comprehend the point of Arendt's depiction and discussion of Eichmann. They failed to see that Arendt was practising a kind of *Umwertung der Werte* of Jewish political culture in terms of ironic rhetoric. The notion of Eichmann's ordinariness was meant to raise the question of the character of his evil. As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, Arendt suggested that this new kind of evil, as carried out in the deeds of an ordinary man, might be far more dangerous and difficult to identify than the classical radical evil. Either Arendt's critics did not understand this point or they did not want to accept and share its conceptually rhetorical potential.

These statements illustrate the kind of tone the campaign against Arendt was beginning to take. For these men, Eichmann was no more and no less than an incarnation of the devil on earth, and his devilish nature explained his evil deeds. However, these contributors

were not satisfied with mere factual argumentation but let their imaginations run wild by regularly succumbing to tasteless and naïve personal assaults against Arendt's character. They depicted Arendt as a traitor among the Jewish people who lacked the knowledge and experience to judge anything related to the Holocaust because she had not personally experienced it for herself.

#### 4.3. EICHMANN'S NEW CRIME

Simultaneously to the publication of Musmanno's account, the *Herald Tribune* published a review of Arendt's book by Eugene Rostow on 19 May. It had an entirely different tone than the other accounts discussed in this chapter. This was a review by a professional lawyer who did not stumble over trivialities but attempted to get to the very core of Arendt's book by reading it for what it was, a trial report. From this point of view, Rostow singled out two major themes on which he focused in his review. He began by highlighting Arendt's style, which in his view was quintessential to understanding the book at all. Second, he pointed to Arendt's discussion of the nature of the Nazi crimes as unprecedented new crimes of the 20th century.

Rostow characterised the texture of the book as that of "good ruminative talk", which he clearly distinguished from pure scholarly studies. He further described it as "discursive and speculative; personal, impressionistic and opinionated", adding that, not being very systematic, "it is full of ironic thrusts, perceptive associations, and argumentative passages, and passages, too, of eloquence and indignation." (Rostow 1963)

He admired Arendt's style instead of seeing it as somehow inappropriate, as so many others had, even praising her impatience with "Jewish pomp, folly, xenophobia, and hypocrisy" and the expressions of her independence as a thinker. Similarly, he did not doubt Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann but situated it in the context

of the description of her style, where it came out proportionally as a stylistic distancing weapon (Rostow 1963).

At the heart of Rostow's review was, however, his estimation of Arendt's basic thesis of the novelty of the new type of crime represented by Eichmann:

The Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish people, she contends, was not a crime against the Jewish people, nor yet against the statutes of Israel, but an example of 'the new crime, the crime against the human status,' or against the very nature of mankind [...] For her, the Nazi crime in undertaking to destroy a whole people was not just another episode in the long history of anti-Semitism. It was so bizarre and so great an evil, she argues, that 'justice' cried out for retribution. The compelling and ultimate element of retribution in our concept of justice, she avers, so persistent and so often denied, warrants the otherwise indefensible and illegal act of kidnapping Eichmann and the death penalty for that poor, confused, petty, evil man who thought clichés and spoke in the official language of a minor bureaucrat. (Rostow 1963)

This was the point at which the lawyer in Rostow came out. He pointed out that lawyers would be tempted to dismiss Arendt's disturbing contention as the yearnings of a layman (Rostow 1963). From a juridical point of view, the problem was Arendt's claim according to which new unprecedented crimes created a situation in which it was necessary to render justice without the help of or beyond the limitations set by positive, posited law:

Miss Arendt's thesis is [...] intolerable for the seemingly uncontrolled power it would give to the judges, and for its implication that the ends of justice justify recourse to illegal or arbitrary meanings. (Rostow 1963)

In Rostow's understanding, the notion that the end of justice justifies recourse to illegal or arbitrary meanings came frighteningly and perilously close to the notions of Ben-Gurion. Had Arendt said that the end justified the means, Rostow would have been completely correct, as Ben-Gurion's strategy was precisely to apply this principle. However, that is not what Arendt said, and this was the point at which Rostow was blinded by his judicial viewpoint,

which prevented him from understanding that in order to grasp what Arendt had really said, it was necessary to distinguish between the juridical and the political. He was not able to see that Arendt had actually pointed to the fact that new crimes such as those committed by Eichmann rendered a normal legal procedure problematic precisely because they lacked precedents. Even though “the essence of judicial art is to come as close as possible to the end of justice within the established and accepted limits of the judicial process” (Rostow 1963), the fact remained that the Nazi crimes went beyond the sphere of law because they were characteristically political. In Arendtian terms, they were political in two ways. On the one hand, they did not fit within the pre-existing process of law because of their novelty; there was no established legislature on the basis of which to judge them. On the other hand, they were political because they were violations of a fundamental political right of every human being to share the earth with other people.

Despite its critical remarks, Rostow’s review was decisively unique compared with the accounts presented by the participants of the smear campaign because it accepted Arendt’s book as a serious contribution to the discussion over the future of the law in a world in which new types of crimes were being born. Had this kind of approach gotten the upper hand in the controversy, its contribution to international law and the development of political theory might have been entirely different.

#### **4.4. THE EVIL OF BANALITY: FACTS**

A review on the most authoritative and influential attacks against Arendt’s report in the initial phase of the controversy would not be satisfying without mentioning Jacob Robinson, who served as one of Gideon Hausner’s assistant prosecutors in Jerusalem. Right from the beginning, he did everything in his power to smear Arendt’s reputation and prevent people from independently taking sides in

the controversy. He even wrote a book on Arendt's book, in which he attempted to disprove every single phrase in it (see Robinson 1965). One of the several public arenas used by Robinson was the Anti-Defamation League's bulletin *Facts*, which published a special contra-Arendtian issue in the summer of 1963. It consisted of a review article compiled by Jacob Robinson, which was entitled *A Report on the Evil of Banality: The Arendt Book*. The article began with a general explanation of why the issue had been published, claiming that it would have been a tragic disservice to Jewish and world history had Arendt's book gone unchallenged and been accepted as gospel. It claimed that the book's research was glib and trite, and, as such, that it was a banal book. Even worse, if it gained acceptance as a work of unquestioned authority by undermining the realities of history, it would become an evil book (Robinson 1963c, 263).

Robinson listed four major areas of concern to be dealt with in his account: the scholarship of the author, Arendt's treatment of Eichmann and his role in the destruction of the European Jewry, her criticism of the judgement at Jerusalem and Jewish complicity and cooperation.

Robinson began his attack on Arendt's scholarship by arguing that her book was filled with errors, misstatements of fact, misinterpretation, and generalisations, particularly with regard to the areas of contemporary history and law, specifically international law and criminal procedure, which in his view were central to her book (Robinson 1963c, 264). He indeed read it as if it were an historical study as opposed to a trial report. He completely ignored the fact that Arendt did not do her own basic research for the book, but leaned mostly on the material that was produced or used in the context of the trial. In addition to this, she used reports and studies written by journalists, historians, and lawyers which appeared before the publication of her own report. However, Robinson also somewhat contradictorily argued that Arendt's book was not really a study of history but belonged to "a small body of literature,

representing particular perspectives, which purports to offer insight into the whole subject.” (Robinson 1963c, 263)

Apart from the accusation that Arendt lacked the scholarly competence to even touch on an issue like the Eichmann trial, Robinson’s most powerful attack was directed against what Arendt said about Jewish collaboration and Eichmann’s personality. Indeed, these two themes were to remain the most debated issues in the controversy, while the juridical aspects of the trial would quickly fade into the background.

A number of contributors to the debate preferred to lean on Robinson’s misreading as opposed to personally trying to understand what Arendt really intended to say. The best example of this is perhaps Robinson’s reading of Arendt’s account of Eichmann’s “Zionism”. When Arendt wrote that Theodor Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* caused Eichmann to convert to Zionism, Robinson refused to admit or understand the deep irony contained in her words. Similarly, he refused to see that Arendt’s depiction of Eichmann as dangerously normal was not meant to be a statement in defence of Eichmann the criminal but rather a call to reflect more on what kind of a criminal was in question here.

As to Jewish collaboration, Robinson was hopelessly unable to read the political criticism that was inscribed in Arendt’s discussion of this theme. Thus, he argued that “the greatest evil of ‘Eichmann in Jerusalem’ [...] is the author’s theme that European Jews were guilty of complicity in their own destruction” (Robinson 1963c, 267). He wrote that “[t]he Jewish population in Nazi Europe was exempt from the authority of the local administration and physically separated from the outside world” (Robinson 1963c, 268), without recognising that this was precisely what Arendt was saying by pointing to the fact that the European Jewish population lacked a political organisation that could have organised a mass escape if not a mass resistance. Instead, he ended up in defending political ignorance by arguing that “[t]he normal human mind could not accept the fact that the

real aim of the Nazis was total destruction and the Germans did all they could to lull the Jews.” (Robinson 1963c, 269)

Robinson’s basic message was that Arendt was mistaken in virtually everything she wrote. As mentioned above, he went to the length of writing an entire book to prove this. However, what is more important in the context of this study is the fact, also mentioned above, that a number of people were satisfied with Robinson’s contribution and never bothered to read Arendt’s book and judge its contents personally.

All of the above analysed contributions sowed the seeds of hatred against Arendt. One more contribution would be needed to seal Arendt’s excommunication from the entire American Jewish intellectual community: an open letter by Gerschom Scholem.

#### **4.5. EXCOMMUNICATION**

Hannah Arendt received a huge amount of letters from her readers and others who wanted to comment on her book or the debate aroused by it. Most of these letters were, of course, not meant to be published and never were published. There is, however, a remarkable exception which became one of the most important and influential contributions to the entire controversy – a letter sent to Arendt on 23 June 1963, by Gerschom Scholem, a highly esteemed Jewish philosopher.

For Arendt, Scholem’s letter was not just another one of the numerous letters she had received. She had learnt to respect and admire Scholem’s views on Jewish philosophy and history, and had probably not expected him to react in such a passionate and condemning way. In addition, his letter was the result of six weeks of reflection and pondering, and was not written on a whim. Unlike many of Arendt’s other critics, he really had read the book and reflected carefully on what to say about it. The fact that he wanted his letter to be published shows that he not only wanted to express his

opinion privately but also wanted to influence the public reception of Arendt's book. This point is crucial because Scholem certainly knew that his account would not be received as the opinion of an ordinary Jew, but instead would have been received such as it was; as an authoritative statement of one of the leading Jewish philosophers.

Scholem did not refute Arendt's account of Jewish policy during the Third Reich as such, although he did claim that it included certain problematic aspects. Compared with other contributions of the smear campaign, he chose an original line of argumentation which proved to be a more efficient critique of Arendt than many of the other wordier contributions. Firstly, he denied the possibility of making a fair and truthful historical judgement of events that were of such recent origin. He also argued that he did not believe that "our generation is in a position to pass any kind of historical judgment. We lack necessary perspective, which alone makes some sort of objectivity possible – and we cannot but lack of it." (Scholem 1963/1964, 241) On the other hand, he also refuted the possibility for him to make any personal judgements on the grounds that he had not personally experienced the horror of the Nazi Reich: "There were among them also many people in no way different from ourselves, who were compelled to make terrible decisions in circumstances that we cannot even begin to reproduce or reconstruct. I do not know whether they were right or wrong. *Nor do I presume to judge. I was not there.*" (Scholem 1963/1964, 243, my italics)

This refusal to judge historically and personally reflects the fact that Scholem did not share Arendt's understanding of the task of judgement. For Scholem, judging was about telling the historical and moral truth about a given matter, whereas it was an essential part and prerequisite of meaningful political action and practice for Arendt. For her, without judging it was impossible to remember and understand the political significance of empirical events, and without remembering and understanding it was impossible to exist politically in a meaningful and durable manner.

Another important aspect of Scholem's critique concerned Arendt's style and her relationship to the Jewish community as being inscribed in it. Scholem complained that Arendt had acquired overtones of malice: "It is that heartless, frequently almost sneering and malicious tone with which their matters, touching the very quick of our life, are treated in your book to which I take exception." (Scholem 1963/1964, 241) In Scholem's view, this tone revealed that Arendt did not love the Jewish people as she should have: "In the Jewish tradition there is a concept, hard to define and yet concrete enough, which we know as *Ahabath Israel*: 'Love of the Jewish people' [...] In you, dear Hannah, as in so many intellectuals who came from the German Left, I find little trace of this." (Scholem 1963/1964, 241) He took offence to Arendt's "flippant tone" but still regarded her "wholly as a daughter of our people, and in no other way." (Scholem, 1963/1964, 242)

These words reveal Scholem's antipolitical conception of Jewishness, which Arendt most certainly did not share. For him, belonging to the Jewish people was a religious-national bond which should have been respected and revered. In this understanding, it was the duty of every Jew to love all other Jews irrespective of their thoughts and actions.

Scholem's nationalistic and antipolitical conception of Jewishness was also reflected in his inability to understand Arendt's ironic description of Eichmann's Zionism. Although he did understand that Arendt's words were not meant to be taken literally, he missed the point of her irony, believing that she was mocking Zionism instead of Eichmann: "[Y]our description of Eichmann as a 'convert to Zionism' could only come from somebody who had a profound dislike of everything to do with Zionism. These passages in your book I find quite impossible to take seriously. They amount to a mockery of Zionism; and I am forced to the conclusion that this was, indeed, your intention." (Scholem 1963/1964, 245) As I will argue throughout this book, Arendt's book did include a significant

amount of criticism of Zionism, although not in this particular passage. In it, she simply ridiculed the prosecution's portrayal of Eichmann as an expert in Zionism. In Arendt's view, the truth was that Eichmann knew surprisingly little about Zionism considering how many years he had spent pondering "the Jewish question".

In my view, Scholem's letter was a factual, albeit rather delicate, attempt to excommunicate Arendt from the Jewish community. He did not explicitly break with Arendt, implying instead that she had done something irreversible, which could have no other effect than to create a gap between her and the rest of the Jewish community:

Why, then, should your book leave one with so strong a sensation of bitterness and shame – not for the compilation, but for the compiler? How is it that your version of the events so often seems to come between us and the events – events which you rightly urge upon our attention? Insofar as I have an answer, it is one which, precisely out of my deep respect for you, I dare not suppress; and it is an answer that goes to the root of our disagreement. (Scholem 1963/1964, 241)

Had Scholem's letter remained merely one of the many private comments Arendt received, it would not have had the power to have her excommunicated from the Jewish community. However, given that Scholem consciously intended for it to be published, one cannot avoid drawing the conclusion that he purposefully used his authority in order to encourage the entire Jewish community to distance itself from Arendt's kind of apostate. As the above quotation illustrates, he was not only speaking on his own behalf but addressed Arendt in the name of "us", that is to say in the name of the entire Jewish community.

What made this excommunication drastic from Arendt's point of view was the fact that it came from somebody whose judgement she had learnt to trust. In addition, Scholem was an intellectual authority figure among the Jews, not just one of the Jewish politicians with whom Arendt had become used to disagreeing. For Arendt, Scholem's appraisal was further proof of the disastrous influence

of public opinion over individual opinions. All of a sudden she had personally become living proof of the isolation to which a conscious pariah, the political fate of whom she had so passionately analysed during the 1940s, was doomed.

In my view, what were really at stake in the correspondence between Scholem and Arendt were the criteria of judgement. Scholem clearly represented the Jewish tradition, in which individual judgement was intended to respect the judgement of the Jewish leadership. What makes this aspect of Scholem's account difficult to grasp is the fact that he carefully veiled his argument behind the notion of what he referred to as Arendt's heartlessness. His intention was not simply to say that Arendt was cruel in her assessment of Jewish conduct, but rather that she lacked the correct type of moral judgement. This type of moral judgement should have been based on a deep and unquestionable reverence and respect for the Jewish leadership.

In a way, Scholem was right. Arendt was heartless in the sense that she lacked any kind of blind and uncritical reverence for anybody. Arendt's conception of good political judgement was exactly the opposite of Scholem's. In Arendt's view, good political judgement could only be based on the independent and courageous consideration of events. Thus, what really came between Arendt and the Jewish community were her independence, originality, and disobedience as a thinker, as well as her demand for personal responsibility as opposed to blindly following leaders.

#### **4.6. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INTELLECTUALS**

In the previous subchapters we have seen that two of the major themes of the controversy over Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial concerned Jewish cooperation on the one hand and the nature of Eichmann's evil on the other. We saw that the main motivation driving Arendt's enemies was self-defence; in the final analysis, they were not only concerned about the conduct of the European Jews as

such but also about saving their own reputations. More precisely, one of the problems with Arendt's book was that it raised unpleasant questions about the role and contribution of American Jews to the fate of the European Jewry.

We have also seen that the contra-Arendtian campaign was organised by representatives of the most important Jewish organisations and shaped by their accounts of how Arendt's report should have been read and understood. They succeeded in turning virtually the entire Jewish community against Arendt, which meant that it was not only Jewish politicians and devoted believers of the Jewish faith who turned against her but also her former friends, as more and more Jewish intellectuals began to criticise her book. This was reflected in the fact that the condemning words of Jacob Robinson *et alia* were not only used by the functionaries of Jewish organisations in their attempts to spread the smear campaign everywhere but also by a number of Jewish intellectuals in their journal reviews, which were not official organs of any of the Jewish organisations but instead represented independent intellectual fractions within the Jewish community. These writers included Marie Syrkin, who wrote for the *Jewish Frontier* and *Dissent*, Norman Podhoretz, who wrote for *Commentary*, Morris Schappes, who wrote for *Jewish Currents*, and Louis Harap, who wrote for *Science and Society*. In all of these contributions, the reading of Robinson was either openly acknowledged or otherwise obvious. However, the accounts published in other journals of the Jewish intelligentsia were not much more favourable to Arendt, although they lacked direct reference to Robinson. These contributions included Konrad Kelien for *Midstream*, Gertrud Ezorsky for *New Politics*, Ernst Simon for *Judaism*, and Lionel Abel for the *Partisan Review*.

Arendt was not so much depressed about the controversy itself, but rather its low intellectual level, which was at least partly determined by the editorial policies of the major magazines and journals (cf. Young-Bruehl 1982, 358–359). We have already discussed the

questionable decision by the *New York Times* to invite Michael Musmanno to review Arendt's book. Had this odd choice remained a one-off, Arendt would probably not have been all that bothered. However, a similar kind of choice was repeated, for example, in the *Partisan Review*, which was much more devastating to Arendt on a personal level because she had been a frequent contributor and distinguished member of the magazine's intellectual community for years (for Arendt's relation to the "family" of the *Partisan Review*, see Bloom 1986). The choice of Lionel Abel to review Arendt's book was odd because it was known in advance that he was openly hostile towards Arendt. His hostility had become clear a couple of years earlier when he published an article in *New Politics* entitled *Pseudo-Profundity*, in which he fiercely criticised Arendt's collection of essays, *Between Past and Future* (Abel 1961).

In the following, I will take a closer look at the intellectual controversy surrounding Arendt's book. Although the distinction between intellectual and other debates is, of course, partly artificial, it is not entirely baseless. It is precisely because it was less directed and shaped by the Jewish organisations that it is a good source from which to more closely approach the question of why the entire Jewish intelligentsia were so enraged over Arendt's book. As far as the powerful Jewish organisations were concerned, it was no surprise that they attacked Arendt, as they had their own political interests to defend. The situation of the more leftist Jewish intellectuals was entirely different because most of them had loose ties to Jewish political groups and religious tradition. In addition, they maintained a clear distance between themselves and the new Jewish state. Thus, they should not have had anything either to hide or defend. They firmly believed that they were at least as much American as they were Jewish, and as such they could not even consider the possibility of moving to Israel. In other words, the debate of the intelligentsia is interesting and important because it was not motivated by direct political or power interests; something else was at stake here.

A closer look at the intellectual debate reveals that two things in particular were at stake. First, there was the question of the personal responsibility of American Jewish intellectuals for what had happened and what was going to happen to the Jews in Europe in particular and in the world at large. Without explicitly admitting it, they read Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership as an accusation of their own political ignorance and blindness shaped by self-deception. This is why much of the intellectual controversy was about what should and could have been known during the 1940s, about Arendt's status within the Jewish community, and her competence and right to make a judgement about the conduct of the European Jewry. Second, there was the question of American Jewish identity, which was in deep crisis during the years of the Eichmann trial and Arendt controversy. Along with the process of assimilation and their increased wealth, the American Jews were also becoming secularised and losing their Jewish identity. Arendt's book concretely raised the question of the character of modern Jewishness to the fore.

I will focus on the question of how the writers approached the questions of commitment and responsibility, and I will show that the accounts were shaped by an attempt to evade this question by turning it into the aforementioned question of Arendt's status and competence. I will argue that American Jewish intellectuals vaguely understood that Arendt's critique extended beyond the context of the Jewish Councils but that they refused to see its ramifications. They also vaguely grasped that what was at stake was the political role and duties of the intellectuals, although they refused to include themselves in the discussion about them.

I will take a closer look at a few representative and significant contributions to the controversy surrounding the role and responsibility of the intellectuals. I will focus on those characteristics and traits which distinguish this branch of the debate from the rest of it. My aim is to illustrate the way in which the controversy surrounding Arendt's book was – partly between the lines – a debate over the

political identity of the American Jewish intelligentsia and its political role and duties. I will argue that this was an episode of conspicuous inability and represented a lack of political judgement and responsibility caused by people's self-deceptive belief that they are capable of remaining outside of the sphere of political commitments by maintaining a critical distance from established power structures.

#### 4.6.I. To Know Enough to Judge

One of the most important arguments repeated in the intellectual debate was that Arendt was wrong in presuming that American Jewish intellectuals really knew the full extent of what was going on during the mass destruction of European Jews in the 1940s. Those who presented this argument maintained that it would have been impossible for them to know because there was not a sufficient amount of reliable information available, which is why Arendt's most serious mistake was to take the position of the *Besserwisser*. In *Midstream*, Konrad Kelien complained:

In fact, most people would probably agree that not enough that is worthwhile has been written on these subjects [...] Only a philistine, parroting pat political and psychological chiches can claim to know the full answers. Yet, in a curious way, almost everybody insists that he knows, and the closer he was to the forest, the more he insists that he knows all the trees. This is also true of Miss Arendt's book. She, too, has, and in her peculiarly petulant way, flings into our faces, 'all the answers'. This is perhaps this book's most striking weakness. Regardless of its merits the book is the work of what Germans call a *Besserwisser* – a know-it-all, or know-it-better. The book is pervaded by vanity, and vanity is the least profitable posture that can be brought to bear upon the subject under discussion. (Kelien 1963, 25)

There has been an endless debate since the end of the Second World War over the point at which people ought to have known about the existence of the concentration camps. This is undoubtedly a difficult question. The answers vary from that of Alberto Moravia, who has

claimed that all the necessary information was available to those who *wanted* to know as early as 1939, to that of Karl Jaspers, who said he had only learnt of the existence of concentration camps after the war. Peter Novick has argued that Americans knew about the destruction on a general level but more often than not were not willing to believe the news about the volume of the destruction (Novick 1999, 19–29). Arendt herself later said that she only began to really believe the news coming from Europe in 1943, as the reports initially appeared to be too absurd to be true (Arendt 1965). What is peculiar about Kellen's argumentation is his attempt to deny that people had the chance or ability to know what had happened during the 1960s, 20 years after the war. Although the memoirs and other accounts of a number of concentration camp survivors and many thorough historical studies had been published since the end of the 1940s, Kellen argued that not enough information had been available to the public. In my view, this is a clear-cut sign of his attempt to defend himself and other American Jewish intellectuals "who were not there".

The question of knowing was inevitably intertwined with the question of judging, as the former was a prerequisite of the latter. It was often argued in the apologies of American Jewish intellectuals that they had never had a sufficient amount of knowledge in order to be able to judge. From another point of view, they accused Arendt of applying a higher standard of judgement where the Jews were concerned, and this, of course, was not considered fair. From their perspective, the conduct of the Jews ought not to have been judged at all. Norman Podhoretz wrote in *Commentary*:

This habit of judging the Jews by one standard and everyone else by another is a habit Miss Arendt shares with many of her fellow-Jews, emphatically including those who think that the main defect of her version of the story is her failure to dwell on all the heroism and all the virtue that the six million displayed among them. But the truth is – *must* be – that the Jews under Hitler acted as men will act when they are set upon by murderers, no better

and no worse: the Final Solution reveals nothing about the victims except that they were mortal beings and hopelessly vulnerable in their powerlessness. (Podhoretz 1963, 208)

Thus, in Podhoretz's view, the conduct of the victims should not have been judged at all because they did what they did under circumstances that were impossible to judge. What made Arendt's account even worse, according to her critics, was that she applied her own standards of judgement and knowledge of history and did not lean on any conventional interpretation of Jewish history. Marie Syrkin argued for the *Jewish Frontier*:

What is at the root of the shortcomings of Miss Arendt's trial of the trial is *her* view of Jewish history, a view commonly held by assimilationists of the Council for Judaism stripe, on the one hand, and 'radicals' of the old school on the other. In this view every affirmation of Jewish national awareness is culpable and to be strictured either as multiple loyalty or treason to a larger international ideal. That is why a Jewish intellectual of Miss Arendt's caliber is able not only distort the fact but – more important – to fail so signally in sympathy and imagination. (Syrkin 1963a, 14)

Representing labour Zionism, Syrkin obviously considered strong Jewish national consciousness a *sine qua non* of successful Jewish politics. She wholeheartedly supported Israeli politics and believed that Israel was and should remain the national state of the Jews. Arendt, for her part, was very critical of the nationalistic aspect of the politics of Israel.

According to some critics, relying on a conventional interpretation of Jewish history would have provided Arendt with the political point of view she dramatically lacked. For example, in *New Politics*, Gertrude Ezorsky equated the "political" with political ideology in such a way that only those who agree with and belong to Jewish ideological movements may be spared a deeply antipolitical attitude:

Miss Arendt's attitude toward political ideology, organization and leadership points up her antipolitical views. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she declared all political ideologies to be incipiently totalitarian. (p. 458) In

*Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Miss Arendt castigates Jewish ideological movements, organizations and leaders. Surveying the Jewish leaders who stood unaided against Nazism, she extends her approval only to 'the few who committed suicide.' (p. 105) She claims that had the Jews been 'unorganized and leaderless' more would have survived. (p. 111) Could the political point be plainer? (Ezorsky 1963, 73)

This quotation shows that Ezorsky's understanding of what politics is was profoundly ideological and dramatically different from Arendt's conception of politics. For the former, politics meant being uncritically committed to an ideological movement and wholeheartedly promoting it in every way, while for Arendt, the political meant, among other things, to retain an independent individual capacity for judgement in every situation and to never blindly trust anybody else's judgement. As we will see in the following chapter, in Arendt's understanding, the importance of maintaining the capacity for independent judgement was only emphasised in politically extreme situations in which the majority of people were tempted to lose their sense of reality and capacity for judgement.

The main problem with Ezorsky's deeply partial and ideological conception of politics lies in the fact that it does not allow room for independent thinking. In addition, from this stance, shared by most of Arendt's critics, changing one's mind in terms of politics and/or one's political affiliation could only lead to inexcusable apostasy. After leaving the Zionist movement in the 1940s, Arendt had definitely become a renegade of Zionism who was not to be trusted:

Since Dr. Arendt is, so to speak, an ex-Zionist, one is tempted to remark that apparently one can no more trust the objectivity of an ex-Zionist than of an ex-Communist or ex-Catholic. Zionists, notably Marie Syrkin in the *May Jewish Frontier*, have already exposed some of Dr. Arendt's manipulation of evidence on this subject. (Schappes 1963c, 21)

In this reasoning, being "ex-something" implied that a person was completely dishonest and capable only of lying and distorting the

truth. A significant point in the accounts of all of Arendt's critics was their view that the only person guilty of distorting the truth and manipulating evidence was Arendt herself. It was as if they had never heard the word "interpretation". If one did not share their standard view of Jewish history, he or she was seen as a dishonest apostate. Simultaneously, they never doubted anything that people like Jacob Robinson or Gideon Hausner told them, as these men were seen as entirely trustworthy and truthful. These men did not interpret anything, nor did they have to choose between significant and insignificant facts and details. They did not judge but merely reported plain facts.

#### **4.6.2. Hannah Arendt's "Jewish Revisionism"**

It would seem reasonable to assume that the harshest critique of Arendt's work would have come from those Jewish quarters which were intellectually and politically furthest from her. Correspondingly, one would think that her leftist intellectual friends would not have been cruel and unfair in their critique of her book. They were. More often than not former friendship made it virtually impossible for a number of Arendt's critics to judge her fairly and impartially, while some of the most decent critiques came from quarters to which she had loose ties. This holds particularly true regarding her critique of Zionist politics and the Jewish leadership, which only very few of her intellectual friends could accept. Conversely, one person who did try to present a fair critique was Ernst Simon, who wrote a lengthy account for *Judaism*, a quarterly of the American Jewish Congress, to which Arendt was most certainly loosely tied. Being an early account based on the version of her assessment published in the *New Yorker*, it was not entirely "contaminated" by the smear campaign, but, rather, represents at least an attempt to presenting an independent account of Arendt's report. This is why Simon's piece deserves closer examination. Nevertheless, it should not, of

course, be forgotten that the Orthodox Jews of *Judaism* had their own political reasons to judge Arendt differently from the other quarters that had contributed to the debate. They sympathised with Arendt's critical attitude towards the state of Israel and partly shared her critique of wartime Jewish politics from their own viewpoint of Jewish orthodoxy, to which the state of Israel and Zionism represented the highest form of heresy.

Similarly to Morris Schappes, who was quoted above, Simon also defined Arendt as an ex-Zionist. However, he did not see this as a problem, instead considering her distance from the Zionist movement and her personal and theoretical knowledge about it as providing her with a "high objectivity mated with profound knowledge". Unlike most of Arendt's other critics, Simon also appreciated her "stylistic dexterity", recognising her capacity for irony even in the face of the most horrible events. Thus, amongst other things, he pointed out that "one is not to take seriously her remark that Theodor Herzl's *Judenstaat*, the Zionist classic, 'converted Eichmann immediately and forever to Zionism' (I, 93). With all her hostility to Zionism, Hannah Arendt would surely not equate Eichmann and Zionism; that would be carrying a joke a bit far." (Simon 1963, 388–389)

For Simon, Arendt's ironic style was not a problem as such. The problem was that it was lacking something, namely the relativising and refreshing aspect of self-irony: "Her lack of self-irony and self-criticism makes it possible for her to consider herself more than an ordinary mortal and to apply to herself a standard other than the one she uses for the objects of her criticism. Upon these she pours out the plentitude of her stylistic ability." (Simon 1963, 389)

This argument is not far from Podhoretz's aforementioned complaint that Arendt applied more rigorous criteria of judgement to Jews than to gentiles. Without entirely understanding it, these two men were on the right track, as they correctly pointed to the fact that there was something peculiarly imbalanced in Arendt's

stylistic operations. Simon also correctly pointed to the fact that this imbalance stemmed from irony:

Irony is of all literary styles the one that creates the greatest distance between writer and subject. It always establishes a hierarchy, the writer on top, his subject below. (Simon 1963, 390)

Nevertheless, he did not understand, or did not want to understand, that this imbalance stemmed from the very structure of independent and critical judgement. He should have pushed his reasoning a step further in order to see that irony is one of the most fundamental tools of independent judgement because of its sharp illuminative character, which all other tropes and linguistic strategies lack. It produces a hierarchical distance from which it is possible to judge a phenomenon without harmonising sympathy, which is inevitable if one stands too close to the phenomenon under scrutiny. Simultaneously, this glance from above also allows one to see the purposeless paradoxes and dilemmas of the situation, which more often than not are indispensable in allowing us to make an accurate political judgement, but which easily remain obscured if one stands too close to the phenomenon or is overly sympathetic to some of the actors involved. As I will argue in Chapter Five, as much as political judgement aims at being sharp and accurate, it is inevitably impudent and relentless, since otherwise it would not be able to get to the “heart of the matter”. Correspondingly, a sympathetic and balanced judgement must always leave something unsaid, thus losing some aspects of its accuracy and sharpness.

Furthermore, Simon pointed out that a style that tends to lean towards polarities attracts parallels as well as contrasts, and he argued that her use of this style led Arendt to carry out a dramatic misinterpretation of the policy of the Jewish Councils:

[W]e may conclude that what was at work in the writer was a curious fantasy of a sort which is quite alien to that of the real historian. It might be called a compulsive supplementing neurosis. Someone (for instance, sociologist)

organizes all new evidence to fit a preconception, at which she has arrived from previous research. Anything that does not fit into the preconceived structure is mercilessly forgotten, anything that is missing is supplied to plug the hole in the structural pattern; it must not evince a lacuna. This is what happens when someone is dominated by a conceptual *horror vacui*. (Simon 1963, 394)

Had Arendt aimed at an historical analysis of the Jewish policy under the Nazi Reich, this evaluation might have been correct. However, what Simon failed to see was that Arendt's intention was not to present an historical narrative of what really happened in the Third Reich. Rather, she had attempted to make a political judgement of Jewish politics. Arendt did make dramatic parallels and contrasts, but her intent was not to distort the conduct of the Jews. Rather, her aim was to highlight the potential problematic ramifications a mistaken policy could have in a politically extreme situation in which there is no possible "good" outcome. Arendt had thus not fabricated entirely new evidence in order to fit a specific preconception, but, rather, the Jewish leaders had failed to understand the novelty and unprecedented character of the Nazi policy of the Final Solution, believing that it was possible to deal with the Nazis as they had always dealt with gentiles. In my view, these quasi-methodological remarks reveal that Simon's intention was not, after all, to be as fair as the introduction to his review would lead us to believe. It turns out that he had merely chosen a different rhetorical strategy than the other reviewers in showing that Arendt's judgement of Jewish politics was mistaken.

This strategy became more explicit at the point at which Simon began dealing with Arendt's relationship to Zionism, in which he found an inherent paradox which rendered her a kind of Revisionist:

Hannah Arendt's Zionist, or rather anti-Zionist, conversion did not keep her from retaining a certain sympathy for that Zionist group which constituted the polar opposition to the *Ihud* on the Arab question, namely, the so-called Revisionists. Founded by the late Vladimir Jabotinsky, they have become the

extreme nationalistic opposition in today's Israel as the Herut ('Freedom') Party [...] Then follows a section which conforms precisely to the position of the (not mentioned) *Ihud* group, namely, that official Zionist policy was helping to tie a Gordian knot which would be untangled, if at all, only by means of a "tragic conflict". Unfortunately, we and the Arabs are still in the midst of this conflict. (Simon 1963, 397)

In order to confirm this argument, Simon referred to a quote from one of Arendt's early articles, published in the *Menorah Journal* in 1945, in which she complained that the policy of the General Zionists would lead to the strengthening of Revisionist extremism. His mistake was to interpret what Arendt wrote as implying that in spite of its extremity, Revisionist terrorism was somehow more honest and idealistic than the policy of the General Zionists. In reality, Arendt was actually criticising both groups, as she did not think either of them was right. As I have shown in Chapter One, for Arendt, the only possibility for there to be a durable solution in Palestine would have had to have been based on the federative principle.

Another more dramatic misreading followed which provided an explanation as to why Simon saw Arendt's attitude towards Zionism in such a negative light. First, he argued that Arendt had experienced Zionism only as a reaction to external pressure, and that she had ignored its primary component, namely its relation to the ancient and uninterrupted Jewish longing for Zion. He then once again quoted Arendt's *Menorah* piece, in which she argued that historically the Jewish people had managed to maintain a kind of quasi-polity in the form of its specific in-between space (Simon 1963, 398–399). Had Simon been better acquainted with Arendt's early writings he might have understood that the notion of a common in-between space of a people as a necessary prerequisite for political existence was always present in Arendt's line of thought. As I showed earlier, Arendt located the mistake of Jewish politics in the interpretation of this principle in a radically nationalistic way which excluded Arabs from the future polity. Arendt criticized

the Jews for not wanting to share Palestine with the Arabs. She never criticised the basic desire of the Jews to found a homeland in Palestine, although she was opposed to the manner in which it had been carried out in practice. She identified a paradox in the fact that the Jews were just as unwilling to share Palestine with the Arabs as the Nazis had been to share Europe with the Jews. This is not a form of anti-Zionism but an example of a political judgement that plays with irony.

A portion of Simon's misreading simply stemmed from the fact that he disagreed with Arendt as to the significance of certain historical events. It is precisely because of this disagreement that his piece confirmed a general trend in the accounts of Arendt's critics. Hardly any of them grasped what she was doing, and hardly anyone understood – or wanted to understand – that it was not her intention to give a balanced historical account of what had happened but to make a political judgement of Jewish politics. This is why Simon also failed to see the context in which Arendt's stylistic and argumentative choices should have been read.

#### **4.6.3. The Crisis of Jewish Identity**

I have argued above that much of the intellectual controversy surrounding Arendt's book was caused by American Jewish intellectuals' unwillingness to admit their personal commitment to and responsibility for the fate of the European Jews. This unwillingness kept them from grasping the real character of Arendt's report as a political judgement as opposed to an historical or moral account of events. However, it did not stem from any kind of intrinsic political inability but rather from the highly peculiar situation in which the American Jewish intellectuals lived, characterised by a deep identity crisis.

In other words, the American Jewish intellectuals were inclined to turn their own problems of political and cultural identity into

an attack against Arendt because she managed to touch on certain sore spots of their crisis, which they were unwilling to admit. Most of Arendt's critics never really admitted that there was a connection between the controversy and this identity crisis, and even those who did admit it had difficulty accurately defining and grasping it. One person who almost got the point without accepting Arendt's arguments was Irving Howe, who described the situation as a chance to be released from the repressed feelings caused by the shock of the death of six million Jews in the 1940s. More precisely, since the 1940s, the American Jews had repressed the desire to discuss the Holocaust; Arendt's book was a provocation which disclosed this "tongue-tiedness", ultimately enabling the Jews to speak about the unspeakable (Bloom 1986, 329). With almost 20 years of hindsight, Howe remarked in his memoirs that one of the ramifications of the excesses of speech and feeling in the controversy was a sense of guilt concerning the Jewish tragedy that was seldom allowed to see daylight. In addition, he pointed out that in the years following the formation of the state of Israel, a wave of simple-hearted nationalist sentiment had swept over the entire American Jewry. However, the very success of the Zionist project meant that there was little room in the diaspora for Zionist declamation (Howe 1982, 275–277).

Despite the provocative power of Arendt's book, only a tiny minority of those involved in the controversy managed to actually grasp what it was all about. This minority was comprised of members of the younger generations of Jewish intellectuals, most gentiles and a handful of Jewish intellectuals who were courageous and independent enough to resist the pressures of the smear campaign.

Norman Fruchter, the editor of *Studies of the Left*, was the voice of young Jewish radicals who found in Arendt's work both a rebellion against the myth of the victim, which Jews tended to substitute for their history, and an argument according to which citizen responsibility was necessary in every modern state in order to prevent the re-emergence of the totalitarian movements like

the one which ravaged Germany. As, for example, Young-Bruehl (1982, 360) has noted, he made these arguments at a moment when the comparison between the Germany of the 1930s and the America of the 1960s was becoming common among the New Left. Understandably, the Old Left was far from pleased, as both arguments criticised its ability to correctly interpret the country's political situation and act accordingly.

In Fruchter's view, the American Jew was in a deep crisis caused by assimilation and its ambiguous effects:

Jews currently exist within the polarities of a traditional European Judaism and a totally secular, bankrupt Americanism. The only vibrancies within those polarities are the victim myth of the Jewish past, which suggests an unending, dangerous uniqueness, and the State of Israel, which offers both refuge and at least a partial conclusion to the epochs of Jewish suffering. (Fruchter 1965, 23)

By the "victim myth", Fruchter was referring to an ancient dictate according to which until the manifestation of God's justice by the Messiah, the Jewish people would suffer repeated persecution and face endless misery caused by the implacable hostility of the gentile world. In Fruchter's view, there were two problems in this myth. On the one hand, it guaranteed a unified identity to the communities of Orthodox Jews who lived separately from whatever national community within which they temporarily resided. On the other hand, the victim myth replaced the continuities of political and economic conflict, which form the history of most cultures. (Fruchter 1965, 23) In other words, within the frame of the victim myth, Jewish history was not really history at all, that is to say it was not characterised by contingent events and occurrences which were impossible to predict in advance, but instead formed a stable and unchanging situation from which there was no escape without God's help.

As to the state of Israel, Fruchter pointed to the fact that the American Jews had always nourished a curious ambivalence towards

Israel. While they granted it continuous emotional, political, and financial support, they steadfastly refused to emigrate. They voluntarily and deliberately preferred their assimilated existence in America to nationally independent existence in Israel. As a result, the American Jew faced three pressures: the demands of the old myth, which dictated traditionalism and denigrated the chances for assimilation; the appeal and advantages of assimilation into America, which suggested that the myth must be discarded, but offered no replacement; the state of Israel, which defined itself as the culmination of the victim myth and offered refuge should that myth become a reality in the United States (Fruchter 1965, 24).

In Fruchter's view, it was because Arendt suggested new definitions for all three pressures that her book caused such controversy:

She interprets the man Jews have defined, since 1945, as a monster epitomizing fanatic anti-Semitism as a banal functionary [...] She assesses the role of the Jews in their extermination, and finds, not the martyrdom of the eternal victim, but cooperation of the Jews with their exterminators. Finally, her evaluation of the conduct of the Israeli trial of Eichmann suggests that Israel is predominantly a national state, involved in the same competitive policies, international duplicity, warfare, and atrocities which characterize the behavior of most national states. (Fruchter 1965, 24)

In retrospect, Fruchter's parallel between 1960s America and 1930s Germany is unconvincing. However, it is easy to understand that this parallel drove the elder generations of American Jewish intellectuals mad as far as it implied that the organised American Jewish community statically and uncritically accepted contemporary American society. What Fruchter really wanted to argue by presenting this parallel was that the American Jewish intellectuals were as conformist and politically naive as their German counterparts – Jewish intellectuals included – had been during the 1930s.

Although Fruchter spoke about Jewish identity in general, it is obvious that his critique pointed, above all, to the problematic character of the political identity of American Jews. In this respect,

assimilation as such was not necessarily a problem, although it became a problem if confronted in the passive and self-deceptive way in which most American Jewish intellectuals viewed it. They defended the Jewish leadership in order to avoid the unpleasant question of their own political passivity. They were bystanders who allowed things to happen without leaving room for active political resistance and citizenship. This choice stemmed from the ancient acceptance of the hierarchical structures within Jewish communities and their antipolitical character, which was shaped by the unquestionable leadership of the rabbis. This attitude was an inevitable contradiction to their outspoken political identity as leftist intellectuals, who were committed to a worldview according to which it was people themselves who decided worldly matters, not religious leaders guided by God. Consequently, Fruchter concluded that American Jewish intellectuals were not really able to face the challenge posed by Arendt (Fruchter 1965, 42).

In sum, Fruchter took his reading between the lines as far as possible, arriving at the conclusion that Arendt's book was almost more about American Jews than it was about the Eichmann trial itself. Although this is a clear-cut exaggeration, he makes an invaluable point understood by few people. Namely, he understood that Arendt's book was a political judgement of the political conduct of both European and American Jews that was based on an empirical analysis of their political choices prior to and during the Second World War.

In this chapter, I have provided a general overview of the controversy over Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial, focusing specifically on its major problematic points. I have illustrated that much of the controversy was caused by an organised campaign based on a systematic misreading of Arendt's text. I have also pointed to the fact that even the majority of those who did read the book under the pressure of Jewish authorities failed to understand what Arendt

was really saying and what she really meant. This was because very few people succeeded in reading the book for what it was: a concrete political judgement of Jewish politics during the Nazi era. In fact, the entire controversy was shaped by a curious distinction between those who understood but did not want to admit and those who could not admit because they did not understand.

Those who understood but did not want to admit were, of course, the organisers of the smear campaign, who considered Arendt's arguments politically dangerous to the American Jewish establishment. They preferred to engage in the character assassination of a single intellectual simply because the only alternative would have been to engage in a profound process of self-criticism and re-evaluation of Jewish politics. Those who could not admit because they did not understand were a group that was comprised of Jewish intellectuals who never really grasped the deeply political character of Arendt's pamphlet. They tended to read it as a heartless manifesto which blamed the victims for their own destruction as opposed to a political evaluation of Jewish political strategies during the Third Reich. They were not politically-minded enough to grasp that political judgement requires distance and impartiality in order to really get to the point, but continued instead to complain about Arendt's heartlessness and harshness.



## 5. ARENDT'S IRONIES AND POLITICAL JUDGEMENT

Throughout this book I have argued that one of the most important reasons for the controversy over Arendt's book was the refusal particularly by Jewish readers to understand or accept her ironies. Strangely enough, however, as far as I am aware, no one has analysed the book from the viewpoint of its rhetoric. This is what I am going to do in this chapter. This does not, of course, mean that the misunderstanding of Arendt's ironies was the only reason behind the controversy. Clearly, it was also about the contents of Arendt's arguments. However, it is extremely important to recognise that the misunderstanding of Arendt's ironies did indeed shape the way her arguments were understood. This means that people found ideas and statements in the book that do not exist at all if her ironies are understood as she intended them.

Nevertheless, it is also true that some people did get the point of her use of irony. In their view, Arendt's style was simply outrageous and out of place. In other words, they believed that it was outrageous to use irony when referring to a phenomenon such as the Holocaust and Nazi-killers. Furthermore, some factions of the Jewish establishment saw the book as a political attack against them and their war-time policies. In my view, they were right. Although Arendt's main intention when writing the book was not to attack the Jewish establishment, she did consciously use irony to inscribe an implicit – and often also quite explicit – critique of the Jewish establishment in it. The sad part of the story is that most of her friends failed to grasp this, seeing it instead as full of accusations against ordinary Jews.

### 5.1. IRONY AS TROPE

Generally speaking, Arendt's way of approaching and understanding reality and its events might be described as what Kenneth Burke refers to as "poetic realism", in terms of which "characters possess degrees of being in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived" (Burke 1945/1969, 504). Burke points out that "human relationships must be substantial, related by the copulative, the 'is' of 'being.'" Poetic realism seeks to place the motives of action, as is the case with the relation between the potential and the actualised (Burke 1945/1969, 505). Poetic realism, in contrast with "scientific realism", cannot confine itself to representation in a metonymic or any other reductionist one-direction sense (Burke 1945/1969, 509). Similarly to the way in which the artist proceeds from "mind" to "body", the poetic realist must take on the role of "handmaiden". This, in Burke's view, leads to the following point:

A terminology of conceptual analysis, if it is not to lead to misrepresentation, must be constructed in conformity with a representative anecdote – whereas anecdotes 'scientifically' selected for reductive purposes are not representative. (Burke 1945/1969, 510)

What, then, is a "representative anecdote"? It is a conceptual construction built in terms of tropes, particularly in terms of synecdoche but also in terms of irony. In my view, Arendt's argumentation is very much built precisely upon representative anecdotes in the Burkean sense. As we will see in the following, Arendt constructs representative anecdotes as *representative examples* of certain types of political action of individual persons. In other words, representative anecdotes constructed by Arendt almost always refer to individual persons and their political actions. More often than not Arendt includes an explicit or implicit political judgement in her accounts of these individuals. Their political conduct is not always exemplary in a positive sense. As we will see in this

chapter, Arendt often gives representative examples of politically questionable political actions.

Burke distinguishes between four “master tropes”: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. What is important and interesting in our context is the way in which Burke connects them to the discovery and description of “the truth”. As we know, Arendt attempted to report on the Eichmann trial as truthfully as she could, and it was precisely in this endeavour that she chose to use synecdoches and ironies. Nevertheless, more often than not, the four tropes overlap one another. Consequently, it is not always easy to distinguish which trope is in question at any given time. Or rather, the tropes do not always exist in their purest forms in actual texts: “Give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon the other three.” (Burke 1945/1969, 503) In our context here this means that it does not matter whether we are able to distinguish different tropes from each other in Arendt’s texts but rather understand how and in what purpose she applies them. In addition, every literal trope corresponds to a specific “realistic” application and these applications overlap one another. Thus, perspective can be substituted for metaphor, reduction for metonymy, representation for synecdoche, and dialectic for irony (Burke 1945/1969, 503).

Burke defines metaphor as a means of seeing something in terms of something else. It tells us something about one character or quality as considered from the point of view of another character or quality. These points of view are not predetermined or limited, and it is by approaching things through a variety of perspectives that we establish their reality. What is particularly important in our context is that “the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical” (Burke 1945/1969, 504). In this chapter, I will show that this carrying over of a term from

one realm into another is one of Arendt's most important textual strategies in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

While the metaphor is somewhat "totalising" in its way of seeing something in terms of something else, metonymy might be characterised as reductive. In Burkean terms, the basic "strategy" of the metonymy is to convey some incorporeal or intangible state or matter in terms of the corporeal or the tangible. Poets alternate between metaphor and metonymy: "[P]oets regain the original relation, in reverse, by a 'metaphorical extension' back from the intangible into a tangible equivalent (the first 'carrying-over' from the material to the spiritual being compensated by a second 'carrying-over' from the spiritual back into the material); and this 'archaicizing' device we call 'metonymy.'" (Burke 1945/1969, 506) In my view, this definition might be extended to apply also to Arendt's political theorisation: her theorising of the political phenomena of the world is very Burkean or "metonymic" in the way described above.

For Burke, it is important to note that as metonymy (reduction) overlaps metaphor (perspective), it also overlaps synecdoche (representation) (Burke 1945/1969, 507). Synecdoche is characterised by the relationship of convertibility between two terms so that conversions imply an integral relationship between part and whole, whole and part, container and contained, and the sign and whatever is signified (Burke 1945/1969, 507–508). Burke treats metonymy as a special application of synecdoche. While synecdoche works in both directions, stressing the relationship or connectedness between two sides of an equation, metonymy follows this path in only one direction, from quality to quantity (Burke 1945/1969, 509).

But what does Burke mean by stating that the realistic application of irony is dialectic? Does it have something to do with the Hegelian-Marxian *Aufhebung*? As far as I can see, the answer is both yes and no. Burke points out that it is much easier to follow the use of the irony-dialectic pair if one takes into account that the dialectic is in some sense equal to the dramatic. That is to say, we have to approach

human action as drama. The role of an actor in drama involves properties both intrinsic to the agent and developed in relation to the scene and other agents. Similarly, the summarisations, the ideas, also possess properties derived both from the agent and the various factors with which the agent is in a relationship: "Where the ideas are in action, we have drama; where the agents are in ideation, we have dialectic." (Burke 1945/1969, 512)

Irony arises when one attempts to use the interaction of terms with one another to produce something which uses all of them. In this context, irony arises because none of the participating sub-perspectives can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. The sub-perspectives in question are not the "truths" of the matter but rather voices, personalities, or positions, which integrally affect one another. When the dialectic (ironic) is properly formed, these voices represent the number of characters needed to produce the total development, i.e. they produce an irony (Burke 1945/1969, 512).

More often than not, irony is built upon synecdochic reversible pairs such as disease-cure, hero-villain, and active-passive. We see irony if we understand the function of the disease in "perfecting" the cure, or the function of the cure in "perpetuating" the influences of the disease (Burke 1945/1969, 512). The dialectic/dramatic/ironic explicitly attempts to establish a distinct set of characters, all of which are on the bias with each other. The sub-certainties of an irony are neither true nor false, but rather contributory (Burke 1945/1969, 512–513).

For Burke, true irony is not "superior" to the enemy. True *humble* irony is based on the sense of fundamental kinship with one's enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, does not merely exist outside of him as an observer but contains him within and is consubstantial with him (Burke 1945/1969, 514). Thus, there is no Jewish victim without a Nazi-perpetrator, no Holocaust without a mechanism of destruction. The active pairs involved in the Holocaust, indeed, dialectically (ironically) require or presuppose each other in order

to exist. However, what Arendt's readers failed to understand was that her intent in pointing out these ironies was not to say that they ought to be seen as particularly acceptable or funny. On the contrary, the paradox of the irony/dialectic is that it makes us laugh without being funny in any harmless or innocent sense of the word. Ironic laugh is cold and does not make us relax. The use of irony may also be hurtful to the reader if he or she is somehow involved in it. Arendt's readers did not understand that the humility of irony does not mean that the enemy or his qualities should be seen in exemplary or positive light. The humility of irony simply means that irony/dialectic can only arise when there exists this kind of reversible relationship between two characters that presuppose each other: if the enemy disappears, the victims disappear.

One of the reasons why irony is so difficult to understand or accept is that it always includes a tendency towards the simplification of literalness. That is to say that, although all the characters in a dramatic or dialectic development are necessary qualifiers of the definition of it, there is usually one particular character that enjoys the role of *primus inter pares*. For, as Burke observes, whereas any and all of the characters may be viewed in terms of any other, this one character may be taken as the summarising vessel, or synecdochic representative, of the development as a whole. This most representative character has a dual function, which Burke refers to as "adjectival" and "substantial". The character is adjectival in the sense that it embodies one of the qualifications necessary to the total definition, while it is substantial because it embodies the conclusions of the development as a whole. Irony is sacrificed to the simplification of literalness when this duality is neglected (Burke 1945/1969, 516).

Burke suggests the all-encompassing ironic formula: "What goes forth as A returns as non-A". For Burke, this is the basic pattern that places the essence of drama and dialectic in the strategic moment of reversal (Burke 1945/1969, 517). Thus, there is no *Aufhebung* here; it

is an interpretation of human action based on an idea that it is always dramatic/ironic/dialectic and ought to be interpreted in terms of the rhetoric of irony. In other words, the Burkean dialectic/irony is not the same as the Hegelian dialectic because the strategic moment of reversal does not produce any transcendence or synthesis. The dialectic does not transcend the characters to some higher lever of being. The irony simply points to the ambivalent as opposed to antithetical nature of human action. In our context it is important to understand that irony is a very sharp means to recognising and revealing political aspects of phenomena under scrutiny.

In the following subchapters, I will reread Arendt's ironies in terms of the Burkean tropes discussed above. My aim is not to carry out an exhaustive reading of the entire book. Instead, I will more closely examine the three themes that caused most of the controversy. They are the themes of Jewish cooperation and the role of Jewish leadership, Arendt's thesis of the collapse of political judgement, and the character of Eichmann's evil.

### **5.2. "THE DARKEST CHAPTER OF THE WHOLE DARK STORY"**

Arendt's critique of Jewish cooperation and the Jewish leadership was included in her third article in the *New Yorker*, published on 2 March 1963, which became Chapter VII in the book entitled *The Wannsee Conference, or Pontius Pilate*. The chapter focused mainly on the execution of the Final Solution, and its basic question was: How had it been possible to organise and execute such an enormous operation of destruction without significant resistance from either Jewish victims or gentile bystanders? Arendt pointed out that mere compliance would never have been sufficient to either smooth out all the enormous difficulties of such a huge operation or to soothe the consciences of those operators who had been brought up on the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill" (Arendt 1963/1965, 115). Arendt refers to Eichmann's statement according to which

Heydrich “expected the greatest difficulties” and ironically remarks that he could not have been more wrong (Arendt 1963/1965, 113). There is already an irony present here: an enterprise that had been expected to be extremely difficult to carry out turned out to proceed surprisingly smoothly. The ease with which the Final Solution was executed was due in large part to the cooperation of the Jews in their own destruction.

In addition, the chapter deals with Eichmann’s role in the execution of the Final Solution. As we saw earlier, Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor at the trial, did everything in his power to prove that Eichmann was the *primus motor* of the destruction of the Jews. Arendt, on the other hand, attempted to highlight all the ironies of a situation in which a group of important Nazi functionaries joined forces in order to organise an enterprise that seemed daunting and challenging even to them: “[T]he Final Solution, if it was to be applied to the whole of Europe, clearly required [...] the active cooperation of all Ministries and of the whole Civil Service.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 112)

Those who were present, “the Ministers themselves”, were tough guys, “Party members of long standing”, as an irony of cleansing had already taken place within the Party: “[T]hose who in the initial stages of the regime had merely ‘coordinated’ themselves, had been replaced.” The trouble was that these remaining men were not easily replaceable and “Hitler had tolerated them, just as Adenauer was to tolerate them [...]” (Arendt 1963/1965, 112)

The second irony that emerged was related to the agenda of the meeting. Before being able to get to the matter proper of the meeting, the participants had to settle some “complicated legal questions”, “such as the treatment of half- and quarter-Jews – should they be killed or only sterilised?” Only after these questions had been settled could the Nazi functionaries proceed to the discussion of the “various types of possible solutions to the problem”, that is to say, the various methods of killing (Arendt 1963/1965, 113).

Eichmann acted as secretary of the meeting. Again, Arendt ironically remarks that it was a very important day for a man who “had never before mingled socially with so many high ‘personages.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 113) For Eichmann, the climax of the meeting was reached when he for the first time in his life saw Heydrich smoke and drink after the meeting ended (Arendt 1963/1965, 114).

The next irony Arendt chose to highlight was the falsehood of Eichmann’s modesty. This is related to the parallel Eichmann drew between the administrative structures of the Catholic Church and certain biblical stories and the Nazi officials. First, he called the participants of the meeting “the Popes of the Third Reich”. Then, he tried to hide behind them by refusing to take responsibility for his own actions. He said that after these powerful men had spoken he had lost all his “doubts about such a bloody solution through violence”, sensing “a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling”, which made him feel free of all guilt. Arendt remarks: “Who was he to judge? Who was he ‘to have [his] own thoughts in this matter’? Well, he was neither the first nor the last to be ruined by modesty.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 114) Here, the irony lies in the parallel between the Popes and the Nazis on the one hand and the enormity of the Nazi enterprise and Eichmann’s modesty on the other.

After having dealt with the “technical” questions of the meeting, Arendt turned to the question of what Eichmann had said about the cooperation with the Jews. She reported that Eichmann said that he knew of no one who was actually against the Final Solution, which was the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience: “Of course, he did not expect the Jews to share the general enthusiasm over their destruction, but he did expect more than compliance, he expected – and received, to a truly extraordinary degree – their cooperation [...] This was ‘of course the very cornerstone’ of everything he did [...] Without Jewish help in administrative and police work [...] there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German manpower.” (Arendt 1963/1965,

117) Here, the irony is a kind of introduction to the decisive lines of the chapter, which have been quoted by almost all scholars dealing with the book:

To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story [...] In the matter of cooperation, there was no distinction between the highly assimilated Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe and the Yiddish-speaking masses of the East. In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation. (Arendt 1963/1965, 117–188)

The irony of these lines lies in the idea that the Nazis could count on Jewish officials to cooperate in the extermination of the Jews. Nevertheless, these lines are not, of course, meant to be exclusively ironic. Rather, they are meant to be a kind of summary of a sad fact of which most people were already aware, namely the cooperation between the Jewish and Nazi officials, which had already been revealed and discussed by a number of historians and survivors (see e.g. Poliakov 1975; Hilberg 1961; Levi 1958). It is impossible to know whether these lines alone would have been enough to arouse a storm around Arendt's report. In any case, there is something metonymical in this judgement that is strengthened by two subsequent points: the heavily synecdochic and ironic attempts to question the motives behind the action and political judgement of European Jewish leaders. The first dealt with the example of Rudolf Kastner in Hungary:

We know how the Jewish officials felt when they became instruments of murder – like captains 'whose ships were about to sink and who succeeded in bringing them safe to port by casting overboard a great part of their precious cargo'; like saviors who 'with a hundred victims save a thousand people, with a thousand ten thousand.' The truth was even more gruesome. Dr. Kastner, in Hungary, for instance, saved exactly 1684 people with approximately

476000 victims [...] 'truly holy principles' were needed 'as the guiding force of the weak human hand which puts down on paper the name of the unknown person and with this decides his life or death.' (Arendt 1963/1965, 118)

This argument alone would have been enough to make the reader understand that Arendt meant to refer to the fact that the sincerity of the Jewish rescue operations was more often than not highly questionable. She highlights the case of Rudolf Kastner as a representative example (synecdoche) of these operations. However, there is also an ironic aspect present here, as it was not enough that the deported Jews were "selected" by the Nazis; in addition, the Jewish functionaries made their own selections as to who was worth saving:

And whom did these 'holy principles' single out for salvation? Those 'who had worked all their lives for the *zibur* [community] – i.e., the functionaries – and the 'most prominent Jews,' as Kastner says in his report. (Arendt 1963/1965, 118)

The synecdoche and irony could not be clearer. The captains who cast a great part of their cargo overboard were the Jewish community leaders who relied on the hierarchical patterns of thought of the Jewish tradition discussed in Chapter One and who consequently focused all of their rescue efforts on community leaders and "prominent Jews". This did not only happen in Hungary with Kastner, but similar logic was used all over Europe.

Arendt connected another representative anecdote to the case of Kastner: the case of Leo Baeck. Her treatment of Baeck caused almost hysterical reactions among the Jews. Arendt took up Leo Baeck as representative of a typical attitude amongst well-meaning Jewish community leaders that ultimately proved to be politically stupid and ethically questionable:

No one bothered to swear the Jewish officials to secrecy; they were voluntary 'bearers of secrets,' either in order to assure quiet and prevent panic, as in Dr. Kastner's case, or out of 'humane' considerations, such as that 'living in the

expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder,' as in the case of Dr. Leo Baeck, former Chief Rabbi of Berlin. (Arendt 1963/1965, 119)

Arendt went on to report that at the trial, one witness had pointed out "the unfortunate consequences of this kind of 'humanity,'" namely that people volunteered for deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and denounced those who tried to tell them the truth as insane (Arendt 1963/1965, 119). The political mistake made by Jewish leaders like Leo Baeck was that they understood cooperation in terms of the politics of lesser evil and believed that their cooperation and concealment of facts from ordinary members of the Jewish communities would avoid a great deal of suffering in a situation in which they felt they had no other choice. Leaders like Kastner pushed the policy of lesser evil to such an extreme that it resulted in a hierarchically selective rescue policy. Although Palestinian Zionists had repeatedly announced that they would accept all Jewish refugees shipped from Europe, American, and European Jewish leaders did not even try to rescue as many Jews as possible. Instead, they chose to select the most prominent Jews from the Jewish masses.

It is important to notice that this choice was problematic for Arendt in political rather than moral terms, although both aspects were involved. As we have seen above, it was politically problematic in three ways. First, it was based on the traditional hierarchy within Jewish communities between more and less important members. In terms of the policy of lesser evil, this hierarchy was put into practice by attempting to rescue as many "prominent" Jews as possible. Second, the policy of lesser evil was partly based on self-deception, as a good portion of Jewish leaders convinced themselves to believe that cooperation really was a way to mitigate the suffering of their fellow Jews. Refusing to face the situation for what it really was, they believed that their policy was based entirely on humane considerations. Third, the policy of lesser evil was partly based on

lying in the form of failing to reveal all the facts of the situation to the entire community. In this way, the majority of the members of the Jewish communities were left without the possibility to personally assess the situation.

If one reads further, it turns out that Arendt was fully aware of the fact that the Jewish leadership was made up of a wide range of people, all of whom faced the situation at hand and led their people in different ways. Arendt classified the Jewish leaders into three types according to certain well known characteristics. Again, her classification is best understood in terms of synecdoche, that is to say representative examples. She mentions Chaim Rumkowski, the leader of the Jewish ghetto of Łódź, as representative of the first type. He was “called Chaim I, who issued currency notes bearing his signature and postage stamps engraved with his portrait, and who rode around in a broken-down horse-drawn carriage.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119) The representative anecdote of the second type is the above mentioned case of Leo Baeck, “scholarly, mild-mannered, highly educated, who believed Jewish policemen would be ‘more gentle and helpful’ and would ‘make the ordeal easier.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119) Finally, the third representative example was taken from among those “few who committed suicide – like Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council, who was not a rabbi but an unbeliever, a Polish-speaking Jewish engineer, but who must still have remembered the rabbinical saying: ‘Let them kill you, but don’t cross the line.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119)

Arendt presented all of these representative anecdotes as examples of politically ungifted leadership based on false or self-deceptive strategy. In the case of Rumkowski, the problem was pure selfishness and vanity. He did not work for the common good of his community, preferring instead to personally enjoy his false power, hoping, and perhaps believing, that the Germans would make an exception and save him from destruction. As for Baeck, he was simply too good a man to ever become a good politician. He was too

credulous, sincerely believing that a policy of lesser evil could and would bring about a bearable result.

Arendt seemed to sympathise most with Czerniakow's solution, identifying in it a certain amount of deep political honesty, insight, and courage. However, his line of thought had one decisive problem. Namely, his ethics of principle led him to give priority to his own personal dignity over the consideration of whether maintaining personal dignity really was the best possible solution from the viewpoint of his community. He did not want to compromise his ethical principles and concluded that all the available alternatives were equally evil. Hence, he preferred to die a dignified death rather than to live a morally corrupt life which was doomed to destruction. In so doing, he rejected the kind of politically minded ethics of responsibility which encourage the politician to look for survival strategies within impossible situations and remind the politician of the fact that whatever he does, he is always responsible for the entire community, not only himself.

As far as I can see, what Arendt meant was that the Jewish leaders were lacking what Max Weber called the "ethics of responsibility", which a political leader should assume regardless of the situation and potential results of his decisions. Instead, they possessed and followed an ethics of principled conviction, which in Weberian terms could never lead to an acceptable political result: "For while it is a consequence of the unworldly ethic of love to say, 'resist not evil with force', the politician is governed by the contrary maxim, namely, 'You shall resist evil with force, for if you do not, you are *responsible* for the spread of evil.'" (Weber 1919/1994, 358)

More precisely, the Jewish leaders were confronted with the dilemma between the ethic of principled conviction and the ethic of responsibility:

We have to understand that ethically oriented activity can follow two fundamentally different, irreconcilably opposed maxims. It can follow the 'ethic of principled conviction' or the 'ethic of responsibility'. It is not that

the ethic of conviction is identical with irresponsibility, nor that the ethic of responsibility means the absence of principled conviction [...] But there is profound opposition between acting by the maxim of the ethic of conviction [...] and acting by the maxim of the ethic of responsibility, which means that one must answer for the foreseeable *consequences* of one's actions. (Weber 1919/1994, 359–360)

It would, of course, be easy to argue, as many of Arendt's critics did, that this distinction cannot be applied to the situation of the Jews in the Nazi Reich because it would have been impossible for them to foresee either the results of the Nazi policy or the outcome of their own actions. In Chapter Four we have seen that this argument was frequently presented in the form of: "You were not there and consequently you cannot judge the actions of the Jews in the Nazi Reich". However, as we have seen above, most of the Jewish leaders were well aware of where the Jews were being deported. Nevertheless, in political terms, the point of Weber's argument is not this, but the politician's attitude towards his actions:

If evil consequences flow from an action done out of pure conviction, this type of person holds the world, not the doer, responsible, or the stupidity of others, or the will of God who made them thus. A man who subscribes to the ethic of responsibility, by contrast, will make allowances for precisely these everyday shortcomings in people. He has no right [...] to presuppose goodness and perfection in human beings. He does not feel that he can shuffle off the consequences of his own actions, as far as he could foresee them, and place the burden on the shoulders of others. (Weber 1919/1994, 360)

In Arendt's view, the Jewish leaders faithfully and fatefully followed the ethics of conviction because they believed that they were not responsible for their actions in the world, but only for their own souls and consciences, that is to say, to God. In other words, the most dramatic political mistake made by the Jewish leaders was their misunderstanding of the nature of worldly action and their adherence to the ethics of conviction within a politically extreme situation. As opposed to adopting a worldly, political attitude and

forcefully resisting evil, they believed that their principal task as religious leaders was to continue following their religious principles and convictions regardless of the situation and circumstances at hand. Their political naivety was well reflected in their attitudes towards the Nazis: they did not understand that any and all convictions and principles would be entirely useless and powerless in the face of Nazi evil. In this respect, Leo Baeck represented one of the most unworldly-minded Jewish leaders of this time. Although his intentions were good, he ended up contributing to an unprecedented evil because of his antipolitical attitude towards the world and humankind. One of his most drastic mistakes was to deny his people's right to make their own assessments and decisions. By hiding some of the decisive facts of the situation at hand, Baeck denied his community the freedom of choice.

Correspondingly, one of the most dramatic misjudgements made by the American Jewish intellectuals was their inability to distinguish between the responsibility of ordinary Jews and that of the Jewish leadership. Arendt's critique of the Jews' conduct was understood to mean that all Jews, regardless of their concrete status and situation, were equally to blame for their own destruction. However, Arendt's thesis was not actually this simple and black and white. In fact, she argued – again ironically/dialectically – that there is no such thing as an entirely innocent victim in the human world and in human interactions. This argument did not stem from an attempt to blur the perpetrators' role in the destruction of the Jews, but aimed at highlighting the fact that there are always alternative strategies of action from which people can choose, even in extreme political situations. In Burkean terms, one could say that the irony inevitably included in the strategy of cooperation could have been avoided.

Furthermore, Arendt strictly distinguished between the political responsibility of the leaders of Jewish communities and the personal responsibility of an individual for himself. Arendt never blamed ordinary Jews for causing their own destruction, but instead

accused the Jewish leadership of political short-sightedness and self-deception, which she claimed significantly contributed to the course of events.

### 5.3. THE COLLAPSE OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL TRADITION

The theme of the role and conduct of the Jewish leadership inevitably raised the question of whether there had been any real possibility for resistance. Again, Arendt ironically pointed out that while the legal irrelevance of the survivors' testimony became pitifully clear, the Israeli government's political intention in this matter was not difficult to assess. She argued that as a faithful henchman of Ben-Gurion, Hausner wanted "to demonstrate that whatever resistance there had been had come from Zionists, as though, of all the Jews, only Zionists knew that if you could not save your life it might still be worthwhile to save your honor" (Arendt 1963/1965, 122).

In Arendt's view, witnesses' statements clearly showed that this was not the case, as they told the court that indeed all Jewish organisations and parties had played a role in the resistance. Consequently, "the true distinction was not between Zionists and non-Zionists but between organized and unorganized people, and, even more important, between the young and the middle-aged. To be sure, those who resisted were a minority, a tiny minority, but under the circumstances 'the miracle was' as one of them pointed out, 'that this minority existed.'" (Arendt 1963/1965, 123)

In order to grasp Arendt's point here, one has to understand what she meant by "circumstances". For her, the real miracle was the fact that there was a tiny minority which had resisted even under the circumstances in which both the Jews and the Nazis did everything in their power to make resistance impossible:

True it was that the Jewish people as a whole had not been organized, that they had possessed no territory, no government, and no army, that, in the hour

of their greatest need, they had no government-in-exile to represent them among the Allies (the Jewish Agency for Palestine, under Dr. Weizmann's presidency, was at best a miserable substitute), no caches of weapons, no youth with military training. But the whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations and Jewish party and welfare organizations on both the local and the international level. Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people. (Arendt 1963/1965, 125)

For Arendt, the real tragedy was not that the Jews had been completely unorganised and lacked leadership, but that they were organised in a dramatically faulty way. Instead of organising its people into a resistance or engineering a mass escape while there still was time, the Jewish leadership chose to cooperate with the enemy. This fateful decision stemmed from the ancient survival strategy of the Jewish communities of negotiating and making concessions with gentiles in order to alleviate their oppression. A mechanical application of the same policy with the Nazi-enemy led to a loss of political judgement. The Jewish leadership was incapable of accurately judging the Nazi policy and was unable to see that this time the strategy of concessions was doomed to fail.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Arendt did not argue that the Jews were the only ones who lost their capacity for judgement. On the contrary, she viewed the conduct of the Jewish leadership as merely one dimension of a wider phenomenon which ruined the entire European political culture:

I have dwelt on this chapter of the story, which the Jerusalem trial failed to put before the eyes of the world in its true dimensions, because it offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society – not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims. (Arendt 1963/1965, 125–126)

As far as I am aware, very few people have understood that this is one of the main arguments of Arendt's book. In order to read her thesis of Jewish cooperation in its proper context, one must read it within the framework of this notion, which leads to two conclusions. First, for Arendt, Jewish cooperation was not an exceptional or separate phenomenon to be understood immanently in itself, but, rather, was the most dramatic expression of a general tendency throughout Europe. In other words, the problem was not that the Jewish leadership was exceptionally prone to cooperation with the enemy, but that it cooperated as readily as anyone else. Second, the phenomenon of cooperation was not essentially and exclusively a Jewish phenomenon, but the principal policy adopted throughout Europe. The entire European political culture was characterised by an odd unwillingness to face and admit what was going on in Germany and a simultaneous eagerness to explain everything in order to ensure a positive outcome and save one's own skin.

Arendt pointed – again ironically – to the fact that an attempt was made to justify this clear-cut political self-deception after the war as an expression of inner emigration:

We need mention here only in passing the so-called 'inner emigration' in Germany – those people who frequently had held positions, even high ones, in the Third Reich and who, after the end of the war, told themselves and the world at large that they had always been 'inwardly opposed' to the regime. The question here is not whether or not they are telling the truth; the point is, rather, that no secret in the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such 'inward opposition'. This was almost a matter of course under the conditions of Nazi terror; as a rather well-known 'inner emigrant', who certainly believed in his own sincerity, once told me, they had to appear 'outwardly' even more like Nazis than ordinary Nazis did, in order to keep their secret. (Arendt 1963/1965, 126–127)

Here, the irony lies, of course, in Arendt's parallel between different groups of secret-bearers, which leads the reader to think that in their attempt to keep their secret, the 'inner emigrants' ended up

following all Nazi orders even more carefully and literally than the Jewish leaders or the SS itself. In reality, inner emigration was an expression of lost conscience which could not be explained away by postwar legitimations of the impossibility of resistance. In Arendt's view, the loss of conscience led to a situation in which people were no longer able to realise that the "new set of German values" was not shared by the outside world. However, she also pointed to the fact that despite everything, there were individuals in Germany who were opposed to Hitler from the very beginning of the regime and had to be distinguished from the fraudulent "inwardly opposed" persons. They also had to be distinguished from active resisters, because it was characteristic of them to do nothing rather than trying to take action:

The position of these people, who, practically speaking, did nothing, was altogether different from that of the conspirators. Their ability to tell right from wrong had remained intact, and they never suffered a 'crisis of conscience.' There may also have been such persons among the members of the resistance, but they were hardly more numerous in the ranks of the conspirators than among the people at large. They were neither heroes nor saints, and they remained completely silent. (Arendt 1963/1965, 104)

Thus, unlike the great majority of Germans, who had lost their political judgement, it was characteristic of these few individuals that they succeeded in maintaining their capacity of judgement and sense of reality in spite of everything. As we will see in more detail below, Arendt's conception of political judgement in extreme situations is shaped precisely by the analysis of the situation of these exemplary individuals.

For Arendt, the idea of "inner emigration" was obviously only an excuse for having been involved in the execution of Nazi policy. Politically speaking, there was no difference between those who "inwardly opposed" and those who wholeheartedly supported the Nazis, as the result was the same in both cases. In fact, at a certain point the only alternative was "not to appear at all":

Hence, the only possible way to live in the Third Reich and not act as a Nazi was not to appear at all: 'Withdrawal from significant participation in public life' was indeed the only criterion by which one might have measured individual guilt [...] If the term was to make any sense, the 'inner emigrant' could only be one who lived 'as though outcast among his own people amidst blindly believing masses' [...] For opposition was indeed 'utterly pointless' in the absence of all organization. It is true that there were Germans who lived for twelve years in this 'outer cold', but their number was insignificant, even among the members of the resistance. (Arendt 1963/1965, 127)

One of the most conspicuous expressions of the moral collapse of European political culture was the infiltration of "mitigating activities". By these "activities", Arendt was referring to the numerous civil servants who later asserted that "they stayed in their jobs for no other reason than to 'mitigate' matters and to prevent 'real Nazis' from taking over their posts" (Arendt 1963/1965, 128). As one of the most representative examples of this type of civil servant, she mentioned the case of Dr. Hans Globke, Undersecretary of State, who rose to the post of Chief of Personnel Division in the West German Chancellery after the war. Arendt ironically pointed out that he had shown rather premature interest in the Jewish question by formulating the first of the directives in which proof of Aryan descent was demanded in 1932 (Arendt 1963/1965, 128).

Slowly but surely, these mitigating activities began to take forms that turned into a complete travesty of the fair and just treatment of people. One such activity was the practice of exemption based on the hierarchical classification of Jews:

The categories had been accepted without protest by German Jewry from the very beginning. And the acceptance of privileged categories – German Jews as against Polish Jews, war veterans and decorated Jews as against ordinary Jews, families whose ancestors were German-born as against recently naturalized citizens, etc. – had been the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society. (Arendt 1963/1965, 131)

In Arendt's view, the most morally disastrous aspect of the acceptance of these privileged categories was that everyone who demanded to

have an exception made in his case implicitly recognised the rule and became – often unwittingly and involuntarily – a participant in a practice which spelled death for all non-special cases. The sad part of the story – which highlights the irony to the extreme – lies in the fact that a number of people acted in good faith:

[T]his point, apparently, was never grasped by these ‘good men,’ Jewish and Gentile, who busied themselves about all those ‘special cases’ for which preferential treatment could be asked. The extent to which even the Jewish victims had accepted the standards of the Final Solution is perhaps nowhere more glaringly evident than in the so-called Kastner Report [...] Even after the end of the war, Kastner was proud of his success in saving ‘prominent Jews,’ a category officially introduced by the Nazis in 1942, as though in his view, too, it went without saying that a famous Jew had more right to stay alive than an ordinary one: to take upon himself such ‘responsibilities’ – to help the Nazis in their efforts to pick out ‘famous’ people from the anonymous mass, for this is what it amounted to – ‘required more courage than to face death.’ (Arendt 1963/1965, 132)

At this point, the purpose of Arendt’s ironic strategy becomes clear. By highlighting certain ironical characteristics of people’s actions and judgements to the extreme, she attempted to reveal certain politically and ethically problematic sides of both gentile and Jewish politics. She focused her ironical critique on the policy of concessions on the one hand and the pervasive policy of selection on the other. It was through this textual strategy that she attempted to show that the political situation in Europe was not only miserable but also extremely grotesque.

Another expression of the moral collapse of European political culture was the all-encompassing conviction that decent conduct and sacrifices were worthless. Returning to this theme towards the end of her report, Arendt presented the memoirs of Peter Bamm (*Die Unsichtbare Flagge*, 1952), who explained that “it is certain that anyone who had dared to suffer death rather than silently tolerate the crime would have sacrificed his life vain. This is not to say that such a sacrifice would have been morally meaningless. It would only have

been practically useless. None of us had a conviction so deeply rooted that we could have taken upon ourselves a practically useless sacrifice for the sake of a higher moral meaning.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 232)

Thus, in the mendacious and macabre context of the Third Reich, decent, morally respectable conduct began to appear entirely worthless and useless. Arendt pointed out that this was precisely the aim of the Nazi regime’s totalitarian policy. Its goal was to create a general atmosphere of moral and political indifference which would lead to a kind of mass oblivion to all the terrible things that had happened. By destroying the categories through which it was possible to distinguish goodness from evil, it aimed at destroying people’s capacity to judge.

Had these odd and morally dubious practices disappeared with the collapse of the Third Reich, one might be content to think that people simply do not adhere to respectable patterns of behaviour in politically extreme situations, and may indeed adopt any patterns whatsoever. However, the collapse of the Third Reich did not mark either a renaissance of European moral and political tradition or the birth of a new and ethically more ideal and respectable political culture. Rather, the moral collapse took the form of an attempt to bury, hide and silence all the morally questionable aspects of people’s conduct during the Third Reich. Simultaneously, the practice of exemptions and exceptions was cherished:

In Germany today, this notion of ‘prominent’ Jews has not yet been forgotten. While the veterans and other privileged groups are no longer mentioned, the fate of ‘famous’ Jews is still deplored at the expense of all others. There are more than a few people, especially among the cultural élite, who still publicly regret the fact that Germany sent Einstein packing, without realizing that it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius. (Arendt 1963/1965, 134)

Here, we are again confronted with Arendt’s ironic treatment of the situation at hand. Arendt ironically points to the fact that although the military hostilities and policy of annihilation were over, a number

of other characteristics of the state of political abasement persisted in the postwar situation. However, in Arendt's view, even the postwar practices of self-deception and moral and political dishonesty could not change the fact that complete and total oblivion of the Nazi atrocities was impossible. She pointed out that there are simply too many people in the world for this to ever be possible. There will always be somebody left alive to tell the story. Hence, in the long run, nothing can be practically useless (Arendt 1963/1965, 232).

This does not, however, necessarily imply that there will one day be a political culture in which most people will be able to judge politically under even the most difficult and extreme situations. What follows, rather, is a general pattern of the conduct of people under conditions of terror, which should always be remembered in order to understand how totalitarian domination is possible and how to resist it. More precisely, in order to understand and resist a totalitarian situation, one should not follow what the majority of people are doing, but rather what the minority is doing in spite of everything (Arendt 1963/1965, 233).

In terms of the Burkean tropes, Arendt's conclusion might be read as a suggestion that representative anecdotes (synecdoches) may also be positive and exemplary. Indeed, Arendt dealt with these types of individuals in a number of essays written after the war (see Arendt 1968a). The dramatic dialectic seems to lie in the fact that these individuals always form a tiny minority. More often than not they are compelled to live in the margins of society and suffer some kind of personal collapse caused by the fact that they are discriminated against because of their original thinking and sharp criticism of conformism.

#### 5.4. EICHMANN'S NEW EVIL

While Arendt saw the Jewish cooperation as the most dramatic expression of the moral collapse of the entire European political

tradition and its political judgement, for her, the case of Eichmann was undoubtedly a representative example of the new type of criminal that was born under the Third Reich. Thus, while the darkest chapter of the whole dark story discussed above was not Jewish cooperation as such, but rather the guiding political principle of concession to the Nazi policy, the reverse side – which highlighted the irony – of Jewish policy was the total failure to understand the political characteristics of the criminals with whom they were confronted. As I have argued above, an attempt was made by the prosecution to hide the unpleasant fact that these criminals did not seem to fit the profile of the kind of monsters who were capable of carrying out such heinous crimes. Strongly supported by the American Jewish establishment and David Ben-Gurion, the attorney general Gideon Hausner did his best to present Eichmann as an evil arch-executioner whose crimes were radically and inherently superhuman.

Arendt was not satisfied with the image presented by the prosecution and its supporters, and although she had initially expected to be faced with a criminal whose appearance corresponded to his crimes, she soon realised that she had to re-evaluate both her understanding of Eichmann's character and his deeds. As a result of this process of re-evaluation, she concluded that one of the reasons why the Jewish leadership had failed to cope with the Nazis was that they had simply failed to comprehend the nature of the Nazi crimes. They failed to grasp that a harmless-looking chain of bureaucratic measures actually constituted an entirely new type of crime which was incomparable with anything that had ever taken place before.

Having seen the accused, Arendt paid attention to the fact that there was something strange about Eichmann's way of talking and expressing his ideas. Although he had personally apologised for the fact that "officialese" was the only language he spoke, he simultaneously seemed to suffer from a mild case of aphasia. However, the problem was not that he did not remember, but rather that he was genuinely

incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché. This was extremely important to Arendt:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such. (Arendt 1963/1965, 49)

The ability to think from the standpoint of somebody else is not the same as the ability to think in general. Rather, it is a specific political faculty which can only develop and be practised and cherished within the reality of the human world. What was present in the Third Reich that suppressed this faculty in such a way that it never occurred to Eichmann that he was committing criminal deeds?

Arendt attempted to answer this question in Chapter VIII of her book, *Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen*. She argued that the question was linked to the new role of duty and obeying orders established in the Third Reich, which amounted to something more than the normal bureaucratic practice of state officials that was common throughout Europe. It amounted to a peculiar travesty of Kant's categorical imperative:

The first indication of Eichmann's vague notion that there was more involved in this whole business than the question of the soldier's carrying out orders that are clearly criminal in nature and intent appeared during the police examination, when he suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty. This was outrageous, on the face of it, and also incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience. (Arendt 1963/1965, 136)

This time the irony lies in the fact that the travesty of Kant's categorical imperative was not intentional. Arendt pointed out that Eichmann explained that from the moment he was charged with

carrying out the Final Solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, since he felt that he was no longer the master of his own deeds and was unable to change the course of events. In Arendt's view, Eichmann had distorted the Kantian formula to read: "Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land [...] In this household use, all that is left of Kant's spirit is the demand that a man do more than obey the law, that he go beyond the mere call of obedience and identify his own will with the principle behind the law – the source from which the law sprang. In Kant's philosophy, that source was practical reason; in Eichmann's household use of him, it was the will of the Führer." (Arendt 1963/1965, 136–137)

In fact, the irony that emerges is twofold. On the one hand, it is inscribed in the simple fact that a criminal such as Eichmann would even refer to Kant as a basis and guide of his own conduct. On the other hand, the irony is taken to the extreme by the fact that it never dawned on Eichmann that Kant's categorical imperative is not something one can invoke at will and then suddenly replace with the will of the Führer. In addition, it is important to notice that here the use of irony acquires a new function as far as it is virtually impossible to argue against clichés in terms of "normal" deliberative strategy. Irony provides a tool with which it is possible to avoid falling into the trap of trying to argue against Eichmann in his own terms.

In Arendt's view, this household distortion was decisive in understanding not only Eichmann's conduct but also the entire functioning of the Nazi bureaucracy:

Much of the horribly painstaking thoroughness in the execution of the Final Solution – thoroughness that usually strikes the observer as typically German, or else as characteristic of the perfect bureaucrat – can be traced to the odd notion, indeed very common in Germany, that to be law-abiding means not merely to obey the laws but to act as though one were the legislator of the laws that one obeys. Hence the conviction that nothing less than going beyond the call of duty will do. (Arendt 1963/1965, 137)

For Arendt, Eichmann was nothing more and nothing less than a perfect example of the extreme bureaucratic mentality which shaped the entire Nazi machinery. His primary principle was to do his duty as well and as uncompromisingly as possible and to respect the spirit of the Führer's orders even before he had given them. The paradox and irony of this attitude was that it brought Eichmann into direct conflict with the orders of his superiors. More precisely, his uncompromising bureaucratic attitude prevented him from adapting his policy to real life situations; he went on executing his murderous duties even when defeat was certain and the rest of the Nazi officials had decided to halt the Final Solution.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to emphasise that Arendt dedicated several pages in her book to the discussion of Eichmann's obsessive zeal in prolonging the Final Solution (see Arendt 1963/1965, 138–145), although her critics claimed that she had attempted to conceal this fact by defending Eichmann as a petty bureaucrat. In reality, she did not conceal anything, but instead merely questioned whether Eichmann's dutifulness was indeed proof of his fanaticism and hatred of the Jews, as her critics had argued:

That Eichmann had at all times done his best to make the Final Solution final was therefore not in dispute. The question was only whether this was indeed proof of his fanaticism, his boundless hatred of Jews, and whether he had lied to the police and committed perjury in court when he claimed he had always obeyed orders. (Arendt 1963/1965, 146)

Arendt concluded that it would be a mistake to explain Eichmann's conduct as a logical result of his fanaticism and antisemitism:

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20. It is not always pointed out in the dispute surrounding Eichmann's character and crimes that he had certain personal reasons for not obeying Himmler's order to halt the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. In the beginning of 1944, he had been recruited to the *Waffen* SS and would probably have been sent to whatever was left of Eastern Front had he remained "unemployed" in Budapest.

For the sad and very uncomfortable truth of the matter probably was that it was not his fanaticism but his very conscience that prompted Eichmann to adopt his uncompromising attitude during the last year of the war, as it had prompted him to move in the opposite direction for a short time three years before. (Arendt 1963/1965, 146)

However, his lack of fanaticism did not mean that Eichmann was not personally committed to his duties. On the contrary, his conduct and policy was a mixture of his bureaucratic mentality and boundless admiration for the Führer:

But the personal element undoubtedly involved was not fanaticism, it was his genuine, 'boundless and immoderate admiration for Hitler' [...] It would be idle to try to figure out which was stronger in him, his admiration for Hitler or his determination to remain a law-abiding citizen of the Third Reich when Germany was already in ruins [...] Eichmann, much less intelligent and without any education to speak of, at least dimly realized that it was not an order but a law which had turned them all into criminals. The distinction between an order and the Führer's word was that the latter's validity was not limited in time and space, which is the outstanding characteristic of the former. This is also the true reason why the Führer's order for the Final Solution was followed by a huge shower of regulations and directives, all drafted by expert lawyers and legal advisers, not by mere administrators; this order, in contrast to ordinary orders was treated as a law. (Arendt 1963/1965, 149)

Thus, the political tragedy and irony of the Final Solution was not that it was executed by a monster with superhuman powers, but that it was executed under circumstances in which lawful conduct and criminal action had become one and the same. In order to obey superior orders and respect the law, one was inevitably forced to take action which according to the traditional yardsticks of decent conduct would have been criminal. From an individual's standpoint, this situation meant that a person could no longer trust the voice of his conscience in traditional terms since the law of Hitler's land demanded that "the voice of conscience tell everyone: "Thou shalt kill". By the same token, the nature of evil changes as well:

Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom [...] and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learnt how to resist temptation. (Arendt 1963/1965, 150)

If the conduct of the Jewish leadership was the darkest chapter in the destruction of the European Jewry, the corruption of lawful and moral conduct was undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the moral collapse of the entire European political culture. Here, the irony lies in the fact that all political relationships and criteria had somehow been turned upside down resulting in a grotesque travesty of “normal” human action and conduct. The grotesque irony of the situation was the fact that in terms of their own laws and principles, the Nazis, like Eichmann, acted in an exemplary manner. What Arendt argued, and what hardly anybody else recognised, was that Eichmann’s actions should have been dealt with in the framework of this corruption in order to truly understand the character of his evil. The core of this evil was that it was not inscribed in man’s intrinsic and true nature but in his deeds. What made these deeds astounding was not their exceptional or devilish nature but their seeming and apparent normalcy. For Arendt, the Eichmann case was important because he was a prime example – indeed a representative anecdote in Burkean terms – of the inclusion of the element of a new evil in perfectly normal conduct.

Hence, in Jerusalem, Arendt could not see any traces of radical evil in Eichmann, of the monstrous wickedness of his heart and brain. There seemed to be nothing particularly strange or awe-inspiring about him, nothing that pointed to the transgression of the boundaries of possible and normal self-interest. There was no trace of inhuman cruelty, sadism or even an insane hatred of the Jews, nor were there any Faustian traces of his having sold his soul to the devil (cf. Arendt 1978b, 4–5).

It was this observation that led Arendt to consider Eichmann's actual deeds and question what actually made them criminal acts. As pointed out above, she identified in him a life-long effort to be a good, law-abiding citizen. This characteristic was by no means exclusive to Eichmann. On the contrary, it was something to which Arendt had pointed immediately after the war, when she argued that the real horror of the 20th century lay in the fact that this kind of "good family man" could become the greatest criminal of the century (see Arendt 1945c, 128). She concluded that the trouble with Eichmann was that he was both terribly and terrifyingly normal (Arendt 1963/1965, 276). Beyond his extraordinary diligence in looking out for his own personal advancement, he had no motives at all. Thus the novelty of Eichmann's evil was that it was not intentional but rather banal, stemming from the fact that he never realised what he was doing.

There is, of course, an extreme irony in the argument that the Nazi evil personified by Eichmann was not, for example, radical but rather banal. However, it is of utmost importance to note that the banality of evil by no means makes it any less harmful, criminal, or immoral. On the contrary, at the core of banal evil lies something which makes it particularly dangerous. The fact that Eichmann never fully realised the enormity of his crimes was a result of the fact that he never stopped to think about what he was doing. In other words, the hallmark of this kind of banal evil is thoughtlessness.

Thoughtlessness is not the same as stupidity, and Eichmann's thoughtless evil did not mean that he did not think at all, or that he would not have had the capacity to think had he wanted to. Rather, the notion of thoughtlessness as the hallmark of banal evil means that evil is born as a result of a chain of seemingly harmless everyday deeds. In other words, what is evil in this chain is not a single deed but rather the end to which these deeds lead.

In Arendt's view, the problem, and the true horror of Eichmann's thoughtlessness and banal evil, lay in the fact that it led to personal

and political irresponsibility. Never stopping to consider what he was actually doing or supporting, it never occurred to him that “in politics, obedience and support are the same” (Arendt 1963/1965, 122). Thus, Arendt presented Eichmann as an extreme case of human conduct, in which different human faculties did not cooperate. Eichmann refused to exercise the faculty which usually follows action or even the intention to act – namely, judgement. In other words, never stopping to think about what he was really doing meant that he never stopped to judge his own deeds, their role and consequences.

It was precisely this cutting of the connection between acting and judging that led to irresponsibility, insofar as judging is the activity through which man is able to assume responsibility for his own actions. In the final analysis, what made Arendt’s interpretation of Eichmann’s evil so uncomfortable for her readers was the simple claim that Eichmann did not do anything extraordinary, but rather acted as most of us act most of the time. We rarely stop to think about what we are really doing and we often refuse to take responsibility for our actions.

I think it must have been this ironical parallel between Eichmann’s and other peoples conduct that drove Arendt’s readers mad. They believed she meant to imply that there is a little Eichmann in every one of us. They also believed that Arendt was mocking their sincere attempts to lead a decent life after the difficult and morally corrupting years of war. After the “68”, it is easy to forget how important general stability and law and order were for most people during the first decades after the war. Arendt’s readers failed to see that she did not mean to argue that we are all equally evil (at least potentially), but that the importance of personal political judgement is the only possible guiding principle of political action. In other words, one should occasionally stop to think what one is really doing. This is the only way we can try to prevent evil deeds from taking place in the future.

### 5.5. ARENDT AS JUDGE

Over the past 30 years or so, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* has often been read as Hannah Arendt's contribution to the theory of political judgement. More precisely, it has been read as a first step towards the themes she would later approach in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). In contrast with this standard interpretation, throughout this book I have argued that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a political judgement of the conduct of the Jewish leadership and Zionist politics. I have also argued that the larger frame of Arendt's critique of Jewish politics is the total collapse of the European political tradition caused by the appearance of Nazi totalitarianism. Instead of reading Arendt's critique of Jewish politics as blaming the victims for causing their own destruction, it should be read in the context of the general collapse of political judgement in Europe. In these terms of interpretation, Arendt's theses of Jewish cooperation and the banality of evil appear as reverse sides of the same coin. The cooperation of the European Jewish leadership with the Nazis is a dramatic example of the collapse of political judgement in a politically extreme situation. The inability of the European tradition of political thought to theorise the political aspect of new phenomena was most clearly revealed in the fact that, instead of searching for politically significant novelties in unprecedented and extreme events and phenomena, it attempted to reduce all novelties to precedents and dealt with them through established patterns of thought and action. True, it would have been extremely difficult to make adequate judgements in a situation in which evil appeared in an entirely new form. Nevertheless, Arendt's point is that evil should have been seen in apparently harmless everyday situations which in themselves did not invite people to push thinking and judging further but rather encouraged them to remain trapped in old patterns of thought and behaviour.

I would like to suggest that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is best understood such as it is: a political judgement of a concrete, empirical

phenomenon. It should not, in other words, be read as a philosophical treatise of political judgement on the theoretical level. In my view, there are two problems in the common strategy of reading and interpretation of Arendt's book. First, it leads to anachronistic interpretations of Arendt's conception of judgement. Arendt scholars end up arguing that everything that she wrote in *The Life of the Mind* can be traced back to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, as if her thinking had not developed at all during a period of time that spanned more than ten years and indeed distinguishes these two texts from each other. Second, it leads to the misinterpretation of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a quasi-theoretical treatise of political judgement inspired by Kantian theorisations of aesthetical judgement. Scholars end up in arguing that Arendt's theses and interpretations are incorrect simply because she leans too heavily on a theory which is not applicable to an extreme phenomenon such as Nazi totalitarianism.

In this subchapter, I will read the *Epilogue* and *Postscript* of the book as concrete judgements. I will challenge the commonly presented argument according to which Arendt somehow overstepped her bounds by making her own judgement of Jewish politics and the Eichmann trial. As we have seen in the previous chapters, it has been argued that as a layman and a person who "was not there", she had no right and competence to judge either Jewish politics in the Third Reich or the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Her decision to take on the role of judge and hand down her own verdict on both the trial and the accused has been seen as an outrageous act of false pride and arrogance. I will challenge this accusation by arguing that Hannah Arendt's judgement and verdict are rather expressions of well-placed pride and arrogance, both of which are necessary prerequisites for competent and valid judgement.

I claim that good political judgement is by its very character a proud and arrogant activity. In order to judge a phenomenon clearly and accurately, one must keep a critical distance, which makes empathising impossible. This judgement is outrageous because it does

not respect the conventions and pre-established patterns of thought. It has to exaggerate and push certain traits of a phenomenon to the extreme in order to make its case. It is pitiless in its impartiality, which often offends those who have something to hide. It is shocking as far it challenges our pre-established conceptions and demands that we think independently. As far as it concerns past events, it is unavoidably informed by hindsight. Thus, it is never fair, because it always knows more than the contemporaries did. Hannah Arendt's judgement shook the world because it was all of these things. It was an original and courageous judgement of a politically extreme and unprecedented situation in which most people lost their capacity for political judgement and sense of reality (cf. Parvikko 2003).

I approach political judgement as a theoretically untameable phenomenon because of its practical nature. In other words, because of its practical and contextual nature, it cannot rely on pre-existing patterns of thought and the unchanging criteria of judgement, but is always based on and shaped by the contingent conditions of concrete situations. I argue that this is why there has not been and cannot be such a thing as a theory of judgement. As an activity focused on worldly occurrences, it should be reconnected with the contingent events of the realm of rhetoric rather than the eternal truths of philosophy. Hence, political judgement belongs to politics as opposed to philosophy for the simple reason that political judgements concern concrete events shared by people in the common world. Furthermore, I also argue that from another perspective, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may be read as a critique of the political use of trials. Arendt points to the fact that the Eichmann trial went beyond the "normal" limits of a trial and contributed to the blurring of the line between politics and court procedures.

In sum, the failure of the Jerusalem court consisted in its not coming to grips with three fundamental issues, all of which have been sufficiently well known and widely discussed since the establishment of the Nuremberg Tribunal: the problem of impaired justice in the court of the victors; a valid definition

of the 'crime against humanity'; and a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime. (Arendt 1963/1965, 274)

As this quote shows, Arendt considered the trial in Jerusalem a total failure in every important respect. In the beginning of the *Epilogue*, she complained that "the irregularities and abnormalities of the trial in Jerusalem were so many, so varied, and of such legal complexity that they overshadowed during the trial [...] the central moral, political, and even legal problems that the trial inevitably posed" (Arendt 1963/1965, 253). In other words, the inherent problem with the trial was that all the politically central and important questions it raised were evaded and buried.

By this, however, Arendt did not mean to suggest that the best possible forum for dealing with politically central and important questions would be a courtroom. Rather, she meant that the Israelis failed to define and conduct the trial in such a way that it would have conformed to the purpose of a trial, which is simply to render justice. Instead of rendering justice, the Israelis chose to list "a great number of purposes the trial was supposed to achieve, all of which were ulterior purposes with respect to the law and to courtroom procedure" (Arendt 1963/1965, 253). The problem was that a number of inherently political questions were drawn into the courtroom proceedings, and they could not be resolved in the frame of a trial for two reasons. Firstly, they simply did not belong there, and secondly, they were simply too big to be dealt with in any court of law.

While a number of international legal experts considered the Eichmann trial an important step forward in the establishment of international norms of criminal law, in Arendt's view, the trial repeated the failures of both the Nuremberg and subsequent successor trials. The most important of these failures was that Eichmann was tried in a court of victors. Despite a number of pleas made by internationally respected experts, no international court was established and the trial did not even succeed in paving the way

for the future establishment of such a court. The situation was made worse by the fact that the defence was not allowed to call its own witnesses.

However, for Arendt, the particulars of the law were not the most important problem. Far more important was the fact that Eichmann had been mistakenly accused and condemned. The most important and dramatic failure of the trial stemmed from the profound misunderstanding of the nature of Eichmann's crimes. Instead of distinguishing in them an entirely unprecedented crime which had never occurred before in human history, the Israelis approached Eichmann's crimes in terms of their own history as a persecuted people:

In the eyes of the Jews, thinking exclusively in terms of their own history, the catastrophe that had befallen them under Hitler [...] appeared not as the most recent of crimes, the unprecedented crime of genocide, but, on the contrary, as the oldest crime they knew and remembered. This misunderstanding, almost inevitable if we consider not only the facts of Jewish history but also, and more important, the current Jewish historical self-understanding, is actually at the root of all the failures and shortcomings of the Jerusalem trial. None of the participants ever arrived at a clear understanding of the actual horror of Auschwitz, which is of a different nature from all the atrocities of the past, because it appeared to prosecution and judges alike as not much more than the most horrible pogrom in Jewish history. They therefore believed that a direct line existed from the early anti-Semitism of the Nazi Party to the Nuremberg Laws and from there to the expulsion of Jews from the Reich and, finally, to the gas chambers. Politically and legally, however, these were 'crimes' different not only in degree of seriousness but in essence. (Arendt 1963/1965, 267)

Thus, in Arendt's view, the basic failure of the Jerusalem trial stemmed from a profound misjudgement by the Jews of their own political history. They did not succeed in distinguishing the traditional hatred of the Jews from modern antisemitism and respectively, they did not succeed in comprehending how this modern political antisemitism was once again turned into an unprecedented policy of the genocide

of an entire people. The decisive step in this change was made when the Nazis progressed from the policy of enforced emigration to the policy of extinction:

It was when the Nazi regime declared that the German people not only were unwilling to have any Jews in Germany but wished to make the entire Jewish people disappear from the face of the earth that the new crime, the crime against humanity – in the sense of a crime ‘against the human status’ or against the very nature of mankind – appeared. Expulsion and genocide, though both are international offenses, must remain distinct; the former is an offense against fellow-nations, whereas the latter is an attack upon human diversity as such, that is, upon a characteristic of the ‘human status’ without which the very words ‘mankind’ or ‘humanity’ would be devoid of meaning. (Arendt 1963/1965, 268–269)

Here, the decisive criterion that distinguishes these different kinds of crimes from each other is the question of whom the crime is committed against. The introduction of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which legalised discrimination against the Jewish minority, was a national crime; they clearly violated national and constitutional rights and liberties, although this seemed to be of no concern to the international community. Enforced emigration, which became official policy after 1938, did concern the international community for the simple reason that those who were expelled began to appear *en masse* at the frontiers of other countries. However, neither of these crimes was unprecedented, and both legalised discrimination and expulsion on a mass scale had been repeatedly practiced in a number of countries. Genocide, in its unprecedentedness, is distinguished from all earlier crimes by the fact that it is committed against humankind as a whole, which is why modern criminals like Eichmann should have been prosecuted by a court that represented humankind as a whole:

[S]o these modern, state-employed mass murderers must be prosecuted because they violated the order of mankind, and not because they killed millions of people. Nothing is more pernicious to an understanding of these

new crimes, or stands more in the way of the emergence of an international penal code that could take care of them, than the common illusion that the crime of murder and the crime of genocide are essentially the same, and that the latter therefore is 'no new crime properly speaking'. The point of the latter is that an altogether different order is broken and an altogether different community is violated. (Arendt 1963/1965, 272)

Thus, for Arendt, the execution of the Jerusalem trial was just another chapter in the long history of the Jewish absence of political judgement, which stemmed from a mistaken self-understanding of their own political history. Once again, they misinterpreted the character of the crimes with which they were confronted. This time, however, the Jews were not the only victims, as far as humankind itself was to suffer from the lack of an international criminal court with the authority to properly deal with these kinds of crimes:

Had the court in Jerusalem understood that there were distinctions between discrimination, expulsion, and genocide, it would immediately have become clear that the supreme crime it was confronted with, the physical extermination of the Jewish people, was a crime against humanity, perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people, and that only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism. Insofar as the victims were Jews, it was right and proper that a Jewish court should sit in judgment; but insofar as the crime was a crime against humanity, it needed an international tribunal to do justice to it. (Arendt 1963/1965, 269)

The Israelis' misjudgement was made worse by the fact that they shared the assumption present in all modern legal systems: that the intent to do wrong is a prerequisite of committing a crime. This assumption prevented them from understanding that "this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong" (Arendt 1963/1965, 276). Eichmann was loaded with all kinds of evil motives, because "when this intent is absent, where, for whatever reasons, even reasons

of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 277)

However, notwithstanding of his motives, Eichmann did commit the crime of playing a central role in an enterprise whose open purpose was the permanent elimination of certain groups of people from the face of the earth, and this was precisely why he, too, had to be eliminated:

[T]here still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world – we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang, (Arendt 1963/1965, 279)

These are the final words of Arendt’s personal verdict on Eichmann, which she stated at the end of the *Epilogue*. A number of her critics found it outrageous that she dared to “correct” the judges who had presided over the case. They failed to understand that Arendt was not really criticising the judges or the verdict, but was merely suggesting that a different formulation of the verdict might have more clearly revealed the real nature of Eichmann’s crimes. She pointed out that one of the principles of justice is that it must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done. Thus, a verdict should reveal the nature of the crime a criminal has committed as clearly as possible (Arendt 1963/1965, 277).

Even more importantly, Arendt pointed to the fact that the real focus of any trial is the deeds of the criminal defendant. Although it has become commonplace to assume that a criminal must have evil motives or intentions in order to do wrong and be capable of committing a crime, motives themselves are not punishable. Only

criminal deeds are punishable, and in the case of “normal crimes” expiated, as motives alone cannot do damage to the world and injure the human community regardless of how evil they may be. Only deeds have an effect on the world, which is why Eichmann also had to be punished on the basis of what he did.

In Arendt’s view, ignoring Eichmann’s motives did not diminish either the enormity of his crimes or his guilt. Rather, it focused attention on the real character of his crimes as offences against humankind and its inviolable right to inhabit the earth. Eichmann’s greatest crime was that he refused to share the earth with the Jewish people. This refusal constituted a violation of the basic human right to inhabit the earth with other people, which was the most important of all the inviolable human and political rights, without which human life on the earth and the sharing of the world would be impossible. Thus, Eichmann’s crime had three decisive characteristics. First, it was a deed which was committed against humankind in the most profound sense. Second, it was irreconcilable because of its profound nature and enormity. And third, because of its irreconcilability, it was unpunishable. The elimination of a criminal who had committed an irreconcilable crime against humankind could only be a formal substitute for a punishment which would have fit the crime.

In Arendt’s view, this was the real dilemma of the Eichmann trial. It revealed that the administrative mass murder committed by the Nazis was a new type of crime for which the European political and judicial tradition was entirely unprepared and which it was entirely unequipped to handle. Because of their sheer enormity, there was no punishment that fit these crimes. Yet they had to be dealt with somehow.

Even more importantly, the real dilemma revealed by the Eichmann trial was not the Nazi crimes as such but the fact that they had actualised the potentiality of these kinds of crimes for the first time in history. Humankind as a whole remained completely unprepared for the possibility that something similar might happen

in the future. Once actualised, there were no guarantees that such crimes would not manifest themselves in some other form:

It is in the very nature of things human that every act that has once made its appearance and has been recorded in the history of mankind stays with mankind as a potentiality long after its actuality has become a thing of the past [...] whatever the punishment, once a specific crime has appeared for the first time, its reappearance is more likely than its initial emergence could ever have been. (Arendt 1963/1965, 273)

More precisely, the character of a phenomenon entirely changes when it changes from a potentiality into a reality. As long as there is only the potential for something to occur, it does not really belong to the world, but as soon as it has been actualised it becomes a constituting element of the reality of the world. Hence, crimes against humankind reach their peak in the fact that they affect and change the human condition on earth in a dramatic and irreducible manner. They mark a point of no return which changes the conditions of life on earth.

This was the real dilemma of the Nazi crimes, to which the Eichmann trial offered no real solution. It left humankind with an unsolved puzzle of administrative mass murder. For Arendt, it marked a total collapse of the entire European political tradition, as it revealed that this tradition lacked the necessary tools with which to deal with such crimes morally, legally, and politically. In the final analysis, the Nazi crimes constituted a dilemma because they left humankind without firm criteria of judgement for the present and future (Arendt 1963/1965, 283). Instead of relying on pre-established patterns of thought and norms of behaviour, one ought to have learnt to judge freely and independently:

There remains, however, one fundamental problem, which was implicitly present in all these postwar trials and which must be mentioned here because it touches upon one of the central moral questions of all time, namely upon the nature and function of human judgment. What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed 'legal' crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they

have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them. (Arendt 1963/1965, 294–295)

The notion of judging freely and without precedent inevitably raises the question of the nature and function of human judgement. This is, indeed, Arendt's final question in her trial report, which she answers by claiming that the collapse of the former political tradition marks the beginning of a new era of independent judgement informed by the "arrogant" conviction that nobody can be trusted:

And this question is all the more serious as we know that the few who were 'arrogant' enough to trust only their own judgment were by no means identical with those persons who continued to abide by old values, or who were guided by a religious belief [...] Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented. (Arendt 1963/1965, 295)

Arendt's apology for the arrogance of judgement may appear outrageous and impudent in the context of the Holocaust. It may even seem to be an expression of intellectual and political elitism to claim that only a few individuals were actually able to maintain their judgement under Nazi pressure. However, independent judgement is arrogant in a very particular way, as it does not imply that one would despise or look down on other people. Nor does it mean that one would have a total lack of respect for other people and their right to inhabit and share the earth with each other. On the contrary, it stems precisely from the firm conviction that it is an inviolable right of every human being to inhabit and share the world with other people. However, there is a fundamental political commandment inscribed in this right, as it is bound with the duty to exercise human faculties of action and judgement in such a way that sharing the world is possible. In other words, the inviolable right to inhabit

the world can only be realised on the condition that it is cherished by acting in concert with other people and by judging their deeds concerning the common world.

Moreover, the arrogance of judgement means that one cannot trust anyone else's judgement because it is actually not necessarily a judgement at all, but rather an expression of obedience and, as such, an irresponsible thoughtlessness. In Arendt's view, independent judgement had already proven too difficult and demanding for most people, many of whom preferred to hide behind other people's judgements. However, things were made even worse by an increasingly prevalent inclination to deliberately refuse to judge: "The argument that we cannot judge if we were not present and involved ourselves seems to convince everyone everywhere, although it seems obvious that if it were true, neither the administration of justice nor the writing of history would ever be possible." (Arendt 1963/1965, 296)

Here, Arendt is pointing to the fact that independent judgement is inevitably always external. Unlike those who argued that one cannot judge if one is not present, Arendt maintains that one cannot judge if one is present, because being present blurs the distance required in order to make good political judgements. Distance is necessary in order to both see the whole situation and be able to judge in somebody else's place.

Being present not only prevents one from keeping one's distance from the phenomenon under scrutiny but also leads to self-righteousness, which stems from the conviction that one always knows what really happened. The problem of self-righteousness is that it is morally corruptive; it builds a moral hierarchy in terms of which only those with sufficient personal experience can distinguish right from wrong. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this attitude leads to a situation in which one can only judge one's own deeds, as nobody else is experienced enough to judge them. Politically speaking, this results in a situation in which political existence becomes impossible since it always is based on sharing the world, and the common world

can only be born as a result of action and judgement which concerns the world as a whole.

One more element is needed in order to outline the frame of the Arendtian universe of judgement and draw together all of its aforementioned aspects. This element is responsibility:

Justice, but not mercy, is a matter of judgment, and about nothing does public opinion everywhere seem to be in happier agreement than that no one has the right to judge somebody else. What public opinion permits us to judge and even to condemn are trends, or whole groups of people – the larger the better – in short, something so general that distinctions can no longer be made, names no longer be named. Needless to add, this taboo applies doubly when the deeds or words of famous people or men in high position are being questioned. This is currently expressed in high-flown assertions that it is ‘superficial’ to insist on details and to mention individuals, whereas it is the sign of sophistication to speak in generalities according to which all cats are gray and we all are equally guilty. (Arendt 1963/1965, 296–297)

If distinctions cannot be made and names cannot be named, two things become impossible. First, the practice of judgement itself is impossible as far as it is always based on distinguishing between right and wrong. Second, it is no longer possible to determine and distinguish the relations and elements of responsibility, as acting in the world is always the action of concrete, living people who commit certain deeds as opposed to trends which occur without protagonists. The aforementioned quote suggests that Arendt firmly refutes the tendency to blur individual moral responsibility by making generalisations. For her, making a judgement of an individual’s conduct requires the examination of details and pinpointing of individuals who have committed certain deeds. In my view, this is a strong plea for the rehabilitation of individual moral judgement and personal responsibility. However, it does not mean that all the responsibility for anything and everything that has ever happened should be placed on the shoulders of individuals. In other words, Arendt does not claim that everyone is the architect of his or her own fortunes.

On the contrary, she emphasises that individual responsibility for one's own deeds must always be distinguished from political responsibility, which is never personal in the same way:

This, of course, is not to deny that there is such a thing as *political* responsibility which, however, exists quite apart from what the individual member of the group has done and therefore can neither be judged in moral terms nor be brought before a criminal court. Every government assumes political responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past [...] It means hardly more, generally speaking, than that every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors. But this kind of responsibility is not what we are taking about here; it is not personal [...] It is quite conceivable that certain political responsibilities among nations might some day be adjudicated in an international court; what is inconceivable is that such a court would be a criminal tribunal which pronounces on the guilt or innocence of individuals. (Arendt 1963/1965, 298)

These concluding words of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* are decisive in order to understand Arendt's true point regarding the nature of Eichmann's crimes and their relation to juridical and political systems. In my view, her central argument is that political crimes cannot be punished, as they are synonymous with the policy of a certain government. Only the criminal deeds committed by individual members of a government can be punished. In this sense, the greatest paradox of Eichmann's crimes was that everyday administrative procedures became the greatest crimes ever committed in the history of the world.

## 6. THE EICHMANN TRIAL AND THE POLITICS OF THE PAST

As we have seen in this book, Arendt's pamphlet *Eichmann in Jerusalem* caused an immense debate immediately after its publication in 1963, especially among American Jews. The extensiveness of this debate in the field of political thought and theory remains unparalleled: once it began, it never really ended. Ever since it first appeared, the book has remained controversial and continues to arouse heated debates. The ongoing critique and discussion of the book suggest that it has remained extremely topical over the past 40 years. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that over the past 20 years or so, the controversy surrounding the book has surpassed its original limits and become intertwined with the debates over the politics of the past in a number of ways. Nowadays, the book is understood as having been a conscious political act intended to influence the way in which the history of the European Jews and the Holocaust was remembered and passed down to future generations.

One of the main characteristics of these new readings is that they use Arendt's pamphlet as a kind of buffer text against which they introduce their own readings of the themes dealt with or at least referred to by Arendt. One conspicuous branch of these new readings is comprised of texts that deal with the trial itself and highlight its positive aspects and impact on the birth of the field of Holocaust studies in general and victim studies in particular. It is characteristic particularly of Holocaust historians to "periodise" the phases of remembering the Holocaust. From their point of view, the Eichmann trial stands as a decisive turning point and starting point for Holocaust studies.

In the following, I will begin by introducing and discussing some of these periodisations. I will then discuss a thesis presented recently

according to which Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann has cast a dark shadow over all attempts in the past decades to carry out historical research on Eichmann and his trial. I will then take up a few new readings of the trial in which Arendt's book is used as a buffer text. Finally, I will critically assess these readings and argue that more often than not they refuse to understand Arendt's interpretation correctly.

I will argue that over the past 20 years or so, Arendt's book has been included in the debate surrounding the singularity of the Holocaust. Recent approaches to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* become comprehensible in this context. Many recent critics of the book have accused it in one way or another of working against the thesis of the singularity of the Holocaust. As we will see, this accusation is most often made in the context of victim studies. In this context, it has been argued that Arendt ignored the standpoint of victims and failed to comprehend the significance of the victims' testimony and memories for the field of Holocaust studies and our understanding of this extreme phenomenon.

I suggest that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* should be understood as one of the very first attempts to read the Holocaust politically, which is why it continues to be refuted to this day. More recent critics of the book have continued to reject Arendt's suggestion that the Holocaust be read politically because doing so would require that they stop viewing the Jews as innocent victims of an awful fate and start approaching them as active contributors to their own history. In other words, Arendt's book is still refuted because it goes against the prevailing trend in the field of victim studies of blurring the Jews' own partial responsibility for their political fate. In addition, a political reading of the Holocaust would require scholars to begin to take Arendt's ironies, with which I dealt in Chapter Five, seriously. Her ironies must be taken seriously as they often mark the points at which the political aspects of the context of the Holocaust emerge.

## 6.1. THE EICHMANN TRIAL AS A TURNING POINT

It is a well-known fact that there has been a significant increase in interest in the Holocaust over the past two or three decades. This is not only reflected in the amount of academic research dealing with the Holocaust but also in the amount and diversity of cultural products related to it, ranging from memoirs and biographies to films, exhibitions, and monuments. According to a number of historians and other scholars, it is now possible to organise the changes in the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered into various phases or periods. In this sense, these scholars argue that the Eichmann trial marked a decisive shift in remembering the destruction of European Jews in two ways. First, it marked the end of the postwar period of forgetting, repression, and silence. Second, the novelty of the trial was that attention was shifted from the perpetrators to the victims (see e.g. Segev 1991/1993; Wieviorka 1998; Felman 2000; Traverso 2004; Cesarani 2004; Bilsky 2004). In the following, I will discuss the approaches used by historians and other scholars who see the Eichmann trial as marking a decisive turning point in the reception of the Holocaust.

Enzo Traverso argues that, generally speaking, over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, the genocide of the Jews occupied a marginal role in every aspect of European life and politics. In Nuremberg, for example, special emphasis was not placed on the singularity of the Holocaust, but, rather, the destruction of the Jews was seen as one of many war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis. As to everyday life, in the immediate aftermath of the war, people were much more preoccupied with reconstruction and rebuilding their lives than they were with mourning the Jews or other victims of the Nazi regime (Traverso 2004, 228–229; cf. Wieviorka 1998, 64, 68–69).

Then, in the 1960s, there was a distinct shift towards the dawning of the era of the witness. Anette Wieviorka (1998), who introduced

this term, argues that the witnesses to the Holocaust had been put on a pedestal and celebrated as the bearers of virtue and wisdom. More often than not these witnesses are identified with the figure of the victim. Holocaust survivors have become living icons. Peter Novick (1999, 201) has even argued that the memory of the Shoah has been sanctified and has become a kind of civil religion of the West, while Arno J. Mayer (1988) has talked about the existence of a memory cult.

Traverso asks how this impressive difference between the indifference of yesterday and the sensibility of today can be explained. He points to several elements which form the basis for an explanation. First, he argues that antisemitism still belonged to the mental *habitus* of European countries after the war. The Shoah did lead to the delegitimation of antisemitism, although it did not happen all at once. In addition, in the context of general catastrophe and destruction, the singularity of the Holocaust was not emphasised. The immensity of the Final Solution was not easily conceivable in the general context of a war that produced 50 million dead and a continent in ruins (Traverso 2004, 230).

Second, the prevailing culture of antifascism focused attention on resistance tending to heighten it to mythical dimensions. The myth of a heroic national fight and resistance refused to question why the resistance movements had not tried to sabotage the mass deportations. The survivors themselves often preferred to concentrate on reintegrating themselves into national communities as ordinary citizens, leaving their individual fates in the background (Traverso 2004, 230).

Third, a few years after the end of the war, the international context was altered by the outbreak of the Cold War, which shifted the existing political balance and modified the means of elaborating the past. Germany ceased to be viewed as an heir and successor of Nazism and became an important member of both NATO and the EEC. The theory of totalitarianism, which was based on the

symmetry between Communism and Nazism, also helped keep the Holocaust in the background while the version of history produced in the DDR intentionally obscured the genocide of the Jews (Traverso 2004, 231).

As for America, Peter Novick has referred quite extensively to the significance of the assimilation process of the Jews. By the 1950s, three quarters of all American Jews were native born. The postwar years also witnessed the rapid collapse of antisemitic barriers to Jewish ascent in every area of American life. American society was becoming increasingly disposed towards treating Jews no differently from any other Americans, and they began to see them as an integral part of the society. It is no wonder that an integrationist as opposed to a particularistic consciousness was the norm among American Jews in the postwar decades. Nor is it any wonder that this universalist mood muted the discussion surrounding the Holocaust (Novick 1999, 113–114).

Novick has also pointed out that until the Eichmann trial, there was widespread reluctance, especially in America, to see the Jews portrayed as victims because victimhood implied the weakness and defencelessness of the Jewish people. Correspondingly, the state of Israel had created an image of the courageous and self-reliant Jew as standing up and fighting for his rights (Novick 1999, 123, 131; cf. Gorny 2003). As Israelis were “negating” the diaspora victim condition that very much included the Holocaust, American Jews, in a parallel fashion, regarded the victimhood symbolised by the Holocaust as a feature of the Old World that they wanted to put behind them (Novick 1999, 121). Consequently, during the 1950s, not even the Jews themselves were particularly eager to talk about the Holocaust and transmit its memory to the future generations.

Nevertheless, Novick recalls that while the postwar Jews’ repudiation of the status of victim was largely spontaneous and tacit, it was also the result of strategic calculation by the leading Jewish organisations, such as the American Jewish Committee. In their

calculation, there was a serious danger in promoting widespread consciousness of the Holocaust. Namely, it would inevitably promote the image of the Jew as victim, which would then promote a new wave of antisemitism. Throughout the 1950s, this remained the judgement of most American Jewish leaders (Novick 1999, 123).

Traverso points out that the transition from the context of the 1940s and 1950s to the present day situation, that is to say from the invisibility of Auschwitz to its omnipresence in the public space, was not a linear process but included several ruptures. More precisely, the reactivation of the memory of the Holocaust has taken place via a few notable symbolic turns. The most important of these turns was the Eichmann trial. Traverso sees it as having been a cathartic moment in the history of the liberation of speech, as it was the first time that the survivors had been called to testify while the accused was reduced to the mere symbol of a regime that had executed the destruction of the Jews. Eichmann's death sentence was understood as a symbolic condemnation of Nazism in general (Traverso 2004, 232).

Wieviorka also emphasises the significance of the Eichmann trial as a decisive turn in beginning again to remember and deal with the Holocaust. In her view, it marked a new chapter in Jewish history, in which genocide became a constitutive element of Jewish identity. Moreover, she argues that the trial introduced a number of innovative elements to the judicial process. For the first time in history, a trial was used to actually attempt to teach a history lesson not only to the "world" in general but to young Israelis who were growing apart from the historical context of the birth of the state of Israel in particular. Finally, the Eichmann trial started the epoch of transmission, during which we have witnessed a growing effort to transmit the memory of the genocide through monuments, museums, and a wide range of cultural products (Wieviorka 1998, 71).

Nevertheless, Wieviorka also points out that the "lesson" of the Eichmann trial was not only positive, as it also revealed the

ambivalent nature of justice and trials when they are consciously used as historiographers. The dilemma of the court of law as an historiographer is related to the role of the testimony of the victims. In the case of the Eichmann trial, the problem was that mass murder was the common factor of the individual experiences of victims with whom the rest of the world was expected to be able to identify (Wieviorka 1998, 99–102). Hannah Arendt criticised this very dilemma: While the aim of the judicial process is to construct a collective memory based solely on the testimonies of the victims, the political analysis and judgement of Nazi totalitarianism threatens to disappear entirely.

For Traverso, the next symbolic turn was constituted by the Six Days' War in 1967. It accentuated the spark of awakening ignited by the Eichmann trial. However, this happened in the form of a singular division between the diaspora Jews and public opinion on the Left. The former perceived the conflict as a concrete threat of a new wave of annihilation, while the latter considered Israel a neocolonial state and an instrument of the geopolitical domination of the United States. In Traverso's view, this conflict connects the problem of remembering the Shoah to the present time and its politics (Traverso 2004, 233; cf. Gorny 2003).

The third symbolic turn in Traverso's periodisation is constituted by a banal media event: the American television series *Holocaust*, which was broadcast in virtually every Western country in the 1970s. Traverso argues that an entire generation was upset by this story, which guided the development of a memory that was maturing in Western countries. The term Holocaust itself came into general use following the series. At the same time, the debate surrounding the denial of the Holocaust first broke out in France as the result of the claims made by Robert Faurisson and his followers. For Traverso, these are the main stages of a process that took different shapes in different European countries (Traverso 2004, 233; cf. Wieviorka 1998, 122–125).

It is characteristic of these historians that they emphasise the general impact of the trial itself as an impetus to pay more attention to the act of remembering the Holocaust. David Cesarani has emphasised the impact and importance of the Eichmann trial from a somewhat different perspective. His basic argument is that it is Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Adolf Eichmann and his trial that has most decisively shaped our understanding of the Nazi criminal. Cesarani argues that Adolf Eichmann has become an icon of the 20th century, of the Nazi regime and the genocide of the Jews. In his view, Eichmann has become a metonym for the entire history of the Nazi persecution, the mass murder of the Jews and its legacy. He finds this odd, however, as Eichmann was not always among the pantheon of Nazi killers, and few men have been so mythologised or misunderstood. Adolf Eichmann and his career were virtually unknown when the Third Reich was defeated and the Allies first set out to punish Nazi criminals. Nor did any of the so-called Nazi hunters initially set out to find Eichmann. Nobody knew who he was, and nobody seemed interested in apprehending him. (Cesarani 2004, 1)

Despite this, however, at his trial, Eichmann was accused of having played a central role in the persecution and mass murder of European Jews from 1935 to 1945. Cesarani points out that in his dramatic opening arguments, the prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, described Eichmann as the Nazi regime's executive arm for the extermination of the Jewish people. Hausner depicted Eichmann as a fanatic who descended into barbarism and argued that he had a "satanic personality" (Cesarani 2004, 3). This was considered ridiculous by many observers, and as we have seen, Arendt, who covered the trial for the *New Yorker* magazine, was certainly among them. Cesarani quotes Arendt's famous lines in her report, in which she argued that the trouble with Eichmann was that he was like so many of us and depicted him as terribly and terrifyingly normal (Cesarani 2004, 4; Arendt 1963/1965, 276).

Cesarani argues that academics and intellectuals were profoundly influenced by Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann: they were captivated by her thesis about his ordinariness, encapsulated in the formula "the banality of evil". He maintains that Arendt's depiction of Eichmann was to a large extent predetermined and mythological and that she included Eichmann in her own theory of totalitarianism by making him the epitome of the totalitarian man. Cesarani argues that by associating Eichmann with totalitarianism, Arendt helped shape the way in which generations of historians and thinkers conceptualised the Third Reich. Consequently, Cesarani continues, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the mass murder of the Jews was seen as the zenith of modern bureaucracy. Eichmann, the bureaucratic desk-killer *par excellence*, became a key to one of the most enduring approaches to the Nazi era and the Final Solution. (Cesarani 2004, 4)

Cesarani claims that Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, played a more pivotal role than the actual trial itself in shaping Eichmann's legacy (Cesarani 2004, 15). He admits that most journalists agreed with Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann but does not give any importance to any other reporter's accounts. In his view, anyone writing on the subject today works in the shadow of Hannah Arendt. In contrast to the historians discussed above, Cesarani argues that the birth of the field of Holocaust studies owes more to Arendt's pamphlet than to the trial itself or the role of the victims' testimonies in it. On the one hand, in Cesarani's view, it was not the trial but the controversy surrounding Arendt's book that brought the Final Solution home to millions of people. On the other hand, Cesarani argues that it was the controversy surrounding Arendt's book that marked the birth of the field of Holocaust studies, which was an unforeseen and oblique legacy of the trial (Cesarani 2004, 325). Hence, in his view, Arendt's role in shaping Eichmann's legacy cannot be overestimated (Cesarani 2004, 344).

Cesarani's emphasis on Arendt's impact on Holocaust studies in general and our understanding of the character of Eichmann as a Nazi criminal in particular seems to be somewhat exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that the beginning of the 21st century has witnessed a kind of revival of the rereadings of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. There is clearly a very different emphasis in these new readings as compared to the earlier debates surrounding the book. This time, the controversy is not about Arendt's interpretation of Jewish politics or Eichmann's personality but on the trial itself, Arendt's critique of it, as well as her impact on the dispute over the singularity of the Holocaust. This is why a few of these new readings deserve closer inspection in the context of the present study.

## 6.2. THE CONCEPTUAL REVOLUTION OF THE VICTIM

Another scholar who has recently emphasised Arendt's impact on our conception of the Holocaust is Shoshana Felman. She has singled out two works that mark conceptual breakthroughs in our conceptualisation of the Holocaust. The first was *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the second was the film *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann.<sup>21</sup> In Felman's view, these works displaced the collective frameworks of perception and changed the vocabulary of collective memory, as they added a new idiom to the discourse on the Holocaust (Felman 2000, 466–467). For Felman, the crux of Arendt's book is the reflection on the significance of legal proceedings in the wake of the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial had to decide not only the guilt of the defendant but also how a crime that is historically unprecedented is to be litigated, understood, and judged within a

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21. *Shoah* is a nine-hour film about the Holocaust directed by Claude Lanzmann. It mainly consists of interviews with people who were involved with the Holocaust in various ways and visits the places they discuss. It draws quite heavily on the distinction between victims, bystanders, and perpetrators made by the historian Raul Hilberg (see Hilberg 1992).

discipline of precedents. In other words, the Eichmann trial had to determine how memory can be used in the redefinition of the judicial meaning of the trial in such a way that the unprecedented can become a precedent in its own right, that is to say a precedent that might prevent the future repetition of such crimes. (Felman 2000, 471–472)

In Felman's view, Arendt perceived the trial as the scene of a dramatic confrontation between the claims of justice and the government and power elite, thus creating a secondary courtroom drama and a secondary case for arbitration and adjudication: *The State vs. Justice*. Felman argues that it is in this dramatic confrontation that Arendt stands up against the state by mobilising the law in an attempt to build a dissident legal perspective. Today, this dissenting legal force has paradoxically become not only part of an historical event but part of its notorious legal historiography, which was part of the legacy of the historical event (Felman 2000, 473–476).

In Felman's view, Arendt's very presence at the trial and her impact on the historiography and memory of the event proved that the event itself had surpassed the known parameters that were set as its limits and reached new unexpected and unknown parameters. The state of Israel had not planned and could not have anticipated the extent of Arendt's charismatic contribution to the meaning and impact of the Eichmann trial. (Felman 2000, 476, n. 16)

To support her argument, Felman takes up Nietzsche's distinction between monumental history and critical history. Monumental history consists of an aggrandisement, a magnification of the high points of the past, seeking inspiration in them, a great impulse for a future action, while critical history judges and condemns, and undercuts illusions and enthusiasms. Critical history never pleases or charms. It is harsh and strident. It is often destructive and always deconstructive. Felman suggests that Arendt is a critical historian of the Eichmann trial. She casts aside the version of the

trial presented by the state of Israel, which sought liberation from the past. Whereas the official state view of the Eichmann trial is one of monumental history, Arendt's view offers a substitutive critical history. What makes this legal case a monumental historical case is the dramatic and totalising way in which the legal institutions endeavoured to put history itself on trial, thereby making the entire world the stage and audience of the trial (Felman 2000, 478).

Felman points out that the Eichmann trial followed the tradition established by the Nuremberg trials, albeit with one crucial contextual difference. Whereas the Nuremberg trials viewed murderous political regimes and their aggressive warfare as the centre of both the trial and what constitutes a monumental history, the Eichmann trial replaced these regimes with the victims, making them the core of what gives history its monumental dimension (Felman 2000, 479). Consequently, the Eichmann trial set out to present a monumental contemplation of the past from a new perspective. Whereas in Nietzsche's thought monumental history records the deeds and actions of great men and consists of the writing of the great, the Eichmann trial focuses on the writing of victims who are dead (Felman 2000, 481–482). Here, the concept of what is constitutive of monumentality is inverted and the perspective is shifted from the "greatness" of the perpetrators to the greatness of the victims.

Arendt disputes the state's view of the trial and takes issue with the very narrative perspective that puts the victims at the centre of the trial. She attempts to decentre the prosecution's story and focus not on the victim but on the criminal and the nature of the crime. She thus offers a decanonising counternarrative to the official story of the Eichmann trial (Felman 2000, 489–490). Felman argues that Arendt's critical history is the decanonising and iconoclastic counternarrative of a resistant reader who believes in diversity and separation rather than unity and communal solidarity and who prefers truth to power (Felman 2000, 490, ff. 45). For Arendt, the courtroom is not the place for tears or the expression of other feelings. On the

contrary, for Arendt, justice is a thoroughly ascetic, disciplined, and conceptual experience and not an emotional stage for spectacular public expression (Felman 2000, 490).

Felman argues that the problem with Arendt's account is that she fails to see that the Eichmann trial historically created the victim for the first time. In Felman's view, the Eichmann trial legally created a radically original and new event. It was not the rehearsal of a given story but a groundbreaking narrative event that was in itself, historically and legally, unprecedented. She argues that the trial struggled to create a new space and a language that was not yet in existence. This was the first time in history that a new legal language and space had been created through the firsthand narratives of victims. (Felman 2000, 493)

Felman points out that a victim is, by definition, not only someone who is oppressed, but someone who has no language of their own with which to articulate his or her victimisation. The only language available to the victim is the oppressor's language. Furthermore, because history, by definition, silences the victim, the reality of the degradation and suffering he or she has had to endure are intrinsically inaccessible. The Eichmann trial is the victims' trial because it is the victims who are writing their own history. To enable such writing, the Eichmann trial had to re-enact memory as change. Felman argues that it was this revolutionary transformation of the victim that allows the victim's story to become realisable as a legal act of the authorship of history. She sees this historically unprecedented revolution in the definition of the victim as the trial's most significant contribution. (Felman 2000, 497–498)

In accordance with the majority of Holocaust historians, Felman maintains that what we refer to as the Holocaust did not exist as a collective story prior to the Eichmann trial. In other words, it did not exist as a semantically authoritative story. Thus, the trial was a transforming act of law and justice. A Jewish past that was previously seen exclusively as a crippling disability was now being

reclaimed as an empowering and proudly shared political and moral identity (Felman 2000, 502).

More precisely, what had not existed prior to the trial was a collective story of the victims' suffering. Over the course of the trial, the victims recovered the language and acquired the semantic and historical authority of the story of their destruction. The result was an international discussion, which defined the experience of the victims and referred to the crime against the Jewish people *independently from the political and military story of the Second World War* (Felman 2000, 503, my italics).

Felman refuses Arendt's critique of the trial according to which it failed to produce an innovative legal norm or a valid (universal) legal precedent. Indeed, Felman is not disturbed by the fact that the trial exceeded its legal limits and failed conceptually. On the contrary, she argues that the Eichmann trial was a singular legal event that created a sacred narrative through its monumental legal records and testimonial chorus of the persecuted (Felman 2000, 505).

There is no reason to deny the argument according to which the Eichmann trial was a very important event in the history of how the Holocaust has been remembered. However, it is astonishing that Felman does not see the manner in which it highlights the victims' viewpoint as problematic. It is also astonishing that Felman does not see the notion of dealing with the Holocaust independently of the political and military history of the Second World War as problematic, almost going so far as to imply that it would be better to read the Holocaust outside of its historical and political context. Felman's approach remains politically ignorant and naïve, as she fails to recognise the politically problematic aspects of the trial that are at the very core of Arendt's critique of it. Although Arendt does point out that the Eichmann trial was one of the first international contexts in which victims were given a voice that was actually heard by other people, it does not change the fact that the trial was also full of politicking and power struggles, which should also be taken into

account when discussing the impact and significance of the trial. Paradoxically, Felman's treatment of the trial ends up confirming Arendt's critique of it: What was at stake was not the task of deciding the guilt or innocence of the accused but the underlying "ulterior purposes", of which, for Felman, the most important was the cavalcade of victims.

### 6.3. THE EICHMANN TRIAL AS A POLITICAL TRIAL

While Felman ignores or fails to understand the political aspects of the Eichmann trial, Leora Bilsky approaches it as one of a chain of political trials held in Israel (the other trials with which she deals are the Kastner trial, the Kufr Qassem trial and the Yigal Amir trial). In her understanding, the common denominator in all of these trials was that the political authorities sought to advance a particular political agenda through criminal prosecution. She distinguishes political trials from show trials in the derogative sense by the fact that in the latter, the legal procedure is a mere *façade* used to conceal the use of brute power by the political authorities against a political opponent, while Israeli political trials tended to have a certain transformative potential. They transformed the struggle over the content of the terms Jewish and democratic into an agonal and dramatic conflict between an accuser and an accused. The legal results of these cases would determine to an important degree the content of the collective memory and the Israeli collective identity for years to come (Bilsky 2004, 2–3). In this general context, Bilsky addresses the ability of a trial to serve as a consciousness-transforming vehicle. She questions the type of politics advanced by trials and how they can be used to promote the formation of a democratic society.

For Bilsky, during criminal trials, the courtroom serves primarily as a stage of human drama. The political struggle waged in the courtroom transforms dry and distant history into a living story with a name, a face, and a body. It turns the theoretical dilemma

into a reality, thus providing a unique forum in which society as a whole can confront its moral, historical and political dilemmas in a more concentrated and intensive manner. Another advantage of the courtroom in comparison with other political fora is its subordination to the dictates of procedural justice, which allows both parties to articulate their stories. In this way, both criminal defendants and the victims who are brought to testify can advance a “counter story” of their own (Bilsky 2004, 3).

However, Bilsky also warns that these advantages should not blind us to the inherent limitations of the courtroom. The main danger in a transformative trial is the transformation of a multilayered political debate into a binary conflict. The adversarial structure and need to translate the rich complexity of reality into familiar legal categories almost inevitably result in the reduction of real world problems to binary representations. It can often distort reality and promote overly black and white solutions. The translation of the conflict into legal discourse can obfuscate the political nature of the competing stories and divert attention from the need to explore a political solution. (Bilsky 2004, 4)

Bilsky approaches the Eichmann trial as a competition between two storytellers, Gideon Hausner, the attorney general and the chief prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, and Hannah Arendt. In Bilsky’s view, these were the two principal accounts of the trial that shaped our understanding of what it was all about. In his role as chief prosecutor, Gideon Hausner represents the official story; indeed, he took on the role of master storyteller and claimed to speak with the voice of six million victims, six million accusers (Bilsky 2004, 85). After the trial was over, he published *Justice in Jerusalem*, his own account of the trial. Arendt was not, of course, an official actor in the legal drama. Conversely to Hausner, she took it upon herself to provide a counternarrative: the story that was not, but in her opinion should have been told in the court room.

Bilsky argues that the clash between Arendt and Hausner is informed by two opposing views of historiography, justice, and politics. Their respective stories have two main aspects: the framework of the narrative and the voice of the narrative. The framework has both temporal and spatial boundaries. With respect to temporal boundaries, Hausner's story embraces the whole of Jewish history, while Arendt begins her story in the 19th century. With respect to spatial boundaries, Hausner's story focuses on the Jewish people while Arendt addresses humankind as a whole. In Bilsky's view, these different temporal and spatial boundaries produce two competing histories of the Holocaust (Bilsky 2004, 93). The second aspect, the voice of the narrative, relates to Arendt's and Hausner's disagreement over the question of how to tell the story, that is, whether the story should be told through written documents or the oral testimonies of survivors. What role should be given to the victims in the trial of their victimiser? (Bilsky 2004, 94)

Bilsky points out that a trial forces its participants to judge a past event and reflect on the precedent it sets for the future. In transformative trials, the participants have to formulate a whole new historical narrative on which judgement is to be based. The Eichmann trial offered the lawyer and the historian a great opportunity because it functioned as a meeting place where the need to tell the story, the need to judge the criminal, and the need to relate history all coincided (Bilsky 2004, 98).

Gideon Hausner sought to bridge the abyss between past and future within the framework of the traditional Jewish historiography of repetition: Jews have always been persecuted for antisemitic reasons. The framework of the story was the Jews' long history of victimisation and persecution throughout the ages. Accordingly, the prosecution chose to focus its case on the legal category of "crimes against the Jewish people". Bilsky observes that Hausner's clear-cut distinction between victims and victimisers left no room for dealing

with ambiguous categories in the grey zone like Jewish cooperation with the Nazis and *Judenräte* (Bilsky 2004, 98–99).

Arendt disagreed that traditional Jewish historiography could account for these new phenomena because it sought present day analogies to the old story of antisemitism. Bilsky points out that Arendt's historical narrative highlighted the lack of historical precedents for Auschwitz. Arendt replaced the thesis of unique Jewish victimhood with the proposition that the physical extermination of the Jewish people was a crime against humanity that was perpetrated upon the entire body of the Jewish people. She rebutted Hausner's narrative of continuity and repetition by noting that only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crimes committed against them, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and antisemitism (Bilsky 2004, 99–100).

Bilsky argues that the different legal categories adopted by Hausner and Arendt engender disparate historical narratives within which the same "facts" have different implications. Hausner needed to discard the historical narrative of the Second World War in order to replace it with one about the Jewish Holocaust. In Hausner's legal framework, the issue of the behaviour of the Jewish leadership might have been seen as blaming the victims, while Arendt's choice of the legal category "crimes against humanity" placed the behaviour of Jewish leaders in the context of its being an expression of the totality of the moral collapse that had taken place throughout Europe (Bilsky 2004, 100).

Bilsky argues that Hausner advocated splitting the story in two and focusing on the suffering of the victims, while Arendt saw this as intentional collective oblivion that condemned a society to be forever trapped in the past. She advocated telling the whole story of how the Jews and others had been led to cooperate with the Nazi system so that this painful experience would become part of the Jewish nation's history. These differences in approach are connected to a larger view of history. According to Hausner's

deterministic approach, the persecution of the Jews throughout the ages was a historical constant that could be changed only with the establishment of a Jewish state. The lesson he drew from the Holocaust was therefore particularistic: the need to empower the Jews by protecting their state. For Arendt, however, the persecution of the Jews was a warning sign to humanity at large against the dangers of the totalitarian state (Bilsky 2004, 104–105).

Bilsky shares with Traverso, Cesarani, and Felman the view according to which the Eichmann trial became a triumph of the victims in many different ways. She argues that the testimonies of the victims decisively contributed to the creation of the consciousness of the Holocaust in Israel and throughout the world (Bilsky 2004, 105). She also accepts the idea that the 1950s was characterised by the silence on the Holocaust and that it was the Eichmann trial that decisively contributed to breaking this silence.

Bilsky reminds us that the novelty of the Nazi crimes lay not only in their plan to eliminate an entire human group but also in their attempt to produce a crime without a witness. Providing a stage for the victims' testimonies carried the ethical message of "giving voice". It was because of this decision that the Eichmann trial was able to "create" the Holocaust in the consciousness of the world. Abstract knowledge about the Holocaust became real through the authentic voices of the survivors. History thus became collective memory (Bilsky 2004, 111).

Consequently, Bilsky argues, the Eichmann trial played a central role in giving authority to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and making them reliable witnesses in terms of the formation of a legal judgement and the writing of history. A link can be made between the change in the perception of the victims following the Eichmann trial and the shift to the writing of history based on victims' testimonies. Although the memoirs of survivors already existed in the beginning of the 1960s, historians were quite reluctant to use them (Bilsky 2004, 112).

In Bilsky's view, in political trials, the contest between narratives becomes paramount. Well aware of the power of the narrative in political trials, the Israeli prosecution provided Holocaust survivors with the opportunity to testify about their personal experiences. On another level, the attorney general used the trial to present a meta-narrative about the relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel in an effort to include the Holocaust survivors in the constitutive narrative of the Israeli collective identity. The case of the prosecution was thus literally built on a chain of human stories (Bilsky 2004, 141).

Bilsky points out that, although Arendt criticised the prosecution's heavy reliance on survivor testimonies rather than written documents, the alternative she offered in her own report also adopted the narrative mode. Bilsky suggests that the courtroom may be the last public space in modern society in which stories in general and oral stories in particular are still considered to be the preferred means of arriving at the truth (Bilsky 2004, 141).

In my view, Bilsky misreads Arendt's narrative motives. Firstly, Arendt did not believe that a political trial could provide a substitute for democratic or parliamentary processes. On the contrary, she accentuated and criticised the problematic aspects of political trials. Moreover, she did not believe that the victims' testimonies constituted the best possible way of arriving at a many-sided truth. On the one hand, she repeatedly highlighted the fact that the victims' testimonies were not necessarily reliable; on the other hand, she pointed to the fact that Hausner directed the witnesses and their stories with questions that decisively shaped the content of their testimony. Secondly, Bilsky does not pay enough attention to the fact that Arendt considered the entire trial a disaster precisely because general attention was displaced from the accused to the victims. In addition, Bilsky does not discuss the problematic aspects of bringing the politics of the past into courtroom proceedings. In Arendtian terms, historical truth and political meaning cannot and

must not be decided in courts of law because they simply are not juridical matters. In Arendtian terms, the legal process should be used as it is intended: for rendering justice in concrete cases of crimes. Political – democratic and parliamentary – processes are the correct contexts in which to discuss and decide upon political meaning.

#### **6.4. THE POLITICS OF VICTIMS**

It is characteristic of all the views (except, perhaps, that of Cesari) discussed above that they approach the Eichmann trial from the viewpoint of victims. This is, of course, not surprising given the growing and pervasive interest in this field. In fact, these approaches may best be understood as expressions of the growing interest in the field of victim studies. It is in this context that all the approaches discussed above see the Eichmann trial as a decisive turning point in the ways of approaching and remembering the Holocaust. More precisely, they locate it as a rupture between the silence and repression of the 1950s and the ever-growing interest in the Holocaust of later decades. It is also characteristic of these studies that they mostly emphasise the positive aspects of the Eichmann trial. This is because they see it as the first time that the victims' suffering was publicly recognised and taken into account.

Correspondingly, all of these approaches criticise Arendt for refusing to take the victims' standpoint into account. Felman and Bilsky in particular argue that Arendt's main mistake was that she failed to grasp the positive impact of the novelty inscribed in the Eichmann trial in this sense. In their view, the Eichmann trial marked both the political and legal/juridical expansion of the court process. They see it as a good thing that the Eichmann trial was a case in which the legal process surpassed its own limits and became a public spectacle in which Nazism and antisemitism were symbolically condemned by the condemnation of one of their representatives. In

addition, all of these approaches emphasise the impact of Arendt's book on our understanding of the Holocaust. Cesarani in particular sees the case as a heavy burden or dark shadow over all those who want to deal with Nazi criminals in one way or another.

I find all of these interpretations problematic. As to the thesis of the Eichmann trial as the moment of the birth of the field of victim studies, the authors entirely ignore Arendt's critique of Hausner's decision to focus on the testimony of victims. In her view, the strong emphasis on the victims' suffering might have blurred and dismissed the political judgement of the phenomenon of Nazism in its entirety. In my view, Arendt's warning was not unfounded, as we have now seen where the politics of victims can lead: we are currently witnessing a period during which ever-increasing numbers of victims appear on the public scene to demand compensation for their past suffering. There seems to be no end to this process, as in a way we are all victims of the atrocities related to the Third Reich and the Second World War.

Dagmar Barnouw has strongly emphasised and criticised precisely this aspect in the ongoing debate over the Holocaust. The one-sided emphasis of Jewish victims leaves countless other important aspects related to the historiography of the Third Reich in the shadows. In terms of historical research, two major problems emerge. First, as Wieviorka has also pointed out, two different accounts of the Holocaust have emerged. On the one hand, there are accounts that focus exclusively on the machinery of the historical Final Solution, while on the other hand, there are accounts that focus exclusively on the victim (Barnouw 2005, 196; Wieviorka 1998). As we have seen above, there are scholars who consider it a positive development that the Holocaust is being discussed and studied without relating it to the general history of the Second World War. These scholars believe that the Holocaust should be studied in its own terrible and fundamental terms without linking it to the troublingly instrumental uses to which the catastrophe is often put (Barnouw 2005, 197).

Second, focusing exclusively on the testimony of victims as resources of historical research produces a whole new set of problems, the most serious of which being, as, for example, Peter Novick has pointed out, that they tend more often than not to be unreliable. He refers to a statement made by the director of Yad Vashem's archive, who once said to a reporter that many so-called witnesses had never actually been to the places where they claim to have witnessed atrocities, while others relied on second-hand information provided by friends or strangers (Novick 1999, 275).

Barnouw points out that the reception of Novick's book is a case in point of how serious historical research is sometimes assessed in the field of victim studies. She argues that quite a few critics of Novick's book claimed that it was an "obsessively" historical account of the remembrance of Jewish persecution that reflects back on the historical status of the remembered events of persecution. These scholars reject, on principle, viewing everything that has to do with the Holocaust from an historical perspective, which leads to the confusion of the historical persecutions themselves with the memory discourses that have grown around and over them (Barnouw 2005, 197).

Nevertheless, Barnouw also points out that the issue here is not the distortion of the truth in the sense of lying but the conception and subsequent construction of stories that fit a certain preconceived and above all meaningful interpretation of a traumatic past. It is precisely in this sense that the Eichmann trial turned out to be a very important event. With its deliberate and highly controlled choreography of a large number of individual memory stories, it took these acts of construction one step further: "The stories recited by eyewitnesses *became* their memories; the surviving victims *were* the authorized delegates of the Holocaust, embodying, as it were, the a priori *unquestionable* facts." (Barnouw 2005, 24) Moreover, this "hyper-facticity" of the status of victim has repressed all other war experiences, excluding them from the sphere of public remembrance and contributing to significant losses through the enforced forgetting of

the historical reality of the Second World War and its consequences (Barnouw 2005, 24).

In the context of this study, the trial accounts discussed above may be read as representative examples of how the Eichmann trial and Arendt's report of it have been inscribed into the debate surrounding the singularity of the Holocaust. It is precisely in terms of rereading and reinterpreting the Eichmann trial as an expression of "victims' voice" that it is possible to see Arendt as representative of those historical revisionists who are not interested in paying attention to the victims' sufferings or the Jewish uniqueness of the Holocaust at large, but prefer "obsessively historical accounts" in which the Jewish genocide is approached in its historical and political context.

Barnouw points out that the historicisation of Jewish persecution has been routinely rejected by many professional historians of the Holocaust because it implies relativisation: "Removed from the protection of supra-historical uniqueness, the Holocaust can then be seen in the context of historical time, namely in relation to other events. As a historical phenomenon of great but not of singular importance, the persecution of Jews [...] is not the forever unfathomable, unspeakable Evil requiring mythopoetic representation. Temporal and relative, these persecutions can become at least partially accessible to rational argumentation and historical documentation." (Barnouw 2005, 198–199)

Thus, the trial accounts discussed above may also be read as excellent expressions of the tendency inscribed in the field of victim studies to absolutise and sacralise the experiences of the victims and indeed the entire phenomenon of the Holocaust. In the context of the field of victim studies, the Holocaust becomes an absolute evil that is incomparable with anything that has ever occurred on earth. What is strikingly interesting and important to understand here is that, politically speaking, the act of absolutising is synonymous to the act of depoliticising. It raises the phenomenon of the Holocaust above human dispute and argumentation as something that is absolutely incontestable.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Arendt added a postscript to the revised and expanded edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which was published in 1965. Obviously, she wanted to comment on the controversy that had been raging ever since the appearance of the series of articles she wrote for the *New Yorker* and clarify what she intended to say in her book. In the context of this study, the postscript includes two important paragraphs that help shape the real and rarely understood context of Arendt's pamphlet. The first deals with Jewish cooperation:

In the debate [...] the most vocal participants were those who either identified the Jewish people with its leadership – in striking contrast to the clear distinction made in almost all the reports of survivors, which may be summed up in the words of a former inmate of Theresienstadt: 'The Jewish people as a whole behaved magnificently. Only the leadership failed' – or justified the Jewish functionaries by citing all the commendable services they had rendered before the war [...] as though there were no difference between helping Jews to emigrate and helping the Nazis to deport them. (Arendt 1963/1965, 284)

This quote shows that Arendt did not intend to criticise ordinary Jews, but instead focused her critique on the Jewish leadership. Nor did Arendt believe that it would have been possible to organise efficient and successful rescue operations during the war. What she does imply, rather, is that had the political judgement of Jewish leaders been sharper and more accurate, they would have seen the importance of escaping as soon as Hitler rose to power in 1933. In an interview given to Günter Gaus in 1964, after the appearance of the German translation of the Eichmann book, Arendt recalls her deep disappointment with the Germans – her own friends included – in the face of the rising Nazi power. Very few of them understood right away that the country was witnessing the appearance of a new type of evil government from which anything could be expected.

Arendt's point is that there would have been time to at least attempt to organise a mass escape between 1933 and 1938, but such an attempt was never made (see Arendt 1965).

As we have seen in this book, the American Jewish organisations did not waste time in organising a smear campaign against Arendt, mostly because of what she said about the actions of the Jewish leadership during the war. What is strange is that Arendt's readers never managed to read the book in its proper context. Although many of them had known Arendt for years, they ignored the fact that this was not the first time that she had criticised the Jewish leadership in general and Zionist leaders in particular. In fact, as I showed in Chapter One, she had been highly critical of Zionist politics and hierarchical Jewish community structures since the 1930s. Since this time, the core of her critique was the argument according to which Jewish political culture and thinking was to remain politically underdeveloped and ignorant as far as it was to rely on the principles of concessions and charity. For Arendt, this kind of politics was a clear sign of the political immaturity of Jewish political culture. In her view, the attempt to develop an independent Jewish political culture and community could not be based on these principles. I would suggest that instead of being outrageous or somehow out of place – as her critics claimed – Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership was perfectly in line with her general understanding of Jewish and Zionist politics. It should not have come as any great surprise to Manhattan Jewish intellectuals.

Another important paragraph in the postscript deals with the politics of the past:

Manipulations of opinion, insofar as they are inspired by well-defined interests, have limited goals; their effect, however, if they happen to touch upon an issue of authentic concern, is no longer subject to their control and may easily produce consequences they never foresaw or intended. It now appeared that the era of the Hitler regime, with its gigantic, unprecedented crimes, constituted an 'unmastered past' not only for the German people or

for the Jews all over the world, but for the rest of the world, which had not forgotten this great catastrophe in the heart of Europe either, and had also been unable to come to terms with it. (Arendt 1963/1965, 283)

Although Arendt did not live to see the extent to which the field of Holocaust studies would expand after the 1970s and 1980s, this quote shows that she understood that there was a connection between the controversy over her book and the politics of history or politics of the past, although these terms were not in use in the 1960s. Here, she seems to suggest that not even the Jewish organisations themselves really understood the extent of the questions they touched upon by organising their campaign against her. They focused solely on their own immediate interests of concealing and hiding the embarrassing conduct of a number of European Jewish leaders during the war. According to Arendt, they were not really conscious of the fact that they were also politicking with the past.

Arendt may have been correct in this assessment in the sense that the general consciousness of the importance and frequency of the politics of history was not very high in the 1960s. The importance and prevalence of this mode of politicking was not yet commonly recognised and understood. In retrospect, it is easy to see that the Arendt controversy was a clear case of the politics of history and politics of memory. Both significant and powerful American Jewish organisations and the Israeli government – particularly Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, as we saw in Chapter Two – attempted to control people's knowledge and judgements of Jewish wartime politics and their conceptions and the political significance of the Holocaust. It is also easy to see in retrospect that these attempts failed miserably. Both the Eichmann trial and the Arendt controversy surrounding it had quite the opposite effect than the Jewish establishment had hoped: an entire new field of research was born that focused its attention on the Holocaust and the role of various actors in it. Peter Novick's argument is related to precisely this line of thought. He has pointed out that the Eichmann trial

and the Arendt controversy broke 15 years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse. As part of this process, there emerged in American culture a distinct thing called the “Holocaust”,<sup>22</sup> that is to say, an event in its own right, not simply a subdivision of general Nazi barbarism. He also points to the shift in focus from the Nazi perpetrators to the Jewish victims discussed in Chapter Six (Novick 1999, 144).

As I illustrated in Chapter Six, the recent renewed interest in reinterpreting the Eichmann trial deals extensively with the role of the victims. In this respect, the trial has been seen as a decisive turning point in the manners of approaching and studying the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial has been praised as having been an impetus for and starting point in viewing the victims of the Holocaust independently of the general context of the Second World War and giving voice to the survivors. Arendt has been criticised for failing to understand this important aspect of the trial. She was, indeed, very critical of Gideon Hausner’s decision to turn the trial into a public performance of the survivors and their experiences and memories instead of focusing on the accused and his crimes. In Arendt’s view, the courtroom was not the proper place for this kind of performance precisely because it drew attention away from the crimes of the accused and towards the suffering of the victims.

In addition, there were other aspects of the organisation of the trial that made it extremely imbalanced as a court process. Arendt argued that instead of being the most suitable country for a trial against the implementers of the Final Solution, as the Israelis

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22. The term Holocaust itself has remained controversial. A number of scholars have criticised it for containing misleading connotations and suggested alternative terms, such as “Shoah” and the “genocide of the Jews”. I have used it in this study because, despite its controversial character, it remains the most widely used term for the destruction of the European Jews. It has been applicable in the context of this study because it refers only to the Jews, excluding other groups of people annihilated by the Nazis.

maintained, it turned out that “Israel was the only country in the world where defence witnesses could not be heard, and where certain witnesses for the prosecution [...] could not be cross-examined” (Arendt 1963/1965, 221). This was because the state of Israel was not willing to guarantee the immunity of potential defence witnesses who were former Nazis. Arendt also highlighted the fact that the prosecution selected its 100 witnesses from hundreds and hundreds of applicants and remarked that it would have been wiser to seek out those who had not volunteered to testify (Arendt 1963/1965, 223).

Nevertheless, the main problem with the survivor-witnesses was that there was no guarantee that their stories were reliable. Arendt pointed out that a number of witnesses were unable to distinguish between their own experiences and the memories and stories they had heard or imagined after the war. Even worse, in Arendt’s view, was “the predilection of the prosecution for witnesses of some prominence, many of whom had published books about their experiences, and who now told what they had previously written, or what they had told and retold many times” (Arendt 1963/1965, 224). Finally, half of the witnesses were not even actually Eichmann’s victims, as they came from Poland and Lithuania, where Eichmann’s competence and authority had been almost nil (Arendt 1963/1965, 225).

Arendt’s critics have understood these remarks as being proof of her contempt for the victims and her corresponding sympathy for Eichmann. In my view, her critics simply failed to see that Arendt clearly had nothing at all against the victims as such. Her critique was focused on the prosecution’s strategy, which was based on a theatrical revival of the experience of the Holocaust instead of on Eichmann’s actual crimes. In general terms, she maintained that telling the story of the Holocaust was of utmost importance, but added that it should have been told somewhere other than the courtroom. In addition, conversely to the supporters of the singularity thesis, she did believe it was possible to tell the story of the Holocaust:

The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story [...] Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that 'it could happen' in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*. (Arendt 1963/1965, 232–233)

In Arendt's understanding, experience is always personal and something that cannot be shared with anybody, no matter how extreme the experience in question happens to be. Nevertheless, experiences can be transformed into stories that can be told and retold to other people and future generations (cf. Arendt 1968b). In addition to the above suggested understanding of the Arendt controversy as a clear case of the politics of history, I argue that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* contains a powerful plea to remember the Holocaust and tell its story to future generations. I would like to suggest that Arendt's book may be understood as an anticipated commentary on and critique of both the thesis of the singularity of the Holocaust and the priority of the victim's viewpoint in Holocaust studies. In order to understand Arendt's anticipated critique of "victimology", it should be approached from the context of Jewish history, which is precisely the context in which Arendt's critique was carried out. Arendt had been criticising the Jewish historiography of upholding an image of Jews as the innocent and helpless victims of eternal and perpetual antisemitism since the 1940s. In a sense, she tended to identify the "politics of victims" with the "history of losers" in a very specific way. In her view, the Jewish self-image of eternal victimhood had managed to sustain an apolitical if not openly antipolitical mentality and culture that conditioned the Jews to yield to discrimination without protest. In this context, victimology is not a recent invention born after the Eichmann trial but one of the most important longstanding patterns of self-understanding among persecuted people.

In another sense, the contemporary victimology of the Jews and other groups of victims of political persecution may be understood

as a kind of travesty of the history of losers. It tends to culminate in a bitter competition between different groups of victims for recognition and compensation of suffering and losses. It is no longer sufficient to give a voice to the losers in order to enrich our understanding of the past; nowadays every single group of victims wants to be exalted as the most important group of sufferers in history (cf. Barnouw 2005).

Novick (1999) has pointed to the fact that the contemporary emphasis on survivors displaces our attention from the original context of atrocities by raising the survivors to the position of post-apocalyptic heroes who miraculously managed to endure hellish existence. In Arendtian terms, this displacement of attention might be understood as an expression of a frustrated desire for defining a “who” which appeared for the first time after the Great War:

The monuments to the ‘Unknown Soldier’ after World War I bear testimony to the then still existing need for glorification, for finding a “who”, an identifiable somebody whom four years of mass slaughter should have revealed. The frustration of this wish and the unwillingness to resign oneself to the brutal fact that the agent of the war was actually nobody inspired the erection of the monuments to the ‘unknown’, to all those whom the war had failed to make known and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity. (Arendt 1958, 181)

Unlike the monuments to the Unknown Soldier, contemporary monuments attempt to name the “who” and thus restore the human dignity of the victims. However, the erection of monuments creates at least two problems. First, a monument may lead to a new period of silence. It may mark the end of the discussion and debate surrounding the events and people for whom it is erected. Remembering and judging is replaced by the formal and ritualistic celebration of anniversaries. Second, as we have actually seen throughout the world, the erection of monuments may lead to the constant need to erect a new monument for a new group of victims that had previously been ignored (cf. Koselleck, Narr & Palonen 2000).

After the war, Arendt was one of the first critics of what was later referred to as the “silence” over Auschwitz in the postwar period. During the 1950s, she wrote a number of reports from Germany based on her own impressions of her first visits to Europe after the collapse of the Nazi Reich. In them, Arendt not only criticised the widespread and widely accepted notion of the “collective guilt” of the German people but also pointed to the pervasive unwillingness to take personal and political responsibility for what had happened. In fact, Arendt’s postwar accounts of Germany suggest that it is a misconception that there existed a collective “silence” about what had happened at Auschwitz. People did talk, books were written, and research was done, although apparently in a different manner and tone than the present day approaches to the Nazi period. Consequently, Arendt’s account suggest that it would be extremely important and interesting to begin to reread and reinterpret the “postwar silence” politically, without the preconceptions of repression and the unwillingness to talk.<sup>23</sup>

In this book, I have made two major arguments. First, over the course of the past two or three decades, Arendt’s report of the Eichmann trial has been relocated from its original context as the political judgement of a politically extreme and unprecedented event to that of the dispute over the singularity of the Holocaust. While Arendt’s thesis of the unprecedentedness of Nazi totalitarianism and the uniqueness of the Holocaust come very close to the singularity thesis, it is decisively different from the latter because she never understood uniqueness in absolute terms. Rather, she approached it as an aspect of the contingency of human action. Given the contingent character of human action and its outcomes, the events and phenomena of the human world should be assessed and judged in terms of their

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23. For recent attempts to reread the Holocaust and the “postwar silence” politically, see e.g. Moeller 2005; Kansteiner 2006; Pearce 2008; Traverso 2008.

uniqueness without confusing this uniqueness with absoluteness, which tends to mystify and depoliticise the events under scrutiny.

Second, because of the displacement of the context in which the Eichmann report is read, its “original” message has once again been ignored. It was intended to be a political judgement of a concrete empirical phenomenon and ought to be read as such. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* should be read as one of the very first attempts to read the Holocaust politically, and this is, in my view, one of the reasons why it is still the subject of such a vast number of suspicious misreadings.

Reading the Holocaust politically would require two crucial conditions. In the context of Arendt’s book, it would require that the ironies put forth by Arendt and discussed here in Chapter Five be taken seriously, as they often mark the points at which the political aspects of the Holocaust emerge. In more general terms, it would mean that scholars should stop viewing the Jews as pure and innocent victims of supra-human and absolute evil forces who were in no way responsible for their own historical and political fate. Instead, they, just as any other people on earth, ought to be seen as active contributors to their own fate and history.

The primary guiding principle of any political reading of unique phenomena should be the acknowledgement of the relative singularity of any empirical event – for the simple reason that they occur only once. Phenomena often tend to be incomprehensible at the outset, and they tend not to adhere to any pre-established patterns of thought. It is precisely for this reason that political reading and interpretation is necessary. In a political reading, a phenomenon may indeed turn out to be completely new and thus require new criteria of judgement.

The ongoing disputes over the Holocaust – with all its instrumentalisations, mythologisations, and sacralisations – suggest that it might be possible to understand it as being a phenomenon of long duration in Koselleckian terms. A number of scholars have spoken about a past that never passes. This is another way of saying that certain events may continue to exist in new forms and after being

displaced from their original contexts for decades or even centuries. In this context, we may ask whether we can truly say that we currently live in a “post-totalitarian” world or a “post-Holocaust” era. What if the Nazi Reich and the Holocaust did not mark the end of an era but the beginning of an era characterised by constant displacement and transference of dehumanisation to new areas and spheres of life? Or what if it was not even a beginning but merely an extreme period of systematic political annihilation and dehumanisation?

Of course, placing the Holocaust in the broader context of political annihilation and destruction destroys its absolute singularity. If we are interested in its political aspect, we cannot approach it from outside its historical and political context. I emphasise this because it seems to me that one of the most important characteristics of the recent readings of the Holocaust has been the strong tendency to take the Holocaust out of its original context and deal with it in immanent and absolute terms without paying any attention to its historical and political conditions.

The question remains: Why has *Eichmann in Jerusalem* become so important? Why is it not simply approached as one of several reports written about the trial? I have argued throughout this book that the importance of Arendt’s report is the result of the displacement of the discussion surrounding it from its original context and its integration into the disputes over the Holocaust and its singularity. It has become a kind of buffer text that authors use for their own purposes. I would also like to suggest that the conceptual displacement of Arendt’s book is a conscious political move made by those who promote certain kinds of interpretations of the singularity of the Holocaust and Israeli politics. Thus, the use of Arendt’s book as a means of politicking continues to this day. I might even go so far as to suggest that the Arendt controversy has become a kind of intellectual event of long duration in Koselleckian terms. Simultaneously, the ongoing debate over the book and its meaning suggests that it has

not lost its actuality. It continues to raise a number of questions and themes that remain controversial in the context of Holocaust studies, political studies of the Nazi Reich, and political theory.

One of the reasons why Arendt's account has not lost its actuality is the fact that she was able to foresee a number of unanticipated consequences of the Eichmann trial. First, as I pointed out earlier, Arendt foresaw the emergence of the field of victim studies, warning that it would encounter a number of politically problematic aspects. The most serious problem related to victim studies is the aforementioned tendency to immanently and exclusively focus on the Holocaust from the viewpoint of its Jewish victims. This myopic and exclusive approach tends to ignore the political reading of the Third Reich. Serious scholarly studies are replaced with all kinds of melancholic memory stories that are often assumed to somehow be more truthful accounts of the period than the historical and political analyses of it.

Second, Arendt foresaw that becoming conscious of the Holocaust might lead to its use as a means of politicking. We have seen that the antisemitism of the 1930s and 1940s has developed into what might be described as fanatic filosemitism in the late 20th and early 21st century. It has become virtually impossible for a gentile to criticise anything Jewish or anything related to Israel without being labelled an antisemite. The functionaries of Jewish organisations, communities and the state of Israel work vehemently to control of what is said about Jews throughout the world. Another expression of the use of the Holocaust as a means of politicking is the astonishing compensation claims for damages for pain and suffering made by third and fourth generation heirs to the victims of the Holocaust. In addition, an astonishing cult of apologies has been born in terms of which the present governments are put under an obligation to apologise atrocities carried out centuries ago. Especially the Germans live under a constant pressure to repeat their apologies of having carried out the Holocaust everywhere.

Third, and perhaps most explicitly, Arendt warned us about the limitations of the judicial process when dealing with Nazi crimes, which were irreconcilable by nature. She also warned that intertwining the judicial and political aspects of these crimes would only lead to new problems. This “warning” implies that Arendt foresaw the appearance of the tendency to deal with political problems in juridical terms. This practice is particularly widespread in the United States, but it is also spreading elsewhere.

In my view, the contemporary discussion surrounding Arendt’s book reflects the attempt by the defenders of the thesis of the singularity of the Holocaust to monopolise the correct interpretations of it and dictate its limits. Arendt’s book is used as a buffer text because it provides the defenders of the singularity thesis with a way to repeat their accusations regarding the dangers of the supposed historical relativism of Arendt’s stance.

The price of the displacement of the dispute over Arendt’s book is that its original “message” is at risk of disappearing once again. Only a handful of scholars have read the book as it was meant to be read, i.e. as a concrete political judgement and thesis of the complete collapse of political judgement in the face of the phenomenon of Nazi totalitarianism. In my view, Arendt’s harsh judgements about the conduct of the Jewish leadership and lack of Jewish resistance, as well as her portrait of the Nazi criminal, become comprehensible only when examined in the context of this original message. She suggests that, in order to understand how it was possible that Nazism could emerge in Europe, it is necessary to take into account the conceptual weakness and obsolescence of the tradition of European political thought. This tradition did not offer tools with which to approach and analyse extreme political phenomena such as Nazism, as such tools did not exist. In other words, conceptually speaking, Nazism was not conceivable in the context of the European tradition of political thought.

From this it followed that the European political elite – the Jewish leaders included – did not really understand the nature of

the enemy with which they were confronted. It is only rarely understood or admitted that Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership included, both implicitly and explicitly, a general critique of the entire European political leadership, which suffered, in her view, from a total breakdown in political judgement.

Arendt has been hailed as one of the most important modern political thinkers in Germany. As proof of this, there is now a street that bears her name in Berlin, just beside Peter Eisman's heavily debated Memorial to Murdered Jews of Europe. Nevertheless, Jaspers' prediction at the height of the Arendt controversy that the time would come when the Jews would erect a monument to her in Israel and proudly claim her as their own has not come to fruition. Perhaps it is for the best. In my view, Arendt's writings are best understood as attempts to write against the general political and theoretical currents of her time. As an independent theoretician and political "judge", she does not belong to any place, time, or group of people. The endeavour to read the Holocaust and the rest of the Nazi era politically has been largely unsuccessful thus far, and it sets a demanding challenge for political theorists of the 21st century.



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**A**rendt, *Eichmann and the Politics of the Past* offers a critical analysis of the original American debate over Hannah Arendt's report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann. First published in 2008, Tuija Parvikko's book discusses both the campaign against Arendt organised by American Zionist organisations and the controversy Arendt's report caused within American Jewish intellectual circles. Parvikko's analysis carefully draws from the historical background of the report, discussing Arendt's early studies of Zionism and her critique of the Jewish state. The volume also gives an account of Eichmann's capture in Argentina and the reception of the report among legal scholars and the world press.

This edition includes a new prologue in which Parvikko reflects on her own account in connection to recent academic discussions on the controversy. The author's analysis also covers contributions that have attempted to follow Arendt's notion of thinking without banisters. With them, Parvikko engages in debate about going beyond Arendt's theoretical reflections on cohabitation, sharing the world, and discussing the new political evils of the present world without pre-given norms and patterns of thought.

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