

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”⁸

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.

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.⁹

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).

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*¹⁰ 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. (Cahn¹¹ 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-

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'rith¹² joined the war by sending out a memorandum to all its regional

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.¹³ 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*

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,¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ (Arendt 1985/1992, 522) Arendt concluded:

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.¹⁶ Instead of trying to rescue as

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.