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**What does it mean to be a pariah?**

Assimilation, depersonalization and uniqueness in the thought of Hannah Arendt

Porto Alegre, 2018

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## NOTA INTRODUTÓRIA

Este trabalho se articula em torno de dois objetivos. O primeiro será reconstruir a abordagem de Hannah Arendt sobre o pária. O pária será o eixo temático com o qual pretendo reproduzir, criticamente, o percurso do pensamento de Arendt partindo de 1944, quando a autora afirmou a “suprema importância” do pária para a reavaliação da humanidade (*The Jew as a Pariah*), passando por 1951, quando a autora reclamou uma “nova lei” e um “novo princípio” para garantir a dignidade humana (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*), e chegando, mas não parando, em 1958, momento em que Arendt afirmou a pluralidade como condição básica da vida humana (*The Human Condition*). O segundo objetivo será questionar a atualidade do pária tendo em vista problemas de política contemporânea. Esta transposição não é simples nem evidente, pois, como Arendt lembrava, a história se faz com rupturas, não com repetições. A história não nos ensina muito, mas ensina algo - e, nos termos de Arendt, os elementos do passado não deveriam servir como corrimão ao pensamento, mas como forças fragmentárias, como exemplos e como memórias que podemos representar, fazendo-os presente de novo, na tarefa de pensar e julgar a atualidade.

Ambos os objetivos, a reconstrução dos termos de Arendt e avaliação de sua relevância, não estão necessariamente separados nos capítulos a seguir. Há momentos em que o texto pende para a descrição de experiências e de conceitos estabelecidos, e momentos em que se propõe a julgar o sentido, sobretudo o sentido político, do que está apresentado. Mas os dois objetivos se mesclam na pergunta pelo significado do pária. Por fim, cabe uma nota sobre a opção pelo texto em inglês: nos últimos dois anos, pela possibilidade e depois pela confirmação do estágio no exterior, passei a escrever os resultados de minha pesquisa, e projetos auxiliares, em inglês. Mantive a escolha para a redação do texto final, que foi lido, discutido e apresentado em contextos em que o inglês era a língua mais indicada para uma divulgação mais ampla do trabalho. Com esta decisão, eu sabia que restringiria as possibilidades do meu texto pelo uso de uma língua que não me é natural, e sabia também que correria o risco de apresentar o texto num inglês com expressões ligeiramente aportuguesadas em determinadas passagens (pelo que conto com a compreensão dos avaliadores). Ao fim, espero que o risco tenha valido a pena.

‘I didn’t mean to stay’, said K., ‘only to rest a little.  
That I’ve done, and now I’m off.’  
‘You’re no doubt surprised at the lack of hospitality,’ said the  
man, ‘but hospitality is not one of our customs,  
we don’t need visitors.’  
(Franz Kafka, *The Castle*)

The concept Jew was not easy to define.  
Of course, I rejoined.  
No easier than the concept German.”  
(Jakob Wasserman, *My path as German and Jew*)

## RESUMO

Esta tese pergunta pelo sentido do *pária* na obra de Hannah Arendt, buscando compreendê-lo dentro do sentido mais amplo do pensamento político da autora. A pesquisa teve como ponto de partida artigos reunidos na coletânea *Escritos Judaicos*, em que a autora tratou do *pária* pelo viés de experiências dos judeus europeus, sobretudo entre o século 19 e o século 20; passou por *Origens do Totalitarismo* (1951), texto em que Arendt definiu o movimento de exclusão e destruição de *párias* europeus, em especial os judeus, como o “agente catalítico” do colapso da Europa; chegando a textos como *A Condição Humana* (1958), em que Arendt apresentou a pluralidade e a unicidade como novos princípios requeridos pela reconstrução da dignidade humana num contexto pós-totalitário. Articulando-se de forma não-monística, este texto tem, como eixos, temas da obra de Arendt como a *assimilação*, tentativa de absorção de judeus e outros *párias* pelo “social”; a *despersonalização*, movimento radical de dissolução da personalidade e alienação do “eu” em favor de forças históricas; e a *unicidade*, como condição básica de seres humanos plurais e insubstituíveis. O trabalho sustenta, de forma geral, que a experiência do *pária*, levando em conta sua exclusão, desaparecimento e tentativa de reaparecimento, é um exemplo fundamental para a ação e o pensamento políticos na contemporaneidade.

**Palavras-chave:** pária; assimilação; despersonalização; totalitarismo; pluralidade.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation questions the meaning of the *pariah* in Hannah Arendt's work, aiming at its comprehension within the broader context of Arendt's political thought. The research departed from articles published in the anthology *The Jewish Writings*, in which Arendt approached the *pariah* relying on experiences of European Jews, mainly between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; dealt with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, text in which she defined the exclusion and destruction of European *pariahs*, specially Jews, as the "catalytic agent" of Europe's broader collapse; arrived at texts such as *The Human Condition* (1958), in which Arendt presented plurality and uniqueness as new principles required by the reestablishment of human dignity in a post-totalitarian world. Developed in non-monistic lines, this text deals with topics of Arendt's work, as *assimilation*, the attempt of absorption of Jews and other pariahs by the "social"; *depersonalization*, the radical movement of dissolution of personality and alienation of the ego towards historical forces; and *uniqueness*, as a basic condition of plural and irreplaceable human beings. It holds, in broad terms, that the *pariah's* experience, its exclusion, disappearance and attempt of reappearance, is a fundamental example for acting and thinking politically in the present world.

**Key-words:** pariah; assimilation; depersonalization; totalitarianism; plurality.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### PROLOGUE: THE PROBLEM OF POLITICS AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF PLURALITY

*“Doesn’t the care for existence  
clearly precede everything else –  
every virtue and every principle?”  
(Hannah Arendt, *Truth and Politics*)*

In September 1950, Hannah Arendt wrote in her “thinking-diary”: “*Problem der Politik: Problem der Gründung*”.<sup>1</sup> The problem of politics is the problem of foundation. To be clear, she did not write that the problem of politics is the lack of foundation. She wrote instead: the problem of politics is the problem of foundation. I begin with this reference, because in the last period of my research I realized that the question I was asking – what does it mean to be *pariah*? – required addressing another, more general, perhaps more difficult one: what is the meaning, or what are the main meanings, of Arendt’s work? Are there a discernible intention, a set of thematic and problems, in which Arendt’s reader could contextualize her work, interpret her arguments, and understand, even if not agreeing with, her unfamiliar<sup>2</sup> definitions of familiar concepts?

These questions, though, form more than a theoretical framework to my inquiry on the pariah’s meanings. I do not ask them merely to gain some introductory clarity, but to explore the assumption that the political thinking of Hannah Arendt, if needed an epitome, could be called a pariah’s thinking. Although any rigid classification of Arendt’s work is unfit to her claim that thinking is “out of order”,<sup>3</sup> I assume that this poses no challenge to the proposed epitome, because the pariah is, precisely, the one who is “out of order”. Moreover, the problem of political grounding (“*Problem der Gründung*”) is related, in Arendt’s perspective, to the pariah situation: groundlessness and wordlessness, the quest for a common-ground and the loss of a common space, are both imbricated as theoretical and political problems.

Let me start with a few notes on the theoretical problem. The question on the theoretical orientation of Arendt could be reframed, to use an academic vocabulary, as

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<sup>1</sup> Arendt, H. *Denktagebuch*. 1950 bis 1973. Erster Band. München/Berlin: Piper. 2016, p. 36

<sup>2</sup> Young-Bruhel, E. *Why Arendt Matters*. New Haven: Yale Uni. Press. 2006, p. 79

<sup>3</sup> Arendt, H. ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, *Social Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1/2, Spring/Summer 1984, p. 16

follows: is there a normativity, a regulative intention, in her work? If there is, what are its content and its relation to the pariah? At a first glance, the answer seems simple. Yes, Arendt's work is filled with what one would call normative prescriptions. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, for instance, described as an articulation of the questions which her "generation had been forced to live...*What happened? Why did it happen? How could it have happened?*", did not unfold an "objective" description of the past.<sup>4</sup> Arendt herself declared that she did not work as a traditional historian, who wants to preserve its object, but as someone who wanted to *destroy* it.<sup>5</sup>

Arendt dismissed the call for cold objectivism, especially regarding the events she was forced to face. While writing the first pages of *The Origins*, she worked with the provisory title *The Burden of Our Times*. This burden "demonstrated", in Arendt's words, "that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle".<sup>6</sup> Accepting the "organic link"<sup>7</sup> between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958), I read the latter as a sort of declaration of this "new political principle", this "new law on earth", which Arendt vindicated in the first text. In the process of writing *The Human Condition*, Arendt's intellectual mood changed while she incorporated new problems into a framework larger than that of *Origins*.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the accumulation of unparalleled political experiences was in the background of a book described by its own author "as a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and *our most recent fears*" (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> The reader of the book, in this sense, would hardly find anything purely empirical in her account of the activities of *labor, work, action* and its correlated distinctions and meanings. On the contrary, critics of Arendt found it too "idealist".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arendt, H. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: Penguin Classics. 2017, p. xxix (Henceforward, OT)

<sup>5</sup> "...my first problem was how to write historically about something – totalitarianism – which I did not want to conserve but, on the contrary, felt engaged to destroy". Arendt, H. 'A Reply to Eric Voegelin', In: *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Edited by Peter Baehr, New York: Penguin, 2003, p. 158. Also: "...the confusion in the issue of 'objectivity' was to assume that there could be answers without questions...". Arendt, H, 'The Concept of History', *Between Past and Future: eight exercises in political thought*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006, p. 49 (Henceforward, BPF)

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, OT, pp. x-xi

<sup>7</sup> See the introduction to the second edition of *The Human Condition*, by Margaret Canovan. Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. xi (Henceforward, HC)

<sup>8</sup> Young-Bruhel, op. cit., p. 79

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, H, HC, p. 5. In *The Origins...*, in the beginning of the part (2) on imperialism, Arendt assumed "looking at this close and yet distant past with the too-wise eyes of those who know the end of the story in advance". Arendt, OT, p. 159

<sup>10</sup> L. Botstein, a favorable reader of Arendt, admits that "There is an inherent idealism in her [Arendt's] writing about the possibilities of politics". Botstein, L. 'Liberating the Pariah', In: *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on ethics and politics*. Berkowitz, R.; Katz, J.; Keenan, T. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 166

Yet the topic of normativity in Arendt requires second thoughts. While some see too much idealism, even utopianism, in her writings, others point to a “normative lacuna”. Others, less sympathetic, even accuse the author of a “permissible” mentality that could foster evils she was trying to prevent. Still others delineate a border between moral (thus normative) and existential (thus normative-free) elements in Arendt’s theory. In the search for a label, to be derived either from descriptive or normative contents, readers and researchers suggested Arendt’s foundationalism or anti-foundationalism, her Hellenism, modernism or “reluctant” modernism, her republicanism or elitism, her Aristotelian, Kantian or Heideggerian roots, not to mention the attempts to solve the enigma of her supposed left or right leaning.<sup>11</sup>

In a summary about pluralism, for instance, a reader may find sub-classifications such as socio-cultural pluralism, liberal pluralism, pluralism of difference, federal pluralism, individual pluralism – all terms that, now and then, can point to some facets of the work of Hannah Arendt, but never capture its depth and extension.<sup>12</sup> Instead of being labeled, I think that Arendt’s work is properly understood around a set of questions. These questions refer not only to Hitler and Stalin, but to broader processes in which problems and paradoxes of the modern ethos were, as she used to say, “crystallized”<sup>13</sup> – problems and paradoxes such as “a rebellion against human existence”<sup>14</sup>, an “unnatural growth of the natural”, the problem of grounding political authority, all entangled with the

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<sup>11</sup> Here is Seyla Benhabib’s notorious reference to the “normative lacuna” in Arendt’s theory: “Although Hannah Arendt’s conception of politics and of the political is quite inconceivable, unintelligible even, without a strongly grounded normative position in universalistic human rights, equality, and respect, one does not find her engaging in any such exercises of normative justification in her writings.” Benhabib, S. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996, p. 194. For the controversial review of Arendt’s work by Martin Jay, in which he detected Arendt’s “existential mentality proclaiming the permissibility and possibility of everything”, see: Jay, M. ‘The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt’. In: *Permanent Exiles: essays on the intellectual migration from Germany to America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 237-256. For G. Kateb’s distinction between “existential values” and “morality”, according to which Arendt “seems suspicious of morality, as if she had an allergy to it”, see Kateb, G. “Existential Values in Arendt’s Treatment of Evil and Morality”. In: *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*. Edited by Seyla Benhabib. New York: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2010, p. 343

<sup>12</sup> Vincent, A. *The Nature of Political Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, See Chapter 7: “Segmented Foundations and Pluralism”

<sup>13</sup> For Arendt’s refusal of “causality” as a historiographical method (“*Methode in den Geschichtswissenschaften*”), and her emphasis on “crystalized elements”, see: Arendt, H. *Denktagebuch*. Erster Band, p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 2

development of mass societies in conditions previously unknown. In this sense, her pariah's philosophy is also a philosophy of modern crisis.<sup>15</sup>

If one places these modern crisis – and the political-philosophical “problem of grounding” – at the center of Arendt's enterprise, the debate between the excess and the deficit of normativity turns out to be, I believe, artificial. Those who charge Arendt with “idealism” miss the point that she, as a political writer, wrote a response, anchored in principles, to this major crisis of the modern ethos. She judged human realities (one of her conclusions being precisely the contemporary fear of judgment). Yet her “idealism” was not arbitrary: against the naturalization of a-political and anti-political processes, she tried to reestablish political “ideas”. She, for instance, did not regard the Greek *polis* as a nostalgic object, but did try to recover some of its lost principles, to recover the principle of *polis*, in order to respond to the modern loss of public spaces. Arendt's criticism, in this sense, was “politically immanent”<sup>16</sup>, as an attempt to make clear to Western civilization how it collapsed, and how it could, if it could, begin anew.

The charge of lack of normativity misses the point too, but in a different way. This point deserves a little more attention. Arendt barely, if ever, used the term norm. Her writings rarely display imperative verbs, as *ought*, *must*, *should*. To the reader of *The Human Condition*, she wrote “this book does not offer an answer”.<sup>17</sup> Arendt did not, moreover, worry with being “effective” or “impacting” – that was a typical masculine concern, she noted.<sup>18</sup> This was not a matter of modesty. The core of the question lies in the concept of norm itself, and its uses. Arendt realized that the crisis of modernity coincided with the end of traditional normativity. Grounding-norms proved to be ineffective and, in a special sense, even destructive from a political point of view. In what follows, I will approach the political problems of what I call, in provisory terms, traditional normativity, trying to reproduce Arendt's main concerns with traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Jerome Kohn emphasizes *where* (between the “no longer” of a lost tradition and the “not yet” of an unpredictable future) and about *what* (the main crisis of our age) Arendt wrote. Kohn, J. Introduction to *Between Past and Future*, p. xviii

<sup>16</sup> According to C. Volk, Arendt's analysis of the loss of humanity “is not morally, ethically, or anthropologically motivated, but purely *politically motivated*.” Volk, C. ‘The Decline of Order: Hannah Arendt and the Paradoxes of the Nation-State’, In: *Politics in Dark Times...*, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 5. Although this is a contestable affirmation (Arendt *does* provide principles and criteria to redefine our political models), it registers her hesitation in embracing a strict normative attitude.

<sup>18</sup> In the interview with Günter Gaus, answering if she wanted her work to be “effective” (the original word is “Wirkung”: “Wollen Sie mit diesen Arbeiten eine Wirkung auch in der Breite erzielen...?”), Arendt replied that she did want to understand, not to be “effective” or influential; that, whenever another person understood the same meaning she did, she had a pleasant feeling of being at home [“dann gibt mir das eine Befriedigung wie ein Heimatgefühl”]. Arendt, H. “Fernsehgespräch mit Günter Gaus”. *Ich Will Verstehen: Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk*. Piper: München/ Berlin, 2016, pp. 48-49

foundations. I will also try to illuminate some aspects of the new foundation proposed by Arendt to the political experience.

### **1.1 The Problem of Traditional Foundations**

Western civilization (meaning a series of political communities built around ideas and events in a chronological, geographical and cultural continuum) was assumed to be grounded upon firm religious commandments, supported by established metaphysical and philosophical truths. It was assumed that human nature, even in its essential possibilities, was contained within cognizable forms of behavior. Man was conformed to a defined scheme of things, according to which even its deviations towards violence (its sins, theologically speaking) were predictable and controllable – as, precisely, marginal deviations of the norm. But these norms proved to be ineffective both as descriptions of man (what were his possibilities) and as prohibitions for man (what he could do and not do). The problem, for Arendt, was not the specific content of norms, nor the quality of arguments proving the validity of these norms. The nature of the problem was, at a first moment, practical, not philosophical: religious and moral norms were no longer guiding disoriented masses. Totalitarianism, and the scale of displacement, manipulation and mass killing of superfluous human beings, was a factual proof that “Thou shall not kill”, for instance, was no longer valid, and that vast segments of European populations did not recognize the old codes.

Moreover, an immediate attempt of reestablishing the old norms (a restoration of religion and morality, for instance), apart from being counter-factual, would be also uncritical, for it would leave unexamined the problematic relation between norms, compliance and behavior. There was, according to Arendt, a “nonthinking” presupposition within established codes and norms, which ended up compromising the political sphere and the awareness of individual consciousness. It seemed that masses simply wanted codes to conform to: “The faster men held to the old code, the more eager will they be to assimilate themselves to the new”.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the fact that Arendt did not reapply the standards of a failing normative order was explained less as a matter of skepticism, and more by the call of “facing up to reality”, of understanding the problematic relation between traditional normativity and political perplexities unfolded in the twentieth century.

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<sup>19</sup> Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, p. 27

She did not replace, I argue, one norm for another. She dismissed instead the traditional relation between codified commandments and political action. Her search for a “new law” was simultaneous to her criticism of the relation between the man who prescribes norms and the man who engages in action, in other terms, between philosophy and politics. For Arendt, traditional search for a firm political ground presupposed a hostility against the dynamics of politics. A well-grounded, orderly politics conformed to a compelling truth: that was the model established, as Arendt always reminded, by Plato’s ideocracy, which remained dominant in the Western tradition of political theory.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, traditional fabrication of a ground *for* politics was established not *by* political beings themselves, but by an isolated man who had just seen his fellow citizens condemning his mentor to death. The founding experience of political theory was marked by the withdraw of its founder, who was suspicious of public deliberation, and assumed that an ideocracy could stabilize public affairs. Politics was imagined through a philosophical withdraw of the self towards the self.<sup>21</sup>

This did not mean that the “construction of a deity”<sup>22</sup>, as the foundation of politics, was ineffective, in the sense of not producing results. Arendt noted that the substitution of political action for the controlled making of a city and its citizens creates forms of government whose problem “is not that they are cruel, which often they are not, but rather that they work too well.”<sup>23</sup> These forms of deity-grounded governments, whose “most obvious salvation from the dangers of plurality is mon-archy, or one-man-rule”, normally produce the “short-range advantages of tyranny, the advantages of stability, security, and productivity”.<sup>24</sup> An absolutely grounded politics seems to solve two problems at once: the justification for ruling, and the effects of this ruling in terms of social cohesion and productivity.

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<sup>20</sup> Arendt, H. ‘Philosophy and Politics’, *Social Research*, Vol. 71, No. 3, Fall 2004, p. 431

<sup>21</sup> Jerome Kohn notes: “On the one hand, thinking discloses the self to the self, the condition of which is the thinker’s *withdrawal* from the world, while on the other, acting displays the self to other selves, the condition of which is the actor’s *appearance* in the world.” Kohn, J. ‘Hannah Arendt’s Jewish Experience’, In: *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on ethics and politics...*, 2010, p. 181

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 11

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, HC, pp. 220-221. See also: “Only if seen in the image of a working activity, could political action be trusted to produce lasting results. And such lasting results meant peace, the peace needed for contemplation: No change”. Arendt, H. ‘Labor, Work, Action’, In: *The Portable...*, 2003, p. 169

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 222. The whole sentence reads: “It is the obvious short-range advantages of tyranny, the advantages of stability, security, and productivity, that one should beware, if only because they pave the way to an inevitable loss of power, even though the actual disaster may occur in a relatively distant future.”



But, according to Arendt, an absolute ground has an important side-effect: “the banishment of citizens from the public realm”.<sup>25</sup> A ground fabricated without public participation, and the subsequent establishment of a concentrated ruling-authority, “pave the way to an inevitable loss of power”. The *problem of grounding*, if we agree with Arendt, when solved with seemingly productive shortcuts turns out to aggravate, even if only gradually, the *problem of politics*. It reinforces the suspicion towards politics, and establishes politically-emptied structures of ruling and dictating. In a very subtle way, “facing up to” complex and multi-sided processes which formed what I am calling the crisis of modernity, Arendt suggested that the “disappearance of the ancient city-state”<sup>26</sup>, symbolized by the decline of Athens, the trial of Socrates and the Platonic reaction, marked the beginning of the gradual disappearance of politics itself, and the emergence of fictional stabilizations of the political.

This is a too general statement, for it ignores important complementary processes and divergent tendencies which were rarely abstracted by Arendt in a linear diagnosis. I believe, yet, it captures, at least in an introductory tone, some elements of the set of questions around Arendt’s thought. For this work, moreover, it signals how the problem of grounding, the fabrication of solutions, and the “banishment of citizens from the public realm” are related. No less important, the “banishment of citizens” from spheres of power was, as we shall see in detail, a kind of prelude to the attempt of expelling pariahs from earth. Writing on the “loss of power” created, paradoxically, by absolute foundations, Arendt reminded that “the actual disaster may occur in a relatively distant future”.<sup>27</sup> In the pariah-case, considering the ancient search for a solid foundation, groundlessness became, centuries later, as we shall see, a literal reality to millions of people.

## **1.2 The Problem of Modern Politics**

Pre-modern world was structured upon fabricated norms, dependent on traditional metaphysics and introspective truths. These worldless truths were defined in terms of self-evidence, immediate revelation, and philosophical self-reference – all speechless foundations. Civilization changed, and with it sources of political and philosophical authority changed as well, but the pattern remained more or less intact; an immediate, absolute ground founded a static world-picture, whose fundamental (grounding) myths

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 221

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 222

were beyond dispute. Politically, the dominant form of those mythological-orders was the govern of one-man, with the effect of “banishment” of people from public affairs, that is, from the spheres of deliberation and initiative.

Modern revolutions changed this scenario. Established ground-myths were overthrown, not only symbolically: the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century testified a succession of revolutionaries attempts, directed against monarchs of an ancient order. Mythical foundations were de-legitimized, rejected as outdated sources of authority. Yet the modern takeover on the old structures, according to Arendt, did not solve the *problem of foundation*. In a way, it only aggravated the problem. I contend that it is regarding these questions that Arendt’s supposed nostalgia of antiquity should be challenged. What seemed a promising beginning of men’s emancipation, indeed, liberated processes that, seen retrospectively, threatened politics even more radically than old tyrannies. For Arendt, the crisis of modernity, with its different outcomes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was not caused by forces of reaction delaying progress; it was shaped by forces generated by modern dynamics themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Let me focus this point in detail. There is a phrase of Arendt on Kant’s transcendental revolution which is elucidative: “Men never seemed to have risen so high and at the same time to have fallen so low”.<sup>29</sup> Kant put tradition, that is, traditional metaphysical assumptions, on trial, judging it, proving its limitations and condemning its fallacies. In our terms, Kant’s revolutionary tribunal overthrew established myth-grounds, not out of an iconoclastic passion, but out of a critical, assumedly empowering, enterprise. Reason, as the new judge-legislator, was accessible to every-man, endowed now with a critical capacity of contesting fabricated myths of public banishment. Relying on reason, not on traditional foundations, men could enter a stage of political maturity.<sup>30</sup>

But Kant’s “calling of each individual to think for himself”<sup>31</sup>, more a philosophical than a political manifesto, was limited in form and in practice. In form, because Kant criticized the possibilities of thinking in terms of knowledge of reality. Kant liberated thought only to recognize its own limitations. In practice, because Kant, aware of the gap

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<sup>28</sup> This is how Arendt closed the Part on ‘Imperialism’ in *The Origins...*: “The danger is that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages.” Arendt, OT, p. 396

<sup>29</sup> Arendt, H. *Was Ist Existenz Philosophie?* Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1990, p. 19

<sup>30</sup> Kant, I. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”. *Practical Philosophy*. Translated and Edited by Mary J. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. “Maturity” is the translation of *Mündigkeit*, which relates to “Mündig” (mature) and “Mund” (mouth), meaning the phase when one becomes able to think and speak for itself.

<sup>31</sup> Kant, *ibid.*, 8:36, p. 18

between rational principles and empirical adherence to these principles, knew very well that concrete men would not become suddenly enlightened, and that an “age of enlightenment” was not the same as an “enlightened age”.<sup>32</sup> Kant, as Arendt stated, “robbed men of the ancient security in Being”<sup>33</sup>, but did not (because he could not) reestablish a stable ground to modern theory and practice.

Kant re-postulated a “transcendence”, but it was then a transcendence which man found only within himself, a kind of *assumed* fabrication. It could tell something of the being of man, but not of the being of reality. It were as if Kant, moved by a philosophical radical drive for inquiry (but not by a political radicalism), collapsed the old structures, including the old identification between thinking and being – and, at the same time, regretted this collapse in political and moral terms. Man could destroy the old metaphysical castles, but the destruction of actual castles was a different matter. Without God and kings, man troubled himself trying to reconcile modern freedom with ancient stability. The alternatives seemed not as secure, not as *grounded*, as the old deities.

What if men started longing for a firm ground, for the old closure provided by the “constructed deities”? God, as a thing-in-itself, could not be known, but as a practical idea, as a moral *foundation*, must be affirmed.<sup>34</sup> Not every man was concretely rational and mature, so perhaps the old structure of commands and prohibitions should not be put on revolutionary trial. The solution could be to postulate that every man carried within himself a potential rational ruler, a ruler which coincided with every other man ruler, and this all-encompassing-ruler being deduced from a rational, *a priori* form of ruling.<sup>35</sup> Man’s actions were to be commanded by the logic structure of human mind in general – now, a sort of modern “ideocrat”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kant, *ibid.*, 8:40, p. 21

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, *Was ist Existenz Philosophie?*, p. 14

<sup>34</sup> On Kant’s defense of the idea of God (compared to which we don’t know any “better” concept) for grounding practical morality, see Kant, I. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. 1988, A589

<sup>35</sup> “It is true: without religion morality would have no incentives, all of which must be derived from happiness. The moral commands must carry with them a promise or a threat.” Kant, I. *Notes and Fragments*. Edited by Paul Guyer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 19:181, p. 441

<sup>36</sup> Kant’s metaphysical state is derived from purely rational norms: “A state (*civitas*) is a union of a number of people under laws of right. To the extent that these are a priori necessary, that is, as long as these follow from these concepts of external right per se (i.e., are not statutory), the form of this state is the form of the state as such, that is, the state according to the *idea* of how the state should be according to pure principles of right....”. Also, grounding morality on metaphysics, Kant defined freedom as a state in which a subject “must be *constrained* (necessitated) [*genötigt*] to conform with the rule”. See Kant, ‘The Metaphysics of Moral’, In: *Practical Philosophy*. Introduction - III Preliminary Concepts of The Metaphysics of Morals (6:222) and Part II – Public Right; Section I – The Right of a State, § 45. p. 337, p. 456

Aware of this problem, Kant alerted that a revolution in principle should not be met with a revolution in practice.<sup>37</sup> He criticized blind-obedient habits, calling everyone to discuss like a “scholar”, to debate publicly the terms of obedience, but without recommending actual disobedience. Moreover, free-discussion should be contained within the limits of the monarchic vertical structure of command, which was concentrated in the hands and the head of the only man who could say “*Argue as much as you want and about whatever you want, but obey!*” (the king).<sup>38</sup> The king, in the model of top-down ruling, “unites in his will the collective will of the people.”<sup>39</sup>, while, at the same time, living in fear of offending God, whose “most sacred office” he is responsible for.<sup>40</sup> The political model, even for the king himself, was the model of vertical ruling-and-obeying.

The central point, for our discussion, is not the impasses of Kant’s philosophy in itself, nor his reluctance in embracing political implications that were beyond his historical imagination, but the position of Kant, with his antinomies, as the philosopher of modern revolutions, in special the French revolution.<sup>41</sup> The perplexities of the modern condition, and in our particular, the perplexities regarding the “problem of grounding”, became explicit in the revolutionaries’ search for a ground to their actions. Revolutionaries experienced, in the political field, a similar deadlock experienced by Kant in his theoretical attempt to dismiss traditional transcendence with a man-made one. Could man become his own absolute ground? What would be the limitation of man’s actions in a universe with no higher authority than man himself? Was man ready to become an absolute foundation, a kind of ruler-and-ruled in the same being?

Revolutions, in this sense, displaced traditional kings without dismissing traditional frameworks. This was nowhere more clear, according to Arendt, than in the revolutionaries vindication of an *absolute* foundation for their *new* foundations. Even the north-Americans revolutionaries, whom, according to Arendt, created stable structures of democratic and participative freedom, did not have the proper vocabulary to imagine

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<sup>37</sup> “A revolution may well bring about a falling off of personal despotism and of avaricious or tyrannical oppression, but never a true reform in one’s way of thinking; instead new prejudices will serve just as well as old ones to harness the great unthinking masses”. Kant, ‘An Answer...’, 8:37, p. 18

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *ibid.*, 8:41, p. 22

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *ibid.*, 8:40, p. 20. Kant ended the text linking “freedom” with the “principles of *government*” [*die Grundsätze der Regierung*], p. 22

<sup>40</sup> Kant, I. “Toward Perpetual Peace”. In: *Practical Philosophy...*, note to 8:353, p. 325. Kant here defended the king’s epithet of “administrator of the divine will on earth and its representative” [*eines Verwesers des göttlichen Willens auf Erden und Stellvertreters desselben*]. Kant, I. *Zum Ewigen Frieden: ein philosophischer Entwurf*. Texte zur Rezeption 1796-1800. Leipzig: Philipp Reclam. 1984, p. 18

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 17

neither to name their new beginning. In declaring their independence with the sentence “We hold these truths to be self-evident”, they unconsciously revealed their problem of paradigm, for “We hold” referred to a plural, deliberative, opinion-based foundation, while the expression “self-evident truths” tried to provide the new foundation a compulsory and perpetual character.<sup>42</sup> This is also felt in the ambivalent role played by the word *God*, until these days, in north-American political discourse, as if a secular and plural republic could not find its own terms and own principles, needing instead to preserve a shadow of the old transcendences.<sup>43</sup>

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In the essay *What is Authority?*, Arendt went back to the original “hostility” between Plato and the polis, which remained influential, in distinct forms and arguments throughout several theories, until the eclipse of tradition in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I will now summarize what I consider the main definitions, methods and projections that, in Arendt’s regard, de-politicized human relations. These were, in short, rejected by Arendt as grounds – “*Gründe*”, both as fundamentals/grounds and reasons/causes – of the political:

a) Plato’s search for an authority to the public realm took him into the “household and family life”, in which the head of the family ruled as a despot, and family members, servant and slaves labored and lived pressured by the necessities of physical endurance.<sup>44</sup> For Arendt, this remained as more than an analogy: the structure of command-obedience oriented towards laboring, producing, and feeding the basic needs of bodily life became paradigmatic in the Western tradition of political thought. This model gained even more influence with the modern “rise of the social”, in which entire political communities were regarded as “big families”, and the laboring-social process was organized by one-man (or

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<sup>42</sup> The sentence opens the second paragraph. In the first paragraph, the north-American revolutionaries declared that their acts were in accordance to the “Laws of Nature” and the “Nature of God”. ‘Declaration of Independence of the United States of America’. In: Hayden, P. *The Philosophy of Human Rights*. St. Paul: Paragon House, 2001, p. 343

<sup>43</sup> “...the men of the French Revolution no less than the founding fathers in America insisted on making the fear of an ‘avenging God’ and hence the belief in ‘a future state’ part and parcel of the new body politic.” Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, BPF, p. 133. For Arendt, the problem was not that revolutionaries were dogmatic, but that they were caught, again, in the problem of grounding, in the relation between theology/philosophy and politics, and that they were suspicious of how men would behave without an absolute standard: “...they were clearly spoken not out of any dogmatic faith in the ‘avenging God’ but out of mistrust in the nature of man”. Ibid., p. 134

<sup>44</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, pp. 104-105

by fictions forcing the one-ness of the social-family). In this case, the *relative freedom* of the political sphere was consumed by the *unconditional necessities* of laboring.

b) another philosophical “solution” was to imagine the political as a technical realm; the “concept of expert”<sup>45</sup> was introduced through the image of authoritative relations of command justified by a specific knowledge. The shipman sails the boat conducting its passengers; the shoemaker works alone, out of his idea (*eidōs*), in the art of making the shoe; the physician is obeyed by his patients because he (the physician) has the know-how etc. The “making” model also became dominant in Western political thought, being, in its extreme form, related to the utopian model of “making” a city, a citizen, or even of making History in the exact terms imagined (better said, known) by the maker. Politics, in this sense, is regarded as an object to be fabricated by a single-subject, which controls a “human material” and creates something out of it;

d) an additional “solution” was the postulation of an immaterial reality, eventually formulated in mythical terms, as a kind of supreme realm to reign over, and determine, the sensitive and material reality of changing things. In this sense, the sphere of ideas was either translated into accessible ludic-tales regarding, for instance, the punishments and the rewards of a hereafter, or postulated, axiomatically, as “fundamental” realities that could not be verified by sensitive experience, nor relativized by a variety of interpretations.<sup>46</sup> As in almost every other solution, the political lost its internal dynamics, its capacity to affirm something from its own activity, being reduced to a mean of achieving the stability (“No change”<sup>47</sup>) required by assumedly more important activities, such as religious worship or philosophical contemplation;

c) a sort of “tyranny of reason”<sup>48</sup> was delineated in the hierarchy in which the *thinking life* was supposed to find the “true being of things”, projecting it into the *acting life*, in the form rational compulsion. The transcendence, whether defined in terms of a natural essence, a logical self-evidence or a necessary *telos* (end), was to be taken as an absolute source of the normative-authority. The *fact* that concrete men and women did not act in accordance to such an *ideal* transcendence was explained in terms of bodily-emotional misconducts (such as in the Platonic model), in terms of a constitutive gap

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 111

<sup>46</sup> Arendt referred to ancient mythological tales as a “solution” to the problem that “truth cannot be the object of persuasion”. For Plato, the multitude, relying on “appearances”, was not suited to grasp the self-evident, immaterial truth. Hence, “persuading the citizens of the existence of hell will make them behave as though they knew the truth.” Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, p. 132

<sup>47</sup> Arendt, ‘Labor, Work, Action’, p. 169

<sup>48</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, p. 108

between the regulative-transcendent and the empirical-natural (in Kant, for instance), or as a mere question of a chronology, as in Marx, for whom Man would gradually produce himself (that is, produce its real essence) as History progressed.

In these paradigms, we find one or another of the following aspects: a denial of speech by an introspective access to an immediate “ground”; a disregard of spatiality and temporality by an assumed eternal, a-temporal nature of politics; a block of change by a repetitive (or permanent) characterization of political relations. But the main a-political aspect of these models is their depiction of human beings as “multiple beings” of a same species or a same model, rendering their differences and particularities as inessential to political activity. In this sense, these methods wash away plurality by imagining a concentration of power in the hands of one or only a few rulers authorized to govern others. In my reading, nothing can be more anti-political for Arendt than undermining plurality by excluding faces and voices from public spaces.

### **1.3 Are We Plural or *Should We Be Plural?***

Now the question is whether plurality, as the human condition of politics, is an *ought* prescribed by Arendt’s theory, or something different. I remember an academic seminar, some years ago in Brazil, when a student challenged the claim that plurality is a given reality. According to him, nothing is given outside the space of conceptual apprehensions. In these terms, plurality is already a mental demarcation of the world, a subjective-conditioning of our perceptual experience, a sort of intellectual-social construct imposed by man’s into empirical reality. According to this position, there would be no independent external realities, only a given mental-framework to which experience must conform – a “space of reasons” upon which the task of philosophy would be only analyzing this space in terms of logical and conceptual coherence.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> It is not in the scope of this work to test Arendt’s anti-subjectivist claims against the background of contemporary philosophy of language. Without further elaboration, I can only register that I do not believe that the challenge presented, for instance, by W. Sellars against the “myth of given”, or the assumption of a non-inferential part of reality which would ground every other portion of perceived or thinkable realities (being thus the “ultimate court of appeals for all factual claims”), does contradict Arendt’s perspective. Perhaps Sellars’ takeover corroborates Arendt’s critique of foundational metaphysics and totalist ideologies. Arendt, I believe, would agree with a “space of reasons” if one understands it as the constant process of thinking and speaking about human realities and experiences. The “given” to which Arendt refers is not a foundational pack of knowledge. For the “myth of given”, see Sellars, W. *Empiricism and The Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 76

Most of Arendt's project would make no sense if we concede to this subjectivist claim. Arendt not only refused the primacy of the conceptual over the real, she affirmed instead almost the opposite: that reality is "fortuitous"; that reality withstands outside the subject; that reality is unfolded by events, not by ideas; that, whenever a subject tries to create a "fiction" or an "image" of reality, "reality takes its revenge"; that the "impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force"; that the impact of reality can be "shocking"; that reality, in its dynamic character, cannot be stabilized by fixed concepts, so that we must permanently "reconcile" our thoughts with reality, or constantly put reality into stories and narratives that re-actualize its meaning for us.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, in "introspection", according to Arendt, "nothing is involved except what the mind has produced itself".<sup>51</sup> Arendt parted both with the tradition which sought "the innermost meaning" of reality and with the "pragmatist" and "utilitarian" attempt to "impose upon reality the preconceived meaning and law of man".<sup>52</sup> For Arendt, one of the main aspects of the modern crisis was the retreat of man to "the prison of his own mind"<sup>53</sup>, and his search for grounds of truth and authority in the inner patterns of a logic or imaginative subjectivity. This man could not "experience the reality of what he himself is not".<sup>54</sup> Reality, in Arendt's regard, is not reducible to an "essential" being, neither can it be fabricated by a human subject. Arendt was no metaphysician and no constructivist.

She rejected, moreover, both the idea that men are governed by a super-human force and, simultaneously, that men, through an absolute mobilization, could generate in themselves an omnipotent force to control and fabricate reality. The main argument in Arendt's rejection is that, when we speak of reality, we speak of *human* realities, that is, of a reality unfolded by the interactions of men and women in plural. Reality is "guaranteed by the presence of others"<sup>55</sup>, and "others" are flesh and bone beings who are in themselves unique instantiations of freedom. Peg Birmingham attributed to Arendt's

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<sup>50</sup> See HC, p. 9, 137, f 2 (in which Arendt emphasized the German term "*Gegenstand*" to refer to the objective character of reality as standing "against" the subject), 252. Also: Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', BPF, p. 252, 257. 'What is Authority?', p. 135

<sup>51</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 280

<sup>52</sup> For Arendt, both traditions and methods had been "refuted by our experiences". Arendt, 'The Concept of History', BPF, p. 86

<sup>53</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 288

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 199



plurality an anarchic element.<sup>56</sup> I would rather say that plurality is marked not exactly by anarchy, but by a “plurarchy”, so that each human being is an *arche*, a beginning, a principle, a movement in itself.<sup>57</sup> This human reality, generated and sustained by the dynamic “flux of action and speech”, cannot, for Arendt, be “solidify in words”<sup>58</sup>, specially by a philosophical discourse that tries to encapsulate the real in univocal word-concepts.

Ignoring this point means ignoring the willingness of Arendt to “see politics with eyes unclouded by philosophy”.<sup>59</sup> As I am arguing, this is no marginal point to Arendt’s project. I believe that even serious and prolific readers of Arendt, mostly those who accused her lack of grounds or her deficit of normativity, do not pay the deserved attention to this point. Not coincidentally, some of these scholars reproduce a traditional architectonic of a political philosophy grounded upon certain fundamental ideas or propositions. Seyla Benhabib, for instance, refused an “essentialist universalism” (“the belief that there is a fundamental human nature or human essence...”), but argued for a sort of “justificatory universalism” (“strong beliefs in the normative content of human reason...in the validity of procedures of inquiry, evidence, and questioning...”) and a “juridical universalism” (the application of universal principles to regulate national institutions and decisions), both grounded on a “moral universalism”. This “moral universalism” means an axiomatic affirmation of the “equal moral respect” entitled to every individual.<sup>60</sup>

Habermas, aware of the “tension between normative approaches, which are constantly in danger of losing contact with social reality, and objetivistic approaches, which screen out all normative aspects...”<sup>61</sup>, also refused human nature, historical teleology and established traditions as normative sources for political philosophy.<sup>62</sup> He proposed not a divine transcendence, but a *pragmatic transcendence* of each citizen towards the understanding of the “structural conditions” for a “communicative

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<sup>56</sup> Birmingham, P. *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: the predicament of common responsibility*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 86

<sup>57</sup> For Arendt’s reflection on the polysemy of the Greek verb “*archein*”, see HC, p. 177

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 181

<sup>59</sup> “Ich will Politik sehen mit, gewissermaßen, von der Philosophie ungetrübten Augen.” Arendt, H. *Ich will...*, p. 47

<sup>60</sup> Benhabib, S. *Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, pp. 63-68

<sup>61</sup> Habermas, J. *Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015, p. 6-7

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

rationality”, which enables a diversity of discursive-agents to engage in an “unlimited interpretation community”.<sup>63</sup> In this community, there are no homogeneous norms of behavior, but only self-chosen norms for dialogue, argumentation, and verification-processes. Homogenous norms (or, in Habermas’ terms, “crystallized complex of beliefs”<sup>64</sup>), could, and probably would, be challenged by skeptical discursive-agents.

I think that, despite the similarities between Arendt, Habermas, Benhabib (for instance, their refusal of naturalistic accounts and homogeneous norms, and their embrace of the binding aspect of speech), there are important differences, especially regarding their approach to the problem of political foundation. These differences cannot be minimized. To begin with, Benhabib’s “moral universalism”, working in the form of a subjective self-imposed maxim, a maxim which is quite similar to the old principle of reciprocity and mutual respect, still relies on the model of a transcendent subject that prescribes and orients actions out of an *ideal* morality. It remains a regulative norm, detached from specific political conditions and historical configurations.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, as a *presupposed* (or self-supposed) norm, it falls prey to the problem of proof, justification and validation, which undermines every rationally prescribed norm in a post-metaphysical universe.<sup>66</sup>

Habermas’ depiction of a communicative community does resemble some aspects of Arendt’s emphasis on the role of speech within horizontal spaces of deliberation. But I regard the Habermasian project as closer to Kant’s idea of a “scholarly” public debate concerning propositions and norms. Debate, and the related processes of “verification”, “will-formation”, “decision-making” etc. are, in my interpretation of Arendt, only a specific dimension of the political. An “intersubjective communication” is not, I believe, a proper frame for Arendt’s view on political realities, which are actual, concrete *spaces* where *people share a world, appearing to each other* not only in mental and symbolical terms. This sharing-a-world, this “being among men”<sup>67</sup>, is not merely a subjective-linguistic exercise aimed at confronting and justifying statements (in other words: the world is not an intellectual forum).

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 24

<sup>65</sup> For this reason, Benhabib introduced a distinction between a “generalized other” and a “concrete other”, both as ontological-normative principles prescribing the acceptance of the other in an abstract and an individual perspective. Benhabib, op. cit., p. 69

<sup>66</sup> Benhabib recognized an unavoidable question within this model: can a moral universalism subsist without an epistemological universalism?, Benhabib, op. cit., p. 63

<sup>67</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 51

Arendt, indeed, defended this spatial-experiential dimension of the political, defining “spaces” and “locations” of human activities.<sup>68</sup> Isolation and loneliness were, according Arendt, radical forms of de-politicization, for men losing contact with others meant losing public reality itself. This contact, for her, was not merely mental, for, even if lonely, an individual man could still rely on the inner machinery of his mind. He could not, however, experience reality. Experience, differently from the circularity of self-evident ideas, requires the possibility of “being affected and affecting the world”.<sup>69</sup> In this perspective, politics requires more than sharing values or ideas subjectively. It relies on a “common sense”, a common way of being present and feeling and speaking about reality, a unifying sense “which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity...”.<sup>70</sup> Sense, in my reading, refers both to meanings shared by fellow citizens, and to perceptive senses and emotions related to factual experiences. Politics, in short, requires more than an idea, a proposition, a symbol, a shared norm; it requires the presence of bodies, of faces and voices, of people with *names*, as “[a]ction without a name, a ‘who’ attached to it, is meaningless”.<sup>71</sup>

#### 1.4 Non-normative Grounds and Conditions

If Arendt was not primarily interested in discussing priorities of norms nor in establishing mentally defined grounds, how can we, after all, understand her approach to the problem of political foundation? How can we understand the “new law” claimed by her to restore freedom and to guarantee dignity in a post-1945 scenario? If I am right in insisting that this *new* law avoided the frameworks of traditional norms, then what kind of “law” is this? In a first attempt of answer, I would like to recall Arendt’s article *Was ist Existenz Philosophie?*, in which she sided with Jaspers to defend a way of escaping the traps into which modern philosophy built some of its problems and its so-called solutions. Arendt then stated,

“Once the concrete world was freed from this specter of Being and from the illusion that we are capable of knowing that specter, philosophy was likewise freed from the necessity of having to explain everything monistically on the basis of one principle, that is, of this omnipresent substance. Instead, we can accept the ‘fragmentation of Being’

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<sup>68</sup> See for instance the titles of the section 10 – “The Location of Human Activities” (Chapter II) and the reference to the “Space of Appearance” in the sections 28 and 29 (Chapter V); “*Die Lokalisierung der Tätigkeiten*” and “*Erscheinungsraum*” in the German edition.

<sup>69</sup> Assy, B. *Hannah Arendt: An Ethics of Personal Responsibility*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 2008, p. 36

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 625

<sup>71</sup> Arendt, HC, 180-181.

(in which context Being no longer means the Being of the ontologies), and we can accommodate the modern sense of alienation in the world and the modern desire to create, in a world that is no longer a home to us, a human world that could become our home.”<sup>72</sup>

For Arendt, it was no longer possible to restore the old identification between thought and things, between thinking and being, as there was no ontological ground to which men and women would conform in physical or metaphysical terms. Moreover, the modern retreat to subjectivity (that is, to the mind’s cognitive content) would not be a proper solution after the discovery of a metaphysically-emptied (or metaphysically inaccessible) world. It would be instead a form of escape into isolation, into fantasy, into arbitrariness, or, at best, into philosophical abstraction. The modern fear of fragmentation could be justified, but not “solved” by imagined forms projected by the subject onto the object. Moreover, the idea that the subject makes its object would be a shortcut to restore the old security of an unitarian Being – for, according to this position, if man can know the chair he makes, he could also know the reality he produces.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, it is not that modern man does not acknowledge anything existing outside himself. He does not acknowledge that the existent is *given* to him, because everything is created, fabricated, controlled by him. Even God became a function of the human mind, or a self-imposition of the human psyche, and even nature, which was not produced by man, could be now artificially re-produced by him. So Arendt called us to *accept* (not to postulate) the “fragmentation of Being” [*Zerrissenheit des Seins*]; to accept that, after Kant, we cannot fabricate a Ground *to* the Being and, at the same time, believe that this Ground comes *from* the Being. She called us to *accommodate* what moderns called “alienation” [*Fremdheit*] – a belief that we lost our true essence or nature, that we could re-discover it, and harmonize ourselves with it once again -, stating that, once we cease this impossible search for our true self, we may start building a home-structure in a world devoid of the old “security of being”.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Arendt, H. *Was Ist Existenz. Philosophie?* , p. 46.

<sup>73</sup> The distinction between “*poeisis*” and “*praxis*”, or, in Arendt’s terms, between *work* and *action*, was already indicated, but not sufficiently developed (according to Arendt), by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which “practice” is distinguished both from epistemic (*episteme*) and technical/productive knowledge (*technē/poeisis*). Men of action are not producers nor scientists. Aristotle, ‘Nicomachean Ethics’. Barnes, J. ed., in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Trad.: Ross, D. Rev.: J. P. Urmson. Vol. 2, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, Book VI, 1139b14 to 1140a24, pp. 1799-1800. The modern framework of a “poetic” view of human reality was established, for instance, with the help of Vico, who wrote of “...the first men of the gentile nations, children of nascent mankind, creating things according to their own ideas.” Vico, G. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, Book II, Section I, [376], p. 117

<sup>74</sup> In the German sentence, Arendt explored the relation between the loss of a “home” in the world [*der Welt, die Heimat nicht mehr ist*] and the vindication of a humanly built world, which could become a new

With Jaspers, Arendt reminded this modern man, imprisoned in him-self, of things which were not created by him, neither by his hands nor by his mind. These are not minor things, but defining conditions, giving aspects of life, or simply, in Jaspers terms, “limit-situations” [*Grenzsituationen*] in which humans exist in the most basic (grounding) sense: death, chance, guilt, and the uncertainty of the world.<sup>75</sup> Death, for instance, is not a construct, but an experience that conditions life, defining, limiting and orienting man’s existence on earth. These conditions cannot be controlled by man’s hand, nor solved by man’s intellect. According to Arendt, human thoughts, in this sense, become a kind of “playful metaphysics” [*spielenden Metaphysik*], “always experimental and never rigidly fixed”, always interplaying with changeable experiences.<sup>76</sup>

It is not that men *must* accept, as norms or prescriptions, existential conditions. “I must die, I must suffer, I must struggle, I am subject to chance, I am inevitably entangled to guilt”.<sup>77</sup> This *must* is not a rational imposition. It is a description, an acceptance, of the grounding-conditions of human life. These border-situations are experienced in a unique way by everyone. They do not imply a certain model of thought: “That I cannot resolve reality into thought becomes the triumph of my potential freedom”.<sup>78</sup> They are just grounding conditions, limiting and defining conditions to our present, unique sense of being. They only shape the situation in which we live. For Jaspers, these situations come as given [*gegeben*] to oneself, limiting oneself in the form of a reality which was not expected, much less produced by oneself. This given is, thus, experienced as “failure” [*Scheitern*], a breakdown of the subjective self-assurance. “How man experiences failure”, wrote Jaspers, “grounds what he becomes.”<sup>79</sup>

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home [*eine Menschenwelt, die Heimat werden können*]; that is, facing the loss and the failure of traditional communities grounded on the “security of being”, men and women have the challenge of building and taking care of, with the demands of action, contingency and responsibility, a world of their own. Arendt, op. cit., p. 46

<sup>75</sup> Arendt, H, op. cit., p. 40. Also: Jaspers, K. *Einführung in die Philosophie*. München: R. Piper & Co. 1971, p. 18

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 41

<sup>77</sup> “...*ich muss sterben, ich muss leiden, ich muss kämpfen, ich bin den Zufall unterworfen, ich verstricke mich unausweichlich in Schuld.*” Jaspers, op. cit., p. 18

<sup>78</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 42

<sup>79</sup> “*Wie er sein Scheitern erfährt, das begründet, wozu der Mensch wird*”, p. 20.

## 1.5 Plurality As a Condition of Life

Arendt opened *The Human Condition* (*Vita Activa*, in the German edition) mentioning the “basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man”.<sup>80</sup> No word in this sentence is superfluous to Arendt’s meaning. She referred to “life’s conditions”, on a basic, fundamental sense, as they were *given to* man, or found by man in their existing situations. They are not a rational law prescribing a certain human behavior. Neither are they an abstract definition of man in general. Arendt went back to Kant (who said that “mere ideas” cannot enrich men’s knowledge)<sup>81</sup>; but also further than Kant. “It is highly unlikely”, she wrote, “that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves”.<sup>82</sup> Man can project laws and categories into nature and into things, but he cannot discover “human nature” – “this would be like jumping over our own shadows”.<sup>83</sup>

The solution, however, would not be postulating Man from the view-point of a transcendental subject, in order to compensate this cognitive deficit concerning the knowledge of our nature. The construction of a “superhuman”<sup>84</sup> representation of ourselves tells us nothing about our giving conditions, in which life in general, and political life in special, are experienced. For Arendt, we lose “humanity” not because of any deviation from a “natural law”, not because of any misapprehension of the moral Good. We lose humanity when we reject some of these “basic conditions of life”, among which are our condition as human individuals, constituted by specific bodies and emotions, situated in particular life-experiences, and capable of spontaneous acts and creative initiative. Our “nature” resides, paradoxically, in our capacity to “denaturalize” ourselves, not by suppressing what is natural to us, but by integrating it into human, “unnatural” modes of existence.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The section I, Chapter I, is precisely called “*Vita Activa* and the Human Condition”. Arendt, HC, p. 7. In the German edition, one reads the reference to “*Grundbedingungen*” (fundamental/basic/grounding conditions) “...unter denen dem Geschlecht der Menschen das Leben auf der Erden gegeben ist”. Arendt, H. *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*. München: Piper. 2016, p. 16

<sup>81</sup> Kant compared a man who relied only in mere ideas [*bloßen Ideen*] with a merchant who, to improve his financial conditions, simply adds some zeros to his cash balance [*Kassenbestand*]. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A602

<sup>82</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 10

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>85</sup> “...being properly human means being to some degree unnatural: initiating action, setting human limits to natural processes; creating lasting structures to house human life; laying down laws and endowing one another with rights that are ‘human’ but not ‘natural’.” Canovan, M. *Hannah Arendt: a reinterpretation of her political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 25

In what follows, we shall see that totalitarianism was the extreme outcome of the modern crisis, a crisis which Arendt labeled as a “rebellion against human existence as it has been given”.<sup>86</sup> The destruction of “humanity”, as Arendt saw it, had not been characterized by a rejection of a recognized ontological law through a conscious embrace of sinful, deviating ideas and norms that caused human beings to behave in a “wrong” way. It was instead a process of *factual* degradation of human beings into conditions analogous to, or even worse than, those of “natural” species. Nazis did more than destroy human conditions historically established in terms of rights, norms and institutions. They degraded human beings into things that lacked basic emotions, spontaneous capacity to react, and even primitive instincts of self-preservation. Totalitarians self-identified with the objective-Being of Nature or History, thus establishing radical new conditions to life/death on earth. By equating their will with Nature’s “will”, they tried to abolish grounding-conditions of human life – as life itself became a mere “material” to their hands and heads.<sup>87</sup>

Among the attacked conditions, plurality was at the center, as totalitarian movements not only excluded people from spheres of power, but also attempted to erase particular ethnic groups and independent human beings from the earth, so that, in totalitarianism, “individuality, anything indeed that distinguishes one man from another, is intolerable”.<sup>88</sup> The totalitarian attempt of creating a “One Man of gigantic dimensions”<sup>89</sup> was, for Arendt, the major threat to the human condition and to human freedom in its most elementary sense. So, the starting point for Arendt’s reflection is not an imaginary depiction of humanity into “ideal” conditions, but a reminder of elementary traces of our humanity, even of those traces inscribed in our basic organic and emotional constitution, and in our original insertion into communities where the reality of others pre-exists ours. There is an orientation in Arendt’s work for, more than understanding, *accepting* ours and others existence in an unjustified, gratuitous way, as a basic condition for the establishment of *politics*, that is, of a spatial *polis* which we build together and where we coexist.

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<sup>86</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 2

<sup>87</sup> “Totalitarian government can be safe only to the extent that it can mobilize man’s own will power to force him into that gigantic movement of History or Nature which supposedly uses mankind as its material and knows neither birth nor death.” Arendt, OT, p. 622

<sup>88</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 599

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 611

If I am right in emphasizing Arendt's defense of the primacy of the real over the conceptual, and of people over rational and systematic truths, then the "normative" problem must be redefined, its vocabulary and method included. Arendt left it clear that totalitarian "ideas" were "neither Plato's eternal essence...nor Kant's regulative principle".<sup>90</sup> Referring to norms in general, I am not distinguishing between the several meanings which norms and laws can assume in philosophical discourse, from necessary and *a priori* laws to positive laws open to exception and interpretation.<sup>91</sup> Arendt indeed stressed that totalitarian "laws", relying on the "identification of man and law"<sup>92</sup>, broke up spaces of interpretation and discussion over general rules and principles, and with the notion of law as a spatial and relational frameworks upon which men move, think, speak. Instead, totalitarian law "stabilized" men, neutralized man's thinking by applying the "strait jacket of logic", and conformed them into a necessary "movement".<sup>93</sup> It abolished the "insecurity of philosophical thought" by implementing ideologies of "total explanation".<sup>94</sup> In a way, if philosophical tradition started with the dialogues of Socrates, totalitarianism abolished philosophy by abolishing conversation.

But, on the other hand, Arendt gradually approached the similarities between traditional philosophical systems and totalizing ideologies (*Weltanschauungen*).<sup>95</sup> She refused to be called a philosopher not only because she saw and experienced the alignment of German intellectuals with Nazism.<sup>96</sup> She realized that the coordination of intellectuals, in most cases, was not due to particular opportunism, but to the very matter and method of their work. This experience was fundamental to Arendt's attempt to break

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<sup>90</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 616

<sup>91</sup> In Hegel's and Kant's dictionaries, for instance, one finds at least eight meanings of law and its synonyms: *Recht* ("Right" as general law), *Bestimmung(en)* ("Determinations" as legal provisions), *Gesetz* (both as ethical and natural laws, and even laws of thinking: *Naturgesetz*, *Gesetz des Rechts*, *Denkgesetz*), *Regel* (as theoretical and practical rules), *Gesetzgebung* ("Legislation", as the act to give laws). Caygill, H. *A Kant Dictionary: the blackwell philosopher dictionaries*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995, p. 275-277. Inwood, M. J. *A Hegel Dictionary: The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 160-163

<sup>92</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 607

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 617

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> It is interesting to dislocate the set of references here to Freud, who refused to translate "Weltanschauung" to English: he defined it as a "specifically German concept" whose translation may "raise difficulties". Still, he defined it as "an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered..." Freud, S. *Lecture XXXV – The Question of a Weltanschauung*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXII (1932-36). London: The Hogarth Press, 1973, p. 158

<sup>96</sup> For Arendt's memories on the "coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*) of intellectuals with the Nazi movement, see: Arendt, *Ich will...*, pp. 58-59



up with the abstract circularity of thought-patterns which are never interrupted by new ideas or facts. In his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), S. Freud wrote that philosophy, overestimating the “epistemological value [*Erkenntniswert*] of our logic operations”, sustains the illusion of being able to produce “a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent”, but then collapses with every new alteration of knowledge.<sup>97</sup> He recalled a verse of Heine, which I reproduce here in its entirety:

“Life and the world’s too fragmented for me!  
A German professor can give me the key.  
He puts life in order with skill magisterial,  
Builds a rational system for better or worse;  
With a nightcap and dressing-grown scraps as material  
He chinks up the holes in the Universe.”<sup>98</sup>

This philosophical attempt of filling the holes of the universe (wearing pajamas), and this “overestimation” of our logic operations and conclusions, had been a permanent source of misunderstanding between the philosophical and the political, a misunderstanding which remained more or less unchallenged. In the twentieth century, however, when the crisis of the modern ethos reached its peak, the sinister implementation of a “natural law”, absolutely valid for humans behaving as animals that had lost their capacity to formulate alternative “laws” of thought and action, demanded, in Arendt’s view, a critical examination of the similitudes between ideology and theory, or, more properly, between the conformation of politics to traditional philosophy. In the process, she redefined her whole vocabulary and method, starting with her grounding terms: she would talk of *human conditions*, not of *natural* or *necessary laws*. In this context, her *Vita Activa* contrasts not only the *Vita Contemplativa* of the philosopher, but also the illusion of a “*Vita Passiva*” created by an identification of theory with practice.

Plurality is, in short, the *unwritten law* for Arendt. This law, however, is not inscribed in the sky, nor deduced by logic-rationality as the fundamental content, or measurement, of positive laws. It is experienced through human senses, it is seen, heard and felt wherever and whenever men leave their isolation to be in contact with others. It

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<sup>97</sup> In the original, Freud stated that philosophy “...arbeitet zum Teil mit den gleichen Methoden [of sciences], entfernt sich aber von ihr, indem sie an der Illusion festhält, ein lückenloses und zusammenhängendes Weltbild liefern zu können...” Freud, S. *Neue Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. Gesammelte Werke. Fünfzehnter Band. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999, p. 173. Freud, S. *Lecture XXXV*..., pp. 160-161

<sup>98</sup> Heine, H. ‘The Homecoming’ [*Die Heimkehr*], LVIII, (Book of Songs). In: *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine*. Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982, p. 99

is, moreover, according to Arendt, a given *fact*, presented by her, in *The Human Condition*, in a declarative mode, not in a hypothetical or subjunctive one: plurality *is*.<sup>99</sup> The “law” of plurality, thus, is not an imposition, but an acceptance of the fundamental “fact of plurality of men and people”, of their fundamental “distinction” and “diversity”. To affirm this condition, Arendt did not necessarily break with philosophical thought or with normative concerns. She only opened spaces for a complex takeover on the political experience, reserving to the processes of forming thoughts and making laws, for instance, only a complementary (not a dominant) position.<sup>100</sup> Because plurality grounds political experiences, theoretical ideas and juridical norms can be constantly reformulated, criticized, implemented, and amended by active men and women.<sup>101</sup>

The argument concerning Arendt’s normative question could be summed up as follows: political concepts *must be* grounded upon plurality, because plural human beings *are* the beginning of political experiences. Empirical polities exclude people from its assemblies and its streets, and many historical actors closed the access to power. But, by doing this, they only denied a political affirmation for plurality. They did not undo the *fact* of plurality. Even if we consider the radical totalitarian attempt to eradicate the *fact* of plurality, this poses no definitive challenge to Arendt’s stance, since her position is grounded on the contingent, fragile, non-necessary appearance of human beings. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, few would doubt men’s capacity to destroy humanity. But, as the existence of humanity is not necessarily guaranteed, its destruction is neither necessarily predicted. Indeed, writing on the mode of persuasion, trying to “teach a sense of politics to a world in danger”<sup>102</sup>, Arendt did not demonstrate necessary ends (“oughts”), but told stories, explained situations and reminded possibilities to a human world in which the most realistic doctrines were producing unsustainable political realities.

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<sup>99</sup> “Action...corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the *fact* that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.” (emphasis added) HC, p. 7. Arendt did not recommend “uniqueness”, she declared it: “Plurality *is* the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that *nobody is* ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.” (emphasis added). Arendt, HC, p. 8

<sup>100</sup> C. Volk examined the relation between action, constitution and norms in the work of Hannah Arendt, emphasizing the interaction between the experience of political action and the establishment of laws: “Arendt is concerned with experiencing and not with inventing or constructing norms and rights”. Volk, C. ‘Hannah Arendt and the Constitutional Theorem of De-Hierarchization. Origins, Consequences, Meaning’. *Constellations Volume 22, No 2, 2015*, p. 18

<sup>101</sup> In an entry to her thinking book (October 1950), already eight years before publishing *The Human Condition*, Arendt noted that, without the fact of the plurality of men and people [*die Tatsache der Pluralität der Menschen und Völker*] and its fundamental “inequality” [*ihre grundsätzliche Ungleichheit*] there is no politics, and no law is needed. Arendt, *Denktagebuch*. Erster Band, p. 37

<sup>102</sup> Feldman, R. H. Introduction to Arendt, H. *The Jewish Writings*. Edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, p. lxx (Henceforward, TJW)

For Mary McCarthy, *The Human Condition* had political insights “both amazing and obvious”.<sup>103</sup> Arendt’s reminder of a basic fact of human reality (that human beings share the earth with each other) may sound “idealist” for contemporary ears. But, whatever prescriptivism one may find in Arendt’s later conceptual formulations, one can hardly deny that her grounding fact, plurality, is a condition experienced and testified by ourselves in a basic sense, and it’s a condition without which politics is transformed into a mere instrument of exclusion and domination. This may sound “obvious”, but it is actually “amazing” if one retells and rethinks the history of Western politics in the last century, when the production of pariahs, followed by their persecution and destruction, was naturalized and normalized within a process that disintegrated countries, destroyed cities and exterminated groups.

In this context, as we will see, the pariah-situation is related to man’s inability to share a world, to accept the grounding-condition of human plurality, the giving condition that being human means being-between-humans. The very existence of the pariah, and the political and social rebellion against his existence, means both that human conditions can be given to men, but also radically rejected by men. Rejecting the pariah, in this sense, relates not to the refutation of a norm, but to the refusal of being part in a world where the reality of others is given to us. Departing from the pariah limit-situation, I propose, with Arendt, hence,

“...to be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See the back cover of the aforementioned edition.

<sup>104</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, p. 141

## CHAPTER TWO

### A POLITICAL QUESTION

I would like to define the guiding question to this work, *What does it mean to be a pariah?*, as a political question. What do I mean by a political question? First of all, it is a question which deals with *appearances*. A political thinking may be exercised in solitude, and may rely on representations, images and references to non-present objects. But it essentially reminds and recalls what was seen and heard, as “incidents of living experiences”<sup>105</sup>, in public spaces. It also deals with secondary objects, related to these experiences, such as written thoughts and analysis, which “appear” to the thinking person not as pure objects strictly defined in themselves, but as reified thoughts, memories, images, testimonies of people who had seen and spoken about these shared experiences from different angles and under different conditions. In this regard, and here I am following Arendt’s writings on the thinking process, one may move away from the world of appearances to think, but, if one thinks politically, he represents this world of appearances, and some specific appearances of it, making it present again to himself.<sup>106</sup>

What “appears to me” is not a sign of subjectivism, but, differently, a sign of a relation, a relation between myself and the different sort of objects that are given to me or selected by me, either as recorded events, as shared memories, as texts, as images. What appears, in this line, can only appear to the “eye” of the mind (a metaphoric eye) if it has first appeared to sensory, bodily eyes of people who have testified and recorded, spoken and written about these appearances before me. Kant, in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, a fundamental source for Arendt’s reflection on the nature of political thought and speech, had stated that, in the process of judging, “one wants to submit the object to his own eyes.”<sup>107</sup>

Even if the person who thinks and judges is not a direct testimony to what happened, he represents or imagine an experience (or an object of art, in Kant’s original proposal), appreciating that experience or that object in all its particularity.<sup>108</sup> It is not a

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<sup>105</sup> Arendt, ‘Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future’, BPF, p. 14

<sup>106</sup> See, for instance, Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, pp. 13-14

<sup>107</sup> Kant, I. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited and Translated by Paul Guyer, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, § 8, p. 101

<sup>108</sup> For Kant, the operation involved in the judgement of taste and pleasure [*Geschmackurteil*], is not cognition (evaluation/classification of an object in accordance to a given rule/category), but imagination, or the power to imagine [*Einbildungskraft*]: “In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it

cognitive operation, an operation of fitting objects into given categories or rules, nor an intuitive contact with the empirical: it stands in the middle, as an imaginative movement (“perhaps”, as Kant wrote, “combined with the understanding”), a movement approximately described as a “searching for a law”.<sup>109</sup> So, to begin with, this work does not ask for any “hidden essence”, nor for any other mental experience that the self can simulate in isolation. Hegel had already stated that if we are to talk about an “essence” of something, this essence must make itself present, thus, appearing in the space of concrete, effective realities.<sup>110</sup> For Arendt, “...thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which take its bearings”.<sup>111</sup>

In this sense, among the appearances upon which this work relies, facts occupy a special position. For Arendt, facts are “political by nature”. Facts concern “events and circumstances in which many are involved”.<sup>112</sup> They are not known *a priori*, nor discovered by scientific experiment. They emerge from the interaction between people, in “common and commonly recognized reality”<sup>113</sup>. Facts, as distinguished from rational and mathematical truths, are not products of the logic mind. In a way, facts resemble Jaspers’ “limit-situations” in their living-force as realities which were not created by thought. Facts, indeed, have a compelling character similar to the conditions of death,

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by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject [*durch die Einbildungskraft (vielleicht mit dem Verstande verbunden) auf das Subjekt*] and its feeling of pleasure and displeasure. The judgment of taste is therefore not a cognitive judgement, hence not a logical one, but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*.” Kant, op. cit., First Section, First Book, § I, p. 89. German edition: Kant, I. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Köln: Anaconda, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> “This is the power of judgment, about which one has cause to presume, by analogy, that it should contain in itself *a priori*, if not exactly its own legislation, then still a proper principle of its own seeking laws [*nach Gesetzen zu suchen*], although a merely subjective one”. Kant, op. cit., Introduction – III, p. 64. German edition: AA 177, p. 26. According to Caygill, “image” [*Bild*], in Kant, “occupies the grey area between concept and intuition”. Caygill, H. op. cit., p. 245

<sup>110</sup> See Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, The Doctrine of Essence, section two, “Appearance” (*Erscheinung*), which starts with “Essence must appear”. Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel’s Science of Logic*. New York: Humanity Books, 1998, p. 479. Hegel’s vocabulary and his whole philosophic-logic enterprise do not recommend further parallels between his and Arendt’s perspective, for it is very difficult to take Hegel out of his system and his language. Yet I believe that Arendt and Hegel share two basic important theoretical orientations: both, as being similarly marked by Kant’s “revolution”, did not present their thoughts and categories as definitions or descriptions of a “beyond” metaphysical reality that determines physical and social realities; both regarded thinking not as an activity intended to jump into the “objective” being of reality, but as a kind of movement around different aspects and several meanings of reality, in special reality as it is lived as a socio-political experience. That Hegel spoke on behalf of an “objective spirit”, and tried to articulate an impersonal global vision of reality and its multiple meanings, it is another matter, which transcends my concerns and our discussion here.

<sup>111</sup> Arendt, BPF, p. 14

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 234

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 232

chance, birth, and the general unpredictability of life, and other grounding conditions for Arendt's non-abstract thinking. In this sense, according to Arendt, "[f]acts are beyond agreement and consent".<sup>114</sup>

This does not mean that Arendt revived a sort of "cult of facts"<sup>115</sup>, typical of a historiography that regards facts as given objects to receptive minds. Facts were, in origin, experiences in "which many were involved", either as actors or testimonies, either doing something or seeing what was done. They were rather done (deeds) out of freedom, lived and experienced by specific men and women in unique circumstances. Moreover, to become part of the human world, the world of objects and artifacts, they needed to be politically *established*.<sup>116</sup> Thus, they were not "created", but they were *established* by a joint work of witnesses, testimonies, memory-tellers, and recognized by citizens as a part of their common-ground.<sup>117</sup> As political objects, facts are performed, seen, and established only in between-men.

In this regard, the idea that a fact is merely "created" by the writer who tells it (hence, telling nothing more than his subjective bias) reflects the modern belief that we are all imprisoned in ourselves, in our subjective beliefs, in our particular interests. According to this idea, no one can witness and memorize an event in its common dimension. For Arendt, however, this kind of subjective-historicism, as any other subjectivism, is unpolitical. If accepted, it would collapse public speech by denying its very "common ground". Thus, in alluding to the "factual matter itself", to the "brutally elementary data" – for instance, to the fact that Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, that Kafka wrote *Der Prozess*, that a man called Harry Heine was born in Düsseldorf -, Arendt reminded that the established ground of facticity, "whose indestructibility has been taken for granted even by the most extreme and most sophisticated believers in historicism"<sup>118</sup>, is a condition for any political experience based on acts, and on spoken memorization and interpretation of acts.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 236

<sup>115</sup> Carr, E. H. "The Historian and His Facts". In: *What is History?*, Penguin: Middlesex, 1986, p. 9

<sup>116</sup> "The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things." Arendt, HC, p. 95

<sup>117</sup> Also: "Conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us." Arendt, 'Truth and Politics, p. 234, 259

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 234-35

## 2.1 A Question of Speech

This brings up the second political dimension of this work. This work speaks about objects. Grounding-facts, not being open to opinion and interpretation themselves, that is, being “beyond agreement”, inform opinion and interpretation. Arendt stated that freedom of opinion is exercised *upon* facts, not in replacement of facts themselves. As logical principles inform mathematical operations, “factual truth” inform opinion and interpretation, which are everything but self-evident, since facts are everything but necessary. The kind of objectivity established by facts, events and other public appearing-realities does not stop speech by the force of its “truth”, but, quite differently, allows, by its grounding-objectivity, the emergence of opinions. A fact, as a political object, exist “only to the extent that it is spoken about”.<sup>119</sup>

Conversely, if something is not spoken about – if not discussed, if its meaning is not explored, if its interpretation is not enlarged -, then it is not political. Hobbes called memory a “sense in decay”, an image, of an object seen, which “is fading, old, and past”.<sup>120</sup> In Arendt’s regard, to be political, a memory must not only be memorized, but “spoken about”. A monument, for instance, will become a dead object (a *past* object), if it does not entail an active and discursive representation or re-elaboration of its political meaning. A memorial, in this sense, favors a special kind of memory (or of thinking, as in the German *Denkmal*): a shared, spoken memory of an “incident” or an actor which is represented, being in this case physically present once more, in the common space of streets, squares and parks. Not thinking and not speaking about the meaning of the objectified fact that is a monument reduces it to a merely architectural thing, a thing deprived of its political significance.

For Arendt, however, political discussion can bring “comprehension” to factual-public matters, but it is never a complete comprehension, for factual truths, “though they are never obscure, are not transparent either, as it is in their very nature to withstand further elucidation”.<sup>121</sup> According to Arendt’s depiction of reality (“sameness in utter diversity”)<sup>122</sup>, a fact preserves its object-character precisely because it is seen and spoken from different vantage points, which do not contradict but confirm the very existence of

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<sup>119</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 234

<sup>120</sup> Hobbes, T. *Leviathan, or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastic and Civil*. In: *The English Works of Thommas Hobbes of Malmesbury*. Vol III. London: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1966. Part I (of Man), Chapter II (of Imagination), p. 6

<sup>121</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 238

<sup>122</sup> Arendt, ‘HC’, p. 57

the shared object. Speaking about political realities or interpreting facts does not remove the matter from its objective-existence, but rather guarantees it, by allowing it to “show itself from all sides”<sup>123</sup>, and allowing a plurality of voices to add their contribution to “withstand enlightenment” of the object.<sup>124</sup>

But what kind of *speaking about appearances* do I have in mind here? The additional political aspect of this work is its *judging* character. The evaluation of the pariah is a political one, for it is entangled with a judgement of political configurations. Modern historiography tried to ground its object on scientific standards, searching for a kind of objectivity that would mean the “extinction of the self”, which von Ranke called the “pure vision of things”.<sup>125</sup> The historian, in this orientation, would abstain “from bestowing either praise or blame, together with an attitude of perfect distance”.<sup>126</sup> This was supposed to resemble a natural science in which no subject would interfere in the observed object. Modern physics added the dimension of causality, according to which “scientific history” would offer an objective account of human processes as if they were mechanically caused. In these terms, explanation would mean justification of deterministic and naturally-inspired relations between causes and effects.

This historiographic perspective is, according to Arendt, also unpolitical, for it denies that every act is contingent. Every insertion of men in reality through “deeds and words” is grounded upon “other potentialities originally inherent in any give situation”.<sup>127</sup> An act, a recorded fact, and every other appearance ‘might have been otherwise’, and this is the “price of freedom”, a price paid by agents, who are entangled within webs of

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<sup>123</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 238.

<sup>124</sup> Discussing all the implications of this topic is not in the purpose of this research. This goes regardless the importance of “facts” in informing public discourse, specially in a time which coined terms as “post-fact” and “fake news” (which, in my view, are nothing more than vulgar implications of the subjectivist “imprisonment” in the self). In defense of Arendt’s point, one can say that, even when politics is assaulted by a partisan struggle of *pro* and *contra*, what seems to be arbitrary and contradictory are the interpretations and the opinions upon facts, not necessarily the facts themselves: when one classifies a bomb attack as a “terrorist act”, and other as an “act of resistance”, none is denying the bombing itself. Only in totalitarian experiences, in which everything becomes a function of the movement, and there is no space to contest official versions, factual truths become radically unprotected by “organized lying”, so the fact that a man called Trotsky existed or not is to be decided by the ruler. Arendt also pointed to an intermediate stage, that of image-making, in which governments (even in the so-called “free world”) not only create an “image”, as a substitute for reality, but start to believe and act for the sake of the image, hence unfolding a “web of deceptions”. Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 251

<sup>125</sup> Arendt, ‘The Concept of History: ancient and modern’, BPF, p. 49. On the “segregation of history from ethics”, and “history from other disciplines”, typical of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Peter Gay noted that it “drove most German historians into a passive acceptance of things as they were”. Gay, P. *Weimar Culture: the outsider as insider*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2001, p. 89

<sup>126</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 49

<sup>127</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 238



multiple, uncontrollable potentialities, and also paid by the difficult establishment of factual truth, which, in its non-necessary, non-logical aspect, can always be denied, ignored or forgotten. The price of freedom, in short, is bargained by accounts that present human realities as rooted in necessity. Events, for the objective-naturalistic perspective, can only be understood in patterns that clean off the contingent-ground of human affairs.

Isaiah Berlin wrote that “[f]or the omniscient being, who sees why nothing can be otherwise than as it is, the notion of responsibility or guilt, of right and wrong, are necessarily empty.”<sup>128</sup> If subjectivism imposes itself on the object, fabricating an object from its own “interest”, pure-vision objectivism extinguishes the humanity of people involved as agents, writers, spectators, interpreters of events, by gluing events in a necessary scheme of things. For Arendt, contingency (the “might have been otherwise”) grounds not only future decisions, but the very interpretation of established facts, the very judgement of appearances. By detaching acts, facts and given situations from necessary patterns of determination, we are allowed to interpret actions in their conditioned, circumstantial, but also free origination.

Arendt uncoupled understanding and justifying. She dealt with appearances, which, as appearances that ‘might have been differently’, could be both comprehended (accepted in their facticity) *and* judged (praised or blamed according to their contingent origin). Comprehension and judgment were entangled in Arendt’s retrospective account, and their interplay resembled that between facts and opinions: to get a fact right, not only describing its “elementary data”, but also contextualizing it, and explaining some of its constitutive interactions (as they appear to oneself), does not mean accepting the fact as an unavoidable outcome of an irresistible process.

Politically, judgment is not passed by History, science or God. Men and women, relying on their limited knowledge and standing on their unique vantage points, judge each other and the realities they unfold. Politics depends on this interaction. Neutralizing historical time within a pre-established monolithical process may comfort us with the illusion of an objective, non-judgmental knowledge. In these terms, we do not pay the “price of freedom”. But an all-encompassing knowledge does not only undermine freedom and responsibility. It falsifies human comprehension itself. A “pure vision” -

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<sup>128</sup> Berlin, I. ‘Historical Inevitability’, in: *The Proper Study of Mankind: an anthology of essays*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p. 135. Also on the relation between knowledge, responsibility and judgement, Berlin noted: “The more we know, the farther the area of human freedom, and consequently of responsibility, is narrowed.” (p. 135)

which extinguishes the plurality of people, and abolishes the limited and complementary interrelations of on-looks and opinions – would mean, again, an attempt of seeing things as a “deity”.

The political aspect of my question, a question that implies judgement, is thus complemented by the political criteria for my judgement. Following Arendt, I will not judge in accordance to a transcendental norm. I will not defend an external - moral, religious or ethnic - viewpoint. I will try to be, with Arendt, “politically immanent”, and this means more than applying general political concepts to the matter. It means comprehending and interpreting the processes in which the fate of the pariah and of European politics were imbricated, culminating in the destruction of both. With the “too-wise eyes” of those who judge concluded events, Arendt did not rely on a fixed table of right-wrong rules. Understanding the “destruction of humanity”, and the rebellion against the pariah, required more than a ready-made, purely reactive moralism.

## **2.2 “Thinking in my identity where I am not”**

Political thinking is informed by facts, texts, concrete evidences, and, never being “self-evident”, it may be “running, as it were, from place to place, from one part of the world to another”.<sup>129</sup> E. H. Carr stated that historians cannot avoid the “trap” of being conditioned by their own circumstances, even if they try to use “obsolete” and “unfamiliar” words.<sup>130</sup> Arendt would agree with that all thinking is conditioned at some extent. But she would never regard this as a “trap”, as if thinkers were limited by a determinate vocabulary and set of images. Representative thinking, for Arendt, is precisely the thinking that frees itself from traps, from one-sidedness, from the asphyxiating atmosphere of a *Zeitgeist*.<sup>131</sup> Thinking, for instance, the problems of modernity with the help of Greeks and Romans (thus, re-presenting them), Arendt tried to move beyond conceptual clichés and predominant interpretations of her epoch. This requires “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not”.<sup>132</sup> “Impartiality”, for Arendt, has to do with an “incessant talk” and “an infinite number of

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<sup>129</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 238

<sup>130</sup> Carr, E. H., op. cit., p. 25

<sup>131</sup> I disagree, hence, with D’Entrèves conclusion that Arendt’s attempt to see “the past without tradition” is “hermeneutically naïve”, for “our appreciation of the past is always mediated by our present standpoint, with its forestructure or understanding and prejudgments.” D’Entrèves, M. P. *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 33

<sup>132</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 237

different standpoints”.<sup>133</sup> We can even be sons of our time, accepting our conditioning by actual circumstances. But, as sons are liberated from repeating the behavior of their parents, we, as plural and active beings, are also free to address and act upon our present realities from different standpoints and with different attitudes.

Arendt once wrote that *doxa*, the Greek word for opinion, also means “splendor and fame”. It thus refers to “the public sphere in which everybody can appear and show who he himself is”.<sup>134</sup> I remember a Professor who once said that “I appear” in my text. To be sure, I do not want to bring up my private concerns to this work. But I do want to appear “in my own identity” thinking and writing of ideas, memories, facts, places “where actually I am not”. In Kant’s analysis, what operates judgement is a “voice” which presupposes the *possibility* of an agreement. It is a voice that aims to speak for others (aims to be a “universal voice” [*allgemeine Stimme*]), and is oriented to the persuasion of people, not to demonstration of truth: “it expects confirmation not from concepts but only from the consent of others”.<sup>135</sup>

In this context, this is also a political work because it avoids a “scientific detachment better known as indifference” (J. Roth).<sup>136</sup> In her reply letter to Eric Voegelin, Arendt wrote that an author who describes, for instance, the conditions of poverty among the British workers in early industrial England neutralizing its emotions and indignation “robs” a part of the object’s nature. Poverty, persecution, extermination are human phenomena in which not only ideas and abstract processes are involved, but actual emotions and sufferings.<sup>137</sup> In this regard, concepts and experiences are integrated, in this work, by my unique view, which relates to the pariah experience as more than a sheer object of curiosity. This is also a work of self-understanding, not only because my second name, Lembert, probably refers to where my Jewish ancestors came from, Lemberg (*Lviv*), a city where pariahs were extinguished in a convulsing period when the region went, within years, from Polish to Soviet then to Nazi rule; not only because my last name, Kasper, is ethnic-German, what would make me, at some point of the 1930s, a *Mischling*, of whom it was said that there is a “civil war in his blood”; not only because

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<sup>133</sup> Arendt, ‘The Concept of History’, p. 51

<sup>134</sup> Arendt, ‘Philosophy and Politics’, p. 433

<sup>135</sup> Kant, op. cit., § 8, p. 101. *Stimme* carries an interesting political polysemy: it means, as noun, opinion/voice/vote; in its verbal modes, *zustimmen* means “to agree” and *abstimmen*, “to vote” (“to give one’s opinion/voice”).

<sup>136</sup> Roth, J. *The Wandering Jews: the classic portrait of a vanished people*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2001, p. 2

<sup>137</sup> In this line, for Arendt, “To describe the concentration camps sine ira is not be ‘objective’, but to condone them...” ‘A Reply to Eric Voegelin’, p. 159.

matters of religious, national, ethnic, class, professional identity have always been enigmas to me; but because this research allowed me to relate my own story to larger stories and experiences, conferring thus a political meaning to it, and a potential “universal” reach to my voice.

### 2.3 A Biographical Question

This work also grounds its question on the life experience of Hannah Arendt. I shall begin with *reality* as it was given to Arendt herself, in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany. Arendt’s work, starting from her early reflections on assimilation and pariahdom, written down in her first non-academic texts, was partly conditioned by “the shocking impact of reality”.<sup>138</sup> Arendt was forced into politics by world events. She did not research modern anti-Semitism, did not align with German Zionists, did not develop her critic of assimilation, and, later, did not establish herself as a major political thinker out of a self-fashioned plan. Her own *Grenzsituationen*, the surrounding forces of her life-context, determined her intellectual and existential journeys, which were permanently entangled. In my view, Arendt can only be understood as a *German-Jewish-American* thinker, and not because of any attribute attached to the “what” of these groups, but because of who she was, what she *experienced* – the German language, the Jewish fate, the north-American political framework.

This is not to say that Arendt’s categories cannot be de-contextualized. She did that with others authors, and she recognized that “everybody is free to do with it [a public work] what he pleases”.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, I believe that Arendt’s work is a fruitful source for exploration and recreation of political concepts. But even if there is no rigidly right or wrong interpretation of Arendt, I still believe, with Jerome Kohn, her ex-student and her literary trustee, that a reader who ignores the Jewish experience that underlines her work lets “something precious and vital slip through one’s fingers and disappear from sight.”<sup>140</sup> I also agree with Benhabib’s conclusion that the origins of Arendt’s political thinking “owe more to her reflection on the Jewish question, and the rise of European anti-

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<sup>138</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, p. 135

<sup>139</sup> Canovan, Introduction..., p. xx

<sup>140</sup> Kohn also says that such a reading is “irresponsible”. Kohn, J. ‘Hannah Arendt’s Jewish Experience: thinking, acting, judging’. In: *Thinking in Dark Times...*, p. 180. Also, drawing a distinction between Jewish identity (a collective sameness) and Jewish experiences (a factual living into specific politico-historical circumstances), Kohn states that “...Arendt’s identity as a Jew, or, as I would prefer to call it, her experience as a Jew, is literally the foundation of her thought; it supports her thinking even when she is not thinking about Jews or Jewish questions.” Kohn, J. Preface to *The Jewish Writings*, p. xxviii

Semitism” than to any specific intellectual influence, from Heidegger or any other philosopher.<sup>141</sup> For Bernstein, Arendt’s “understanding of the Jewish question and anti-Semitism shaped her more general understanding of both history and politics”.<sup>142</sup> Arendt’s “Jewishness”, according to Ron H. Feldman, “is not her sole concern nor the sole determinant of her work, but our understanding of her work is both diminished and seriously distorted if we overlook it.”<sup>143</sup>

When one defends the role of Arendt’s experience as a Jew, an important specification must be made: it is, preeminently, an experience of a *Jew as a pariah*. Arendt did more than thinking *about* the pariah. She thought *as* a pariah. She was a pariah within a pariah-people, experiencing sometimes a double sense of dislocation. Arendt, in this particular, was never “polemical”, if one understand it as “an aggressive controversialist”<sup>144</sup>, as she never wrote to attack someone, and her books were never designed reactions to other books and texts. She became a pariah out of her own comprehension and judgement of the surrounding realities, in specific of Jewish and European realities. Judging with a distinct voice, as those who start “an emancipation of their own”<sup>145</sup>, was the only way of resisting group-pressures and other forms of social conformism that undermined political judgment and actuation. Even when Arendt left personal ambiguity to write in the name of a group, speaking for instance on behalf of a Jewish “We”, she did it with the critical coherence of whom regards active men and women as always responsible to some extent, even when they occupy the position of victims.<sup>146</sup>

The pariah’s appearance and disappearance, and the post-1945 quest for its re-appearance, in this sense, are assumed to coincide, in important aspects, with the similar movement of “humanity”, not as an abstract form, but as politically organized structures of European civilization, which, in persecuting and annihilating its pariahs, ended up in

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<sup>141</sup> Benhabib, S. *Dignity in Adversity*..., p. 206, note 8

<sup>142</sup> Bernstein, R. J. *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 1996, p. 52

<sup>143</sup> Feldman, Introduction to the Jewish Writings, p. xlv-xlv. Far from being evident, the “essential link between her [Arendt’s] conception of Jewish history and her political theory” is not always considered by scholars and students. Feldman noted that, in the Spring 1977 issue of *Social Research*, dedicated to the work and life of Arendt, none of the essayist quoted from her “Jewish Writings”. In Brazil, generally speaking, the proliferation of Arendt’s studies has not been accompanied by an interest in her analysis of Jewish matters (hopefully, this might change with the recent translation and publication of *Escritos Judaicos* - Amarilys, 2016).

<sup>144</sup> Merriam-Webster online

<sup>145</sup> Arendt, H. ‘The Jew as a Pariah’, TJW, p. 276

<sup>146</sup> Thus, for Kohn, in relation to Arendt’s Jewish experience, she was sometimes an “eyewitness”, sometimes an “actor or a sufferer”, conditioned by particular circumstances, but she was also a “judge”, seeing personal and world events with an “enlarged mentality”. Kohn, Preface to Jewish Writings, p. xxviii

an unprecedented self-destruction. I agree, in this context, with Peg Birmingham that Arendt's thinking is properly grounded not in a general wonder of "being", but rather on the "speechless horror"<sup>147</sup> embodied in the death camps and in the pariah's general disappearance. Another way of saying this is recurring to the German language: the "*Grund*" (ground/foundation/reason) of Arendt's political thinking is also the "*Abgrund*" (abyss) opened when she and her husband heard the first news about Auschwitz and the Nazi project of exterminating human plurality through the systematic killing of Jews and other "sub-races".<sup>148</sup>

## 2.4 Beyond the Particular and the Universal

As Kohn noted, Arendt wrote about human, not only Jewish conditions.<sup>149</sup> She also started from the "outrageous fact" according to which a phenomenon historically unimportant, anti-Semitism, became the "catalytic" factor for the end of European politics in general.<sup>150</sup> Jewish, European and human experiences are, thus, imbricated, not in the form of an indistinct identity, but as in a web of relations. According to Feldman, there is a "Jewish-European dialectic" in Arendt's work, and, by not being tied to a parochial Judaism neither to an abstract enlightened Europeanism, Arendt used "both as platforms from which to gain a critical insight into the other".<sup>151</sup> This perspective considers, for instance, the genocide of Jews not as a merely Jewish matter (as suggested by the more particularistic words Holocaust, with a religious connotation, and *Shoah*, with a national-linguistic emphasis), but as a human process of first importance.<sup>152</sup>

This means, however, something different from an easy jump to a general universalism. Arendt cultivated that intellectual temper "which clung to concrete details with an exaggerated, almost pedantic carefulness".<sup>153</sup> Even if she related the persecution of Jews to a broader "minority problem" in the European interwar period, any reader should pay attention to the specific position of Jews as the "minority par

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<sup>147</sup> Birmingham, P. op. cit., p. 7

<sup>148</sup> Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch mit Gunter Gäus", Ich will..., p. 47

<sup>149</sup> Kohn, J. 'Hannah Arendt's Jewish Experience', p. 179

<sup>150</sup> "...it must be possible to face and understand the outrageous fact that so small (and, in world politics, so unimportant) a phenomenon as the Jewish question and antisemitism could become the catalytic agent for first, the Nazi movement, then a world war, and finally the establishment of death factories." Arendt, OT, p. x

<sup>151</sup> Feldman, R. op. cit., p. xlv

<sup>152</sup> Roudinesco, E. *Retorno à Questão Judaica*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar. 2009, p. 138

<sup>153</sup> Arendt, H. 'On Humanity in Dark Times: thoughts about Lessing', *Men in Dark Times*, p. 5

excellence”.<sup>154</sup> Jews were a historical group with no land and no specific national conscience in European terms, the “strangest strangers”<sup>155</sup>, precisely in an age when ethnic and tribal belonging emerged as dominant factors of political identification. Jewish modern experience, thus, in its radical particularity, in its lack of communication with non-Jewish experiences, only proved the failure of direct, homogenizing universalism.

Uniqueness, in this sense, was so present in Arendt’s analysis that she rarely addressed Jews in general (as if it existed a Jewish permanent “substance”). Similarly, she refused to discuss an “eternal” (that is, necessary) anti-Semitism<sup>156</sup>, detached from the historical grounds from which politically-oriented comprehension and mobilization arises. She focused on the specific constellation of social and political forces around *modern European Jews*, frequently comprehending them in additional categories (German, French, *Ostjuden*, assimilated, religious, poor, rich, parvenu, pariah etc.). The pariah, as our specific work type, is even embodied in concrete men and women, *who* experienced pariahdom in the most real sense, with all the richness and ambivalences of unique life-paths. If the pariah becomes a simple universal, he becomes nothing. He or she loses all significance.

I propose, in this line, to avoid simple oppositions (such as particular and universal), for Arendt’s own imagination relied sometimes on “threefold”, as if she refused to conform analysis and judgement into rigid dichotomies.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, by presenting the pariah as a representative type in Arendt’s work, a type that can illuminate, relate and exemplify even topics in which the Jewish question is not directly invoked, I am certainly “historicizing” Arendt’s notions. But this, differently from what is generally assumed, does not mean a constriction of meaning to past conditions. Historicized, here, means politically grounded in contexts which are, to a great extent, similar to our contemporary conditions. Moreover, in discussing the pariah’s meaning with events and stories, I follow Arendt’s own recommendation of thinking and “teaching by example”.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Arendt, H. ‘The Minority Question’, TJW, p. 126

<sup>155</sup> Sleznik, Y. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 40

<sup>156</sup> “Rejecting ‘substance ontology’, Arendt develop instead an ‘ontology of the event’”. Birmingham, P. *op. cit.*, p. 33

<sup>157</sup> “Often the way she sheds light into neglected corners of experience is by making new distinctions, many of them threefold, as if conventional dichotomies were too constricting for her intellectual imagination”. Canovan, M. Introduction..., p. vii

<sup>158</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 243

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE PARIAH CONDITION

In 1950, reviewing Selma Stern's book about the "Court Jew" in Absolutist Europe, Arendt acknowledged the writer's "authority in the field", her "full command" of the historical background, her "lively and pleasant descriptions", but criticized the "attitude" of the author. Stern described and explained Court Jews' stories, but removed their political responsibility. According to Arendt, in the book, Court Jews' activities were justified as deriving from "the political and economic spirit of the time". This theoretical "attitude" regarded, for instance, Ephraim (Frederick the Great's provider) as acting and deciding in accordance "to factors outside his own and outside all Jewish responsibilities".<sup>159</sup> Court Jews, in this perspective, had no alternative but behaving the way they behaved and doing what they did.

As I am arguing, Arendt's analysis combined both historical comprehension *and* political judgement. Hers is not a morally abstract commendation of past events, but a politically grounded judgement of tendencies, decisions and mentalities that, in her view, contributed to the well-known "end of the story". Concerning Jewish attitudes, the contingent origin of events - what Arendt called the "price of freedom" - has a special significance. Even if one must empathize with European Jews, who lived pressed by an overwhelming anti-Semitism, and whose options were socially and politically limited, one's justification of their dominant pre-1933 models of behavior implies that resisting, changing circumstances, and avoiding later developments was not possible. In other terms, means that *their destruction was irresistible*, what is another way of saying that it was *necessary*. In the case of European Jewish history, denying the contingent "might have been otherwise" implies a sinister meaning.

It is also inaccurate, in terms of historical records. Arendt herself escaped in 1933, when the options were even narrower than before. Individuals, groups, movements responded in different ways to the "Jewish Question" and to anti-Semitism itself. Jews had emigrated or stayed, they had assimilated or turned orthodox, they had been drawn into political movements (Zionist, socialist, communist, nationalist), or they had remained individually indifferent, opting for discretion. In the "end of the story", however, millions

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<sup>159</sup> Review: The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of the Period of Absolutism in Central Europe, by Selma Stern (review by Arendt), *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1952), pp. 176-178



had died, and the late 1940s was a time for a critical re-evaluation of this story, including of the Jewish attitudes, of their actions and inactions.

It is in this context that Arendt's following sentence (indeed, a judgement) must be read and interpreted:

"...the misfortune of the Jewish people...has been that the parvenu has been more important than the pariah".<sup>160</sup>

At great extent, my quest for the pariah's meaning evolves around this statement: the *pariah* should have been more important, more determinant than the *parvenu* (in broader terms, the "social climber"). To understand it, I shall recall the "beginning of the story". The modern condition of Jews in Europe was the *pariah condition*. Max Weber defined Jews as pariahs, as a sort of caste, for they constituted a "social group lacking autonomous political organization" and having "a far-reaching distinctiveness in economic functioning". Moreover, for Weber, the social separation of Jews, complemented by their political powerlessness, was compensated by a Jewish faith in God and an expectation of a "messianic kingdom". Jews, lacking a stable ground in concrete world, sought a "tie", in Weber's terms, to an extra-world. Weber also attributed to Jews a "resentment", a longing for revenge, in consequence of this position.<sup>161</sup>

Compared to Arendt's analysis, Weber's Jewish archetype mixed sociological definitions with religious "essentialization". In explaining Jews both through their economic modern condition and their ancient beliefs, Weber's archetype resembled a stereotype, in the sense of a fixed image/impression, which denies Jews a historically conditioned, yet not deterministic position. Arendt told a different story. The beginning, as it was delineated in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, must be fully quoted:

"Jewish history offers the extraordinary spectacle of a people, unique in this respect, which began its history with a well-defined concept of history and an almost conscious resolution to achieve a well-circumscribed plan on earth and then, without given up this concept, avoided all political action for two thousand years. The result was that the political history of the Jewish people became even more dependent upon unforeseen, accidental factors than the history of other nations, so that the Jews stumbled from one role to the other and accepted responsibility for none."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Arendt, H. 'Active Patience', TJW, p. 141

<sup>161</sup> Weber, M. *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretive sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. University of California Press, 1978. See chapter "Pariah People and Ressentiment: Judaism versus Hinduism", p. 493

<sup>162</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 9

Jews, according to Arendt, were born as a political people. They had a historical view and a political purpose. Even if moved by an “almost conscious resolution” (“almost-conscious” perhaps due to the theological inspiration to their acts), ancient Jews acted, and created a polity organized around certain laws, and limited into a certain geography (the “well-circumscribed plan”). But exodus marked a rupture in Jewish history. After the traumatic destruction of the temple by the Romans, and after the defeat of the Maccabean revolts in ancient Palestine, Jews reinterpreted themselves as a cultural-spiritual, yet non-political community. “Without giving up” the historical “concept”, and so being dependent on a nostalgia of a foundational past and on a hope for a redemptive future, Jews avoided action, that is, avoided initiating new circumstances in the present. Jewish actors were either dead (the biblical patriarchs and prophets) or unborn (the imagined Messiah).

By living in “diasporic” conditions, “a people without a government, without a country, and without a language”, in other words, a people scattered around many countries, speaking many languages, consenting to many governments was gradually defined by, among other characteristics, a “lack of political ability and judgment”.<sup>163</sup> One crucial consequence of this Jewish withdraw from politics and from history (which, in Arendt’s sense, constitute the “realm of action”) was that Jewish destiny became completely dependent on external “accidental factors” – the history of others. Their geographical, social and economic positions were limited by the few options available to them. Thus they “stumbled from one role to the other”, because these roles were not designed, nor willed by them. Political responsibility, an underlying theme of Arendt’s thinking, was absent from the modern view of Jews. In general, Jews accommodated to circumstances, instead of “responding” to them.

### **3.1 The Pariah Becomes Usurer and Financier**

Among the roles that Jews “stumbled upon”, the economical one was central. In Middle Ages and early modernity, given the Christian taboos concerning the use of money and the activity of usury, Jews, forming a caste to which was denied access to normal society and economy, found in financial transactions their means of endurance. Living in ghettos, whose inner economic activity was “limited to minor craftwork and peddling”, “the Jews came into contact with other people only during catastrophes and

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

expulsions.”<sup>164</sup> The exception was the usurer, or later the court Jew, who held the monopoly of what Arendt called the “ghetto’s foreign commerce”. The court Jew became the “representative of his people”, the Jew ascribed to contact Christian princes and rulers, and also to sustain his fellow coreligionists, who “depended on his charity”.<sup>165</sup>

The relation so established between Jews and non-Jews was *economical* and *utilitarian*. Wealthy Jews – financial agents, usurers, suppliers of money and products – were *tolerated* as long as they proved to be *useful*, specially to the court (thus, the designation of court Jew or *Hofjude*) – “they had ascended the throne by the grace of the princes and their own money”<sup>166</sup>. Princes and rulers used Jewish resources to build infrastructure, to wage wars, to adorn palaces, or simply to enrich themselves. Frederick I from Prussia, for instance, accepted the fifty wealthiest Jews who were expelled by Leopold I, from Austria. These rich Jews, to settle in Berlin, should invest in industries and pay special taxes for travelling, marrying, having children. They could not trade wood, tobacco, leather, wine, nor practice specialized arts, and they were also barred from guilds, and they were forbidden of building a synagogue.<sup>167</sup> Frederick II, in “The Charter Decreed for the Jews of Prussia” (1750), conditioned the permanence of Jews to certain economic obligations and prohibitions, and defined “the money-business” as the reason (the ground) of Jewish permanence in Prussia.<sup>168</sup>

In the historical process in which “the Jewish usurer rose first from court Jew to creditor of absolutist states”<sup>169</sup>, the wealthy Jew was caught in the same politically unstable relation. Being a pariah, he had access to a specific Jewish trans-national economy, which had put him in the privileged position of being the prince’s, and later the state’s, financial agent. On the other hand, his international position in economic terms coincided with his rootless situation from a political point of view. His existence – the “tolerance” of his existence – was dependent on his money. What was valued was not his culture, his religion, nor his own individuality, but his resources. He embodied a monetary function, so his rights (the right to move, the right to own a house, the right to build a synagogue) were conditioned by the fulfillment of this function. Jews literally needed *to*

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<sup>164</sup> Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, TJW, p. 70

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>166</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 8

<sup>167</sup> Elon, A. *The Pity of It All: a history of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933*. New York: Metropolitan, 2002, p. 14

<sup>168</sup> [http://www.berlin.ucla.edu/research/texts/Frederick\\_the\\_Great.pdf](http://www.berlin.ucla.edu/research/texts/Frederick_the_Great.pdf), p. 4

<sup>169</sup> Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 71

*pay for rights*.<sup>170</sup> Amos Elon described the “newly emerging middle class of Berlin” as being predominantly formed by “well-to-do Jews who lacked citizenship rights or the courage to demand them. Their toleration could be abrogated at any moment.”<sup>171</sup>

This Jewish condition was further weakened by its relations to different strata of non-Jewish society, which, in general, regarded Jews with hostility and resentment because of the particularities of the “caste”. Decadent aristocrats, for instance, eventually needed to borrow Jewish money (to afford the old way of life), being thus indebted to interests and rates administered by Jews. For German Junkers, Jews became the symbol of the disintegration of feudal stability. The bourgeoisie and the peasantry, on their turn, resented Jewish “special” relation to monarchs, while despising the “unproductive” and “parasitical” nature of the Jewish “mobile capital”, not visibly integrated to any form of social labor or work. Common natives regarded the title of “privileged Jews” (in Prussia, court Jews were officially called *Generalpriviligierte Juden*) as indicating an actual distinction of “special rights” who most people did not have.<sup>172</sup> As political protection did not mean social acceptance, the unstable status quo of paid tolerance could be suddenly destroyed by social revolts and official expulsions, when the resentment of depending on Jews (and the eventual debts and competition that resulted from of this dependence) surpassed the economic calculus of “toleration”.<sup>173</sup>

### **3.2 The Internal Life of the Pariah-caste**

The Jewish ghetto, shtetl or community<sup>174</sup> was a small society outside society, or a “caste” with a minimal contact with the host society. Prior to emancipation, the Jewish community self-organized around laws, rituals and positions which were relatively autonomous within the small space of the ghetto. But the ghetto’s inner complexity,

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<sup>170</sup> In Arendt’s view of this Jewish situation in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, “The laws guaranteeing *protection of residence, person, and property* – that is, human rights as understood by the eighteenth century – were *paid for* by prosperous Jews in the form of special taxes and achievements...Human rights were ranked according to one’s ability to pay.” Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 84

<sup>171</sup> Elon, A., op. cit., p. 37

<sup>172</sup> Wealthy Jews, according to Dohm, received from Fredrick I “all sort of favors and support”. Quoted by Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 8

<sup>173</sup> Writing on the edict of 1812 and “the frank pro-Jewish attitude of the state” during the Prussian reforms, Arendt stated that political melioration did not mean social integration: “At that time, however, state and society were very far from being identical and the absolute monarchy still remained absolutely separated from the people even when it carried through measures in behalf of the people, such as the emancipation of the Prussian serf.” Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 27

<sup>174</sup> I will refer, here, to the generic term of “ghetto” as a separated Jewish community, without adding further distinctive reference to the variety of historical communities in Central and Eastern Europe. A ghetto signifies here, generically, the living situation, conditioned by modern interactions between Jews and non-Jews, of a relatively separate communitarian existence.

divided around the synagogue, the school, the kosher butchery, the household, the artisan workshop etc., was unified around the figure of the “representative”, the Jew or the small circle of Jews who, by their privileged access to rulers, governed (politically) and sustained (economically) the Jewish community.

In this context, inner “democracy” (arguing and debating were essential to Jewish diasporic existence)<sup>175</sup> was constrained by the religious opinion of rabbis and, more important, by the pragmatic decisions of wealthy Jews, who became the actual leaders. Considering the pariah condition, in special the external pressure exercised by host societies, the lasting model was that of an oligarchy or plutocracy.<sup>176</sup> The decision-making was disputed by religious and economic principles – both a-political principles, in Arendt’s view. As everything, ultimately, depended on the king’s “tolerance”, the dominant criteria was economic: “Our taxes”, said a rabbi in Cologne, “protect us”.<sup>177</sup> Jews were regarded as money-bags, and so started to think of themselves, when it came to evaluate their relation to non-Jewish governors, as merely sources of money. They incorporated to their worldview the image of an external world which was open only for a limited financial-personal interaction.

Concerning the general population of the ghetto, this created a situation which Arendt called, following Bernard Lazare, “double slavery”.<sup>178</sup> Their existence depended on wealthy Jews, while the existence of wealthy Jews depended on kings and rulers. Middle and low-class Jews - artisans, traders, wanderer and beggars - were subject to a

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<sup>175</sup> Drawing a general image of the *kehillah* (community) in modern Western Europe, Kochan stated that “*Pari passu* with the exercise of these powers, rabbis and other scholars debate virtually every topic in classic political theory. I do not wish to claim that the particular topic will necessarily take the form of a systematic treatise – rather, it is through and amidst the clash of specific interests and viewpoints that the topic is debated”. Kochan, L. *The Making of Western Jewry: 1600-1819*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. 2004, p. 2

<sup>176</sup> Describing a “medieval Jewish community”, Walzer wrote: “In principle, these were democratic communities, governed by an assembly of male members, meeting in the synagogue. External pressures tended to produce oligarchy or, more precisely, plutocracy, - the rule of the heads of the wealthiest families, who were best able to deal with avaricious kinds. But the rule of the wealthy was continually challenged by the authority of the rabbinic court.” Walzer, M. *Spheres of Justice*, p. 72. Also according to Arendt, “Out of the democratic organization of a pariah people there grew the plutocratic regime of a doubly powerful class of parvenus.” Arendt, ‘All Israel Takes Care of Israel’, TJW, p. 154

<sup>177</sup> To the question of who rules the community, the answer was “normally it is the wealthy who rule”. Kochan acknowledges that the conflict between religious/philosophical and economic/pragmatic considerations, that is, “conflict between rabbis and parnass will avert an undue concentration of power” [parnass are the elder, “guardians”, normally the wealthy]. But the author then justified that the ultimate reasoning belonged to the wealthy (whom employed the rabbis): “it is essential that this should be so. The elected leader is by no means to be regarded primarily as the representative of ‘his’ kehillah, but rather as its guardian, his wealth serving as a weapon, to be wielded for the benefit of all members.” Kochan, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>178</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jew as a Pariah: a Hidden Tradition’, p. 284

leader who, by its turns, was subject to an external ruler. In this vertical structure, the factor of utility was weakened as one looked down to the bottom: only Jewish leaders were useful. The rest, in contrast, was useless, tolerated insofar the Jewish leader could justify his instrumentality. Being the visible face of Jews, the wealthy leader had behind himself an entire population that existed because of his political contact, worked upon his economic activities and survived because of his charity.

To be sure, the “slavery” referred to Arendt had nothing to do with compulsory work, nor exploration of the labor force of slaves. Jews were analogous to ancient slaves in the sense that they lived an economical existence lacking political rights. Even wealthy Jews, living in affluence and comfort, enjoying limited freedom of movement, developed a “slave mentality” by internalizing the need to be useful to their Christian or secular “masters”. Internally, though, there was no class division in Jewish communities. As Arendt reminded, the poor were not explored, and the rich were not integrated into a system of production. The ghetto was thus a parallel world also in economic terms.<sup>179</sup> There was a “fateful personal union” around the wealthy Jew and the rest of the Jewish community, which helped to sustain a delusion about their “slave-condition”: inside the ghetto, there were festivals and marriages, households and small shops, and a communitarian life with relatively economical, spiritual, and artistic development.

Indeed, as we shall see, Arendt regarded pre-emancipation Jewish communities as having, despite all of its structural fragilities, an overwhelming “humanity”.<sup>180</sup> This is one of the first meanings of the pariah condition, according to Arendt: standing outside all social connections, a pariah-caste develops a warmth, a sense of solidarity, which was a remarkable aspect of Jewish communities prior to the crisis precipitated by emancipation and assimilation. By not being tied to society’s conventions, and by being free from social prejudices, pariahs kept a sense of proximity which gradually disappeared in the process that she called the “rise of the social”. The pariah’s vantage point taught Hannah Arendt that, when a society justifies oppression in productive, mythological or ideological terms, only those standing outside social codes and rites can retain a sense of

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<sup>179</sup> Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 71

<sup>180</sup> Arendt spoke of a specific “beautiful” Jewish “humanity” [*Menschlichkeit*] and “absence of prejudice” [*Vorurteilslosigkeit*], due to their loss of a political world [*Weltverlustes*] and their standing outside all social connections [*Außerhalb-aller-gesellschaftlichen-Bindungen-Stehen*]. Arendt, H. *Ich will...*, p. 66 In ‘The Crisis of Culture’, Arendt wrote of a discovery “in those who were not admitted to society certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society”; examples of these groups are “workers and proletarians, but also, more subtly, in the role assigned to homosexuals (for instance, in Proust) or to Jews, that is, to groups which society had never quite absorbed.” Arendt, BPF, p. 197.

solidarity and intimacy; and, if these pariahs are denied a political framework to voice their judgments as outsiders, they can still build, in the absence of a polity of rights, a small community of affection.

### 3.3 The Problem of Choosing Life

Along with the social question and the detachment of the political from the economical, Arendt's distinction between *mere life* and *good life* is another notorious source of misunderstanding. Interpreters focused on Arendt's Hellenism tend to discard this topic as an unjustified anachronism, unfitted to contemporary politics. Accordingly, in democratic mass societies, one would hardly figure out the relevance of an agonistic heroism inspired in Greek poetry. I don't intend to clean Arendt's political thinking off its ancient inspirations. They are an important component of works as *The Human Condition*, and must not be explained away as mere theoretical instruments to the presentation of a truer, hidden sense of Arendt's book. I just want to read the theme of courage with a different background, that of the Jewish question, and the specific case of the court Jews, to bring further elucidation to it.<sup>181</sup>

The principle of life is constitutive of Jewish thought since biblical times: "...I have set before you life and death, ...therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live..."<sup>182</sup> After the dispersion, in the moment that, according to Arendt, Jews withdraw from history, this principle received an additional validation. Its lasting authority was laid down in the Babylon exile around the idea that "The law of the kingdom is law" (*Dina de-malkhutah Dina*).<sup>183</sup> This was a practical application, to a dispersed people, of the commandment to choose life: whenever you are, accept the existent political conditions. Maimonides, for instance, had argued that religious martyrdom (or political self-immolation) was not acceptable in Jewish terms, since it was senseless to die for the sake of Jewish principles: these principles could only be exercised in life.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Comparing the Greek background of *The Human Condition* with the Jewish basis of Arendt's early texts, Bernstein writes that "...one should not forget that *The Human Condition* was published in 1958, when Arendt was 52. Her political education had begun 25 years earlier, and her primary concern had been to understand Jewish politics – or, rather, the failures of Jewish politics. It was her reflections on this phenomenon that initially led her to advocate a politics from below, a politics that emerges spontaneously among a people who assume responsibility for their actions." Bernstein, R. J., op. cit., pp. 31-32

<sup>182</sup> Dt. 30:19

<sup>183</sup> Kochan, op. cit., p. 108

<sup>184</sup> Schama, S. *A História dos Judeus: à procura das palavras: 1000 a.C. – 1492 d.C.* São Paulo: Cia das Letras. 2015, p. 368

This transformed Jews perhaps in the most peaceful of European peoples. Joseph Roth celebrated this by recalling Eastern Jews – “the most antimilitaristic people in the world” - who preferred migrating to another continent or even cutting a finger out than enlisting to an army.<sup>185</sup> Acts of physical violence by Jews, very rare indeed, were as a rule reactions to aggressions, and were never sustained in a systematic or institutional way. The established Jewish mode of responding to violence was to be more discrete, silent, to “choose life”, to keep working, and to avoid contact with gentiles. Reacting with counter-violence or with protests, in the imagination of most diasporic Jews, would only incite anti-Semites. In a similar way, Jews never reclaimed political power, and before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they did not advocate in a significant way any radical transformation of societies. The Maccabean martyrs of Masada were long ago dead, and their acts did not inspire modern Jews.

“The Jewish will to live”, Arendt wrote, “is both famous and infamous”.<sup>186</sup> It was famous because, as long as civilization worked upon a basic humanism, limiting its violence with pragmatic-economic and religious-moral considerations, the “will to live” was responsible for the notorious endurance of Jews as a distinctive group in history. Jews stood as an exception to the rise and fall of peoples. Yet in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became “infamous”, for Jews were unprepared to match the radical, unparalleled violence unleashed by Nazi anti-Semitism. Jews became famous for having *subsisted throughout centuries*, and infamous for being easily *destroyed in no more than five years*. If, on the one hand, under “normal” conditions, Jewish survival became a sort of historical rule, on the other hand, under “abnormal” circumstances, Jewish extermination was practically normalized. Historically, and I believe there is no exaggeration in this statement, *the outcome of the Jewish principle of life was the realization of Jewish death*.

Arendt formulated it as follows:

“...now the dreadful time has come when every day proves that death begins his reign of terror precisely when life becomes the highest good; that he who prefers to *live* on his knees will *die* on his knees; that no one is more easily murdered than a slave.”<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> “The Eastern Jews were the most heroic of pacifists. They were martyrs for pacifism. They chose crippledom. No one has yet celebrated the heroism of these Jews”. Roth, J, op. cit., pp. 93-94

<sup>186</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jewish Army – The Beginning of Jewish Politics?’, TJW, p. 137

<sup>187</sup> Arendt, ‘Not One Kaddish Will be Said’, p. 163



In other words: if one chooses mere life, if one displays a “will to survive at any price”<sup>188</sup>, one degrades oneself, becoming unprotected and exposing one’s own life to further aggressions and humiliations, and even to death. This insight informed Arendt’s distinction between life, in a mere natural-physical sense of survival, and what Greeks called “good life”, or political life in Arendt’s view, a life under human conditions, in a worldly-community supporting a juridical and meaningful existence, in which individuals have a stable framework to protect and develop their lives, while acting collectively, under relative freedom.<sup>189</sup>

### 3.4 The Institution of the Parvenu

Michael Graetz contested the charge of court Jews’ *political inertia*. According to him, in several episodes, wealthy Jews used their economic influence to advance “specifically Jewish political aims”. He offered three examples, from different contexts: first, the case of Wolf Wertheimer, creditor of the Habsburg Empire, who mobilized other court Jews and the Christian princes of Saxony and Bavaria to pressure the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa to revoke an edict that expelled Jews from Prague, Bohemia and Moldavia; second, the story of the economic leadership of the Bordeaux Jewish community, who aligned with non-Jewish bourgeoisie, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to defy the ancient regime in France; third, the request and pressures of Jewish notables in Prussia, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for the improvement of the conditions of poor Jewish populations in Eastern Europe. In the last case, Gerson Bleichröder, creditor, economic assessor and friend of Bismarck, approached the Prussian Chancellor in 1877 in the following terms:

“For twenty-two years I have served Your Majesty faithfully, without any compensation. Now the time has come to request such a compensation. What I ask is equality for the Jews of Romania.”<sup>190</sup>

I think that these counter examples and arguments can help us to refine some aspects of Arendt’s perspective. Court Jews may have behaved, eventually, in accordance to principles others than self-interest. Albert Ballin, one of the *Kaiserjuden*, engaged in diplomatic efforts (with an English court Jew) to avoid the First World War. Bleichröder had “lost a substantial sum of money as a result” of helping German aristocrats and

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<sup>188</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jewish Army...’, p. 137

<sup>189</sup> “...politics is never for the sake of life. As far as the members of the polis are concerned, household life exists for the sake of the ‘good life’ in the *polis*.” Arendt, HC, p. 37

<sup>190</sup> Graetz, M. “Jewry in the modern period: the role of the ‘rising class’ in the politicization of Jews in Europe”. In: *Assimilation and Community: the Jews in nineteenth-century Europe*. Edited by Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 172

sparing economic scandals involving Bismarck.<sup>191</sup> They were not only non-egoistic in pressing for social and political improvements to average Jews, but they also behaved eventually in accordance to national interests.<sup>192</sup> These, however, were either exceptions or isolated political initiatives that, in general, were neutralized by the fundamental apolitical character of their relations with rulers.

Even if they used their influence eventually, their basic function was to serve, not to change power.<sup>193</sup> In sticking obstinately to the principle that “Without money there’s no living”<sup>194</sup>, court Jews ended up in isolation or despair. Bleichröder tried to emulate aristocracy and bought for himself the title of “von”: he became Gerson *von* Bleichröder. Albert Ballin tried to dissuade his friend the Kaiser from entering the war. After hearing the news of the Kaiser’s abdication as a consequence of the German defeat, Ballin committed suicide. Walther Rathenau, the other “Kaiser-Jew”, who “obsessively declared himself a Jew” to every new acquaintance, wrote a pamphlet defending inter-marriage as a way to “arianize” the “unshapely” physical outlook of German Jews. After the First World War, and after secretly working for the reestablishment of the German arms industry, Rathenau, who said to Kurt Blumenfeld he would accept the Foreign Affairs ministry to “break down the barriers that anti-Semites have erected to isolate us”, and who refused to use a bodyguard, was assassinated by right-wing militants in the streets of Berlin.<sup>195</sup>

To be sure, there was a rationality in court Jew’s behavior, if one understands as rational a continuous avoidance of open conflict for the sake of preservation. But Arendt warned that this line of reasoning is blind to larger processes and broader relations that may threaten household security and even the mere physical life. Moreover, a rationality that establishes lower parameters to itself ends up degrading relations. Arendt wrote

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<sup>191</sup> Graez, op. cit., p. 172

<sup>192</sup> For a description of the ambivalent relation between the Kaiser Wilhelm II, who regarded average Jews as “parasites” and held a “traditional” antisemitism, and “his” rich Jews, like Ballin and James Simon, who were his close friends, see: Elon, op. cit., p. 265-267

<sup>193</sup> According to M. Meyer, Court Jews “were accepted because they served the interests of monarch or noble, not because had been any change in thinking about the Jew. The Court Jews were acquainted with great political figures, spoke a number of languages, and were often assimilated in their manners and dress. But in the realm of Christian intellectual life even the exceptional Court Jews were not participants. Though business connections between Jews and non-Jews were common, cultural and social relationships were virtually non-existent.” Meyer, M. A. *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish identity and European culture in Germany, 1749-1824*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1972, p. 13

<sup>194</sup> “what the rich Jew said to the poor Jew a century earlier: ‘Without money there’s no living’”. Kochan, op. cit., p. 191

<sup>195</sup> Elon, op. cit., pp. 200, 236, 269, 364

sarcastically that “...every program that takes the status quo into account also helps to realize it.”<sup>196</sup> A general mistrust in politics, and a specific Jewish belief that nothing but private endurance could be politically achieved, were both symptomatic of an epoch in which “anyone who can see farther than the tip of his own nose is said to live in a fantasy world”.<sup>197</sup>

For Arendt, however, how would have looked like the alternative paths – the “might have been otherwise”? In the article *Jewish Politics*, Arendt listed, negatively, notions that, in her view, had been guiding Jewish leaders, and thus characterizing Jewish *apolitia*, until then (1942). I will briefly comment these aspects, to draw initial answers to the relation between the pariah situation and politics:

**“abhorrence for principles”**: as we saw, Jewish leaders may have acted politically, *eventually*. But they lacked vision, and their acts had no consistency. They behaved mostly seeking “opportunistic success”, forming thus a view based on their self-importance and their prestige, something which could not be easily accommodated with the principle of acting on behalf of their people and other peoples. Indeed, they were typically moderns in the sense of being confused by the “relativity of all values”, by assuming that human relations were fundamentally negotiations from one-to-one, and everything was based on momentary, personal “valuations”. As Arendt defended, politics demands stabilization and equalization: it creates a framework of institutions and spaces where men, in their plurality, can be equalized by law, being thus able to discuss and decide in horizontal spheres. This was not at stake in the game of paying for protection and blackmailing rulers with the idea of exchanging goods for some political concessions.

**“fear of betting on the wrong horse”**: for wealthy Jews, political calculation meant seeking secure alternatives, which could preserve an already fragile status quo. Fear, indeed, was a dominant principle of behavior (being, thus, a principle of non-action): they did not want to risk their position; they did not imagine risking their careers; they feared kings and they feared host societies; they feared admitting, publicly, that Jews had specific demands (let us remember that Arendt lived during the 1930s in Paris, when the Rothschild opposed Jewish protests intended to pressure the French government to resist

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<sup>196</sup> Arendt, ‘The Crisis of Zionism’, TJW, p. 184

<sup>197</sup> Arendt, ‘Jewish Politics’, TJW, p. 242

Hitler. The Rothschild also lamented the large influx of “visible” *Otsjuden* into French streets, which, in the family’s view, could lead to more anti-Semitism. They did not want to compromise their status as “good French”).<sup>198</sup> Courage, as we shall see in detail, was a prerequisite to politics, not necessarily leading to the ancient warrior’s heroism, but at least to the initiative of making oneself vulnerable in the agitation of the public affairs: “Whoever entered the political realm had first to be ready to risk his life, and too great a love for life obstructed freedom, was a sure sign of slavishness.”<sup>199</sup>

**“admiration of those who hold power on this earth”**: Jewish leaders seldom thought in terms of direct action. Acting as equals “among peers” was outside their imagination. The shortcut to power was to befriend with the ruler. In times of social anti-Semitism, this also seemed “rational”. Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, court-factor in Württemberg and finance minister of the Duke Karl Alexander, was publicly hanged by “natives” after the Duke passed away and Oppenheimer lost his protection. Several Jews in the turbulent times between the World Wars suffered from a certain king’s nostalgia, as they feared, with good reasons, that the fall of kings would leave them exposed to ethnic-social resentments. This was especially true in the regions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, a multi-ethnic state in which Jews enjoyed juridical protection and even some degrees of national autonomy. Joseph Roth, who spent his life around Brody, Lemberg, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, said that his “strongest experience was the War and the destruction of my fatherland, the only one I ever had, the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary”.<sup>200</sup> In the politico-historical imagination of Jews, security was associated with a benevolent monarch. The idea was: better being subject to the personal extravagances of a friendly absolute ruler than being exposed to the emotions of hostile societies.

This “admiration of the powerful” led Jews to interpret politics as a sort of diplomacy behind the scenes, negotiated in palace rooms, not in public spaces. For conspiracy theorists, this was a proof of a Jewish hidden manipulation. But, for Jews, it meant something different: they did not want to provoke anti-Semitic feelings by

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<sup>198</sup> Young-Bruhel, E. *Hannah Arendt: for the love of the world*. 2a ed. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 120-121. Also, for Arendt, politicization of Jews was undermined by “a shared Jewish *fear of admitting that there are and always have been divergent interests between Jews and segments of the people among whom they live*”. Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 51

<sup>199</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 36

<sup>200</sup> Roth, J. op. cit., p. 141. Not coincidentally, Arendt affirmed that Austrian-Jews did not develop a tradition of “rebels” and critics until the end of the first war (with the Social-Democrats). Karl Kraus was an exception among Jews that “preferred to trust themselves to the Hapsburg monarchy’s protection”. Arendt, OT, p. 83

embracing this or that position in *public*.<sup>201</sup> This tactic of appeasing anti-Semitic masses with silence accustomed Jews in a political quietism neighboring cowardice. Spaces “behind the scenes” are necessarily private, outside the “light” of the public. Jewish action could have been displayed in public, perhaps not as an open defiance to anti-Semitic feelings, but as genuine articulations of a people who had been enduring humiliation and oppression. The case of Jewish sages who accepted open “debates” with Christian theologians, in the middle ages, could be seen as an early display of Jewish courage, later matched by the German-Jewish revolutionaries of 1848, who argued not only for an abstract idea of a German nation, but also voiced their specific “prison” as Jews in Germany.<sup>202</sup>

**“reluctance to mobilize the energies of their own people”<sup>203</sup>:** Inherently tied to the former, this topic touches another important theme in Arendt’s political work: the politicization of masses. As I am arguing, the modern “eclipse of authority” involved two problems of grounding and stabilizing political communities. Foundations started to collapse, as kings were no longer legitimate leaders. On the other side, the collapse of traditional pillars – of authority, of religious norms, of, in Freudian terms, repressive expedients instituted by “civilization” – liberated unprecedented social emotions, amplified by a sense of helplessness and disorientation among the masses. For Arendt, both extremes – the concentration of authority in one man and the dissolution of any form of legitimated authority – were dangerous forms of de-politicization. One of Arendt’s main concerns related to the replacement of amorphous masses by politically responsible and discernible groups and individuals.

This, applied to the Jewish condition, meant that individual Jews, out of their different orientations and in their different regions, could have been allowed to participate, in some way, in their political process, forming their own opinions and

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<sup>201</sup> Graetz, in this sense, undermines his own defense of the “political aspect of court Jews” writing about Bleichröder and Alphonse de Rothschild negotiations on the end of the Franco-Prussian War: “Although their principal interest focused on financial transactions, they were not chary of involvement in politics and diplomacy, *as long as these affairs were conducted behind closed doors.*” (emphasis added) Graetz, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>202</sup> Johann Jacoby, a German Jewish revolutionary, said “Since I am at once a Jew and a German, I cannot become free as German without also becoming free as a Jew. I cannot separate the two...we all languish together in one great prison”. Among the 230 Berliners killed by Prussian troops in 1848, 21 were Jews (proportionally, a number three times higher their share in the general population). Elon, op. cit., p. 164, 172. I will return to Jacoby’s case later.

<sup>203</sup> The topics were extracted from Arendt, ‘Jewish Politics’, p. 241

displaying their own views. It could have been a matter of acting “from below”, not being led “from above”. In the grounding sense of Arendt, the basic political relation is not conducting others, but acting *with others*. Politics is about creating spaces for plurality, not controlling plurality. As we shall see in the next section, Arendt ratified this point during the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Supported by factual evidences, Arendt argued that the vertical organization of Jewish communities, cooperating with external rulers, facilitated their own liquidation: in communities with *no* Jewish institutions, where Jews were left to their own improvised decisions, the numbers of killing had not been so high as in places with established *Judenräte*. It was another example for Arendt’s conviction that improvisation was better than rigidly organized bureaucracies and verticalized institutions with no space for inner democracy and spontaneous initiative.

### **3.5 The Pariah Between Adaptation and Martyrdom**

The role of the Jewish councils (*Judenräte*) established by Adolf Eichmann’s office emerged during his trial in Jerusalem, which Arendt covered for the magazine *The New Yorker* in 1961. Arendt said that this was a factual matter she could not avoid, since it informed part of the discussion during the procedures in the court. The topic, however, was not presented as proof to any general thesis in the report, neither was it related to the central topic of her analysis, Adolf Eichmann himself. Moreover, Arendt insisted that, by presenting the story of the *Judenräte*, she was not using it as a general illustration of the history of Jews in Europe: “My book is a report *about the trial*, not a representation of that history”.<sup>204</sup> When asked about the historical adaptation of Jews to “Gentiles” in Europe, Arendt also stressed that she did not work, in the report, “deeply into Jewish history”, and that this sort of historical paradigm could only apply to “the initial states of the Nazi regime”.<sup>205</sup>

For didactical purposes, I propose here to mitigate Arendt’s own conscious affirmation. I propose to relate her approach to the Jewish councils with her earlier stories about Jewish *apolitia*. There is a line one cannot ignore. Moreover, approaching it, I intend to bring more clarity to the articulation of her Jewish writings, her report on Eichmann and her general political theory. By doing this, one can avoid the common perplexity around Arendt’s statements in the case of the Jewish leaders under Eichmann,

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<sup>204</sup> Arendt, “The Eichmann Case and The Germans: A conversation with Thilo Koch”, TJW, p. 486.

<sup>205</sup> Arendt, “Answers to Questions...”, p. 482

for they were not an aleatory commentary, but a part of a consistent discourse on Jewish politics. Moreover, one can also question, for instance, the opinion that *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, despite being “Arendt’s most intensely Jewish work”, did not discriminate “carefully among the various stages of the ‘silent’ cooperation between the Nazi regime and Jewish organizations and committees”, resulting thus in a “confused” judgment, which seemed to ignore questions such as,

“Was it so hard to grasp that they [Jewish leaders] would interpret Nazi extermination policy as a more massive form of the traditional anti-Semitism to which they had been subjected since time immemorial? Was it so impossible to see that the Jewish councils tried to keep a semblance of order and everydayness in running the lives of their communities, and somehow still entertained the hope that they could influence and maybe even postpone the worst from happening to them?”<sup>206</sup>

Let me try to clarify these questions. The Eichmann report was published in 1963. Arendt had been dealing with Jewish affairs since the 1930s, and had been complaining against the dominant form of Jewish leaderships since then. The question of responsibility and inaction was already in her horizon. Even accepting that, in Eichmann’s text, Arendt dealt with a specific form of Jewish politics, within a radically new context of powerlessness, I assume that the topic becomes less controversial if we relate it to the longer story of Jewish quietism. This was also the position, for instance, of the greatest historian of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg.<sup>207</sup> To deal with this difficult point, we don’t need a chronological line of causation, but a historical background, to relate somehow the court Jews of the eighteenth century established by Christian kings as “Jewish dictators”<sup>208</sup> to the *Junderäte* of the Nazi period, which symbolized the “moral collapse of respectable Jewish society”.<sup>209</sup> In this regard, the contrasting types of the *pariah* and the *parvenu*, and the relating oppositions *life vs. good life, fear vs. courage, private vs. public* are, in my reading, indispensable references to understand Arendt’s claims.

Chaim Rumkowski and Adam Czerniakow embody some aspects of these oppositions. They form an opposition in itself. Rumkowski was chosen, on the basis of his economic activities, by the Nazi officers in the region of Lodz as the governor of the local ghetto, the second largest in Poland. The Jewish leaders, as Arendt reminded, were

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<sup>206</sup> Benhabib, S. *The Reluctant Modernism...*, pp. 179-181

<sup>207</sup> Hilberg, R. *A Destruição dos Judeus Europeus*. Barueri: Amarelly, 2016, p. 1282

<sup>208</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 80, f 17.

<sup>209</sup> Arendt, ‘Eichmann...’, p. 81

responsible for formulating lists of Jewish inhabitants, controlling their finances and transferring money, goods and propriety to Nazi authorities in order to pay for the “expenses” with transport and “relocation”, supplying Jewish “police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains”, distributing “Yellow Star badges” etc.<sup>210</sup> Rumkowski accepted these tasks with an unmatched determination. His belief in the principle of adaptation transformed the ghetto of Lodz in a small factory, whose workers were subject to a situation worse than slavery (they were not enough fed to work, and they could not be sold to another “master”), and whose politics were analogous to an illusory micro-monarchy (this small monarchy was anything but a sovereign community). The personal extravagances of Rumkowski – in his speeches, he addressed to “my Jews”; he printed currency and post stamps with his image; he “rode around in a broken-down horse-drawn carriage”<sup>211</sup>, and was ironically called “Chaim I, the king of Jews” - was only an embarrassing outcome of the tradition of vertical govern. The point to be stressed here, though, is the practical orientation adopted by him, which was a systematic application of the “principle of survival”.

“Only one thing can save us”, Rumkowski addressed the Lodz Ghetto in 1941, “a collective acceptance of a productive life, in an atmosphere of utter calm”. Rumkoswski applied the principle of compliance, assuming that the “will to live” would prevail as long as Jews could prove their utility. So his authoritarian attitude – “I will attack every symptom of corruption with the greatest severity”<sup>212</sup> – was directed against those who dared to disturb the productivity of his domain: those, for instance, who tried to tell the truth about the deportations and who realized that the Nazis were no longer abiding to the laws of economic instrumentality. Rumkowski was a perfect leader of a perfected system, for he emulated the prevailing terms of larger society: when the deportations were set in, he threatened to “put all the parasites on the lists”.<sup>213</sup> The irony of this part of the story is that the Lodz Ghetto achieved a certain success. It was one of the first to be established

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<sup>210</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>212</sup> Speech of C. Rumkowski at 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1941, quoted in: *Lodz Ghetto: inside a community under siege. Compiled and edited by Alan Adelson and Robert Lapidus*. Viking, 1989, p. 109. Rumkowski also managed to turn the “ghetto courts” in the last embodiments of injustice under those conditions: he nominated the two judges of the Lodz ghetto court, where the trials had no previous investigation, no prosecutors, no defense lawyers. “Rumkowski reserved for himself the right to punish the guilty”. Trunk, I. *Judenrate: the Jewish councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi occupation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 182

<sup>213</sup> He also complained, when the Nazis informed that Gypsies were to be transferred to Lodz, that “Gypsies are the sort of people who can do anything”. *Lodz Ghetto...*, p. xviii, 174



and the last to be disabled. Some of its buildings are standing today, for there was no revolt in Lodz.<sup>214</sup>

When the deportations to extermination camps (called “resettlements”) began, Rumkowski choose the strategy of surrendering certain groups to save others. In this moment, he was honest with his masses: “I have to perform this bloody operation myself; I simply must cut off limbs to save the body!” Or: “I came [today] like a robber to rob your dearest ones from your very hearts!”<sup>215</sup> Rumkowski once addressed the parents of soon to be deported children in the following terms: “...I never imagined I would be forced to deliver this sacrifice to the altar with my own hands. In my old age, I must stretch out my hands and beg. Brothers and sisters: Hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers: Give me your children!...Offer them up into my hands as a sacrifice, so that I can avoid having further victims...”.<sup>216</sup> He was later also killed in Auschwitz along with the last deported from Lodz.<sup>217</sup>

In every aspect, he was a startling contrast to Adam Czerniakow, the leader of the largest Polish Ghetto, Warsaw. Czerniakow also assumed that, in the “darkest chapter” of Jewish European history, it was better to negotiate “humane” small improvements with an inhuman order, so to avoid “unnecessary” pains. But Czerniakow still knew that are certain conditions more important than life itself. For Arendt, he, “who was not a rabbi but an unbeliever”, a secular Polish Jew, acted in accordance to the rabbinical saying “Let them kill you, but don’t cross the line”.<sup>218</sup> On late July 1942, after being informed by the Nazis about the beginning of deportations to Treblinka, Czerniakow tried to obtain exemptions for the ghetto’s orphans. Realizing his failure, he went back to his office, wrote a note to his wife (“*I can no longer bear all this*”), and killed himself with a capsule of cyanide. If rebellion, on a political and moral basis, coincides with the pariah’s activation, Czerniakow can be regarded as a late pariah, as one who has chosen when

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<sup>214</sup> I. Trunk argues that there were more “democratic” models of councils compared to Rumkowski’s; Rumkowski created an “exemplary ghetto”, based on the ‘rescue through work’ theory, and on total expropriation of Jewish propriety and total exploration of Jewish labor in favor of Nazi economy. Trunk, I. op. cit., p. 83

<sup>215</sup> Trunk, op. cit., p. 423

<sup>216</sup> In the original: “*Väter und Mütter, gebt mir eure Kinder!...Legt eure Opfer in meine Hände, damit ich weitere Opfer verhindern kann...*” Strzelecki, A. *The Deportation of Jews from the Lodz Ghetto to KL Auschwitz and their Extermination: a description of the events and the presentation of historical sources*. Oswiecim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Muzeum. 2006, p.27

<sup>217</sup> “...there was only one fate for Jews in German hands, whether they were cowards or heroes, humble or proud. Neither the letter [of Hans Biebow] not the special carriage were able to save Chaim Rumkowski, the king of the Jews, from the gas chamber.” Levi, P. *The Drowned and the Saved*. London: Abacus, 2001, p. 48

<sup>218</sup> Arendt, H. *Eichmann and the Holocaust*. London: Penguin. 2005, p. 64

choice was no longer relevant, and one whose initiative, the beginning of something new, meant for that context no longer natality, but self-inflicted mortality.<sup>219</sup>

Hannah Arendt stressed how many Jews had committed one of the gravest political mistakes, according to her: they had relied on a sort of wishful thinking, another form of imprisonment in the self, sustained by an unshakable optimism which neutralizes the force of facts with self-told consolations. They retained the hope that political reality would turn into something better, that the external order would reassume its normalcy, that European hosts would never “cross the line”. Rumkowski, as no other Jewish leader, combined the narrative of necessary adaptation and blind faith on external forces, as he reacted to protests of the Lodz ghetto inhabitants against the precarious food conditions:

“I can’t put any more into the soup than I have. Who is this demonstration against? Against me? I’m just a servant of the authorities. I have to bow my head and do as I’m told. No strike of yours can force me to make thicker soup, for I have nothing...The Jewish authorities are definitely doing all that can be done. I do what I can, wherever possible. I hope that the situation will improve in the near future.”<sup>220</sup>

Going back a little further: on the public shyness of French Jews during the Dreyfus Affair, an episode regarded by Arendt as a prelude to Nazism, she had written that “Precisely because they had played so small a part in the political development of the lands in which they lived, they had come, during the course of the century, to make a fetish of legal equality”. This fetish, this optimistic belief that legal equality was a metaphysical given, and not a political reality established and preserved by human action, created on these post-emancipation Jews a sense of “eternal security”.<sup>221</sup> The belief on the order’s necessity could only be sustained with the referred systematic, self-regenerated optimism, for any historically conscious Jew knew that historical realities can change. The “fetish of legality”, perhaps derived from a subjective-cognitive requirement for order, led Jews to fabricate an inner sense of normalcy, even when external reality actualized itself around abnormal patterns of anti-Semitic violence.

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<sup>219</sup> Before the act of self-sacrifice, Czerniakow also tried to keep an appearance of dignity and calm (he was like “the captain of a sinking ship who requested the band to play to raise the morale of the passengers”), having inaugurated parks for school children days before the episode of his suicide. According to Hilberg and Staron, “Czerniakow tried not to accept the truth until the very last moment. As panic gripped the ghetto, he even asked a number of SS men whether he might deny the rumors”. See Introduction, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow: a prelude to doom*. Edited by Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, Josef Kermisz. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 1999, p. 63

<sup>220</sup> *Lodz Ghetto...*, p. 412

<sup>221</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 153

The optimism broke apart when the violence of reality became literally inescapable. According to Arendt's historical analysis of the principle of life, optimism abruptly turned into suicide, into a silent martyrdom. When Hitler invaded Austria, in 1938, Austrian Jews, who had believed in the state's permanence more than any other Jew in the continent, started to invalidate the principle of life without giving up discretion and respectability: "...we have seen how quickly eloquent optimism could change to speechless pessimism". Four years before Czerniakow ingested the capsule of cyanide in Warsaw, Jews of Vienna committed suicide leaving "conventional, meaningless" letters – for, in Arendt's words, "Nobody cares about motives; they seem to be clear to all of us". Without ever discovering a "higher ideal than life", that is, without ever launching themselves into political initiative, into open protest, organized revolt, or even into public martyrdom, these law-abiding, respectable Jews became ready to die unpolitical deaths. They opted for a private martyrdom:

"There are those odd optimists among us who, having made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way."<sup>222</sup>

The absence of protest and meaningful letters was due to a combination of blind optimism with a sense of abandonment (or *Verlassenheit*, the term Arendt used in German for "loneliness"), of being left by others and by a social-cultural reality of which they imagined to be an integral part. To abandon oneself was the last stage of this process. They rebelled in private spaces, as in Max Liebermann's living room in Berlin, whose windows, after 1933, the painter kept closed ("I don't want to see this new world around me"<sup>223</sup>), and in the other private, quiet rooms where Kurt Tucholsky (in Sweden), Stefan Zweig (in Brazil), Ernst Toller (in New York), Ernst Lissauer (in Vienna), and, even decades after the 30s, many others who had suffered that period (as Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Bruno Bettelheim), took their life respectably, breaking up with the Jewish principle of life's sanctity without offering any further complaining-reason to a world which had ceased to offer reasonable grounds to life.

Also late, Robert Weltsch, a journalist who had written an article for the *Jüdische Rundschau* called "Wear It with Pride, the Yellow Patch!", an article that was assumed

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<sup>222</sup> Arendt, 'We Refugees', TJW, p. 266

<sup>223</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 393

to have saved many from suicide, soon regretted the article, especially its headline. According to him, it should have been entitled instead, “Pack Your Bags and Run!”<sup>224</sup>

### 3.6 “Last version of human sacrifice”

Concerning this part of Arendt’s pariah story, I want to stress that there is no empathy (or pathos) missing in her perspective. The pronoun she used in some texts – “we”, “our” – are proper: throughout her experience as a Jewess in Europe, Arendt considered suicide while being kept as inmate by French officials at the camp of Gurs. She also immersed on a melancholic state after finding out about the reality of the genocide.<sup>225</sup> She identified, in a way, with the speechless Jewish martyrs of dark rooms. Regarding the genocide as a whole, most of her statements and ideas evolved around her conclusion that “*This ought not to have happened*”.<sup>226</sup> From this conclusion, she articulated a political revolt with words, examples and principles, deserving a special place in the tradition of self-conscious, critical Jewish thinkers.

But, concerning the specific case of the *Judenräte*, things are more difficult. Richard Bernstein, for instance, criticized Arendt’s text for an involuntary irony: she wrote about personal responsibility, and she herself should be held accountable for “how her book was read (or even misread)”.<sup>227</sup> I do agree that Arendt could have put more emphasis on some distinctions, avoided some ironical remarks, and made certain claims more clear, for she approached very difficult matters, raised original interpretations, and dealt with facts that were not already established as part of a common discourse on the genocide. This is, indeed, a difficulty that, in my view, cannot be ignored neither solved in Arendt’s work: her way of judging is not easily grasped by untrained readers, since it does not facilitate interpretation with simple conclusions or circular messages. Arendt was aware that this problem could be aggravated by the context of her report to *The New Yorker*: “Since I had never written for mass audiences I didn’t know what could happen.”<sup>228</sup>

But this question also touches Arendt’s general attitude as an intellectual, and as political thinker in particular. Is it possible to detach *how* one writes from *what* one

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 401

<sup>225</sup> Young-Bruhel, E. *Hannah Arendt: for the love of the world*. 2aed. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 154, p. 184, p. 186

<sup>226</sup> Arendt, Interview to Gaus, in: *Hannah Arendt: the last interview and other conversations*, p. 23. The original sentence reads: “*Dieses hätte nicht geschehen dürfen*”. Arendt, *Ich will...*, p. 62

<sup>227</sup> Bernstein, R. J. *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question...*, p. 159

<sup>228</sup> Arendt, ‘Answers to Questions Submitted...’, TJW, p. 478

writes? Walter Laqueur said that the problem was not the content, but the form of her writing.<sup>229</sup> But, as Arendt insisted, the person is revealed through *how* one writes. If one represses one's own style, one's own specific presentation of thoughts, opinions and data into a certain written rhetoric, one represses one's own voice – one's view into reality is constrained to the point of losing originality and personality, thus losing a specific access to reality. Arendt insisted that the report was basically about facts, and this is not accurate: it was about facts and about interpretations and conclusions raised by these facts as they were reflected in her process of describing, thinking, and judging (“once I wrote, I was bound to tell the truth *as I saw it*”<sup>230</sup>; emphasis added). Arendt could only illuminate, and help to establish, a part of that phenomenon precisely because she brought her personal view into play. In other words, the complexity of the object could only be unveiled and established with the participation of an original subject.

Replying to one critic, Arendt (with irony) said he “belongs among the happy few who are psychologically color blind; they see only black and white”.<sup>231</sup> Even if her analysis did not provide easy conclusions, readers jumped into implications never supported by her data or her claims. Arendt was accused of having asked “why was there not more active resistance [during the genocide]”, and of drawing conclusions that would point to a bovine-like passivity of Jews in the death camps. However, the question of resistance was raised by the Israeli prosecutor, and was defined as “silly and cruel” by Arendt herself, since it disregarded the conditions of total domination, and the fact the Jews, “[o]nce they were caught and driven to their death, they behaved like all other groups in the same circumstances”.<sup>232</sup>

Moreover, Arendt was accused of ignoring general circumstances that put Jews on a fragile position, while she indeed mentioned these “vulnerabilities – no territory, no government, no army, no government in exile, no weapons, no youth with military training”.<sup>233</sup> She, as I mentioned before, could have made, for instance, a clearer distinction between the terms *cooperation* and *collaboration*. Non-Jews collaborationists were mostly voluntary, trying to help the Nazi regime, and even imitating Nazi methods,

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<sup>229</sup> “Miss Arendt was attacked not so much for what she said, but for how she said it.” Laqueur, W. “A Reply to Hannah Arendt”. *The New York Review*. February 3, 1966.

<sup>230</sup> Arendt, ‘Answers...’, p. 478

<sup>231</sup> Arendt, ‘The Formidable Dr. Robinson’, TJW, p. 500

<sup>232</sup> Arendt, ‘The Destruction of Six Million’, TJW, p. 494

<sup>233</sup> Arendt, ‘The Formidable Dr. Robinson’, p. 496. In the new introduction to Trunk’s *Judenrat*, Steven T. Katz complained that Arendt ignored the “*near total Jewish powerlessness*”. New Introduction to Trunk, op. cit., xvii

for ideological, utilitarian, or sadistic motives. Jewish “cooperation” was imposed by Nazi authorities, implemented through terror, and constant humiliation (leaders were frequently beaten), and normalized as a strategy of prolonging life and preserving what could be preserved.<sup>234</sup> But Arendt never doubted the fatalistic implications of this atmosphere in which absolute domination was reinforced by complete Jewish powerlessness. She even left aside the matter of resistance within ghettos, and did not explore further the variations of personal attitudes that, even in the most extreme conditions, helped to create different outcomes.<sup>235</sup> Ignoring these nuances, readers of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* proceeded to many other forms of induction from facts and suggestion that were not in her text.<sup>236</sup> The most problematic, though, involved precisely her stance on the *Judenräte*, a stance that was taken by some as a proof of Arendt’s lack of “soul”, her “self-hatred”, and even of her preference of Eichmann over his victims.<sup>237</sup> Indeed, as I am arguing, Arendt wrote what she wrote as a committed Jew<sup>238</sup>, who admitted that “wrong done by my own people naturally grieves me more than wrong done by other peoples”.<sup>239</sup>

Arendt did not say that the Jewish leaders under Eichmann were traitors. She said that there was perplexity *because* they were *not traitors*, “and *still* they became the tools of Nazis”<sup>240</sup>, in a process, characteristic of totalitarian domination, according to which victims played a role in their own destruction.

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<sup>234</sup> Trunk, op. cit., p. 573

<sup>235</sup> The study of Trunk, based precisely on the impossibility of inducing a single type of leadership, stresses the differences according to personal, regional, groups conditions and attitudes. There were leaders who committed suicide when the deportations began, leaders that tried to help underground efforts, and leaders who became corrupt and despotic. There were also significant movements of political opposition within the ghettos, as when Polish-Jews POWs confronted the Jewish police and even German order-policemen, in Lodz, demanding (and achieving) momentary better food conditions. (See Chapter 19 – Opposition to the Jewish Councils and the Ghetto Police). The study’s emphasis on personal stories and multiple, specific facts, proved that a short range of “possibilities” was not discarded even in those terrible conditions. Moreover, Trunk concluded his study corroborating one of the points (in which Arendt herself hesitated) that I am trying to stress here: “It follows from our study that the phenomenon of the Jewish Councils should be discussed in the framework of Jewish history...”. Trunk, op. cit., p. 575

<sup>236</sup> For instance, that Arendt said that the trial in Jerusalem was illegitimate, that Eichmann’s sentence was unjust, that she tried to exculpate Eichmann as a normal human being, that she provided material for anti-Semites etc.

<sup>237</sup> Bernstein summarizes the attacks on Arendt after the report: “She was accused of being anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic. She was ‘soulless’, ‘malicious’, ‘arrogant’, and ‘flippant’. She distorted the facts. She trivialized the entire Holocaust with her catchword ‘the banality of evil’. There were those who accused her of making Eichmann seem much more attractive than the Jews he murdered.” Bernstein, R. op. cit., p. 158

<sup>238</sup> She famously stated: “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.”. Arendt, *Eichmann and The Holocaust*, p. 61

<sup>239</sup> Arendt, ‘A Letter to Gershom Scholem’, TJW, p. 467

<sup>240</sup> Arendt, ‘The Formidable...’, TJW, p. 497

What Arendt actually *did say* regarding the leaders of Jewish councils?

She said that, within a short range of possibilities, they still had some responsibility, for they were not totally forced into their position. They were “less helpless than the Jewish masses”, since they upheld more information and participated in some decisions.<sup>241</sup> Their belief that “cooperation” would bring a better outcome was a subjective matter: objectively, they became an “important factor in the bureaucracy of destruction”, helping to determine the attitudes and the reactions of their communities in those decisive times. Applying Arendt’s words, one could say that they governed and organized their people in a time when disorganization and improvisation was required. Arendt never said they were not “victims”<sup>242</sup>, but they were victims in a position of responsibility.

Now, for Arendt, what could have the *Judenräte* done differently? Even favorable commentators ask this question, as if Arendt’s analysis demanded the impossible, relying on a “counter-factual” claim beyond “confirmation or falsification” on the basis of “hard evidence”.<sup>243</sup> That is precisely the point: yes, Arendt did not accept every attitude as necessary. She asked for other possibilities, and, against those who accused her of being utopian and not knowing what she was writing<sup>244</sup>, she did have evidence to support her claim: either positive evidences of people who acted differently within a minimum range of possibilities (like in the Rumkowski-Czerniakow contradistinction), or the negative evidences according to which “organization” achieved a sinister efficiency, as in the case of the Hungarian Jews, who, being the last community to be caught and organized, had 95% of its members exterminated when Germans were already losing the war.

What, so, the *Judenräte*, according to Arendt, could have concretely done:

“Relinquished” their position; “tell the people all is lost, *sauve qui peut*”; followed their fellows to camps and “suffer the same fate” (as the Polish educator Janusz Korczak did, movingly joining his students to Treblinka, in the episode that led to Czerniakow’s

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<sup>241</sup> Steven Katz and Jacob Robinson presented Trunk’s Judenrat as a proof of the “inescapability of Jewish ‘cooperation’ with the Nazi overlord” (Katz, p. xii), but they, and the study itself, disprove their claim, by presenting the “dilemmas”, and the variability of individual attitudes.

<sup>242</sup> “...even the *Judenräte* were, of course, victims. This doesn’t mean they are a hundred percent exonerated, but they obviously stand on the other side [of the perpetrators]. Arendt, Interview by Joachim Fest, p. 42

<sup>243</sup> Bernstein, R. op. cit., p. 162

<sup>244</sup> “Her reflections about Jews, Zionism, and the solution of the ‘Arab questions’ were not just farfetched or utopian. Much of the time she did not know what she was writing about.” Laquer, W. “The Arendt Cult”, In: *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*. Edited by Steven E. Aschheim; University of California Press, 2001, p. 54

suicide); used actively the structure of councils “as a cover for underground work”.<sup>245</sup> Arendt also said that, for her, the line not to be crossed was the preparation of deportation lists, in which some leaders behaved as “masters over life and death”. She radically opposed to views and justifications which sounded “rational”, as she explained in a letter:

“It was common enough to think a) If some of us have to die, it is better that we decide than the Nazis. I disagree. It would have been infinitely better to let the Nazis do their own murderous business. b) With a hundred victims we shall save a thousand. This sound to me like the last version of human sacrifice: pick seven virgins, sacrifice them to placate the wrath of the gods. Well, this is not my religious belief, and most certainly it is not the faith of Judaism. Finally, the theory of the lesser evil: Let us serve in order to prevent worse men from taking these positions; let us do bad things in order to prevent the worst.”<sup>246</sup>

The topic of the *Judenräte* is certainly painful. Arendt knew it, and referred to it as part of a general collapse of European society. Even if Arendt tried to isolate it from the broader scope of Jewish history, the themes of courage and dignity, which trespassed her articles in the 30s and 40s, reappeared in her blaming of the Jewish leaders. It was not an *easy* condemnation. But, given the “end of the story”, it was required by the task of rethinking politics after 1945. Jews were among the people who needed an urgent revision of their political stories and principles, so to finally stop *suffering* history. To ask for rebellion in their weakest moment was outrageous, and Arendt not only did not ask it as she also helped to analyze how rebellion was meaningless in the darkest conditions.<sup>247</sup> Elsewhere, Arendt had written that, under total domination, after the depletion of every moral, political and physical resource, no revolt was possible. The question of rebellion, indeed, served as a “smoke screen for the question that was not asked” – and this was the question regarding the cooperation of Jewish leaders, policemen and other individuals who, *outside* the extermination camps, served as tools of self-domination: “Why did you cooperate in the destruction of your own people and, eventually, in our own ruin?”<sup>248</sup> This was not a moralistic rhetorical question with no plausible answer. It was a question oriented to the *re-politicization* of the Jewish people.

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<sup>245</sup> Arendt, ‘The Destruction of Six Million’, p. 494. As I mentioned before, there were examples of leaders who took these paths.

<sup>246</sup> Arendt, ‘Answers to Questions...’, p. 481

<sup>247</sup> This is not to say that Arendt did not praise the dignity of rebellion. For her, though, organizing Jews outside the Third Reich around a visible army was a political question of first order.

<sup>248</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann...*, p. 70



### 3.7 Which Rationality?

Here, without losing sight of this specific episode, we can move to a more general discussion regarding what I am presenting as Arendt's attempt to comprehend and judge. Arendt was accused of *not comprehending* political actors and their circumstances, and yet *daring to judge* their behavior. As I am arguing, comprehending, for Arendt, did not mean searching for reasons to justify, via definite causal explanations, empirical-political configurations. It was not a matter of finding the "rationality" of the empirical reality. Indeed, Arendt even admitted that "coming to terms" with that reality was not exactly possible: "Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves."<sup>249</sup> If one is Hegelian, one would say: there is no possibility of *aufheben* this moment of world history. There is no positive principle to incorporate into the historical march of reason.<sup>250</sup> Arendt judged precisely because comprehension did not mean exposing events as necessary. Her judgment, in my reading, is powerful because of this impossibility of "coming to terms", of normalizing, within any pattern of probability and necessity, a process so radically inhuman and destructive.

Now, the political basis of Arendt's judgment can be made more explicit, especially considering the following attempts of invalidating her point with the claim that: a) as anyone *who is not in the active situation* (anyone "*who was not there*"), Arendt could not have judged; b) Arendt ignored the *rationality* of obedience and adaptation; c) Arendt disregarded objective conditions which made *impossible* the political integration of European Jews decades before the episode of the *Judenräte*. The first claim can be easily dismissed, I assume, for if it were valid, it would collapse the basis of judgement, of judging and being judged. If only the involved actors were allowed to judge their own acts, then judgement would be replaced by self-justification, and by *a priori* immunization of every actor. Politically speaking, one cannot judge oneself.<sup>251</sup>

The two other topics – b) that adaptation, historically speaking, was *rational* and c) that integration was *impossible* - relate to Arendt's general depiction of political action.

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<sup>249</sup> Arendt, Interview..., p. 23. The German verb used by Arendt in the interview is not precisely "to reconcile", but "*fertig werden*", to "come to terms", to "handle". Arendt, *Ich will...*, p. 62

<sup>250</sup> The very impossibility of "reconciliation" confirms Arendt's fragmentary approach to political events. In other words, any presupposition of necessary progress or regress is broken by the primacy of contingency: "There is no Hegelian dialectic between continuity and discontinuity in Arendt's work because the contradiction is not sublated. And Arendt tells us why she rejects philosophical sublation. She says that one could sublimate this contradiction between continuity and discontinuity only if one told a single story about history." Heller, A. 'On Tradition and New Beginnings'. In: *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, p. 20

<sup>251</sup> In the Eichmann report, Arendt qualified as "fantastic" the discussion on "whether anyone who was not present is entitled 'to sit in judgement' over the past." Arendt, *Eichmann and The Holocaust*, p. 111

Both deserve to be discussed more thoughtfully, for here the question goes beyond the specific case of European Jews. This point requires calling into question the definition of *rationality*. From a Hobbesian point of view, preserving corporeal identity, that is, securing one's body from external accidents is a physical law that no reasoning-process could disregard. Indeed, Hobbes understood reason not as a faculty through which man could discover metaphysical ends, but rather as an instrument of ratiocination, of adding and subtracting, or multiplying and dividing things and its bodily perceived proprieties. Grounding the reasoning process and the definition of things on a mathematical model, Hobbes depicted the rational man as capable of syllogistically extracting conclusions from premises, or simply calculating effects from causes ("*Science* is the knowledge of consequences"), within a physical space in which any body's rational movement is oriented to its own preservation.<sup>252</sup>

In this model, the strategy of survival can be accepted as rational, also in its conclusion of trusting an absolute ruler entitled to preserve the order and avoid any physical treat to individual bodies. But Arendt refused this model either on the basis of its theoretical flaws (its attempt of grounding a political world on physical laws, logical syllogisms and subjective ratiocination) and of its historical failure (nowhere more evident than in the history of European Jews, to whom the politics of fear, self-preservation and alienation from power led to a catastrophic end). Indeed, in the model of calculation of consequences from causes (or premises), there is no historical evaluation in Arendt's sense, for history is a collection of unexpected stories and of facts that cannot be anticipated via subjective reasoning. Moreover, if one could politicize and historicize the calculus of fearful bodies, Jews should logically reinforce their desire for protection in environments "naturally" hostile (assuming anti-Semitism as a "natural" element of social relations). But, even if one could abstract a fixed premise from the stories of European Jews, soon the twentieth century would prove that men could produce a "state" much more violent than any hypothetical state of nature.

Arendt proposed a different political rationality: she recovered the Greek sense of a "speaking animal" (*zoon logon ekhon*), or a being capable of speech.<sup>253</sup> Hobbes himself

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<sup>252</sup> For Hobbes' definition of reason and science: Hobbes, op. cit., Chapter 5, Of Reason and Science, pp. 29-38. Also: "Reasoning is a step-by-step process in which each stage logically depends on the previous one." Newey, G. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan*. London: Routledge. 2008, p. 56

<sup>253</sup> Interpreting Aristotle, Arendt added that "according to this [Greek] opinion, everybody outside the polis – slaves and barbarians – was *aneu logou*, deprived, of course, not of the faculty of speech, but of a way of

had noted that “The Greeks have but one word, *logos*, for both *speech* and *reason*; not that they thought there was no speech without reason, but not reasoning without speech.”<sup>254</sup> This is what Arendt tried to recover, after the modern imprisonment on the self: an interdependence between reason and speech, or, in other terms, between thinking and talking. The exchange of words and opinions is intended to do more than feeding one’s cognitive appetite for knowledge; to *speak* is concomitant to *see* and *be seen* in a public reality formed by interactions and by a “web of relations”, where one *appears to others*.<sup>255</sup> In this line, where there is silence, there is no politics.<sup>256</sup>

So, what is at stake is something more than a diplomatic dialogue (Jews, as we saw, dialogued with representatives of societies and governments). It is rather a “venture” into a reality larger than one’s own ghetto, a venture experienced through the reorientation of one’s attitudes and thoughts with principles others than those governing private deliberation and social preservation. The first emotion aroused by this public venture may be fear – of exposing vulnerabilities, of risking economic security, of being criticized or even attacked by others –, but, politically speaking, fear can evolve into courage, and courage can turn into what Arendt called public happiness, that sense of good life achieved by one’s insertion into mediated and relational spaces where freedom is experienced and rights are secured.

For example, instead of being led by plutocrats that could only “reason” in private spaces, extracting consequences from the premises fear and utility, Jews could have organized for the sake of speaking, of telling their stories, their suffering and their demands in visible spaces, thus enacting a different political configuration. Their appearance *to others* would also mean the appearance of others *to them*. For Arendt, this would not have necessarily implied a harmonic moment of recognition, but it could have at least taught Jews how to *see* political configurations, and its re-configurations, without relying on the fixed wishful thinking of adaptation. Inability to judge was connected to inability in capturing the unpredictable shape of political relations. As Jews seldom appeared in public, political constellations and events were mostly invisible to them.

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life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other.” Arendt, HC, p. 27

<sup>254</sup> Hobbes, op. cit., Chapter IV, Of Speech, p. 25

<sup>255</sup> Arendt opened her chapter on action stating that plurality is the condition “of both action and speech” (section 24 – *The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action*, which is precisely followed by the section on the “web” of interactions (section 25 – *The Web of Relationships and the Enacted Stories*)

<sup>256</sup> Hull, M. B. *The Hidden Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. London: RoutledgeCurzon. 2002, p. 153

Rousseau once wrote,

“I will never believe that I have understood the reasons of Jews until they have a free state, schools, universities, where they could speak and debate without risk. Only then will we be able to know what they have to say.”<sup>257</sup>

This is an important passage for it condenses much of what I am trying to argue: public appearance could have politicized and also humanized Jews, for becoming human, in Arendt’s sense, is becoming able to spontaneously appear and speak with others, while others listen to our reasons and our stories, seeing us as more than images, types or abstractions, that is, seeing us as living persons capable of articulating our humanity. The passage is also important, for in it Rousseau mentioned “free spaces” where Jews could have spoken “without risk”. His argument suggested a sort of ethnic autonomy, a sense that Jews could only be free, and freely speaking beings, within spaces administered by themselves. Rousseau seemed to accept the conclusion that public spaces are unavoidably dominated by certain political cultures.<sup>258</sup>

So the question remains: what were the possibilities of Jews in a space full of “risks”, dominated by a pervasive political culture (that of Christianity or of ethnic-nationalities)? Was a Jewish revolution or a Jewish politicization ever possible? A first answer is: denying the very possibility of alternative configurations, for Arendt, means denying politics itself. For Jews, this denial of possibilities, and of politics in Arendt’s sense, could only mean the *necessity of suffering* (and, thus, the *necessity of protection from suffering*). As a principle, though, Arendt affirmed that freedom is “*not a prize for suffering endured*”<sup>259</sup>, or, in other terms, that freedom is based on *acting, not suffering*. That was a political lesson to be learned: even in the best political moment of Jews in Europe – when they gained political emancipation –, passivity (so “suffering”) was predominant, since rights were conceded (and soon removed) by monarchs and rulers out of instrumental considerations.

On a factual basis, the argument follows like this: if even in the darkest hour some Jews, against gigantic forces, showed some form of dignity or even resistance, then during

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<sup>257</sup> The original reads: “*Je ne croirai jamais avoir bien entendu les raisons des Juifs qu’ils n’aient un Etat libre, des écoles, des universités, où ils puissent parler et disputer sans risque. Alors seulement nous pourrions savoir ce qu’ils ont à dire.*” Rousseau, J. J. *Émile ou de L’Éducation*, Livre IV. In: *Œuvres Complètes IV*, Gallimard, 1990, p. 621. I discovered this passage during the reading of Rousinesco’s *Retour sur la Question Juive* (2009). Roudinesco, op. cit., p. 30

<sup>258</sup> The sequence of his argument reinforces this perception: “In Constantinople, the Turks say their reasons, but we do not dare [*nous n’osons*] saying ours; there, it is our turn to grovel [*ramper*].” Rousseau, *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

the ups and downs of emancipation, during times when anti-Semitism was still traditional, more could have been done. Actually, it had been done. Arendt's answer to the collapse of tradition relied also on fragments of the past, mostly fragments which had been "hidden" behind the dominance of certain traditions. Without the "burden" of dominant forms of thinking and behaving (of dominant "traditions"), some of these past experiences and principles could be now recovered with an original force. The Jewish *pariah* is a such a case: its tradition had been hidden, but it was not non-existent.

There were even political pariahs who escaped to Arendt's sight, such as Johann Jacoby. Jacoby, a doctor *and* a revolutionary, a conscious German-and-Jew, was elected to the parliament in Frankfurt during the political revolution of 1848. He had already been called "an insolent Jew" by Fredrick Wilhelm, the king, for having written a pamphlet vindicating democratic reforms. On the end of that year, Jacoby and twenty others German deputies went to the king's palace in Potsdam, to protest against his reactionaries measures. The king turned his back and dismissed the deputies. Jacoby then replied with a sentence later established as part of the history of German democracy: "This is the tragedy of kings, that they refuse to hear the truth!". Jacoby was then sued, for the second time, by the king. Until the end of his life, he was regarded by monarchist and nationalist as a traitor, whose pacifism was seen as pro-French and anti-Prussian.<sup>260</sup>

Jacoby's is more than a story of courage. He was an embodiment of a possibility, a factual proof of contingency and alternative, and a reminder that even in authoritarian contexts some margin of action is possible. Indeed, it is only from this margin that political actualization can spring. In a way, these were political possibilities in Arendt's sense, since they were oriented to *begin*, to *constitute* a democratic space. The clash between democratic and un-democratic possibilities is a political, contingent clash in itself, which can end up in oppressive configurations of power. But, as long someone or some group acts and speaks, appearing as an example of previously unseen possibilities, and so enlarging the political imagination of its context, power (with its *possibilities*, its *potencies*) is momentary actualized.

From the point of view of the actor (and even from that of the judge)<sup>261</sup>, it is irrelevant and, according to Arendt, impossible to know the outcome of certain political

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<sup>260</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>261</sup> I do not agree with the view that Arendt formulated two distinct theories of judgment, as claimed, for instance, by Benhabib (p. 175) and Maurizio P. D'Entrèves; they argue, in broad terms, that Arendt depicted two models of judgement, one based on Kant's reflection (and the search for universals from particulars) and other based of Aristotle's view on the prudent, who tries to orient himself in particular circumstances;

initiatives. Interpreting Arendt's meaning, a political *appearance* can be said a form of resistance, a *Widerstand*, a standing in contrast to seemingly erosive forces pressuring and disintegrating a given organism. But the natural accent is only metaphorical: no political process of disintegration is necessary; so "resisting", that is, counter-acting what seems an overwhelming force is a political attitude per excellence. This contra-standing overwhelming forces does not require a physical *force*, as Arendt's distinction between *power* and *force* indicated, but a readiness to actualize *power*, which can mean a readiness to do something or to say a few words, "because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation."<sup>262</sup>

Jacoby's words did not change the German constellation (indeed, the other deputies apologized, "assuring the king's courtiers that he had spoken only for himself"), but inspired a multitude who marched in solidarity to him in the streets of Berlin, hence actualizing and demonstrating the possibilities of democratic power in Germany, even if just for one day.<sup>263</sup> That the *possibility of 1848* (of a democratic, politically egalitarian, federalist, secular, and horizontal state) was surpassed by the *possibility of 1871* (of a militaristic, religiously conservative, monarchic and vertical state), and that both possibilities were smashed by the *possibility of 1933* do not invalidate Arendt's theory of initiative-beginnings. Indeed, it confirms her depiction of political-human processes, which, for being contingent, depend on a renovated awareness, and on one's willingness to appear in contradistinction to seemingly necessary forces. To ask for "objective" possibilities and "objective" anticipations of action means, for Arendt, disregard that the "unexpected can be expected" from active men.<sup>264</sup>

### 3.8 "Breaking the Spell of the Status Quo"

Delineating lessons from 20<sup>th</sup> century authoritarianism, fascism and totalitarianism, the historian Timothy Synder warned against the dangers of "anticipatory obedience". He argued that "adapting instinctively, without reflecting, to a new situation"

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the first one would relate to the spectator, and the second, to the actor. D'Entrèves himself recognized that "the contradiction is more apparent than real...Both are concerned with the judgment of particulars *qua* particulars". D'Entrèves, M. P. "Arendt's Theory of Judgment", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000 p. 253. Arendt's emphasis on "particulars" is due to a pervasive cognitive deficit of *action*, which is *experienced and judged* on the basis of not having definite, transparent reasons (that is, universals) to act, to anticipate consequences of action, and to ascribe necessary meanings to action.

<sup>262</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 191

<sup>263</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 173

<sup>264</sup> Arendt, HC., p. 178

is a form of surrender which dispenses actual intimidation and concrete regulations. It does not necessarily imply a desire to profit with this new situation, but simply a tendency to adjust, to avoid friction, to be one and the same with the new political landscape. What psychologists call “suggestibility”, Arendt called “conformism”, a process that is not necessarily imposed by outside forces, but is formed through a circular social dynamic that counts with the adherence of a weakened individual who reinforces the process. Here, it is only important to bear in mind this almost unconscious adaptation to visible or imagined new situations, a dynamics that form a “spell” which tends to reinforce the cycle of adherence and suggestion.

Snyder also argued that the last century invalidated the assumed opposition security *versus* freedom (according to which the increase of one implies the decrease of the other), for totalitarian experiences, as distinct from traditional tyrannies, demanded more than the surrender of civil liberties. Totalitarian domination did not stop until destroying private sphere, including the innermost sphere of intimacy and subjectivity. The modern history of European Jews corroborates this insight. Snyder’s recommendation is: do not believe in the permanence of institutions, and do not wait for representation. Don’t expect others or seemingly better ideas to prove themselves, but simply “stand out”. “The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken.”<sup>265</sup> In Arendt’s term, initiative-action “appears in the guise of a miracle”,<sup>266</sup> for it defeats a sense of fatalism with a new face and new voice who becomes visible.

This also requires an additional observation on the necessities and the possibilities of the political. Some scholars point to two political models on Arendt’s work: one model based on the agonistic, individually grounded, depiction of action in *The Human Condition*; the other, based on the defense of republican institutions delineated in *On Revolution*.<sup>267</sup> I do agree that the two books provide different emphasis on the political experience, but I do not think that from this we can extract two models from Arendt. As I am defending, she thought around a set of questions, that may not always develop in a rectilinear way, but always evolve in terms of coherence and cross-relations. The interdependence, for instance, between agents and institutions, between action and work,

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<sup>265</sup> Snyder, T. *On Tyranny: twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. London: Bodley Head. 2017, chapter 1 (Do Not Obey in Advance) p. 17, chapter 8 (Stand Out), p. 49

<sup>266</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 178

<sup>267</sup> For an indication of the diversity of receptions of Arendt’s work, covering from the “agonistic” reading to the “republican” interpretation, from the emphasis on “exclusion” until the elaborations on “human rights”, see *Arendt Handbuch: Lebel-Werk-Wirkung*. Wolfgang Heuer, Bernd Heiter und Stefanie Rosenmüller (Hrsg.). Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler. 2011, pp. 314-382

or, in other terms, between the agitation of political experiences and the stable framework of law and institutions, is everywhere in Arendt's texts, starting with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she described both the disregard for institutions (the "lawlessness" movement) and the disregard for people (the "One-man" ideology) of totalitarianism. An actualization of power requires both an organized framework and the appearance of active – talkative, thinking, moving – people within this framework:

"Political institutions, no matter how well or how badly designed, depend for continued existence upon acting men."<sup>268</sup>

Considering this interaction between institutions and citizens, the former discussion on the possibilities of Jewish politics needs to be complemented with the observation that Jews lacked theoretical and practical frameworks for activation. Individually, some Jews may have stood out in public, but they did not have nor did create a proper platform to act. The pariah and the rebel were never politically instituted as valid examples. The pariah tradition remained mostly "unconscious" to itself.<sup>269</sup>

### **3.9 Responsibility and Interaction**

I contend, thus, that the whole discussion on the Jewish question, and even Arendt's reproach of the Jewish leaders under Eichmann, must be read in terms of political responsibility, and not in terms of guilt for the genocide. Arendt distinguished, indeed, between *individual guilt* (a moral-juridical notion) and *shared responsibility* (a political one).<sup>270</sup> From a juridical point of view, guilt is ascribed to individuals whose individual acts configured certain crimes. In this sense, juridical culpability requires an indication of specific individuals, whose deeds are measured against types of crime. Responsibility, from a political perspective, also depends on the concept of person as a center of moral integrity and juridical accountability, but it expands it to a broader sense of co-potentiality and co-responsibility.<sup>271</sup> *Political responsibility* cannot be fragmented

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<sup>268</sup> Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', BPF, p. 153

<sup>269</sup> Referring to the Jewish-European context, Arendt wrote: "The 'conscious pariah' (Bernard Lazare) was the only tradition of rebellion which established itself, although those who belonged to it were hardly aware of its existence." Arendt, OT, p. 84, f 26.

<sup>270</sup> For the former: "There is no such a thing as collective guilt or collective innocence; guilt and innocence make sense only if applied to individuals" (p. 29). For the latter: "...no man, however strong, can ever accomplish anything, good or bad, without the help of others." (p. 47). Arendt, 'Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship', *Responsibility and Judgement*.

<sup>271</sup> According to Bethania Assy, one can talk, following Arendt's own formulation in the 1960s, of a "political morality" (an expression that Arendt only formulated after the Eichmann trial), which breaks with the morality of universal norms, conventional commands, or subjective autonomy, and relies on a "personal



into isolated pieces, for, as we have been discussing, public experiences always involve a plurality of actors. Thinking in terms of political agency, any removal of an agent from its relational context implies an artificial (un-real) account of his position. Political agents are permanently *within* “mutual determinations”, *within* a “world of universal interdependence”.<sup>272</sup>

Kant, in his “Third Analogy of Experience” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, had established that experience [*Erfahrung*] is characterized by a simultaneous “reciprocity” or “interaction” [*Wechselwirkung*] between substances which coexist in the same space. From this notion, a principle of community, indeed a “dynamic community”, in which shared appearances form a “composite real”, could be derived as referring to a living reality of co-participants.<sup>273</sup> In a similar way, Hegel, in his *Doctrine of the Essence (Science of Logic)*, worked on the transformative logic of active relations: a one-sided relation of action-and-reaction [*Wirkung und Gegenwirkung*], in which one substance is passively determined by the violence of an external power, is “sublated” [*aufgehoben*] to a relation of “reciprocity” [*Wechselwirkung*], of identical capacities to act and react, to determine and be determined. This new situation “vanishes” an absolute sense of necessary causation, of one being a necessary effect of external causes.<sup>274</sup>

Politically speaking, this helps us to understand Arendt’s refusal to reduce freedom to the private reality of the subjective-self – be it the self of subjective intentions, desires, or simple choices between objects (the “free-will”). These are “private” characterizations of freedom, and as such, they are incomplete, for they ignore the always-relational position of human beings within webs of interactions. In a Hegelian vocabulary, these are only “abstract” depictions of freedom, because they detach the agent from its global context. Levels of “abstraction” (or separation) are necessary to preserve other degrees of freedom or other realms of existence (private, familiar, social etc.), but these other non-political spaces are determined and, in last analysis, guaranteed (or threatened) by political configurations. For a Hegelian, thus, freedom could not result from retreat to

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responsibility” that is always situational, and dependent on the insertion of the “person” in the “ethical (inter)action”, and its orientation to world’s publicity, visibility and durability. Assy, B. op. cit., p. 158, 163

<sup>272</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 237

<sup>273</sup> The Third Analogy reads: “All substances, so far as they can be perceived in space as simultaneous, are in thoroughgoing reciprocal action.” Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason: concise text*. Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1982, p. 85

<sup>274</sup> “In reciprocity, therefore, necessity and causality have vanished”. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, p. 570

privacy nor from a “resignation” in the face of political events. It results from the acquisition of a “communitarian consciousness”.<sup>275</sup>

Arendt’s defense of a positive (external co-participation) over a negative (private un-disturbance) depiction of freedom is not arbitrary. In saying that “to *be* free and to act are the same”<sup>276</sup>, she is not falling back into a nostalgic imagination unsuited to modern times. She is grasping a constitutive, for her unavoidable, dynamic of public realities. From a political point of view, hence, the notion of “responsibility” – or *amor mundi* – requires leaving the “protective security of our four walls”.<sup>277</sup> In this line, Arendt took on the accepted meaning of “interest” (something that belongs to a self-oriented particularity), replacing it by “*inter-est*”, something “which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together”,<sup>278</sup> that is, something that concerns the existence of many, not of one.

### 3.10 From Interaction to Solidarity

If political experiences are indeed interactive, the political failure of Jews can only be comprehended along with the political failure of non-Jews in Europe. Still discussing the Dreyfus Affair, Arendt said that the inaction of assimilated French Jews was met by a mob hysteria. Detached from the mob, only a few individuals understood the political significance of the episode. Clemenceau, a journalist at the time, and one of the few politicians admired by Arendt, grasped the republican meaning of the campaign *contra* Dreyfus: “by infringing on the rights of one you infringe on the rights of all”. For Arendt, solidarity is the “political basis” of any republic.<sup>279</sup> To be precise, it is “civic solidarity”, not to the moral duty of loving one’s neighbor or feeling compassion towards others. It is a matter of concerted initiative, of defending or reclaiming rights with other citizens, of grasping the interconnectedness of political configurations based on citizenship. Breaking with simplistic analysis that remove political responsibility (by ascribing it to exterior

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<sup>275</sup> “...a liberdade resulta não de uma resignação diante dos acontecimentos mas da consciência adquirida de uma comunidade.” Rosenfield, D. *Política e Liberdade em Hegel*. São Paulo: Ática, 1995, p. 24

<sup>276</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Freedom?’, p. 151

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155

<sup>278</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 182

<sup>279</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 137. In a letter to Jaspers, in 1946, Arendt, discussing her former professor’s book *The Question of German Guilt [Die Schuldfrage]*, referred to the matter of solidarity and Clemenceau: “Solidarität, die (in den Worten Clemenceaus “*L’Affaire d’un seul est l’affaire de tous*”) die politische Grundlage der Republik ist”. Arendt, *Wahrheit Gibt Es Nur Zu Zweien: Briefe an die Freunde*. München/Berlin: Piper, 2015, p. 66

causes), Arendt illuminated different sides of the phenomenon of irresponsibility, which shaped certain conditions to the decline of political humanism in Europe.

Though the Jews had their specific history of inaction, Arendt noted that Germans, in addition to being “coordinated” (*gleichgeschaltet*) from 1933, did not offer, even at the end of the war, any significant form of *political* resistance to Hitler: desertions were mostly opportunistic, conceived when military defeat was eminent, and when private suffering affected also citizens of the Reich.<sup>280</sup> No significant movement, neither secret conspiracy, claimed a conscious restoration of rights, no principle of solidarity was vindicated, and the destruction of institutions and of other groups was never seriously alluded as a sufficient reason to rebuild, or constitute, a polity of “interaction” and “reciprocity”. This, as Arendt elaborated, was not caused by a specific German character.<sup>281</sup> Totalitarianism provoked an unbounded moral and political collapse, simultaneous to the widespread cooperation and generalized bystander neutrality of national groups, social classes, and individuals throughout Europe. Shockingly, it also provoked the disintegration, and some degrees of cooperation, among its own victims. In this line, the case of the *Judenräte*, according to Arendt,

“...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.”<sup>282</sup>

Regarding this general collapse, Arendt asked what led a few individuals and groups to resist disintegration, and remain just when definitions and uses of just and right were confounded and even inverted. This question, as most questions raised by totalitarianism, could not be answered in traditional terms. Since Aristotle, a practice of virtues had been dependent on an ethical community that recognized these same virtues. Centuries later, Hegel indicated that *individual* definitions of what is virtue [*Tugend*] can

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<sup>280</sup> “...such defections were never serious enough to throw the machinery out of gear; they consisted of individual acts not of mercy but of corruption, and they were inspired not by conscience but by the desire to salt some money or some connections away for the dark days to come.” Arendt, *Eichmann...*, p. 59

<sup>281</sup> Arendt avoided the vocabulary of fixed national “characteristics”. One of the few occasions in which she recognized specifically German tendencies was in her conversation with Joachim Fest: “In my view, the German as a people aren’t especially brutal. In fact, I do not believe in such national characteristics. Still, the story I told just now, Jünger’s story, is specifically German. I mean this inability... “to think in the place of every other person” – yes, the inability... This kind of stupidity, it’s like talking to a brick wall. You never get any reaction, because these people never pay any attention to you. That is German. The second thing that strikes me as specifically German is this frankly crazy way that obedience is idealized.” Arendt, *The Last Interview...*, p. 49-50

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73

only take place during extraordinary [*außerordentlichen*] ethical collisions.<sup>283</sup> But ethical collisions, in his sense, referred to a conflict between equally valid principles of freedom (such as in the tragic clash between the demands of particular affection and public law). How could one be virtuous if an overwhelming mass of men mobilizes around inverted notions of virtue and duty? How can one act and judge if a multitude of indistinct individuals shouts the same refrains, and marches in the same direction? Indeed, there was no “ethical collision”, no need to dispute how to act and judge, since the absolute laws and imperatives of movement were *pre-judgements* and *pre-indications* of what to do and what to say. In conditions of uniformity, there is no collision whatsoever.

Arendt asked this question until her last texts and works. It informed her reflections on the conditions for responsible action, and for the kind of consciousness required by political responsibility. She offered several tentative answers, one being the capacity of thinking, understood not as a special method of cognition, but as a free, perpetual process of imagining different perspectives, positioning itself in the “place of others”, and relativizing its own assumptions. She referred to a basic *stop and think*. This thinking process does not produce rigid commands, but it at least is expected to prevent an engagement in systematic harmful routines. No immediate object of cognition (no norm or command), as no immediate inner feeling (no “voice of conscience”, no “moral emotions”) could prevent the mass crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, a possible answer would be blowing a constant “wind of thought”, a wind that does not build convictions up, but perhaps is prone to destroy “creeds”.<sup>284</sup>

But the question of resistance, and its conditions, remained a perplexity for Arendt. She referred to a paradoxical capacity to tell “right from wrong” precisely in the absence of definitions of right and wrong. Scholars complained against its inconsistency<sup>285</sup>, perhaps not recognizing that Arendt could not solve any of these perplexities. The political-philosophical problem is that those who *did something*, even under the most extreme conditions, did not fall into a single category. Arendt did not find a single explanation, for instance, for the cases of Denmark, Italy, and Bulgaria, countries

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<sup>283</sup> Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*. Mit einer Einleitung herausgegeben von Bernhard Lakebrink. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2009, §150, pp. 294-295

<sup>284</sup> Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, p. 26

<sup>285</sup> “But if we agree with her that this is a reflective judgment wherein we judge particulars directly, without subsuming them under some universal or general rule, we can still ask – and this is the second issue – what we mean by ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and how these predicates are to be distinguished from ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’.” Bernstein, R. op. cit., p. 175

in which the implementation of the Final Solution did not succeed. People who helped victims in the cities and forests of Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, did not have a common background: they were religious, atheist, educated, vulgar, thieves, all of them probably upholding fragments of a no longer valid humanism.<sup>286</sup> What they did share perhaps was not a set of beliefs, nor a special instinct or intuition, but an willingness to act even when action, in Arendt's sense, was no longer possible, for their acts must be hidden.

From the point of view of political action, though, the new beginning was only possible with a performative virtue, courage. As a mode of active appearance, courage is more than the sum of inner beliefs, norms, feelings, that may have propelled one to do something. Arendt mentioned Churchill ("the greatest statesman thus far of our century") both in a lecture about thinking after *Eichmann*, and in a passage about the relation between freedom and courage. Pressed by totalitarianism, Churchill "stood in conspicuous contrast to whatever we may think the *Zeitgeist* of this age to be", and remaining "beyond the fashions of the times", he was regarded, in accordance to the fluctuation of popular feelings, an outcast rejected as warmonger, and then a leader acclaimed as a savior. Yet he had remained consistent in his courage to judge things as he saw it. Courage was the "first quality" because it guarantees all others, according to him.<sup>287</sup> Courage also guarantees the capacity to judge, to keep personal integrity and to display a civic orientation, even in the darkest hour, as members of Danish society, Italian soldiers, Polish insurgents and the members of Zegota, the *Wehrmacht* sergeant Anton Schmid, Zivia Lubetkin and the Jewish underground in Warsaw, who had stood out, and done something more than only trying to save their skins.

Here, readers who ignore the historical background of Arendt's writings may fail to appreciate her defense of courage, excellence and personality. They are not nostalgic ideals. Arendt's citizens are not "little boys clamoring for attention" and "her appeal to heroism and glory" does not presuppose any "*machismo*"<sup>288</sup> (Where is the machismo in the stories of Rosa Luxemburg and Zivia Lubetkin?). Arendt tried to teach courage to a world in which political structures crumbled because of a disseminated lethargy and a preponderant concern with private life. The conceptual poetic of *The Human Condition* may mislead the reader with Greek examples; but they are mostly this, *examples* to a

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<sup>286</sup> For the diverse background of people who risked their life to save Jews from the genocide, See Gilbert, M. *The Righteous: the unsung heroes of the Holocaust*. New York: Henry Holt and Co. 2003

<sup>287</sup> See: Arendt, 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy', pp. 739-740; Arendt, 'What is Freedom?', p. 154.

<sup>288</sup> Pitkin, H. 'On Relating Private and Public'. *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Aug., 1981), p. 338, 341

world who had failed politically and humanly. In the sinister end, courage meant risking one's life. But, before, as Arendt herself wrote, courage may have signified simply leaving one's house. (If the reader needs a contemporary example: courage perhaps means offering a political opinion before one's boss without fearing losing the job.)

In a similar line, Arendt's emphasis on the uniqueness and integrity of personality - "this concept of action is highly individualistic"<sup>289</sup> - does not relate to "romantic" feelings.<sup>290</sup> She did not propose an abstract existentialism, neither did she create a cult of the authentic inner-self. Personal heroism, in the conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, is related to responsibility towards public matters, and one's initiative within the larger political interactions. An example of contemporary courage is the jumbled Capitan Mandrake (played by Peter Sellers in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, 1964), who tries, very carefully and inconsistently, to dissuade his jingoistic commandant from starting a nuclear war out of pre-given commands. This heroism may lead to "immortality", another of Arendt's controversial terms, insofar one becomes a memory to be talked upon in his community. Finally, Arendt's call for alternative possibilities for a Jewish politics, and her call for civic solidarity as a political basis for Europe, far from being utopian and un-real, point out to a much needed political renovation in her, and also our, time. In this sense, one could even talk of Hannah Arendt's *ideal realism*.

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<sup>289</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 194

<sup>290</sup> Laqueur, W. op. cit., p. 49 (where the author says that Arendt's sympathies to revolutionaries were "always emotional and romantic, rather than rational and philosophical.")

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PARIAH AND PARASITE

#### 4.1 Wealth and Powerlessness

Hannah Arendt's reading of Karl Marx, as her reading of any classic thinker, combined strong statements with nuanced observations. She did not repeat established interpretations. Not coincidentally, Arendt dedicated to Marx an attention similar to which she dedicated to Plato. Both authors stood, for her, at the beginning and the end of Western tradition of thought. She criticized both, and apologized for having criticized both. In Marx's case, she excused the author from "Marxism", an ideology which granted to Marx appraisal and blame "for many things of which he was entirely innocent."<sup>291</sup> Arendt embraced and rejected Marx, as her post-traditional interpretation and appropriation recommended: an author is not a doctrine which must be wholly accepted or discarded.

In this first section, I will compare Marx and Arendt limiting myself, in a first moment, to the discussion of the emancipation of European Jews, and the relation between economics and politics in this case. Marx's *On the Jewish Question* (1844) was not dealt with systematically by Arendt, as she focused her reading on the late Marx and his general thesis. She only called the text "historically false and in many points unjust", and restricted its relevance to the context of the rebellion of intellectual Jews against rich Jews.<sup>292</sup> Yet I think that Marx's text is relevant for three reasons: one, as a document of epoch, it points to the common approach of 19<sup>th</sup> century's authors to the *Judenfrage*, with its typical predication of Jews in general, its dramatic-grandiose definitions, and its defense of secular-ideological "solutions" to the "Jewish problem"; two, as a way of contrasting Arendt and Marx approaches; three, in order to present their important convergence.

Marx favored the political emancipation of Jews, as long as Jews were approached from a religious perspective. Civil emancipation was in accordance to the secularization

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<sup>291</sup> Arendt, 'Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought', p. 275

<sup>292</sup> "...one should not forget that Marx's voice was that of the Jewish intelligentsia, full of hate against the machinations of the rich Jews who had sold universal human rights for the sake of special privileges of their own class." Arendt, 'Privileged Jews', p. 22. In the Part One of OT, Antisemitism, Arendt mentioned Marx's "famous anti-Jewish writings", concluding, basically, that a) Marx was not anti-Semitic; b) his criticism was directed against Jewish bankers; c) he, as others critics from the left, "mistook the Jewish banker for a central figure in the capital system...". Arendt, OT, p. 43-44, p. 61

of the state, that is, with the “*emancipation* of the State from Judaism, Christianity, and *religion* in general”.<sup>293</sup> An universal state would make no distinction between its citizens. Political emancipation, however, was not enough. Preserving the contradiction between civil society and the state, political emancipation was satisfied with the form of a constitutional democracy constrained by private propriety and particularistic needs. Marx’s defense of a “human emancipation” required the dissolution of propriety, that is, required the reorientation of man from “a self-sufficient monad” to his socialization as a “species-being”.<sup>294</sup>

Marx elaborated, thus, the terms of the Jewish emancipation combining the general approach of the enlightenment with his specific vocabulary and perspective. As we shall see, most of enlightenment authors accepted Jewish emancipation under the condition that it would be followed by Jews’ actualization of their “human essence”, which meant leaving their presupposed “Jewish essence”. In Marx’s specific argument, Jewish particularity was identified with the egoistic forces of civil society. The prevalence of Jews as distinct members of society was a signal that “man” was still divided into an “*abstract citizen*”, protected by political equality, and an empirical “*egoistic man*”, concerned only with himself, and not with the “species-man”.<sup>295</sup> The perseverance of Judaism only testified that political emancipation did not overcome social fragmentation.

But, for Marx, Judaism, indeed “practical Judaism”, was more than a sign of fragmentation. It was its very agent. Jews, whose God was, according to Marx, “money”, or “*practical need and self-interest*”, embodied the egoistic forces of civil society. Moreover, civil-society was Jewish. So, if private propriety and economic fragmentation were institutionalized in Christian Europe, this meant that “Christianity...has now been reabsorbed into Judaism”.<sup>296</sup> Both were under the influence of the “monotheism of the Jews”, which was in fact a “polytheism” dissolved into money and the diversity of objects which money could buy.<sup>297</sup> According to Marx’s human emancipation, thus, the abolition of need and egoism, or simply of “huckstering”, would mean abolishing the “*empirical*

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<sup>293</sup> Marx, K. ‘On the Jewish Question’. In: The Marx-Engels Reader. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978, p. 32

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-43

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 46

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 52. In the original: “*Das Christentum ist aus dem Judentum entsprungen. Es hat sich wieder in das Judentum aufgelöst.*” Marx, K. *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1981, p. 297

<sup>297</sup> Marx, op. cit., p. 50



essence” of Judaism. In the newer conditions, “the Jew becomes *impossible*”, because society no longer works on the basis of self-interest.<sup>298</sup>

I will not enter here in the heated debate whether Marx, or his *On The Jewish Question*, was anti-Semitic or not. What interests me is, first, to emphasize Marx reification of Jews into an idea with a specific meaning and a specific destiny in his conceptualization of history. Bernard Lazare wrote that Marx analyzed not Jews, but “bourgeoisie Jews”, ignoring the “truly strong characteristic mass of the [Jewish] nation”, its proletariat.<sup>299</sup> Marx was aware that rich Jews were an empirical minority among “Jews in general”, and we may even concede, for the purpose of our discussion, that the one-sidedness of most of Marx’s assertions were justified for an analytical representation of the court Jew (even though Marx referred to “the real Jew” and the “everyday Jew”). Let us not assume that the biographical problem of self-rejection of his Jewish roots led Marx to a passionate commendation of Jews.<sup>300</sup> Let us suppose, instead, that he is only discussing, as Arendt did, a specific archetypical activity of Jews in a specific moment of history.<sup>301</sup>

What would remain as important differences between Arendt and Marx approaches? Arendt, in accordance to her fragmentary<sup>302</sup>, factually-based political analysis, stressed that the historical position of Jews contradicted most of ideological projections on Jews. The particular pariah-position, moreover, could not be absorbed by a general scheme of class conflict, as wealthy Jews were not exactly members of bourgeoisie, and poor Jews were not proletarians. Jewish emancipation involved circumstances too specific for being abstracted into a larger process of economy’s socialization. The Jewish cause, as Lazare later concluded, could not be simply “assimilated” to a socialist cause.

A series of facts and historical conditions supported these claims. For instance, after political emancipation, when Jews gradually ceased to form a “fateful union” around the ghetto, and individually assimilated to different social classes, ideological anti-

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>299</sup> Lazare, B. *The Social Conception of Judaism and the Jewish People*. New York: Tucker, 1900, p. 28

<sup>300</sup> For an analysis combining Marx’s biography, and his supposed self-rejection following the assimilation of his father, with his theoretical and philosophical background, see: Wolfson, M. *Marx: Economist, Philosopher, Jew: steps in the development of a doctrine*. London: Macmillan Press, 1982

<sup>301</sup> That is, indeed, Arendt’s conclusion regarding not only Marx, but other “rebel” Jews, as L. Börne: “The anti-Jewish denunciations of Marx and Boerne cannot be properly understood except in the light of this conflict between rich Jews and Jewish intellectuals.” Arendt, OT, p. 83

<sup>302</sup> “General trends...can hardly ever be explained satisfactory by one reason or by one cause alone.” Arendt, OT, p. 4

Semitism increased. Jews left Jewishness to assume their “function” in the social process, a move in which a significant part of them sided with workers and embraced variants of Socialism and Communism. They “abolished” their own connection with religion and with “egoism”, assimilating to the general historical developments of European societies. Still, the persistence of anti-Semitism and its metamorphosis into ideology indicated that the Jewish question was not merely a social question. In some ways, the Jewish question, as we will see in the next chapter, assumed even more complex circumstances in its contact to society. This was recognized by some socialist and communist writers and leaders who proposed specific “solutions” to the Jewish question, such as the creation of autonomous Jewish regions in Soviet Union.<sup>303</sup>

In fact, as Arendt reminded, Jews were accused of being “parasites” who exploited social forces and controlled politics precisely when they “lost public functions and their influence”, and when most of them became productive, as emancipated middle and lower class juridical persons.<sup>304</sup> What was strikingly contradictory to Marx’s view, and what was crucial to Arendt’s refusal of fixed premises in reading history, was the flagrant dissymmetry between the economic wealth and the political power of Jews. Contradicting established assumptions, wealthy Jews did not accumulate wealth for the sake of accumulation, much less did they control politics as a consequence of their accumulation. As Arendt recalled, and this could be verified in the transition between generations in innumerable Jewish families (such as in the families Zweig, Benjamin, Warburg, and also in the family Arendt itself), wealth was pursued not for its own sake, but for the sake of intellectual and political activities. Sons and granddaughters of merchants and bankers became writers, students, artists, activists.<sup>305</sup>

Jewish “egoism”, in these terms, was not “an end in itself”, nor a particularistic force behind politics. As soon as Jews seemed to achieve financial “surplus”, the only

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<sup>303</sup> In a general perspective, Otto Bauer broke up with the dogmatic view, established within Marxism, that national differences were merely a by-product of economic divisions, producing thus a socio-historical analysis (and defense) of nationalities as authentic “subjects” in the European context. Bauer, O. *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000

<sup>304</sup> “Antisemitism reached its climax when Jews had similarly lost their public functions and their influence, and were left with nothing but their wealth.” Arendt maintained that this pattern was valid for Western and Central European countries. Austrian anti-Semitism, for instance, “became violent” precisely when Jews lost the historical protection of the Habsburg monarchy, turning out to be the most vulnerable of Austrian ethnic minorities. Arendt, OT, p. 5

<sup>305</sup> “The Jewish bourgeoisie, in sharp contrast to its German and Austrian equivalents, was uninterested in positions of power, even of the economic kind. It was content with its accumulated wealth, happy in the security and peace that its wealth seemed to guarantee. An increasing number of sons from well-to-do homes deserted commercial life, since the empty accumulation of wealth was senseless.” Arendt, ‘Stefan Zweig: Jews in the world of yesterday’, TJW, p. 321

thing that most of them demanded was to preserve their juridical security. Indeed, in the most radical development of modern economy – imperialism –, Jews did not play, according to Arendt, a special role in “the expansion for the sake of expansion”.<sup>306</sup> The bourgeoisie was the original force behind the imperialist drive, and the un-Marxist, improbable alliance, in imperialistic countries, between the economic elite and the mob proved to Arendt that economic relations were less predictable, less schematic than Marx assumed.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, it contributed to Arendt’s everlasting comprehension that the political is not the superstructure of the economical, a mere configuration determined by social-economic developments. In this sense, identifying political equality (political emancipation) with capitalistic civil-society was, for Arendt, one of Marx’s great problems.

In fact, anyone reading modern Jewish history cannot easily dismiss political stability as a mere expediency of an egoistic civil society. In Arendt’s sense, political freedom is not established because of an economic process, but *despite* of it. Politics is not a mere surface of a deep laboring process. Political relations only spring when men and women decide to step out, momentarily, their laboring and working activities. By becoming political, men add a new dimension, embedded in different categories and relations, to their life in common, thus creating an “island of freedom” surrounded by a “sea of necessities”. One of the aspects of the Jewish problem, in this sense, was not that Jews were too particularistic, but perhaps that they were too Marxists in believing that they could achieve emancipation only by assimilating to social forces and social activities.

It was not abolition of property that would emancipate Jews. It was rather finding a stable ground, securing a *proper* place in the world, in a political sense, and not in an “economic world”, in which “everything is functional by definition”.<sup>308</sup> This world of stability was supposed to guarantee both civil-social and political rights: having a place and having a voice would mean an effective Jewish emancipation. This is one of the

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<sup>306</sup> Discussing the limited role of Jewish financiers in the imperialist process in South Africa, Arendt defined them as “representatives, not the owners, of the superfluous capital”; they were *déclassé*, “mob element among the Jewish people”, and even in their limited participation, they introduced an anti-imperialist “factor of normalcy and productivity” to the economic relations. Here also anti-Semites repeated “fantastic notions of a secret international Jewish power”, in a way that “a violent antisemitism survived the disappearance of the Jewish financiers as well”. Arendt, OT, pp. 261-268

<sup>307</sup> In this line, Arendt noted that pan-nationalistic parties and movements, breaking with class and national interests, attempted to act “above” classes and parties, “to act as whole”. Masses became an important source of support to the economic forces of imperialism. Arendt, OT, p. 327

<sup>308</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 246

reasons why Arendt worked upon a triple distinction of *wealth, property, power*. *Power* refers to a political co-existence and co-initiative among men in a public spaces. *Property* is a “privately owned place in the common world, something stable, marked off from the property of others”<sup>309</sup>. *Wealth* “is something insubstantial, not tied to any particular location, and its most characteristic form is capital, the function of which is to generate more wealth in an endless process”.<sup>310</sup> Some European Jews were wealthy but not powerful. Their wealth did not even secured their property in some cases. Court Jews accumulated wealth, but they and their communities were constantly threatened with expulsion. They could end up economically wealthy, but physically displaced and politically powerless.<sup>311</sup>

This situation, according to Arendt, led to one of the most revolting facts of the destruction of Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nazis accused Jews of controlling world political-power, while they revoked Jews’ basic rights, robbed their property and stripped their place in the world. It is in this context that Arendt’s bitterness against court Jews should be read: their tactics contributed to the absurd, defenseless position in which “our Rothschilds have a better chance of becoming beggars or peddlers than our beggars and peddlers of becoming Rothschilds”.<sup>312</sup> Poor and wealthy Jews alike ended up in collective ditches and extermination camps. Jewish wealth proved to be ridiculously powerless in the face of the destruction. Prominent Jews failed in convincing world powers to react against anti-Semitic measures, as they unsuccessfully begged for larger immigration quotas to powers which were mostly unworried with re-locating masses of Jews in the world.

Regarding this point, there is a partial agreement between Arendt and Marx. Arendt dismissed Marx’s general political prescription, and pointed to fundamental problems in the architectonic of his theory. But, while disagreeing with his prognosis, she accepted an extent of his diagnosis.<sup>313</sup> Marx had noted that, in itself, economic orientation is not sufficient to create a stable world. Marx may have not followed his intuition towards the specificities of the political, but his comprehension of the instability generated by economic processes, his central idea that nothing stands when money emerges as the

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<sup>309</sup> Canovan, M. *Hannah Arendt: a reinterpretation...*, p. 82

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> “The Jews were pariahs as long as they remained politically powerless.” Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 74

<sup>312</sup> Arendt, ‘Jewish Politics’, p. 241

<sup>313</sup> For Arendt’s qualification of Marx as the “greatest of modern labor theorists”, see Arendt, HC, p. 93

“common denominator” between men, was very important for Arendt’s own analysis of modern “world alienation”.<sup>314</sup> Arendt, however, declared that a stable world will not arise from economy – however organized “social forces” are. It will only arise outside economy, as a “freely chosen form of political organization”.<sup>315</sup>

Arendt concluded that the threat to politics did not come from “capitalist” economy, but from economy itself. The problem was grounding politics in an activity related to natural forces, to needs and impulses. The problem was shaping political man in the image of the laboring animal, that specimen absorbed into the silent, repetitive, compulsory process of laboring and producing. No matter how connected (in the communist view) or disconnected (in the liberal view) to the rest of society is this laboring man: he is equally a mere productive body, not a political agent, when absorbed by his daily economical task.<sup>316</sup> *Labor does not free men*. Men’s decision to establish, preserve or improve their political conditions coincides with the suspension of the “slave mentality” according to which there is nothing more important than busying oneself with the processual and recurrent impositions of “necessity”.

I do not propose an exact symmetry between the court Jews’ case and the analysis of labor as delineated by Arendt. I just want to point out that court Jews, in orienting their behavior by an economic mentality, were unconscious that the struggle for freedom required a different vocabulary and a different attitude, thus a model different from the parvenu. Court Jews seemed blind to realize that financial transactions form an “unreal world”<sup>317</sup>, since related to private spaces and to subjective variations. They relied on “the permanence of a process rather than the permanence of a stable structure”.<sup>318</sup> Wealthy Jews, in general, remained “uninterested in positions of power, even of the economic kind”<sup>319</sup> not by a fixed egoism, but by their fundamental lack of political experience, and by their general unwillingness to risk themselves in the political space. At the end, in wordless isolation, most of them longed for the lost warmth of the small ghetto, which they imagined to have guarded and protected better than no one else.

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<sup>314</sup> “The much deplored devaluation of all things, that is, the loss of all intrinsic worth, begins with their transformation into values and commodities...”, HC, p. 165

<sup>315</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 13

<sup>316</sup> Arendt showed the similarities between liberal and Marx economics, both grounding politics on economic processes, with the difference that Marx tried to “solve” liberal contradictions by “the construction of a ‘socialized man’, who is even less an acting being than the ‘economic man’ of liberal economics”. Arendt, HC, p. 42, fn 35

<sup>317</sup> Arendt, ‘Active Patience’, TJW, p. 141

<sup>318</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 69

<sup>319</sup> Arendt, ‘Stefan Zweig...’, p. 321

## 4.2 Defining the social

In the last chapter, I explored the pariah-condition in its economical dimension, tracing specific elements of the stories of modern Jews, and relating these elements to concepts of Arendt's larger thought. The tension between *life*, understood as physical endurance, and *good life*, understood as a political life under a structure of rights and within spaces of action, was related to correspondent themes such as fear and courage, adaptation and initiative, and also to the specific contradistinction *parvenu* and *pariah*. Now I want to focus the tension between economics and politics approaching a different aspect: what Arendt called the *rise of the social*. I will try to relate this controversial analysis to another implication of the pariah problem. What Arendt wrote about the rise of a mass society, I assume, can be better understood with the background of the experiences in which pariahs played an important role.

Arendt referred to the modern rise of the social as a major force threatening the autonomy of the political. The social is characterized by a gradual merging between the private and the public. The result is a loss of both private and public spaces as relatively separated from the other: there is no longer a clear demarcation between these two different modes of existence. Another striking aspect of this process is the ascension of economic affairs (which belonged to the household, as "laws of the house", *oikos-nomia*) to a dominant place in political discussions: promising more jobs, growing GDP, better economy, "professional politicians" need to prove their utility for private security and protection. The very term *political economy* would indicate the conceptual loss of distinction effected by the emergence of the social.

Arendt's critique of the social, with her re-distinction between private/economic and public/political spaces, generated protest from readers. Maurizio D'Entrèves defined Arendt's terms as too "fixed".<sup>320</sup> Hanna Pitkin complained against Arendt's lack of sensibility concerning questions of material justice. Pitkin voiced a common criticism, according to which Arendt proposed an asepsis that would devoid the public of concrete matters for discussions: "what *does* she imagine as the *content* of political speech and action"?<sup>321</sup> In this sense, by cleaning her message off economic demands, and by grounding this message on ancient examples, Arendt would have nothing to teach for a

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<sup>320</sup> D'Entrèves, M. P. op. cit., p. 62

<sup>321</sup> Pitkin also pointed to a "curious emptiness of content characterizing Arendt's image of the public sphere". Pitkin, H. op. cit., p. 337. A similar critique is presented by Feldman: "In her [Arendt's] political theory she aestheticizes and sanitizes politics to such an extent that one often wonders what the exact content of 'political action' really is. Feldman, R. H. 'Introduction...', p. lxxvi, fn 104

contemporary world that, both in its mentality and practices, has incorporated economic goals to the political.

For now, I just want to make some statements of clarification. Arendt's social is not an all-encompassing tool of empirical analysis. With the social, she is *not* proposing, on the one hand, a general description of every modern society, neither, on the other, a rigid normative demarcation. The *social* is not the same as society, as Arendt alluded to French good society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to European class-societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to north-American civil-society of the 1960s.<sup>322</sup> The social is better understood against the background of correlated historical phenomena and political problems: the advent of mass societies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of totalitarian movements, and the general loss of political mediation. In this sense, it is a "*Gegenbegriff*", a sort of contrasting concept to rethink and criticize the possibilities of political freedom in our time.<sup>323</sup>

As a contrasting concept, it is oriented to recover, or un-cover, a visible space for public activities. In other terms, it is, in Arendt's peculiar way of thinking, a criteria for comprehending the loss of politics *and* imagining new possibilities of demarcation between the private and the public. Arendt's terms cannot be said "too fixed", for her analysis departs from the historical fluctuation of activities, from the momentary dominance, let us say, of *work* over *action*, and then of the *animal laborans* over the *homo faber*. A reader doesn't need to agree with each of her stories of world alienation to accept the importance of *some* sense of distinction between private and public. It's not that her terms are too fixed, but that our processes became too fluid. The social problem could be exemplified with this very indisposition of scholars to think outside dominant social discourses. This indisposition would prove Arendt's very point that the social emerges imposing irresistible, unnegotiable terms.

In this respect, I agree with Dana Villa on the problem of reading Arendt with the presupposition of a specific conceptual/social agenda.<sup>324</sup> The presupposition of undebatable ends contradicts Arendt's proposal of *freedom as the meaning of politics*. For Arendt, *meaning* cannot be understood in terms of means-end categories. Something

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<sup>322</sup> In this line, Benhabib ascribed three meanings to "social" in Arendt's work: "the growth of capitalist commodity exchange economy", "mass society" and "sociability...civic associations". Benhabib, S. *The Reluctant...*, p. 23.

<sup>323</sup> Arendt Handbuch, op. cit., p. 282

<sup>324</sup> Villa, D. *Arendt and Heidegger: the fate of the political*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 206

or some experience is meaningful insofar it is not degraded as a mean to a “higher” thing or experience. In this sense, the exercise of freedom *within* politics is an “end in itself”. In fact, Arendt regarded end-in-itself as a paradox, for instrumentalism denies in principle anything which falls outside the variable relations of use. If politics should be regarded only in its usefulness for a “higher” activity, it would mean that institutions and rights could be always substituted by more efficient and rapid means to that end. Referring to freedom as meaning *of* and *within* politics, a meaning independent from successes or failures of specific political-projects, Arendt also avoided the language of “values”, which, in their anthropocentric-subjectivistic resonance, presuppose that man, as the creator and user of values, disposes of the earth and of the world at his will, using them in accordance to his momentary “evaluation” and “ends”.<sup>325</sup>

I also think that Villa is right in observing that there is an anxiety among “rationalistic” readers of Arendt. Projects pre-oriented to an intersubjective consensus or to specific ends of justice try to reestablish what Arendt called the old unity of being, an attempt which Villa interpreted as a new call for dis-alienation. In the first chapter, I argued that alienation and fragmentation (*Zerrissenheit*) of being are given to Arendt. In this line, ends are not to be imposed, but to be formulated *throughout the exercise* of action and judgement among plural citizens; for the possibility of free action and independent judgement, it is required a certain distance between citizens, and a distance of citizens from “rational” standards.<sup>326</sup> Active participation within the political-world requires degrees of non-identity and estrangement, for, according to Villa,

“...it is not alienation per se that she [Arendt] combats, but *world* alienation. One could go even further and say that to be *worldly* in Arendt’s sense is to inscribe a certain modality of alienation at the heart of one’s existence, and to give this alienation an extremely positive valorization.”<sup>327</sup>

So, it is not that Arendt’s action and judgement are “empty”, but that they can only be free and spontaneous insofar they are liberated from the pressures of absolute-external *oughts* and *ends*. Again, this is not a purely theoretical discussion, as it is informed by experiences in which goals presented as necessary and absolute – as the question of

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<sup>325</sup> For Arendt’s definition of “meaning”, and her critique of instrumentalism, see HC, pp. 155-156

<sup>326</sup> In this point, Benhabib, with a Platonic tone, seems to ask what Arendt cannot offer: a general criteria to establish the “rationality” of political decisions: “The ‘people’ is sovereign on a democracy, but it is neither always just nor always wise.” Benhabib, op. cit., p. 208. Arendt does try to establish “conditions” for a political space free of absolute, majoritarian decisions. She cannot, however, prescribe, *a priori*, how this or that discussion should be “decided”.

<sup>327</sup> Villa, op. cit., p. 203



poverty in the French Revolution, the survival of the race in Nazism, the production of equality in Soviet Union – served as tools of domination and violence. It is not that Arendt was insensible to pre-political experiences. She was just perhaps too “sensible” to the immanent dignity and freedom of the political, as she was aware of the modern problem of trying to solve social questions, departing from seemingly humane justifications, with abusive instruments.

Still, for Arendt, the identification politics-society would create a “total citizen”, who have no place to hide from the public light.<sup>328</sup> Without the right for a private space of his own, where he can stay with his friends, his familiars, and his private thoughts, where he can eat, love, laugh and talk in peace, a citizen loses an important basis for his integrity and personality. If every sphere of life is subject to regulations and norms, the citizen may also lose his capacity for spontaneous thoughts, opinions, and initiative.<sup>329</sup> It can be indeed said that Arendt emphasized more distinctions between activities, and its correlated spaces, than “dialectical transformations” or “mutual determinations”.<sup>330</sup> This theoretical attitude can be explained by her non-monistic approach. She refused positions according to which “everything becomes everything”, and she was skeptical towards the manipulative discourse in which the positive becomes negative, destruction becomes production, labor produces freedom etc. This attitude may have prevented her of establishing some interesting connection between different fields, but her priority in recovering the political, both in conceptual and practical terms, led her to a coherent phenomenology of political action. For her, political appearances are not an illusory effect of a deeper determination.

With this, we can reconsider the accusation of “emptiness” in Arendt’s political speech. Indeed, she wrote that emotions inherently tied to intimacy, such as love, would be perverted if transformed into factors of political identification.<sup>331</sup> “Pain”, for instance, being uncommunicable through words, could only be “experienced” in the inner space of

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<sup>328</sup> One of Arendt’s definition of “totalitarian governments” was precisely those “in which the totality of human life is claimed to be so politicized that under them there is no longer any freedom whatsoever”. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 108

<sup>329</sup> In this line, Arendt argued that “spontaneity”, although depending on political structures to “its organization”, can subsist even to tyrannical attacks, since these do not touch the integrity of the individual. Only a “total politicization” threatens spontaneous acts and thoughts. Arendt, *ibid.*, p. 128

<sup>330</sup> Arendt wrote, for instance, that Marx’s characterization of the political as a “superstructure” of the social prevented him of perceiving “any serious gulf between the two realms”. Arendt, *HC*, p. 33

<sup>331</sup> “Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world”. Arendt, *HC*, p. 52

the body.<sup>332</sup> She also indicated that there can be no freedom when political discussions are dominated by economical necessities. But here the argument can take a different side. Arendt wrote that, in the public realm – which “constitutes reality” –, “...even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delight of the senses –...are *transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized*, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance” (emphasis added).<sup>333</sup> So the whole controversy could be reframed by saying that Arendt is not cleaning the political, but demanding the *transformation* of experiences into political terms, so they become adequate to appear as communicated opinions and reflective judgments to others. According to Arendt, rational truth becomes mere opinion in the public sphere. In the same line, subjective feelings are transformed into public propositions when someone “deprivatizes” and communicates them: he or she must put his or her feelings into words to relate it to others in a politically relevant way. Finally, *economic necessities*, when become objects of public discussion, are transformed into matters of *possibility*, of possible agreements, goals and legislation. What is absolutely necessary dismisses political appreciation.

### **4.3 Life-process: Administration**

Arendt’s writings of the late 1950s and early 1960s – among which *The Human Condition*, *On Revolution* and *Between Past and Future* – evolved from a project in which she proposed to study and criticize Karl Marx. It would be an attempt to cover a gap for which she was criticized after the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Critics indicated that the book lacked a more systematic approach to Stalinism and its grounding theory/ideology, Marxism. Despite pointing to totalitarian elements in Marxism, Arendt never affirmed a direct causality between Marx and Stalin. Soviet totalitarianism was product of contingent experiences and historical circumstances which were more than a certain effect of certain ideas.<sup>334</sup> Still, keeping this cautious theoretical attitude, Arendt proceeded to study structural elements in Marx and, according to her conclusion that “whoever touches Marx touches the tradition of Western thought”<sup>335</sup>, also in the classic

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<sup>332</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 113

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 50

<sup>334</sup> Arendt was dubious and extremely cautious in passing a conclusion on the relation between Marx’s theory and totalitarian government: on the one hand, she wrote “I think it can be shown that the line from Aristotle to Marx shows both fewer and less decisive breaks than the line from Marx to Stalin”; on the other, “As an ideology Marxism is doubtless the only link that binds the totalitarian form of government directly to that tradition [of Western political thought]”. Arendt, ‘Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought’, p. 277

<sup>335</sup> Arendt, *ibid.*, pp. 276-77

and modern tradition of political theory. The result was a series of lectures, conferences and texts that originated her main works of political thought, in whose pages readers find her “law” of human plurality.

In *The Human Condition*, her most declarative book, Arendt disentangled activities that, according to her, had been mixed throughout theoretical definitions, historical experiences and social shifts. Arendt delineated three basic activities: *labor*, *work*, and *action*. *Labor* can be generally identified with the natural life and the cyclical processes of nature, including the “biological process of the human body” and the related activities that sustain life in an organic sense. *Work*, on its turn, creates artificial things (including things so different as books, machines, houses, and laws and institutions) which are properly added as parts of a human world, to be distinguished from a natural environment. *Action*, finally, refers to activities between-men, and to all stories enacted in meaningful interactions between plural, speaking human beings. Arendt called it the political activity, because, although the other activities relate to the political (citizens need, for instance, to be fed and housed), politics per se is action, that is, interactions between unique human beings through speech and deeds.<sup>336</sup>

Assuming that Arendt’s main storyline is the “rebellion against human existence as it has been given”, I propose to focus now on one of the many events interpreted by Arendt’s in *The Human Condition*: the “factual transformation of the whole society into a laboring society”.<sup>337</sup> For this, I shall deal again with some aspects of Arendt’s reading of Karl Marx, the “greatest theorist of labor”, in her opinion. I discussed before their perspectives on the Jewish economy in modern Europe. Now I want to expand the discussion to deal with a structural relation between economy and politics in modernity. In broader terms, in the previous sections, I discussed the economical from a private perspective, showing how private self-orientation is incompatible with political activation and creation of institutions. Now I want to focus on the social perspective, on the problems of a socialized economy – or what Arendt called a *laboring* society -, trying to present how labor, in its modern expansion, threatens both the human capacity to act and the human creation of durable institutions (in other words, how *labor* undermines the activities of *work* and *action*).

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<sup>336</sup> Arendt, HC, pp. 7-8

<sup>337</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 4

One of Arendt's main point is that Marx projected the activity of labor (*Arbeit*) over other activities, defining Man itself as a creature of labor. Commentators protested, saying that Marx also spoke of a specific activity of work.<sup>338</sup> But Arendt's point is that, even when he spoke of other categories, he was thinking in terms of laboring, as it was denoted by his re-definition of Man as a species-being (*Gattungswesen*).<sup>339</sup> The problem lies perhaps on the language of dialectical productions and movements from categories to categories. If work is produced by labor, and political freedom is produced by both, and if the whole process is understood in terms of a teleology of historical periods, then it is difficult to avoid certain conclusions: that labor, for instance, is the definitive force in a teleological process whose freedom can only be experienced in its end (*telos*), that is, in a society which is still to come (so, there can be no real freedom today); and so freedom must be understood as a collective project, measured in centuries, of a "socialized mankind" (*gesellschaftliche Menschheit*). Since life is understood as a) organic-physical life of needs and b) as life of humanity taken as a whole-species, then individual human beings and individual world artifacts become alienated or estranged if they are not integrated into the life process of human society in this century-measured creation of freedom. Thus, everyone and everything is valued in its contribution to the life-process of society.

Moreover, Arendt's criticism is not that individuals will become, according to Marx's vision, the "same", but that, by as referring to them as "integral part of the whole", one may risk denying this part a real integrity, that is, an existence partially independent from the whole.<sup>340</sup> Arendt is less concerned with sameness, as if individuals would resemble each other as animals from a same species, and more with *functionalization*, that is, with reducing individuals to social roles and parts adjusted to the life-process of

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<sup>338</sup> According to Weisman, "Neither Hegelian nor Marxian labor merely relates labor to production for immediate consumption. Labor is world building in the very same way as Arendtian work builds a world." But that is precisely the problem, in my reading: labor "expands" its force to a determinant position, until losing the specificities of other activities. If labor "creates" the world, one is authorized to think that free institutions will spring "naturally" from the laboring effort. See: Weisman, T. *Hannah Arendt and Karl Marx: on totalitarianism and the tradition of western political thought*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014, p. 79

<sup>339</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 99, f 36. According to Arendt, Marx defined "labor" as the "truer" human reality, the determining force behind politics ("...labor is the principle of rationality and its laws..."), behind creative and technological work ("Labor is the principle of productivity"), assuming thus a kind of demiurge-metaphysical position ("the creator of Mankind", in Lenin's words). See: Arendt, 'From Hegel to Marx', *The Promise of Politics*, p. 79

<sup>340</sup> Also according to Weisman, "When Marx writes, 'human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations', he is not reducing individuals to sameness. Rather, each individual is an integral part of the whole." Weisman, op. cit., p. 73

the whole. In the same line, the question is not if Marx felt pray to a sort of fatalism, but that he told a meta-story of labor-necessity whose main characters are classes, groups and a species living within long durations, in chronological units that no flesh-and-bone individual can ever experience. By the way, this is also a problem with Hegel. The incorporation of historical and collective social-dimensions – peoples, classes, nation-states, cultures etc. – into philosophical discourse can enrich one’s consciousness to processes larger than one’s own limited circle of direct experiences. But, on the other hand, this kind of discourse can lead to depersonalized interpretations, according to which classes, nationalities, movements are truly autonomous subjects, in contrast to individuals that only suffer the consequences of the interaction between these gigantic agents. These accounts may reinforce a sense of irresponsibility or, in other words, of an externalization of responsibility towards abstract entities.

There is, nevertheless, the “essential difference” between Hegel and Marx, one, according to Arendt, of “catastrophic importance”.<sup>341</sup> Hegel limited his interpretation of the world-spirit to the past, and its relations to present configurations. Philosophy can only grasp the meaning of social and spiritual forms which are real/effective (*wirklich*). Marx’s deduction of a future state of things, of a simple solution to a complex series of determinations, is not only an inversion of Hegel, but a very rejection of Hegel’s fundamental “*political* instinct”: that neither philosophers nor men of action can foretell future configurations, for history is made up of unpredictable actions.<sup>342</sup> While Hegel’s scheme implied that any “progress” would contain in itself configurations of the past (a tribute to historical authority), Marx’s conscious realization of the absolute in a future “classless society” implied a rejection of traditional sources of authorities, which, by being unable to grasp the *telos* of the process, were defined as partial or false consciences.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Arendt, “From Hegel to Marx”, In: *The Promise of Politics*, p. 70

<sup>342</sup> Weisman, while rejecting necessitarianism in Marx’s original formulation, does concede the point when she admits that Marx removed the experience of “wonder” (*thaumazein*) from his system. “Marx stands with Plato. He belongs to the circle of philosophers.” Weisman, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>343</sup> In a letter to Joseph Bloch (1890), Engels tried to dismiss the accusations of an economic determinism and material “absolutism” in Marx’s theory, mentioning that elements others than the economical also play a role in historical development. The statements of Engels himself discredited his purpose: “economic [assumptions and conditions] are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one.” In this line, “state power” (political power) can either “run in the same direction [of economic development], and then development is more rapid” or can oppose it, “in which case nowadays state power in every great people will go to pieces in the long run”. Concerning the autonomy of juridical reasoning: “the jurist imagines he is operating with *a priori* propositions, whereas they are really only economic reflexes;”. The same is true of “the realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air, religion, philosophy, etc.” – they “have a

As processual truth is not only found via the contemplation of established social-political forms, but it is also anticipated in accordance to the logic laws of the process, Marx introduced, according to Arendt, “deadly antipolitical” premises to his theory. *Absolute* realization of Man through labor, meaning Man’s re-creation and dis-alienation through “a single gigantic developmental process”<sup>344</sup>, intends to solve political contradictions by undoing the contradictions of labor. It identified, so to speak, freedom with the end of necessity, and dismissed partial forms of freedom as “prejudices” or “ideologies”,<sup>345</sup> as it was any representation of freedom that did not coincide with the socialization of labor and the social control over human activities in general. For Arendt, this scheme is not simply wrong. It is indeed a right translation of a social epoch, in which the *animal laborans* or the “species-being” became the dominant model for human values and relations. In this context, the pariah is threatened of becoming a parasite, and, on the other hand, anyone perceived as a social parasite is threatened of being ostracized as a pariah. For Arendt, the parasite-problem is fundamentally inscribed in Marx’s interpretation of modernity:

“What Marx understood was that labor itself had undergone a decisive change in the modern world; that it had not only become the source of all wealth, and consequently the origin of all social values, but that all men, independent of class origin, were sooner or later destined to become laborers, and that *those who could not be adjusted into this process of labor would be seen and judged by society as mere parasites*. To put it another way: while others were concerned with this or that right of the laboring class, Marx already foresaw the time when, not this class, but the consciousness that corresponds to it, and to its importance for society as a whole, would decree that no one would have any rights, not the even the right to stay alive, who was not a laborer. The result of this process of course has not been the elimination of all other occupations, but the reinterpretation of all human activities as laboring activities.” (emphasis added)<sup>346</sup>

Let me adjust the focus of this discussion. For Arendt, the “most fateful error” of Marx and Lenin (and, I would add, of Engels) was to imagine this process as ending in “mere administration”.<sup>347</sup> The abolition of labor, the activity that defined Man throughout

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prehistoric stock”; some of these “false conceptions of nature” could be explained by the “low economic development of the prehistoric period”. These false conceptions will be cleaned off with economic developments: “And even though economic necessity was the main driving force of the progressive knowledge of nature and becomes ever more so, it would surely be pedantic to try to find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense. The history of science is the history of the gradual clearing away of this nonsense...”. Engels, F. Letters on Historical Materialism. In: The Marx-Engels Reader. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York; London W. W. Norton & Co. 1978, pp. 760-65

<sup>344</sup> Arendt, ‘From Hegel to Marx’, p. 74

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>346</sup> Arendt, ‘Marx and Western Political Thought’, pp. 278-279

<sup>347</sup> Arendt, ‘From Hegel to Marx’, p. 77. According to Engels, “All Socialists are agreed that the political state, and with it political authority, will disappear as a result of the coming social revolution, that is, that

history, and the sublation of political disputes, would create a passive society of pure leisure, since needs, disputes, differences, estrangement etc. would be solved and, and the productive relations would be technically administered, “freeing” men to pursue multiple distractions. For Arendt, this ideal combined an image of Greek leisure with modern bureaucracy, the latter being the “deadly antipolitical” element. For organizing the life process – the rhythmical production and consumption of goods needed by a socialized mankind -, a structure of control, functionalization and coordination replaces the public, as a former place for deliberation, contestation, and participation of citizens. What rules now is a *Büro*, a gigantic office in “which nobody occupies the empty chair of the ruler”.

So, according to Arendt, Marxism-Leninism does not imply totalitarianism as a whole, but one of its elements: bureaucracy.<sup>348</sup> Bureaucracy, or mere administration, is the proper form of organization of men living under conditions of “radical and universal equality”,<sup>349</sup> that is, as beings equalized by the social process of labor-production. This form of government is, according to Arendt, even more dangerous, for it creates a radical form of powerlessness, in which “nobody takes responsibility”.<sup>350</sup> Its domination is more oppressive than ancient tyrannies, for, in the latter, the tyrant, a concrete person, could still be held accountable as the source of rules and decrees. A “socialized mankind”, differently, is represented by no-one other than the process itself, and its organization assumes the form of “universal procedures” (periodical and cyclical regulations, applications, measurements etc.), which are independent of personal motivations and resolutions.<sup>351</sup> To use Arendt’s categories-activities: the *labor* process is artificialized by social *work* (by mechanical and impersonal normative-institutions oriented to “administer” the life-process). This is another heterodox conclusion of Arendt: Marx assumed that the modern liberal state was inherently violent, for it was based on the control of one class over other. Arendt replied that social bureaucracies, organizing society in order to fulfill a necessary end, could be even more despotic and violent, for they closed political spaces to contestation and discussion, restricting the life of the “species-being” to labor, and to regulated leisure after labor.

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public functions will lose their political character and be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society.” Engels, F. ‘On Authority’. In: The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 732

<sup>348</sup> “If the October Revolution had been permitted to follow the lines prescribed by Marx and Lenin, which was not the case, it would probably have resulted in bureaucratic rule”. Arendt, *ibid.*, p. 78

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78

#### 4.4 Life-process: Struggle

Let us now remember that Arendt related the “rise of the social” to two modern phenomena: the disintegration of societies into mass societies and the consolidation of national societies. The historical basis of the rise of the social is the process of absorption of families into classes, and then the disintegration of classes and communitarian spaces into lonely individuals. Rapid urbanization, loss of communal forms of life, and abrupt economic transformations shaped what Arendt called the “mass phenomenon of loneliness”.<sup>352</sup> In a way, this can be seen as a breakdown of the inner complexity of Hegel’s *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* – not as a simple regression to the abstract individual with his propriety. It meant instead the emergence of an unprecedented situation of uprootedness and superfluity, since the lonely individual belonged to nothing and nothing belonged to him. He or she was left behind, with a sense of abandonment, by social and historical realities.<sup>353</sup>

Arendt noted that Marx did not understand “that the germs of a communistic society were present in the reality of a national household”.<sup>354</sup> This is another heterodox affirmation of Arendt: national communities could socially organize the life (*labor*) process, thus creating a national or ethnic form of communism. Specific traditions could be seen as obstacles to the coordination of social forces. They would be held as “backwards” or “reactionaries” forces preventing a total reintegration of individual, groups, and associations into the socialized process of production-consumption of the nation. This nation-society (as distinct from a nation-state) rescues the individual from his isolation, thus recreating a sense of communion through a “big family”.<sup>355</sup> It substitutes his intolerable loneliness by a demand of equality, not the artificial equality of citizenship, but the equality of conformity and coordination of social beings:

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<sup>352</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 59

<sup>353</sup> I will explore this process with more detail in the next chapters. For now, it is interesting to note that, for Arendt, “atomized society” was “prepared for the Nazis in Germany by historical circumstances”, while created “artificially” by Stalin in Russia. Arendt, OT, p. 417

<sup>354</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 44

<sup>355</sup> “The organic theories of nationalism, especially in its Central European versions, all rest on an identification of the nation and the relationships between its members with the family and family relationships”. Arendt, HC, p. 256. Peter Gay recalled youth, right- and left-wing movements’ aspirations to build (or re-build, in some imaginations) a “whole”, non-fragmentary society, during the Republic of Weimar: “The result was a peculiarly undoctinaire, unanalytical, in fact unpolitical socialism – it was a ‘a self-evident proposition’, one observer noted, for all people in the youth movement to be Socialists. Young men and women, seeking purity and renewal, were Socialists by instinct; the *völkisch*, right-wing groups demanded the ‘reawakening of a genuine Germanness – *deutsches Volkstum* – in German lands’, while the left-wing groups called for ‘the restoration of a *societas*, a communally constructed society.’” Gay, P. op. cit., p. 79



“Whether a nation consists of equals or non-equals is of no great importance in this respect, for society always demand that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest.”<sup>356</sup>

This is an interesting takeover of Arendt, as she did not focus solely on the racial discourse of ethnic identification. Both are correlated phenomena and, combined, became stronger elements of domination during totalitarian experiences. Yet here society, an amorphous mass society, relying on some abstract factors of identification, creates a principle of coordination which resembles to that of a family. This social-family, grounded on the imperatives of “life”, emerges as a form of self-government, for the governors of these socialized nations are not arbitrary leaders: they simply administer the “needs” of this enlarged family. Life, here, is no longer the chaotic sum of private lives of the liberal model, but the abstract life of the species or of the national society, which assumes the status of a truer reality over the fragmentation and disintegration of particular concrete families and individuals. The social family creates a paradox which pervades Arendt’s reflections: it is a fictional factor of unification, which nevertheless creates adherence and adjustment, thus generating real consequences.

In the last chapter of *The Human Condition – The Vita Activa and the Modern Age*, Arendt wrote about processes that accentuated world-alienation and also earth-alienation. According to these processes, men and women started to trust “realities” that were not directly related to their daily perceptual life (Arendt called this process an “absolute renunciation of the senses”)<sup>357</sup>, like the formalistic “reality” of mathematical and logical reasoning, the deeper “reality” of chemical and atomic processes, the “universal reality” of a beyond-earth galaxy, the social reality of laboring nations or species. *Being* was no longer *appearing* to concrete individual men and women.<sup>358</sup> Arendt called this a loss of “common sense”,<sup>359</sup> meaning not the loss of commonly established ideas and behaviors, but the loss of a basic rootedness in communities of experience, along with visible interactive citizens. This process of world alienation, as I am arguing, does not lead necessarily to self-preoccupation: it may inaugurate “gigantic” forms of actuation, typical of an hubristic modernity, according to which “Man” disposes of himself, of his species, or of “the earth from the outside”.<sup>360</sup> Considering our case of

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<sup>356</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 39

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 287

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., p. 276

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 280

<sup>360</sup> Villa, op. cit., p. 192

discussion: Man disposes of his own society, thus instituting an impersonal reality in which everyone is adjusted to the rhythms of everybody. Indeed, it institutes, through this fictional identification, a laboring no-body.

To grasp this process, we can think of the culture of labor that permeates socialized economies. One can look to capitalist and socialist examples. Decades before McDonald's had started praising the employees (or functionaries) of the month, Soviet Union and aligned countries implemented a culture of labor, according to which the continuation of the revolution would demand, instead of political participation and deliberation, total commitment to a laboring-life. The Stakhanovite movement in USSR, founded upon the example of a mine-worker who had established a record of productivity, created a cult of heroic dedication to work, discipline and productivity.<sup>361</sup> In the DDR, the soviet aligned East Germany, ruled by a bureaucratic organization under the dictatorship of a single-party (SED), State-Owned factories (*Volkseigenen Betriebe – VEB*) followed planning targets issued by the party in order to coordinate and control every aspect of laborers' life.

Laborers were organized under collectives, designed to enhance competition and productivity. These collectives, on their turn, were awarded medals in accordance to their efficiency, and were encouraged to form “combat groups of the laboring class” (*Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse*). Laboring for life also meant “struggling” for life, and so confirming the “rule of the labor”<sup>362</sup>: after protests in 1953, the regime created units of “strugglers”, working as informants, and preventing agitation and political unrest. In a socialized country, rigidly organized according to the principle that today's labor creates tomorrow's freedom, bureaucratic administration of life was compatible with the struggle for sustaining life and, by necessity, producing the freedom to come. As one VEB activist said, “The way we labor today becomes the way we live tomorrow”.<sup>363</sup> Bureaucratic mechanization, on one side, and struggle for collective life, on the other, created the sense of irresistibility, which, for Arendt, characterizes the modern “unnatural

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<sup>361</sup> D. Priestland noted how Stalin's work-cult created around Alexei Stakhanov was simultaneous to the purges of the Great Terror and a larger campaign of persecution, denunciation and execution of “anybody who showed signs of ‘bourgeois’ corruption”. Priestland, D. *The Red Flag: a history of Communism*. New York: Grove Press. 2009, p. 177 For Arendt, the “Stakhanov system...broke up all solidarity and class consciousness among the workers, first by ferocious competition and second by the temporary solidification of a Stakhanovite aristocracy...” OT, p. 420

<sup>362</sup> “...it is force to which we must someday appeal in order to erect the rule of the labor.” Marx, K. ‘The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution’. In: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 523

<sup>363</sup> I first read the slogan (“*So wie wir heute arbeiten werden wir morgen leben*”) in the exhibition *Alltag in der DDR*, in the Museum in the Kulturbrauerei, in Berlin.

growth of the natural”. The impersonality of administrative and mechanic processes is reinforced by the ever growing demands of the abstract needs of the social organism.<sup>364</sup>

In a process ruled by nobody, there can be no responsibility and there can be no resistance. Anyone who, consciously or not, resists to the life-process is automatically rendered as social parasite. For Arendt, when the norms of production and coordination equalize the labor of every-body, “those who did not keep the rules could be considered to be asocial or abnormal”.<sup>365</sup> After the replacement of people by roles and functions, those who do not fit are considered ab-normal, a-social, work-shy, or, given the emphasis on the social-organism, mere parasites. In biology, parasitism is a matter of microscopic objectivity: there is a verifiable organism which takes a vital energy from another organism. In a social perspective, parasitism, although metaphorical and abstractly defined by the dominant discourse of production, turns out to be a matter of social engineering and violence.<sup>366</sup>

Arendt noted that the “socialized man” was “even less an acting being” than the individual of liberal economics.<sup>367</sup> The latter, even though oriented to his privacy, is still an identifiable agent. The social is not identifiable, does not act, cannot be held accountable by specific decisions. There is another irony at this point. Marx and other theoreticians of modern economy thought that, via the material developments of modern society, old regulations of religious, magical, and mythical orders would fall as false conceptualizations of nature. Progress, in special economic and scientific progress, would imply more autonomy, as men would free themselves from old superstitions. Arendt claimed something very different: mass societies, relying on gigantic-impersonal representations of itself, tend to create new, more dangerous myths of powerlessness. With the language of future goals and statistical indexes, the social relies on terms that

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<sup>364</sup> D’Entrèves complains against an “ambiguity” in Arendt’s analysis of modernity, according to which she pointed to the advance of “working”, artificial mechanisms through technology and specialization, and, on the other side, she referred to an intrusion of the “natural”. Accordingly, Arendt never “solved” this ambiguity. D’Entrèves, op. cit., p. 53. I argue that it cannot be solved because it is not an ambiguity, but an interaction between the two activities (labor and work), or, if one may, a fusion of both. The victory of the *animal laborans* over the *homo faber* does not mean the suppression of work-techniques (and of machines, technologies, artifices etc.), but an incorporation of work-techniques by the laboring process. This duality is precisely expressed in the formula “unnatural growth of the natural”. I agree with Villa once more: “Nature’s automatism is enhanced by the machine.” Villa, op. cit., p. 199

<sup>365</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 42

<sup>366</sup> Arendt used Soviet Union “new law against social parasites” (who “were supposed to be selected by the people themselves in mass meetings”), introduced in 1957, to show that the country could “relapse into totalitarianism between one day and another”. Arendt, OT, p. xlv

<sup>367</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 42, f 35

are not experienced nor understandable through common speech by common citizens. *In order to* save a race, to create equality, to undo poverty, the social process may confiscate food, ostracize discontents, purge classes, expel group-populations, as the process is only governed by “needs”, but not checked by concrete citizens.

The language of life, enhanced by the totalitarian refusal of liberal instrumentality, justified the invasion of the “vital space” (*Lebensraum*) on the East, justified the euthanasia and “mercy-killings” of “disabled” persons in the *Aktion T4*, justified the exclusion and extermination of degenerate, perverted, sub-human (*Untermenschen*) races, as justified the death of thousands of laborers (many of them political prisoners and “class enemies”) charged, for instance, with building Stalin’s White Sea-Baltic Sea channel. It also justified the creation of efficient instruments to implement “painful” measures (chemical weapons, atomic bombs, gas chambers) to achieve “necessary” ends. According to Arendt, the greatest paradox, and also the greatest proof of the failure of modern forms of politics, is that the promotion of life to the highest value helped to create a politics of destruction, which only aggravated helplessness in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

“If it is true that politics is nothing more than a necessary evil for sustaining the life of humanity, then politics has indeed begun to banish itself from the world and transform its meaning into meaninglessness.”<sup>368</sup>

#### **4.5 Keeping the Process Under Control**

I have explored so far some aspects of the tension between pariah and society, in special mass society. Max Weber defined the pariah as a caste *with economic function* but *without political rights*. Arendt took over this historical situation, and told subsequent stories in which the pariah did not, or could not, improve his instrumental situation towards a political condition with rights to act and speak. As we shall see in the next chapter, the pariah-situation was weakened not so much because of his exclusion by malevolent rulers. The pariah’s major tension emerged in contrast to society. This became especially true when a disintegrated society turned into a mass society, re-identified in terms of a socialized single-subject (a nation, a race, a species).

Arendt affirmed that the pariah enters the political realm as a rebel. This is not a gratuitous rebellion. The pariah rebels, in this case, against society, or against the “social process”, which forced upon him a degrading situation. There can be, in fact, a circular tension between the pariah and society: either society precludes the integration of a group

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<sup>368</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 110

or an individual; or someone, by acting, that is, by not conforming to society, puts himself in contrast to the social-standards. So far, the pariah's clash with society has been examined in economic terms. I have explored this tension, firstly, through the acceptance of given economic roles by Jews in Europe, with their embrace of an un-political functionality. Now, I've presented how the problem of economic functionality becomes politically more dangerous with the emergence of totalistic societies, which engulf every sphere and everybody, as if it were a great factory or a great family.

If I am right in characterizing the pariah as someone who refuses to be disintegrated by the economic process of society, we shall discuss also the position of workers. Indeed, according to Arendt's terms, we shall call them "laborers", for workers still have a control over their material and a degree of freedom in ascribing meaning to their works. Modern laborers are absorbed by the necessary and cyclical process of society, thus lacking any degree of independence, any space of autonomy within this process. Moreover, given the functionalization of society around economic goals, the laborer becomes a paradigmatic model to society: everyone and everything is understood and evaluated in terms of coordinated social labor. Independent art, political protest and sheer laziness are incongruent to the "social", as they delay the process of production-consumption.

Discussing the relation between individuals and a still stratified society, Arendt recalled the position of marginal groups "which society had never quite absorbed", as Jews, homosexuals, workers and proletarians.<sup>369</sup> These groups, as we saw in the case of Jews, still could find an alternative home, with "certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society"<sup>370</sup>, among their communities still standing outside or in the margins of society: ghettos, revolutionary parties, unions, social clubs. The protective boundaries of small communities were soon to be dismantled with the rise of the social, which, as we saw, coincided with the massification of society into disconnected individuals. In conditions of uprootedness and atomization, there is no escape to alternative societies:

"A good part of the despair of individuals under the conditions of mass society is due to the fact that these avenues of escape are now closed because society has incorporated all strata of the population."<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture', BPF, p. 197

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

For Arendt, the incorporation of laborers by society was concomitant to their expropriation from the “world”. Indeed, expropriation and socialization were different aspects of the same process. First, laborers were “deprived of the twofold protection of family and propriety” (in the beginning of the industrial revolution). Then, “society became the subject of the new life process”, absorbing the laborer as a mere body (or a mere “force”, in Marx’s terms) into his new abstract “family”, society, within his new “propriety”, the nation, or the race, or the species.<sup>372</sup> It is not coincident that one of the events marking the modern loss of the world is the literal expropriation of people, with their removal of a concrete location in the world, and their subsequent incorporation into the intangible process of “social production”. Historically, for Arendt, this phenomenon was aggravated by imperialism. In the transition of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, unbounded economic processes generated superfluous men and superfluous capital. According to the nature of the wealth-process, superfluous men and wealth were sent beyond the institutional and geographical limits of the nation-state, to continue the process of accumulation of wealth in “uncivilized” territories. The inner logic of accumulation created an “expansion for the sake of expansion”, which uprooted more people, and undermined political institutions and controls. By creating new forms of domination through bureaucracy and decrees, imperialistic politics facilitated the movement in which “wealth became a never-ending process of getting wealthier.”<sup>373</sup>

In 1970, in one of her last interviews, Arendt spoke about the relation between economy and politics. Adelbert Reif, the interviewer, insisted to know Arendt’s opinion on the “alternatives for the future”: capitalism, socialism or another possibility?<sup>374</sup> Arendt refused to answer a question in such terms, for it assumed two presuppositions that she did not share: that thinkers could work with models of predictability (“let us hope it will come as a surprise to us”), and that social processes are, fundamentally, of an economic nature. Arendt refused to frame the question as a struggle between capitalism and socialism. These two models were very similar in her perspective (“we have here twins, each wearing a different hat”). The solution, for her, was certainly not “to expropriate the

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<sup>372</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 256

<sup>373</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 188.

<sup>374</sup> Arendt, The Last Interview, p. 80. Reif formulated the question from the perspective of “this stage of the historical development of mankind”, to which Arendt replied: “I see no such alternative in history; nor do I know what is in store there. Let’s not talk about such grand matters as ‘the historical development of mankind’...”

expropriators”, neither to institute a collective ownership (“a contradiction in terms”).<sup>375</sup> Capitalism initiated a process of expropriation continued through “mild forms of expropriation” as inflation, recession, overtaxation, devaluation of currency.

On its turn, practical forms of socialism, mainly those of Eastern Europe, had only carried the process ahead. In Russia, indeed, by that period, there was “total expropriation”, in Arendt’s words: “all political and legal safeguards of private ownership have disappeared”. Moreover, as propriety was also related, for Arendt, to a community-rooted place in the world, socialism expropriated its laborers also by destroying their “class”, their unions and parties, and their rights – “collective bargaining, strikes, unemployment insurance” etc.<sup>376</sup> Decentralized forms of agency and multiple centers of power (promised by the formula “all the power to the councils”) had been destroyed (“precisely by the Communist Party and by Lenin himself”) with the consolidation of an one-party ruling according to a single ideology. “In essence”, Arendt concluded, “socialism has simply continued, and driven to its extreme, what capitalism began. Why should it be the remedy?”<sup>377</sup>

Arendt’s moving away from both capitalistic and socialist interpretations of politics meant, fundamentally, a rejection of the idea that politics would be solved through the choice of the best economic model. Arendt’s project is a consideration of human beings not as laborers who will become free in the future, but as laborers or workers who can also be free citizens now. Marx had complained against the “decomposition [*Zersetzung*] of man into Jew and citizen, Protestant and citizen, religious man and citizen”<sup>378</sup>, and also against man’s alienation from his labor, the products of his labor, and from man himself and his natural essence.<sup>379</sup> Marx claimed then a “re-composition” of man into a “species being”, a man no longer estranged from other men and from his labor-work. Arendt’s rejection of this abstract model reestablished *political power in concreteness*: politically, human beings appear to others, and experience otherness, in a “decomposed” way, that is, as Jews, Protestants, artists, workers, woman etc. There is no access to an immediate source of “recomposition”. A political freedom experienced in

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p. 84

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Marx, K. ‘On The Jewish Question’, pp. 35-36

<sup>379</sup> Marx summed up “estrangement” of “Man’s species being” (the estrangement of man’s body from himself, the estrangement from the “product of his labour”, the estrangement from other’s) as follows: “...the proposition that man’s species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man’s essential nature”. Marx, K. ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844’. In: The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 77

Arendt's terms means an artificial equalization of workers, laborers, businessmen, atheists, Catholics etc. as citizens entitled to participate, to have a say, on the configuration of their social landscape. In Arendt's sense, a laborer becomes free not by abstractly "owning" the laboring processes of society, but by becoming a citizen with a rightful location in the world, with entitlement to act and speak on its own behalf.

Here, it is also important to see Arendt's defense of political *work* (creation, preservation or recreation of institutions) and political *action* (speaking and manifesting spontaneously) against the demands of a silent, repetitive, conformed labor – or of a politics designed as an administered "struggle for life". In other words, here one may see her emphasis on world-institutions as the locus for a politics of plural beings against the impersonal process of economy. For Arendt, what protects laborers and people in general in the "so-called capitalist countries of the West is not capitalism, but a legal system...", for "the question is what we can do to get and keep this [economic] process under control so that it does not degenerate, under one name or another, into the monstrosities in which it has fallen in the East."<sup>380</sup> Arendt pointed to the fact that what was unbearable for the communist dictatorship in Russia was not economic concessions to private consume and comfort, nor even some minor degrees of technical and administrative autonomy to factories and business. Political reforms and political demands were actually unacceptable – public agitation was a sufficient condition for intervention in satellite countries.<sup>381</sup>

Breaking with the dichotomy right-left, Arendt suggested that both sides insisted that an economic system produced certain political institutions, while, for her, it is "action" that arises spontaneously, inserting the discussion of principles and creation of institutions over the processes of production, accumulation, distribution. That "economic power" could still not control "political power" disproved Marx: "the state and its constitutions are not superstructures". So the core difference for Arendt was not the

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<sup>380</sup> Arendt, *The Last Interview...*, p. 82

<sup>381</sup> Arendt compared soviet repression in Czechoslovakia ("The Soviet Union marched into Czechoslovakia not because of the new 'economic model' but because of the *political* reforms connected with it.") with the case of DDR, which "has become constantly more tyrannical ideologically the greater its economic concessions". *Ibid.*, pp. 86-86. As an example, one could also think of the "closed cities" from Soviet Union (some still standing in actual Russia), like Ozyorsk (called city-40), a city organized around the plutonium plant in Mayak; inhabitants, nuclear workers and their families, have access to better products and goods, and enjoy private comforts which inhabitants from surrounding cities do not enjoy. Still, during Stalin's period, a worker who refused to keep his job on the plant was killed; even today, the city is closed, and no citizen is entitled to the right of speaking or complaining (part of the population suffers from diseases provoked by nuclear accidents). See the documentary 'City 40' (2016). Directed by Samira Goetschel (1h20min).



arbitrary classification of countries in accordance to their economic tendencies, but the quality of political institutions, with which citizens could have a certain deliberative control over their economic process – as Canovan put it, the difference between “serving a [economic] process, and subordinating it to human goals”.<sup>382</sup> Politically, the world was not divided between socialist and capitalist, but between countries with political rights (as “Sweden on one side, the United States on the other”) and countries with no rights for participation and actuation (“Franco’s Spain on one side, Soviet Russia on the other”).<sup>383</sup> In Arendt’s categories, the decisive difference was between countries where frame-worked action was possible and countries where an unbounded laboring-productive process remained unchecked:

“...only legal and political institutions that are independent of the economic forces and their automatism can control and check the inherently monstrous potentialities of this process.”<sup>384</sup>

#### **4.6 Final remarks**

In Arendt’s perspective, any govern grounded on economic forces – either the govern of particularistic corporations which invade the public sphere, or the self-oriented govern of private agents towards their own satisfactions, or, finally, the gigantic govern of socialist bureaucracies that take society as if it is owned by them – is not political. Politics is not about private life, nor about the life of the race, or the nation, or the species (mankind, until the creation of nuclear weapons, was assumed to be immortal; even if millions were destroyed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mankind kept on living). Politics is instead about what Arendt called the *world*, an institutional and civilizational structure in which men and women confirm their status as unique citizens, being entitled to a place, to a meaningful life of relations and productive work, with the possibility of intervention on their economic and political affairs. It’s a freely chosen and freely experienced form of human organization.

Now, in my view, Arendt can be criticized for stressing more the oppositions between the economic and the political than their eventual complementation. Economic prosperity and political freedom can go hand in hand. The economical and the political do not form a necessary opposition. Economic prosperity can enlarge our political experience by providing material conditions for the fulfilment of natural and social

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<sup>382</sup> Canovan, op. cit., p. 83

<sup>383</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 84

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p. 81

demands without which contemporary freedom would be inconceivable. If Arendt thought, as I am arguing, in terms of re-concretization of life around direct experiences (as opposed to the “fictional realities” of global ideologies and abstract systems), then she could have stressed how private, social and economic spheres relate to the political in a more positive way. As one of her former students noted, “the socioeconomic and political domains cannot be distinguished as strictly as Arendt had distinguished them, for they are, in daily life, too intertwined.”<sup>385</sup>

But I believe that the question, again, is more a matter of how and why Arendt wrote than of the actual content of her ideas. As Villa observed, “*Everything* Arendt has to say about action and the public realm is framed in terms of analysis of the de-worldling of the public world in the modern age.”<sup>386</sup> As I am defending, her critique of society and economy do not fit into a sociological account of empirical-historical forms. Her reading is not simply a collection of historical lessons, but a conceptual, factually-based, analysis of the modern crisis of politics, followed by a judgement oriented to the recovery or the recreation of certain political conditions and principles. Based on the analysis of what is “new”, or still unarticulated, it’s a “creative response”<sup>387</sup>, which is meant to confront established political and social beliefs. Moreover, she also defended the *a-political autonomy* of the private and of privacy. By *not* politicizing private and economic life, Arendt precisely preserved these forms in their relative independence, thus recognizing their importance. Totalitarian and pre-totalitarian dominations caused the “destruction of bonds”<sup>388</sup> (family, marriage, friendship, privacy), and Arendt certainly knew the political importance of preserving pre-political and extra-political forms of life.

Moreover, Arendt ascribed social tasks of first importance to the technical-economical, such as the reduction of poverty.<sup>389</sup> She also stressed that one *social factor* for the *political success* of the north-American revolution was the satisfactory economic conditions of the former colonies.<sup>390</sup> Yet Arendt’s effort was oriented to persuade contemporary readers of a difference which sounded obvious on a nominal basis, but which had been lost in predominant practices, the difference between economy and politics. Her emphasis on differences, on a clear demarcation, was meant to recover what

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<sup>385</sup> Young-Bruhel, E. *Why Arendt Matters?*, p. 142

<sup>386</sup> Villa, op. cit., p. 189

<sup>387</sup> Young-Bruhel, op. cit., p. 61

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p. 54

<sup>389</sup> Arendt, H. *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin Books. 2006, p. 104 (Henceforward, OR)

<sup>390</sup> Arendt, OR, p. 58

was for her *exclusive* grounding terms and experiences of the political. As Pitkin noted, every major political theorist was “concerned with this transition from private to public”,<sup>391</sup> and perhaps no other historical period matched the events of end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of devastating consequences emerging from the tension between the processes of *life* and the institutions of the *good life*. Arendt could not simply accept as “natural” the “steady transformation of the *citoyen* of the French Revolution into the *bourgeois* of the prewar period”.<sup>392</sup>

Still on this difficult topic, one cannot go further by saying that economic processes of mass societies are totalitarians in essence – an affirmation which, I assume, would strike Arendt in an analytical and moral level. An expression such as “totalitarianism of the market” is, to say the least, “hyperbolic and misleading”.<sup>393</sup> Democratic mass societies, with all its pathological and a-political tendencies, are still based on (even if limited) options of life, on (even if weakened) freedom of movement, speech, press, on (threatened, but still valid) reserves of privacy and private spheres, on a limited, state-controlled, criticizable, use of violence, and on a general possibility of differentiation on political, social and personal levels. A critique of mass-economy may benefit from several elements of Arendt’s work, as I am trying to show, but not from an indistinct identification with the totalitarian phenomenon – if for no other reason, at least for the fact that totalitarianism *rejected* economic rationality. Arendt’s work definitely does not suggest that, at night, all prisoners are grey.

Still, the *political critique of economy* articulated by Hannah Arendt deserves to be considered not only in its alternative to the right-left divide, but also in its complex account of several modes of economic de-politicization. From the political apathy of private oriented individuals to the behavioristic and conformist processes of a “socialized economy”, Arendt brought up different arguments and different experiences to remind that a random collection of private aims does not form a public matter. Moreover, she insisted that an abstract recreation of economic identity around a “social” which forces on to the public an impersonal, seemingly natural impetus (“the rule of labor”, in Marx’s formulation) may aggravate the phenomenon of powerlessness. Economic systems are real, but not in “pure forms”, as they coexist with political configurations. The political

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<sup>391</sup> Pitkin, H. op. cit., p. 348

<sup>392</sup> Arendt, ‘The Moral of History’, TJW, p. 315

<sup>393</sup> Fraser discussed John Gray, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri comparisons between totalitarianism and global market capitalism in Fraser, N. *Scales of Justice: reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 139

question, thus, is how to prevent economic processes of robbing freedom, something that happens, according to Arendt,

“...when a dissenter or opponent becomes ‘unemployable’ or when consumer goods are so scarce and life so uncomfortable that it is easy for the government to ‘buy’ whole sections of the population. What people in the [European] East do care about are freedom, civil rights, legal guarantees. For these are the conditions for being free to say, to write, and to print whatever one likes.”<sup>394</sup>

Just short of Arendt’s death, ironically, if one considers the accusations of Arendt’s “utopianism”, a series of democratic revolutions rejected the authoritarian model of modern revolutions.<sup>395</sup> While the latter was based on single parties and single leaders acting on behalf of laws “made” by history, and forcing necessary means to pursue necessary social ends, those new democratic revolutions reclaimed an institutional space for plural deliberation and shared determination by a coalition of different individuals and social groups. These acts of re-politicization, from the overthrow of autocracies in Portugal, Spain and Greece in the 1970s to the re-democratization in Brazil and Argentina, and the fall of dictators in the Philippines and in South Korea, in the 1980s, were “Arendtian revolutions”, in the words of Jonathan Schell.<sup>396</sup> “Caring about freedom”, as Arendt indicated, people on the East also joined these “arendtian revolutions” in their rejection of governments which promised to solve the “social question”. Bureaucratic-dictatorship, ruling as representatives of the no-body process of social laboring, were overthrown in Ukraine, Georgia, in the Balkans, and years before in Poland, where a movement with a suggestive “arendtian” name (*Solidarity*) mobilized, nonviolently, for the sake of establishing political and civil rights, diverse groups and individuals, from workers, students, intellectuals, religious leaders and many others who would be pointed out, under the perspective of social adjustment, as agitators, parasites, and a-social elements.

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<sup>394</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 86

<sup>395</sup> For Engels, “A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon – authoritarian mean, if such there be all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries.” Engels, ‘On Authority’, p. 733

<sup>396</sup> Schell, J. ‘The Arendtian Revolutions’, Introduction to Arendt, OR, p. xxi

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BECOMING PARVENU: THE PARIAH ASSIMILATES

*“Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are.”*  
(Hannah Arendt, *We Refugees*)

#### 5.1 Introduction

Why did Arendt criticize the phenomenon of assimilation of European Jews? In broad terms, the story of assimilation told by Hannah Arendt rested on the conclusion that Jews were *never politically emancipated* – even if some edicts, conceding eventually civil rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were nominally regarded as edicts of emancipation.<sup>397</sup> Instead, one of Arendt’s main claims was that assimilation undermined emancipation. Indeed, she held that both processes, seemingly related and mutually implicated at that time, stand in opposition. One cannot be emancipated through assimilation. More than this, assimilation poses a threat to political freedom. To understand this and others of Arendt’s (strong) claims, I will attempt to define the controversial term *assimilation*.

*Assimilate* designates the incorporation of something, and the comprehension of something. “I assimilated that idea”. “He assimilated the blows that life has brought”. In a sense, to comprehend is to incorporate: an idea, an experience, a situation, as long as it is assimilated, becomes part of what something is. It creates an identity between what assimilates and what is assimilated. On a different angle, as a process relating human beings, assimilation announces its limits, and perhaps its failure in its own terms. The person who assimilates can only become *similar*, never equal to others. If the goal is equality, assimilation contradicts its objective by proposing a relation in which one *tries* to become only *similar* to another. As similarity is not equality, both stand in unequal conditions in the beginning and in the end of the process.

Arendt begun one of her discussions on the assimilation of Jews mentioning equality, the “most uncertain venture of modern mankind”. “Equality of condition” was, for her, an important cornerstone of justice and, at the same time, an ideal politically

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<sup>397</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 23. Some edicts conferred civil, but not political rights; others, such as the edict of Baden (1807), promised the attribution of rights only under the condition of a political and ethical formation (*politische und sittliche Bildung*) of Jews. In general, rights could be revoked under any pretext. Sorkin, D. *The Transformation of German Jewry: 1780-1840*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 29-30

dangerous.<sup>398</sup> Accordingly, the extrapolation of equality from certain limited spheres – political, juridical, formal – to broader realms originated some of the gravest political problems of modern times. Arendt, in fact, related the emergence of racial movements to this longing for equality. Ethnic and racial tribalism did not embrace inequality as an ontological principle. They rejected inequality, thus aiming to build a society of equals. This is another important part of Arendt’s story: the expansion of equality, from a political to a social principle, destroys political freedom. By becoming a social principle, equality loses its limited status as a term of orientation and stabilization of relations between citizens. As equality becomes an all-encompassing goal, society starts a radical discrimination to abolish discrimination. It behaves impatiently towards any social and natural differences among group and individuals. It can no longer tolerate inequality.<sup>399</sup>

In this line, *society* is a key term to understand Arendt’s critique of assimilation. She referred to assimilation as “adjustment to and reception by society”.<sup>400</sup> Jewish assimilation meant “acceptance by non-Jewish society”.<sup>401</sup> Assimilation was so a social, not a political process. It did not mean granting rights, neither enlarging the scope of citizenship nor creating new political structures. It meant adaptation to certain social standards and adoption of certain social roles. When Arendt referred to assimilation as the “disappearance of the Jews’ separate existence”<sup>402</sup>, she meant the disappearance of Jews as a socially distinct entity. It was the first moment of Jewish disintegration in Europe. Arendt’s first claims – that assimilation was un-political and that it implied the social disappearance of Jews – was complemented by a stronger conclusion: that assimilation prepared the way to 1933 and to Hitler.<sup>403</sup> To understand these statements, one needs to bear in mind specific historical features of “rise of the social” in that context. First, society demanded equalization. Then, social assimilation, proving ultimately its impossibility (becoming similar, as I mentioned before, does not mean becoming equal), spread over into something much more problematic: totalitarian politics legalized

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<sup>398</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 69

<sup>399</sup> For Arendt, when equality is transformed from a political into a social principle, it is likely for it “to be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is ‘normal’ if he is like everybody else and ‘abnormal’ if he happens to be different...And it has been precisely this new concept of equality that has made modern race relations so difficult...” Arendt, OT, pp. 69-70

<sup>400</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 72

<sup>401</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 71

<sup>402</sup> Arendt, H. *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*. First Complete Edition. Edited by Liliane Weissberg. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 105 (Henceforward, RV)

<sup>403</sup> “The anti-Semitic charge of treason is pure fabrication, but belief in it has its basis in this tactic of assimilationists Jews. In that sense 1933 is simply the natural outcome of 100 percent Jewish conformity with the German people.” Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 53

discrimination in order to abolish discrimination and differentiation, actualizing the meaning of the “disappearance of Jews”.

From a historical point of view, before 1933, the conditions of assimilation – its background, its models and its first tendencies – were defined in a highly complex period. It was complex; yet it was also a short period. Chronologically, Arendt traced the beginning of assimilation, of its defining ideas and events, to Moses Mendelssohn’s life in Berlin, C. W. Dohm’s publication of *On the Civil Improvement of the Jews* [*Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*], and the opening of Henriette Herz salon, all events around the 1770s and 1780s.<sup>404</sup> Arendt referred to the end of assimilation – better said, the end of its illusions – around the first decades of the 1800s, with the repeal of civil rights, and the reaction to the spirit of tolerance and reform in Prussia, during the first years of that century. The closing of illusions was marked by events such as the publication of Grattenauer’s *Against the Jews* [*Wider die Juden*] (1803), the anti-Napoleonic movements, the substitution of salons by masculine fraternities (where tea and conversations were replaced by beer and chauvinistic songs), and the general climate of reaction symbolized by the Congress of Vienna. No more than 50 years, in Arendt’s account, were needed to establish movements that would define the process of assimilation and, later, contribute to the collapse of European peoples.

The historical complexity of assimilation was matched by its theoretical and conceptual intricacy. Arendt mentioned thinkers and authors as diverse as Lessing, Goethe, Mirabeau, W. Humboldt, Herder, and also Mendelssohn, as having settled the terms and the models for the paths taken, and for those not taken, during the epoch of assimilation. Many among them, even though being more or less friendly to the “civil improvement” of Jews, could not, according to Arendt, grasp the political significance of the Jewish question. Friends of Jews helped to frame the model of social assimilation, while anti-Semites increasingly redefined the Jewish question/problem (*Judenfrage*) as a political matter, a matter that would require political measures as disfranchisement, alteration of rights, legal segregation and even expulsion.<sup>405</sup> The proponents of “tolerance” still preached social adjustment. As we shall see, Enlightened theories of tolerance preached social and individual adaptation, presupposing equalization as a

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<sup>404</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 18

<sup>405</sup> “It is one of the most unfortunate facts in the history of the Jewish people that only their enemies, but never their friends, could understand that the Jewish question is a ‘political problem’” Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, pp. 23-24

condition for political integration. Political integration would be a “natural” effect in an equalized society. For Arendt, this confusion of political integration with social adjustment was one of Enlightenment’s gravest mistake.

To understand what kind – or kinds – of social adjustment Arendt referred, we must explore a little more the polysemy of the *social* in her approach. Some readers analyzed Arendt’s *social* in three phenomena: economic exchange-market, mass society, and sociability. Accordingly, assimilation meant social adaptation only in the last sense, an adjustment to manners, clothes, vocabulary, and to certain social-style in order to gain acceptance.<sup>406</sup> I disagree with such a reduction of the social and of social assimilation. To start with, as we saw in the previous chapters, the circumstances of European Jews were shaped by the acceptance of limited economic roles. Jews not only conformed to norms of behavior, but to the few instrumental functions that were opened to them. Moreover, considering the deformation of society into a mass-society, the Jewish question was, in Arendt’s terms, a “catalytic agent”. The disintegration of Jewish communities, and the aggravation of their powerlessness, coincided with larger processes of social massification, to which Jews, being one of the weakest groups in that context, became exemplary in the worst sense.

Still, in the perspective of sociability, of adoption of certain manners, languages, styles, the process of assimilation, “of adjustment to and absorption by society”, of changing names and buying aristocratic titles, originated events and figures that cannot be reduced to a story of pure conformation. Indeed, as we will see, one of main protagonists of assimilation according to Arendt was the *exceptional Jew*. Certainly, he was not simply a silent and erased individual. Trying to escape the mass of Jews stereotypically reduced by anti-Semitism into an agglomeration of bad qualities and evil images, *exceptional Jews* performed a double effort of differentiation: from average Jews, but also from society in general, which wanted to be entertained by some individual specialty of these ex-Jews. These exceptions became “Jews and yet presumably not *like Jews*”.<sup>407</sup> In the German editions, Arendt referred to the *Ausnahmejuden*, a term for those Jews who, as exceptions, were taken from, and taken out, the mass of Jews.<sup>408</sup> Society, to

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<sup>406</sup> Benhabib, op. cit., p. 29

<sup>407</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 72

<sup>408</sup> “Wenn Assimilation bedeuten sollte, dass sie wirklich von der nichtjüdischen Gesellschaft akzeptiert waren, so haben sie sich dieser nur so lange erfreut, wie sie sich klar als Ausnahmen von der jüdischen Massen abhoben.” Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft: Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totaler Herrschaft*. München/Berlin: Piper. 2017, p. 141



prove its tolerance, picked up some individual Jews out of the more visible masses and communities (out of the *Judentum*). These superposed efforts of differentiation – from average Jews and from average non-Jews – made ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) one of the main conditions of assimilation.

The complexity of assimilation, moreover, was reflected also in Arendt's *political methodology*. As I have been emphasizing, Arendt replaced objective causality by a phenomenology of interactions. Grounded on possibilities and contingent tendencies, these interactions formed configurations determined by choices and behaviors, words and acts, of agents who, knowingly or not, were responsible. Broadly speaking, the background and the outcome of assimilation was formed by interactions of Jews *and* non-Jews. To be sure, interactions are not symmetrical relations of mutual determination. In this sense, the possibilities of European Jews, as I insist, were undeniably limited. But, as Arendt also emphasized, politics is not necessarily about physical force, about the amount of bodies standing for or against something. Minority groups, when politically articulated for the sake of justice or freedom, can initiate transformative events, regardless the physical and social forces against them.

In this line, Arendt, speaking as a Jew and for Jews in 1943, held that

“Lacking the courage to fight for a change of our social and legal status, we have decided instead, so many of us, to try a change of identity. And this curious behavior makes matters much worse. The confusion in which we live is partly our own work.”<sup>409</sup>

Rather than acting politically (“to fight for a change”), many Jews *decided* to socially assimilate (“try a change of identity”), a process that resulted in a political deterioration (“matters [are] much worse”) for which Jews themselves were co-responsible (“partly our own work”). Arendt concluded that insisting in pure suffering was a narrative-bias that could only reinforce a sense of powerlessness among Jews. On the other hand, Arendt also stressed the conditions shaped by external, non-Jewish forces, which established overwhelming obstacles to politicization and liberation. Arendt recalled Heine's statement that he would not have converted “if the law permitted one to steal silver spoons”.<sup>410</sup> The law in Heine's epoch incorporated the dominant social values, thus inflating the conditions for citizenship and general rights with certain social criteria – for instance, with the necessity of being Christian in order to become a professor.

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<sup>409</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, p. 271

<sup>410</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 21

“Jewish intellectuals had to abandon Judaism so as not to starve”.<sup>411</sup> In general, European law in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, identifying citizenship and sociability, fostered assimilation and discouraged rebellion. It “...put a premium on lack of character and punished simple human dignity with starvation.”<sup>412</sup> The few, either visible or invisible, possibilities open to Jews were mostly undermined by the perceived necessity of assimilation.

In the same line, as Arendt tried to illuminate the political failures of both Jews and non-Jews, in their multiple groups and individuals, and in their different regional and historical contexts, she also combined what I have been calling aspects of comprehension *and* judgement. Max Weber defined “empathic or appreciative accuracy”, in social analysis, as the search for evidences and elements of the “emotional context” in which certain actions occurred. To “understand” the meaning of pattern of behaviors, in this sense, requires taking into account subjective orientations, “emotional reactions”, and other “irrational” forces which inform empirical “social-actions” [*Soziales Handeln*]. For Weber, most empirical “social-actions” fall in the border of meaningful and meaningless behaviors, between behaviors in which discernible levels of meaning coexist with “not fully understandable” experiences.<sup>413</sup>

Still, Weber’s methodological foundations presupposed a certain passivity to the multiplicity of empirical forms. The diverse categories, and sub-categories, of sociology would approach (“understand” and “clarify”) causes<sup>414</sup> of certain social intercourses and consequences. One may say that Arendt pursued a sort of “empathic accuracy” while rejecting the passivity of causal explanations, which tended to emphasize the necessity of certain social effects, taking thus as simply “understandable” processes that aggravated the oppression of Jews in Europe. Arendt’s analysis was political, not sociological. So, instead of presupposing a fixed, abstract proposition such as “Assimilation is wrong”, she worked on origins and on visible tendencies and examples of assimilation as they could be comprehended in the formation of a-political, un-democratic, and unjust historical configurations.

More than this, Arendt tried to “destroy” what had been political destructible. In less extreme terms, she tried to un-hide possibilities and models undermined by the

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>413</sup> Weber, op. cit., pp. 4-5

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. Weber defined sociology as a science [*Wissenschaft*] “welche soziales Handeln deutend verstehen und dadurch in seinem Ablauf und seinem Wirkungen ursächlich erklären will.” Weber, M. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der Verstehenden Soziologie*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr. 1972, p. 1

generalized assimilation of Jews. In this line, Arendt stressed the predominance of patterns that led to assimilation, but she did it complaining - that the parvenu became more influent than the pariah, that rebellion came too late, that Zionism became only relevant in the aftermath of the destruction of European Jews, that some Jews opted to become revolutionaries as non-Jews etc. One could say that this late historical conscience is in accordance with a political thought that only contemplates and judges events when they are fully developed. Only when was too dark, a post-1945 owl could fly over the dust to grasp the meaning of that destruction. Arendt admitted this chronological vantage point. But the interesting point here is that some of Arendt's critical remarks on assimilation were written down even *before* von Hindenburg's indication of Hitler to the chancellery.<sup>415</sup> So here the accusation of an easy judgement, and the questioning of someone "who was not there" and who knew the end of the story, miss the point, for Arendt, besides being there (she left Berlin in 1933), could intuit some of the destructive mechanisms of assimilation even before the final stages of Nazi extermination. That is why some readers spoke of Arendt, an author who obstinately refused theoretical predictability, as being sometimes strangely "prophetic".<sup>416</sup>

## 5.2 Enlightenment: the theoretical basis

"What", asked Peter Gay, "does Hume, who was a conservative, have in common with Condorcet, who was a democrat? Holbach, who ridiculed all religion, with Lessing, who practically tried to invent one? Diderot, who envied and despised antiquaries, with Gibbon, who admired and emulated them? Rousseau, who worshiped Plato, with Jefferson, who could not bring himself to finish the *Republic*?"<sup>417</sup> When one speaks of Enlightenment, one may refer to a variety of ideas, authors, events that can be hardly reduced to a single significance. In order to avoid ambiguity, I will restrain myself to what Arendt said and wrote on this topic. This is basically the same orientation for authors with whom Arendt engaged. She normally avoided self-generated hypothesis, and almost all of her terms and ideas relied on her interpretation, and appropriation, of others authors and experiences. I will try to interpret Arendt's points by comparing them to external sources, but my general concern here will be with reconstructing her arguments on the

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<sup>415</sup> For instances, two texts that I analyze in this section were written before 1933: 'The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question' [*Aufklärung und Judenfrage*] (1932) and 'Rahel Varnhagen' (mostly written in the period between 1930-33).

<sup>416</sup> Bernstein, R. 'Hannah Arendt's Zionism?', in: Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem, p. 195

<sup>417</sup> Gay, P. op. cit., p. x

topic of assimilation. I won't discuss how accurate were Arendt's Lessing, Herder, Mendelssohn etc., as I will try to understand what she, interpreting these authors, had to say about the topic of assimilation.

What Arendt had to say, to being with: "The classic form in which the Jewish question was posed in the Enlightenment provides classic antisemitism its theoretical basis."<sup>418</sup> Arendt did not tell a story of a millenary anti-Judaism, neither did she emphasize a continuity of Jewish-hatred, as if hostility against Jews were an unchangeable metaphysical given. The Jewish question was precisely formulated during the Enlightenment, mostly by anti-religious authors, and in a period when the Church lost a considerable part of its political and spiritual dominance. Indeed, for someone seeing retrospectively, the destructiveness of modern anti-Semitism, and the complex attempts of "solving" the Jewish Question, from assimilation to extermination, could only be developed in a post-religious context. Arendt was schooled enough to know that modern anti-Semitism did not develop out of nothing. Religious Jewish-hatred had been an important element in Christian discourses and practices along centuries. But any reduction of the *Judenfrage* and of ideological anti-Semitism to middle ages myths would be misleading, both in terms of historical comprehension and political orientation.<sup>419</sup>

Indeed, as I just mentioned, *equality* was one of the main elements in the debates of emancipation and assimilation, and equality was a product of the Enlightenment. Until the revolutionary affirmation of the rights of men, Europe had been organized within nonegalitarian frameworks, in which aristocratic lineages, religious orders, guilds and corporations, incipient classes, and a multiplicity of regional groups were regulated and governed by a complex monarchical-feudal system. Jews could be protected and tolerated as an economic caste, preserving an internal sense of being a world apart. In the new configuration of modern societies and modern states, the idea of equality could not tolerate parallel worlds: equalization, and social adaptation, replaced the role of external instrumentality as a condition for tolerance. Tolerance, grounded on the idea that all humans are equals, demanded a concrete actualization of equality. Tolerance, in this context, could only mean toleration between equals.

In this new scenario, Jews were no longer tolerated on the basis of their inequality (as a specific caste), neither in accordance to old prejudices and discriminations (for

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<sup>418</sup> Arendt, 'Antisemitism', p. 65

<sup>419</sup> For a comparison between Jewish hatred and ideological antisemitism, see for instance Arendt, 'Antisemitism', p. 70

instance, the Christian idea that Jews could be tolerated as second class citizens, being living “proofs” of the error of not accepting Christ). Jews were to be tolerated as equal human beings. This orientation took many theoretical and practical forms. According to Arendt, G. E. Lessing was one of the main articulators of the concept of tolerance in the Enlightenment. In his notorious play *Nathan the Wise*, Lessing established his terms for tolerance. Asked by the Sultan Saladin to explain which religion was true, Nathan (a “rich Jew”) told the fable of the rings. In the fable, a man of the east had received a ring “from a valued hand”. The ring had a “hidden virtue” of making someone beloved “of God and man”. The man kept the ring, and later promised to give it to each one of his three sons. In secret, he sent the ring to a jeweler, asking two exact copies of the original. The jeweler brought back three rings, so “the father’s eye could not distinguish which had been the model”.

The father then gathered his sons, gave each one a ring and a blessing, and died. Each son had a ring, but “the true ring could no more be distinguished / Than now can – the true faith”. Although the father had shown and distributed equal respect to each son, without favoring one with the original ring, now each son “claims to be the lord o’ th’ house”. The three sons went to a judge, in order to decide which was the original ring, but the judge settled the impossibility of solving the question (“Am I to guess enigmas?”). The judge recommended forgetting truth (“None of your rings is true. The real ring / Perhaps is gone”), and embracing belief (“Let each believe his own the real ring”). By believing they held the real ring, the sons could love and beloved “With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance”.<sup>420</sup>

Lessing’s fable of tolerance had several implications. First of all, he established the priority of people over cognitive truth and systematic dogmas. In Arendt’s words, “Man becomes more important than the truth”.<sup>421</sup> The goal of human history is not to prove the validity of one religion over the others, but to spread the conscience that “all religious faiths are in the end merely different names for the same man.”<sup>422</sup> Coexistence and tolerance depends on the abolishment of truth, so no son can claim dominance over the other. In Lessing’s words, “...the father choose no longer / To tolerate the one ring’s tyranny”.<sup>423</sup> Religion becomes a subjective belief, not an objective, moral-political truth,

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<sup>420</sup> Lessing, G. E. *Nathan the Wise*. Mineola: Dover. 2015, pp. 50-59

<sup>421</sup> Arendt, ‘The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question’, p. 4

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Lessing, op. cit., p. 57

and this implied a liberation from tyrannies built upon dogmas. It also meant the suppression of religious Jew-hatred for the sake of human equality. In essence, humanity was a single unity, so any religious development, instead of claiming exclusive conceptual validity, should point to moral perfection, and thus to tolerance and respect between the sons of a moralized, virtuous humanity.

The argument that men are essentially equal could be also read in a different way, through the abolition of specific religious truths and the restoration of universal truths. As we will see soon, this was the framework adopted by Moses Mendelssohn. *Jews, too, are human beings* became a motto of Enlightenment's equalization. The question was how this ideal was to be understood, and how would this equality be brought from idea to practice. In terms of historical contingency, Jews were visibly unequal, they had specific ceremonial laws, a different calendar, different historical and philosophical references, different economic occupations and social norms. How could they become "men"? Did it mean becoming "human" like their hosts? This paradox was reflected in the texts of many Enlightened philosophers, who could affirm in general a common ground for humanity, while at the same time despising the particular aspect that humanity took in the form of Jews – as in Kant's anti-Jewish remarks, and in Voltaire's defense of universal tolerance along his specific attack on Judaism and Jews.<sup>424</sup> Abstractly, Jews

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<sup>424</sup> This is Judaism, according to Kant: a faith with no "essential connection" to Christianity, which only provided a "physical occasion [*physische Veranlassung*] for the founding of this [Christian] Church"; originally, it was "only a collection of merely statutory laws [*statutarischer Gesetze*]", leading to no religion, only to a polity governed by a "secular regent" (God) [*weltlicher regent*], with no claims over conscience or moral dispositions; any moral conscience (grounded on a "faith in future life") that individual Jews may have formed historically is explained by the participation of Jews in the human nature, and not as "an integral part of the legislation of Judaism." Hostility towards Jews, according to Kant, is due to the essential anti-universality of Judaism: Jews are "hostile to all other people and hence treated with hostility by all of them." Judaism resembles a "mechanical cult"; Christianity could only implement its revolution with a "total abandonment [*völlige Verlassung*] of the Judaism in which it originated"; the resemblance of early Christianity with Judaism was purely strategical (as "means of introducing a pure moral religion [*reine moralische Religion*] in place of an old cult [*alten Kultus*] which the people were much too well habituated"), and helped by external ethical theories, such as Greek ones; as a possible cause of the historical endurance of Jews as a distinct, non-assimilated, people, Kant offered the "stiffneckedness" [*hartnäckigerweise*] of a people who want to make its messiah a political, not a moral concept; Jewish books would be preserved "though not for the sake of religion, yet for scholarship", as the history of the Jewish people falls back "to epochs of prehistory"; the Jews "refuse to recognize as a law anything that differs from theirs". Kant compared Jewish assimilation and conversion to Christianity with an "euthanasia of Judaism", from which would result only "pure moral religion". Kant. I. 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason' (pp. 154-187); 'The conflict of the faculties' (p. 273; 276). In: *Religion and Rational Theology*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Kant, I. *Die Religion Innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*. Leipzig: Verlag Von Felix Meiner. 1950, pp. 139-153. According to Herder's notes of Kant's Lectures on Ethics, Kant stated the following in a discussion of lying: "Every coward is a liar; Jews, for example, not only in business, but also in common life. It is hardest of all to judge Jews; they are cowards." 'Notes Taken by J. G. Herder' In: *Lectures on Ethics*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2001, p. 27. Also, for an analysis of Kant's definition of Judaism (as "universal hatred",

could be equal, but they were not effectively equals. In this line, the *Judentum* was regarded, by most Enlightened men, as a collection of despicable practices and beliefs, and of debased individuals in the need for regeneration.

Theoretical tolerance, hence, meant practical intolerance against the concrete forms of Judaism of that period. So the common saying – *to the Jews as individuals, everything; to the Jews as a people, nothing* – was derived from this paradoxical intolerant tolerance. Jews could actualize their “human” essence through an individual effort of personal formation and moralization. They could leave, as individuals, the particularity of the *Judentum*. So this movement towards their humanization would imply, simultaneously, the disintegration of a separate, distinct Jewish sociability. To be sure, there was no ethnic essentialism in this perspective. Jews could be regenerated, exactly because they were not fixed by biological or cultural predeterminations. But they could only be regenerated – that is, rescued to humanity - as individual human beings, not as a distinct group unadjusted to prevalent social standards and norms.

According to Arendt, emancipation became not a political issue, but a project of social-education. With the presupposition of historical progress, humanity would be expected to dismantle its atavistic traditions, its oppressive institutions, and its backwards superstitions. Judaism, as a religion, was either source of anachronistic ideas and rituals, as it was the target of prejudices of other religious and traditional groups. Tolerance, as a social aim, was to be pursued by the means of personal education, or formation (*Bildung*). Human beings should be educated, and this was true specially for individual Jews, coming from a people haunted by ancient laws and dressing anachronistic clothes, also involved in degrading economic activities. So, especially for writers sympathetic to Jews, the Jewish question would be solved with education - of Jews into new virtues, manners, ideas, attitudes, and of non-Jews into new forms of tolerance.

In Arendt’s regard, what must have been a political question – a question of struggling for rights and extending rights to an European people – became a matter of moral and educational *preparation for* rights. Jews should regenerate, through education, into moral individual beings as a condition for emancipation. The Jewish question, in this sense, was mostly reduced to the question if Jews could be educated or not, and under

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opposed to the “universal love” of Christianity), see Rosenstock, B. *Philosophy and The Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 191

which circumstances.<sup>425</sup> A sort of “tutelary politics” (*Erziehungspolitik*) was conceived in accordance to this “contract of regeneration for rights”.<sup>426</sup> Jews, in order to become full citizens, were expected to become – before or, in more “tolerant” proposals, after receiving rights – virtuous, rational, educated men, ready to enter respectable society. In this context, appears the exceptional Jew, the Jew of exceptional education who proves, by his own means, that, despite being born a Jew, he could behave as a cultivated man.

To be sure, the exceptional-Jew is not exactly the non-Jewish-Jew of Isaac Deutscher, for the later transcends the boundaries of a Jewish community carrying an universal message to a larger public.<sup>427</sup> Repressing his Jewishness within private spaces, or even within his mere subjectivity, Arendt’s exceptional Jew tried to prove to society that he could excel in liberal arts, professions and intellectual matters valued by that society. In this process, his potential rebellion was neutralized. The exceptional Jew could occupy private, economic and social spaces, but he had nothing to bring to political discussions. As Arendt indicated, this man who *was and was not Jew* wanted to prove to society that he could become a normal human being. He rarely thought of a political struggle to become a citizen.<sup>428</sup> The fact that many Prussian Jews converted to Christianity after the edicts of emancipation in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the fact that they were mostly wealthy Jews, proved to Arendt that there was an attempt to “escape from emancipation” via baptism and assimilation in general.<sup>429</sup> Assimilation, in this sense, implied depoliticization. This tendency was only aggravated when a romantic cult of self-made personalities was added to the framework of individual education and *Bildung*. The individual path implied an escape from communal life – mostly centered in the Jewish family – into a self-oriented project of personal cultivation: “...individual Jews became pre-occupied only with the development of their personality and their ‘*education sentimentale*’”.<sup>430</sup>

This unpolitical feature of assimilation was reinforced by its de-historicizing orientation. Jews were expected to detach themselves from their specific historic

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<sup>425</sup> “Underlying the discussions of emancipation was an image of a corrupt and debased Jewish people. Because of this image, emancipation was to become linked to the notion of the Jews’ moral regeneration. The emancipation debate essentially turned on whether this regeneration was possible, who was to be responsible for it, and when and under what conditions it was to take place.” Sorkin, op. cit., p. 23

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 38, 40

<sup>427</sup> Deutscher, I. *O Judeu Não-Judeu e Outros Ensaios*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970

<sup>428</sup> “Through culture, and not through political means like emancipation, did Jews seek to escape from the lowly status of their people.” Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 20

<sup>429</sup> “It looked as if the educated Jews of Prussia tried to escape emancipation by baptism.” Ibid., p. 17

<sup>430</sup> Arendt, *ibid.*, 20.



conditions, their distinct traditions, their collective memories and cultural milieus, jumping from there into the abstract model of the prevalent *Bildung*. Besides presupposing an immediate obliteration of Jewish identities, this movement would deplete the particular circumstances in which the Jewish question could be politically approached. In this context, the endurance of anti-Semitism could be explained by the failure of Jews in educating themselves, but it could not be tackled by political means like the admission of public Jewish voices and the grant of stable rights to the Jewish community. Jews needed to be educated in order to efface anti-Semitism (so anti-Semites were exculpated from their prejudices as long as Jews were still “degenerated”). The phenomenon of anti-Semitism, instead of being imputed to anti-Semites, was so ascribed to the backwards, non-educated Jews.

According to Arendt, Herder was one of the few thinkers who avoided the abstract model of equality, with its reduction of difference into private beliefs, and its presupposition of a common model for the “formation” of humanity. Defending the uniqueness of groups and individuals, Herder defended that no project of tolerance could rely on a complete identification between men. Proposing that the “real differentiation among men is more important than their ‘virtual’ sameness”, the German thinker appreciated the historical dimension of the Jewish question, recommending thus, according to Arendt, the political task “to incorporate another nation within Germany”.<sup>431</sup> The *Judenfrage*, in this sense, turned into a political demand for recognizing a historical people. Political comprehension would arise within the public sphere, through the exercise of rights, suffrage, and political mediation, in which German-speaking-Jews could share a space with other German peoples and groups. This demand, in these terms, was never seriously appreciated.

### **5.3 Assimilation as Ambivalence: the case of Moses Mendelssohn**

The year of 1743 changed the paradigm for Jewish integration in Europe. In that year, Moses Mendelssohn walked during five or six days the distance of one hundred miles from Dessau, his former town, to Berlin. He was 14 years old, “frail and sickly”,

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<sup>431</sup> Arendt, ‘Enlightenment and the Jewish Question’, TJW, p. 13. For a more nuanced account of Herder’s position on the emancipation of Jews, according to which the German thinker argued for the civic education (though not religious conversion) and political integration of Jews in Europe (“their Palestine is then there where they live and nobly work, everywhere”), as he also defended elsewhere their reestablishment in the middle East (“literal Palestine”) as a distinct *Volk*, see Sikka, S. *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 245

and extremely poor. The boy was interrogated in the Rosenthaler Tor, the gate through which cattle and Jews could enter Berlin. At that time, only a few Jewish families lived in the city. They were mostly useful-protected Jews [*Schutzjuden*], wealthy family members paying special taxes and fulfilling specific economic functions. Mendelssohn was accepted within the walls of Berlin, because his former teacher was then the chief rabbi of the local Jewish community.<sup>432</sup> As he was protected by *exceptionally useful* Jews, Mendelssohn could enter the city to become the paradigmatic *exceptionally educated* Jew. In Arendt's terms, the "privilege" of being tolerated was enlarged to receive a "new type of excepted Jew": not the Jew of money, but that of "culture and education".<sup>433</sup>

The ascension of Mendelssohn was impressive. While living in the rabbinic seminar, he studied – hidden, since no secular books were allowed – German, Latin, Greek, French, and science, logic, mathematics, philosophy. With the help of a few learned Jewish and Huguenot friends, Mendelssohn came to discover Leibniz and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reading both works in Latin. As soon as he was accepted as a tutor of a wealthy Jewish family, he could buy his first books, and from then he extended his range of readings to Spinoza, Plato, Cicero, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and also to English and Italian literature. Self-taught, since he never attended an academic seminar and never received formal secular instruction, Mendelssohn would start to publish articles, essays (he won a competition on the topic of metaphysics, leaving Kant only with a mention of honor), until he achieved intellectual fame with the publication *Phaidon* (1767). Becoming the "German Socrates" or the "Socrates of Berlin", Mendelssohn was nominated to the Prussian Academy of Science. As the nomination was refused by Frederick II (likely because of his Jewish origin), Mendelssohn said he preferred "to be honored by an academy and vetoed by a king than the other way around".<sup>434</sup> Mendelssohn's prestige kept growing.

The first significance of Mendelssohn's story is that he was taken as a proof, a living proof, that Jews could be "educated" and "formed". They could learn to think as philosophers, to write as German literates, and to behave as virtuous, rational men. Mendelssohn proved that mobility, formation, and transformation were indeed possible – they weren't empty ideals. A Jew, or someone coming from a Jewish background, could display human *Tugenden*. He became admired not only as an exceptional philosopher and

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<sup>432</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 1, 33.

<sup>433</sup> Arendt, 'Privileged Jews', p. 14

<sup>434</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 41

thinker, but as a Jew who managed to become a philosopher, and a prudent man, a sort of modern Aristotelian *phronimos* who could write in Hebrew and speak with leading German intellectuals in equal terms (friend of Lessing, he was the inspiration for the character of *Nathan the Wise*). The framework of the Enlightenment had found its figure and its story: coming from the country side of Germany, being born as a Jew years before the proclamation of the rights of men, having spent days after days eating only a piece of bread, Mendelssohn, relying mostly on his capacities and his intellect, had reshaped his destiny as an unparalleled self-made man, as we would call it today.

Moreover, Mendelssohn was not only taken as an exemplary success of the *Aufklärung*. He embraced and developed the project theoretically. In broad terms, he did not abolish truth in favor of men, as Lessing did, but he unified men under the eternity and universality of rational truths. Relying on a classic philosophical model, Mendelssohn argued for the natural rights of men, which could be rationally grasped by every human being. In the same line, practical rationality was accessible to every individual, who could shape his own nature in order to become a virtuous and wise man. Human perfection was not a historical project, but an individual task. According to Arendt, Mendelssohn detached reason from history, thus prescribing subjective introspection as a way of grasping intellectual truths and practical virtuous.<sup>435</sup> Self-perfection, not political struggle, was the key to solve the Jewish question. The concrete differences between Jews and Christians, as the specific ceremonies, dialects, clothes, and superstitions which differentiated Jews, even internally, were to be explained as contingent, historical manifestations of human diversity. Some of these contingent practices and traditions could delay, and even undermine, human formation. But, in principle, no man was condemned to remain uncultured.

Individually, Jews and Christians could be equally debased, as one could find individual Jews and Christians equally virtuous. This difference was due to contingent, individual choices and circumstances. In essence, there was no difference between men. The same was true for the essential similarity of Judaism and Christianity as systems of belief: in essence, they could be reduced to the rational principles of “natural religion”. Jewish rituals and symbols were simply historical phenomena related to chronological circumstances and empirical representations, which remained in the field of accidents. Jewish law, differently, was eternal, and compatible with human reason. This dualism

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<sup>435</sup> Arendt, ‘The Enlightenment...’, p. 7

was not restrained to Mendelssohn's theory. He lived in two, perhaps three different but simultaneous worlds: the "universal" world of German philosophy and literature, the "particular" world of Jewish law, studies, and interpretation, and the "practical" world of business (he became a bookkeeper) and family tasks. Even though Mendelssohn could integrate these different worlds in an honorable way, achieving respectability in every field, the paradoxes of Jewish emancipation were reflected in his life, his work, and his legacy.

In this sense, he can be said truly exemplary of the years of emancipation-assimilation, as Arendt attributed ambiguity as a characteristic of this process.<sup>436</sup> Through his exceptional intellect and gifts, Mendelssohn tried to prove his and other Jews' normalcy. Admitting the historical specificity of the oppressive conditions under which Jews were kept - "They bind our hands and rebuke us that we do not use them"<sup>437</sup> -, he nevertheless abstracted the plea for rights to a matter of reason (as every man was "naturally" entitled to universal rights). His unsolvable dualism soon turned against him as a challenge, an insulting challenge made by his friend Lavater: why did he insist in keeping Jewish tradition, that is, Jewish particularity, if human rationality prescribed an universal set of virtues equal to all? Why did he not become a man like most of normal European men, that is, why did he not become Christian? When Lavater provoked him to either refute Christianity, or to immediately convert (as Socrates would do if he recognized the truth)<sup>438</sup>, Mendelssohn despised being involved in a situation typical of medieval disputes.<sup>439</sup> He did not want to be forced into an open religious fight in the time of toleration. His only struggle was to, orderly and respectably, perfect himself and help to reform his people (he preferred that a non-Jew defended Jewish emancipation, and

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<sup>436</sup> "This ambiguity [*of being Jew and non-Jew at the same time*] became decisive for the social behavior of the assimilated and emancipated Jewry in western Europe." Arendt, 'Privileged Jews', p. 7

<sup>437</sup> "Man bindet uns die Hände, und macht uns zum Vorwurfe, dass wir sie nicht gebrauchen." Mendelssohn, M. 'Vorrede zu Manasseh Ben Israels *Rettung der Juden*'. In: *Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2001, p. 11

<sup>438</sup> Lavater's challenge to Mendelssohn, written in his translation to a book on the fundamentals of Christianity, reads: "I dare to ask you, to ask and entreat you before the GOD of truth, your Creator and Father and mine: not merely pleading that you read this treatise...but to refute it publicly in case you find the *essential* arguments adduced in support of the facts of Christianity to be incorrect: in case, however, you find them correct, to do what prudence, love of truth, and honesty bid you do; - what Socrates would have done, had he read this treatise and found it irrefutable." Quoted by Altmann, A. *Moses Mendelssohn: a biographical study*. London, Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998, p. 209

<sup>439</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 48

celebrated the fact that no one could defend the rights of man without defending simultaneously the rights of Jews).<sup>440</sup>

Mendelssohn was no rebel, but he was neither a coward. When he experienced social insult, even if a veiled insult, he reacted. The controversy with Lavater initiated a gradual, theoretical answer to the problem of dualism. As when Mendelssohn did not want to beg to Frederick II for the right of “protected” (he did not want to beg for “natural rights”), he did not want to propose an open critique of Christianity, for specific religious dogmas were to be finally protected as beliefs of subjective freedom.<sup>441</sup> But his dignity impelled him to answer to Lavater – “I declare myself a Jew. I shall always remain a Jew”<sup>442</sup> –, formulating a series of arguments that would culminate in his *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism (Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum, 1783)*.<sup>443</sup> Mendelssohn recognized the need for Jewish regeneration, as contemporary Judaism had decayed into meaningless, particularistic rituals and symbols, which had but little in common with the original rationality of Mosaic legislation.

However, this historical decay of Judaism would not prove the superiority of Christianity. And, here, Mendelssohn’s counter-argument was fueled with a – restrained and educated – pariah’s indignation. Inverting the logic of arguments formulated by several German thinkers from Kant to Hegel, which had been ascribing to Judaism a deficit of rationality (if not sheer irrationality), Mendelssohn stated the opposite: Judaism, taken in its essential formulations, is much closer to pure rationality than it is Christianity. Jewish legislation does not depend on dogmas (such as the Trinity), and does not contradict fundamentals of monotheism (as the eternity and infinity of God, and the forbiddance of idolatry), which Christians explicitly do with the theory of the divinity of a finite human being, who never reclaimed himself to be God. Jesus, for Mendelssohn, was a moral example, but in no way a divinity.<sup>444</sup> Moreover, if Judaism was to fall, this

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<sup>440</sup> “It is fortunate for us that no one can insist on the rights of man without at the same time espousing our own rights.” Quoted by Arendt, RV, p. 88

<sup>441</sup> In the draft of his answer to Lavater, Mendelssohn wrote: “I hate all religious disputes, especially those conducted before the eyes of the public. Experience teaches that they are useless. They are productive more of hatred among men than of clarification.” Quoted by Altmann, op. cit., p. 212

<sup>442</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 48

<sup>443</sup> “Far from drawing Mendelssohn toward Christianity, Lavater had only reinforced his anchorage in Judaism”. Altmann, op. cit., p. 210

<sup>444</sup> Mendelssohn affirmed, in private circles, that he admired Jesus “philosophically”, and, moreover, that he believed that violent sermons made by some priests (“Christian rabbis”) throughout history were a perversion of Jesus’ teachings. This sympathetic view was enough to convince some friends that Mendelssohn was ready to conversion. Altmann, op. cit., p. 205

would imply the destruction of the basis upon which the house of Christianity had been built. Both religions would collapse together.<sup>445</sup>

This was the closer Mendelssohn got to a rebellion – it was, in fact, an impressive theoretical rebellion, given the conditions of his time. But, as it could not succeed philosophically, it could be neither translated into a specific program for political mobilization. Mendelssohn tried to solve the problem of dualism (the universality of reason and the particularity of religions) affirming the dignity of Judaism (closer to universality than no other religion), but his political contract prescribed a secular state in which either Jewish and Christian beliefs were to be contained only in the conscience, while Jews and Christians would behave as virtuous men in the public sphere. *Be a man in the streets, and a Jew at home*, the assimilationist motto, was interpreted as a call for Jews to become citizens of “Mosaic persuasion”, “Israelites”, Germans of “Jewish belief”, that is, to conceal their Jewish identity as mere private experiences.

Mendelssohn, who Arendt described as “an extraordinary and unique individual”, who did not break his connection with the Jewish masses, and “did not consider himself an exception”, formulated a powerful program of social reform and education. According to Arendt, he knew that “the extraordinary esteem given to his person only corresponded to the extraordinary contempt in which his people were held.”<sup>446</sup> Conscious of this, he worked to bridge distant worlds: he translated the *Torah* to German (whose editions were burnt by zealot, orthodox rabbis), he defended the study of Jewish law and secular disciplines, the learning of Hebrew *and* German, and the renunciation of certain ceremonies, rituals and dresses, in favor of a modern, regenerated Jewish identity. But “Mendelssohn himself never took any interest in the political battles of his time, not even in the fight for Jewish emancipation”.<sup>447</sup> Involuntarily, Mendelssohn provided arguments for that typical Prussian “alliance of the *Aufklärung* and state absolutism”.<sup>448</sup> Jews would not enter politics. Instead, politics (that is, State’s tutelage) would enter the Jewish world, in order to educate, cultivate, domesticate Jews until their normalization.

The argument of regeneration prescribed at least two difficult, if not impossible tasks: the repression of Jewish identity into a private or subjective data; and the “acculturation” of millions of individuals coming from distinct regions, traditions, social

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<sup>445</sup> “Nun ist das Christentum, wie Sie wissen, auf dem Judentum gebauet, und muss nothwendig, wenn dieses fällt, mit ihm über einen Hauffen stürzen.” Mendelssohn, *M. Jerusalem...*, p. 83

<sup>446</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 16

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>448</sup> Sorkin, *op. cit.*, p. 25

groups. Taken to its extreme consequences, it implicitly recommended, as Arendt recalled ironically, *do as Mendelssohn did, become a genius!*<sup>449</sup> This model of acculturation had its consequences: it neutralized the political energy of an oppressed people (“This new freedom of reason, of formation, of thinking for oneself, does not change the world at all.”)<sup>450</sup>; it removed this people from its historical grounds (as would any other people subjected to an universalistic receipt of *Bildung*); it associated distinct Jewish identities with in-human/a-social qualities, so denying, for the sake of human tolerance, the specific human shapes of the *Judentum*. Jews could not be emancipated as Jews.

To be sure, Mendelssohn was not responsible for the whole extension and implications of this model. He provided an honorable example of someone trying to solve the paradoxes of the Jewish question as it was formulated by the Enlightenment. He founded the tradition of reformation, which intended to preserve essential attributes of Judaism while discarding elements unfitted to new epochs. Mendelssohn was what is called today an hybrid figure, who could cross communitarian borders, learning from different traditions, and opening himself through dialogue to different arguments, views and different forms of human communication.<sup>451</sup> But, by becoming a respected member of a society that disrespected Jewish history; by becoming “protected” by a king who had ignored him, and who had kept his wife and children as unprotected (with no rights) until his death; by educating himself and discussing openly and politely with a few companion in private circles, while avoiding political controversies; and by trying to solve the particular unfavorable conditions of European Jews with universal philosophy and abstract morality, Mendelssohn, through his brilliant biography, left an ambiguous legacy for the process of assimilation-emancipation.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Also, commenting the induction from Mendelssohn’s exceptional path to a general model of emancipation: “Thus Moses Mendelssohn had been able to assimilate to his alien surroundings without abandoning his Judaism. He needed only to lay aside old ‘prejudices’ in a highly deceptive present, and learn thinking. It was still possible for him to believe that his course should serve as a model, that it was not the accidental destiny of an individual.” Arendt, RV, p. 104

<sup>450</sup> Arendt, ‘The Enlightenment...’, p. 8

<sup>451</sup> In his biography, Salomon Maimon recalled how Mendelssohn practiced a spontaneous tolerance and openness in relation to his interlocutors: “Jews newly arrived from Poland, whose thoughts are for the most part confused, and whose language is an unintelligible jargon, Mendelssohn could understand perfectly. In his conversations with them he adopted their expressions and forms of speech, sought to bring down his mode of thinking to theirs, and thus to raise theirs to his own”; and: “He understood also the art of finding out the good side of every man and every event”. Maimon, S. *An Autobiography*. Montreal: Dawson Brothers. 1888, p. 224

<sup>452</sup> For Sorkin, “[b]ecause Mendelssohn used radical means to achieve the conservative end of sustaining his dualism, he left an ambiguous legacy.” Sorkin, op. cit., 72

“A radical reformer in the guise of a conservative”<sup>453</sup>, Mendelssohn answered to the paradoxes of his epoch in a truly unique way – so his example could not be established as an effective, general model. His most famous disciple, David Friedländer, soon abandoned the argument of natural rights, moving back to the argument of utility, as he presented in his third petition for rights to the Prussian king, in 1790:

“Not with empty declamations, *not with appeals to the rights of man*, have we importuned our beloved sovereign, but with the humble plea that through the amelioration of our civil relations, new potential can be imparted to the unused energies of true, industrious subjects who, obligated by gratitude, *might assist in the prosperity and well-being of the state.*”(emphasis added)<sup>454</sup>

In Arendt’s words, Friedländer “openly contradicted” Mendelssohn’s recommendation of adaptation to external law *and* preservation of Jewish law (“Bear both burdens as best you can”), when he proposed the infamous baptism of Jews for “public integration into society”.<sup>455</sup> The proposal was rejected by the Protestant provost of Berlin, as it had been taken as a humiliation by most local Jews. A Jewish historian called Friedländer an “ape”, and Heine later joked that Friedländer tried to “cure a ‘skin abscess’ by a ‘bloodletting’”.<sup>456</sup> Notwithstanding the embarrassment caused by Friedländer’s “dry baptism” proposal (it asked for the exemption of the necessity of recognizing the divinity of Jesus), the path of discretion, of concealment of Jewish identity, of gradual imitation of prevalent norms set the tone of assimilation. The ceremonies of Reform Synagogues, animated by organs, avoiding any mention to specific Jewish words, became gradually more “universal”, that is, more similar to Christian ceremonies. The sons of Mendelssohn became quasi-secular, assimilated Jews, and her daughters converted to Christianity. His grandson, born Jakob Mendelssohn, would later become the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, author of one version of Ave Maria.

#### **5.4 Salomon Maimon: the skeptical pariah**

A different pariah-path was taken by Salomon Maimon. Born in a Lithuanian small village from an impoverished Jewish family, Maimon, due to an arrangement of his father, married at the age of 13, and became father at 14. His intellectual power, and his acute drive for knowledge, inquiry, and his unconstrained imagination, led him to stood

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<sup>453</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>454</sup> Quoted by Sorkin, op. cit., p. 76

<sup>455</sup> Arendt, ‘The Enlightenment...’, p. 9

<sup>456</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 75



out in centers of rabbinic studies in Poland. He soon mastered principles of the Kabbalah, gaining notoriety in the emerging centers of Hassidism, and learning to think and argue in accordance to the Talmudic tradition. Maimon rapidly reached the limits of religious wisdom, and so he described as being in a “dark” atmosphere from where he needed to escape in his drive for truth and light. He left his family, and tried to be accepted in Berlin, the center of Jewish Enlightenment and European culture. He only managed to enter Berlin in his second attempt. In the first one, he was expelled by a Jewish guard for carrying Maimonides’ *The Guide for the Perplexed*, a dangerous book according to the local Jewish authorities.

Maimon impressed the acculturated Jews of Berlin, but remained a strange pariah among educated-pariahs, an *Ostjude* speaking an irregular German, with unconventional gestures and a disconcerting frankness. Mendelssohn initially embraced him, even, as Maimon himself recalled, unimpressed by the fact that an Eastern Jew could read books of mathematics and immediately solve intricate problems. In that context, Maimon could be another striking example of a self-made exceptional Jew. He was exceptional, but he was too much of a pariah as well. Soon the bourgeois followers of Mendelssohn started to complain against Maimon’s iconoclastic reasoning. As his “skeptical rationalism” developed, and he did not conform to respectable living standards, Maimon, “the dark twin of Mendelssohn”<sup>457</sup>, was charged with “trying to spread dangerous opinions and systems”, not settling “any plan of life”, and being “addicted to sensual pleasures”.<sup>458</sup> Mendelssohn gave him a letter of reference, and asked him to leave Berlin.

Maimon had appreciated Mendelssohn’s welcome, and admired his intellectual acuteness, his range of wisdom and knowledge, and his conciliatory humanity. (He did not admire Mendelssohn’s followers). But if Mendelssohn accepted the conditions for a *Bildung*, and avoided clashes with the dominant standards (and with the political configuration) of his time, Maimon could not do it – because of his restless temperament, his unbounded quest for knowledge and experience, his absolute independence from group connections, material objectives, social relations. Maimon indeed suggested that Mendelssohn’s difficult conciliation of different worlds – with his philosophical dualism – came for the sake of social peace, but with the price of intellectual accommodation: “...how far a man may be inconsistent for the sake of human welfare”.<sup>459</sup> Specific

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<sup>457</sup> Gay, R. *The Jews of Germany: a historical portrait*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 107

<sup>458</sup> Maimon, S. op. cit., p. 240

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. p. 231

religious traditions, for Maimon, could not be rationally sustained, not by an uncompromised philosopher. After leaving Berlin, Maimon was hosted in a Jewish house in Hamburg, where he refused “to say prayers which [he] regarded as a result of an anthropomorphic system of theology”.<sup>460</sup> Some of the guests asked the house owner to expel Maimon immediately.

In his wandering through Poland, Prussia (he went four times to Berlin), Netherlands, Maimon never broke with his bohemian, erratic lifestyle – he engaged in intellectual debates, taught in secular seminaries, contemplated suicide, and never established a permanent address. Having criticized Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant regarded him as one of his best critics), he embraced a strange combination of Spinozism with Hume, a sort of dogmatic rational substantialism with empirical skepticism, finding no compromise between the two levels, and leading, practically, a life that he consciously assumed as Epicurean. Concerning the Jewish question, Maimon also held, simultaneously, radical Enlightened presuppositions – as the substitution of religious particularism by a rational, universal morality as a way of improving human relations – with a stubborn pariah-pride of his uniqueness.

He finally decided to be baptized, so not to starve (“I had learnt no particular profession, I had not distinguished myself in any special science, I was not even master of any language in which I could make myself perfectly intelligible.”).<sup>461</sup> But his request was written in his own terms. It was not plea for integration, no justification of utility, no reverence to a “most merciful” king (as Mendelssohn had to address Fredrick II) – it was, in fact, almost a request to *not* be accepted. Maimon started his letter to a priest of Hamburg declaring that, “The Jewish religion, it is true, comes, in its article of faith, nearer to reason than Christianity.” But, as he conceded that Christianity was more effective in practical terms, and he accepted moral perfection as a human objective, he would agree with the “practical use” of the new religion – not, however, without affirming that, for him, the “mysteries of the Christian religion” were nothing more than “allegorical representations of the truths that are most important for man”. The priest replied that Maimon’s soul did not seem to truly embrace Christ, as he was “too much of a philosopher...to be able to become a Christian.” Apparently satisfied with the outcome

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., p. 246

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., p. 253

(the story was told by Maimon himself), he declared: “I must therefore remain what I am – a stiffnecked Jew”.<sup>462</sup>

For Arendt, the paradoxes of the Jewish question were lived by Maimon through his exceptional fame and his exceptional misery. Maimon could only have lived that existential and intellectual adventure as a Jew. But also his miserable death, perishing, finally divorced, as a 46 years old, alcoholic man, hosted in a noble’s castle, could only be explained by his pariah condition. “If a Polish non-Jew could have succeeded at all in becoming a well-known commentator of Kant he would have died, not in the castle of a count but probably as a full professor with bourgeois status and leaving a small fortune.”<sup>463</sup> Also ambiguously, Maimon established his unique conditions for life, and for his own destruction, avoiding any permanent engagement with social structures and cultural norms<sup>464</sup>; but he simultaneously seemed to have nurtured the dearest of Enlightenment’s expectations: that the abolition of religion and tradition would put an end to oppression.

Remaining a “stiffnecked Jew”, he nevertheless celebrated the threat that Enlightened philosophies would put to the “rabbinical despotism”. He believed that, with a sharp criticism of the Jewish “theocracy”, with the “spread of light and truth”, the “national existence” of Jews would be abolished.<sup>465</sup> He was wrong. Jewish existence was not merely a matter of “religious law”, and the Jewish question would outlast the decline of theological beliefs. Self-declared a skeptic, Maimon was also a believer – in his very own way - in the Enlightenment’s promise of regeneration, of acculturation, and liberation. But, having experiencing social dissimulation, having understood that acculturation also implied adaptation and conformity, Salomon Maimon collapsed his own traditions, and dared to know his individual truth, performing an erratic search for authenticity, a search to be recalled as a fascinating biography, but still a painful, politically inactive, and self-destructive biography. Since Arendt hardly expected the pariah to be a model of perfection, a model purely designed to specific political effects,

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., pp. 255-57

<sup>463</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 29

<sup>464</sup> Recalling his early days in the Jewish community, where he could find only one friend with “a love of speculation”, Maimon wrote: “We were the only persons in the place, who ventured to be not imitators, but to think independently about everything. It was a natural result of this, that, as we differed from all the rest of the community in our opinion and conduct, we separated ourselves from them by degrees; but, as we had still to live by the community, our circumstances on this account became every day worse and worse.” Maimon, op. cit., p. 138

<sup>465</sup> Maimon, op. cit., p. 266

Salomon Maimon, even though rarely discussed by her at length, was undeniably a pariah in the outset of the age of assimilation.

### 5.5 Rahel Levin-Varnhagen: between self-creation and fate

Along with the article *The Jew as a Pariah: a hidden tradition*, and other essays on Jewish affairs, Arendt's biography on Rahel Levin-Varnhagen is one of the main documents of her search for the meaning of the pariah, the parvenu, and assimilation. There, one also hears an echo of Arendt's late topics – as the force of given life-conditions, the tension between uniqueness and society, and the problems of introspection. The ambivalences of assimilation, and of Arendt's thoughts on assimilation, also appear in the text in full colors. Arendt identified with Rahel Varnhagen (actually, she insisted that her biographed was more justly designated by her first, pre-marriage name, Rahel Levin).<sup>466</sup> Arendt even famously stated that she would tell Rahel's story "as she herself might have told it".<sup>467</sup> To be sure, this was not exactly a historiographic arrogance: Arendt tried not to over-explain her subject imposing it speculations from outside. She wanted to let Rahel speak through her letters, through her own words, thoughts and memories.

Moreover, Arendt tried to de-assimilate Rahel, as she accused Rahel's husband, the diplomat Karl August Varnhagen, of having tried, by his editions of her letters, "to make Rahel's associations and circle of friends appear less Jewish and more aristocratic, and to show Rahel herself in a more conventional light, one more in keeping with the taste of the times."<sup>468</sup> Arendt wanted to reestablish a defining life-condition of Rahel, her Jewishness, meaning both her complex relation with an existent Jewish community (*Judentum*) and with her own *being-Jew (Judesein)*.<sup>469</sup> Rahel had suffered what, according to Arendt, several Jewish pariahs had suffered in the hands of non-Jewish interpreters and

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<sup>466</sup> "She had at last rid herself of Rahel Levin, but she did not want to become Friederike Varnhagen, *née* Robert. The former was not socially acceptable; the latter could not summon up the resolution to make a fraudulent self-identification. For 'all my life I considered myself Rahel and nothing else.'" Arendt, RV, p. 247

<sup>467</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 81

<sup>468</sup> According to Arendt, Varnhagen, in his edition, had transformed Rahel's friends, with their distinctively Jewish names (Henriette Herz, Rebecca Friedländer, Pauline Wiesel), in almost anonymous names (Frau von B., Frau von Fr., Frau von V.). Ibid., p. 80

<sup>469</sup> The English translation of the original text, written in German, uses interchangeably the term "Jewishness" for at least three significances: *Judentum* (as a communitarian-collective form of life), *Jüdisches*, an adjective, as in "Sie haben noch *Jüdisches* an sich", and *Judesein* (being-Jewish, in the sense of an existential life-condition). Arendt, H. *Rahel Varnhagen: Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik*. München: Piper, 2014, p. 233

historians: an assimilation of their own stories, and an depletion of existential conditions which had defined their external and inner paths. Rahel had defined herself as a “fugitive from Egypt and Palestine” lying in a deathbed in Berlin, when she famously declared that the condition she refused for years had been the center of her experience: “having been born a Jewess [*eine Jüdin geboren zu sein*] – this I should on no account now wish to have missed.”<sup>470</sup> It was Rahel Levin herself, Arendt told us, who asked to be de-assimilated.

But the Jewish condition did not come as an easy data of life. Indeed, in Rahel’s portrait, Arendt stressed the fluctuant ambivalence of assimilation, as Rahel went from a *shlemihl* (unlucky person, “who has anticipated nothing”)<sup>471</sup> to a parvenu, and by trying to sustain her identity as a parvenu, she finally realized that the pariah condition was inextricable. So, the ambiguity of assimilation relativized the borders between social-escalation and individual rebellion: Arendt did not propose a fixed social or anthropological typology. She described, and conceptualized, personal attitudes, indeed very contrasting attitudes, never losing sight of the non-deterministic potentialities inherent to the situation of oppressed peoples and misfit individuals. In fact, Hannah Arendt affirmed that pariah-parvenu are not even exclusively Jewish types (although she mostly wrote of Jewish examples), being models of adaptation and rebellion verifiable among excluded groups elsewhere.<sup>472</sup>

Arendt was also ambivalent in defining the reach of Rahel’s story: she did not want to lose her particularity as a mere allegory of a larger European-Jewish history, but she emphasized that Rahel’s story, though chronologically starting in Berlin in 1771, had “already begun seventeen hundred years earlier in Jerusalem.”<sup>473</sup> So, by not managing to escape her Jewish condition, and by living the pains and troubles of what this condition meant in German states in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, her “whole life had become a segment of Jewish history in Germany”.<sup>474</sup> Only as “a Jew and a pariah”, Rahel had found “a place in the history of European humanity”.<sup>475</sup> To this, Arendt added: also as a woman, for she experienced the “Woman Problem” (“the discrepancy between what men expected of

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<sup>470</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 85

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 85

<sup>473</sup> Arendt declared that she would deal with “only one aspect of the complex problems of assimilation...namely, the manner in which assimilation to the intellectual and social life of the environment works out concretely in the history of an individual’s life...”. Arendt, RV, p. 82

<sup>474</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 255

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 258

women ‘in general’ and what women could give or wanted in their turn”<sup>476</sup> before it became a primary topic of political and social debates. Living a life of adaptation to roles or living it in her own terms, that was a lasting question in Rahel’s trajectory.

As a symbol of Rahel’s question, stood her salon in Berlin. Salons organized by Jewish women became spaces of “mixed society” when Prussia seemed to originate new forms of social intercourse. Brendel Mendelssohn (Moses Mendelssohn’s daughter), later married to Schlegel (becoming then Dorothea Schlegel), hosted one of these salons. Rahel’s salon, however, stood out as an association “outside society and its conventions”.<sup>477</sup> There, one was judged solely on the merits of his or her personality. Rank, money, fame played no role in the evaluation of its members (although princes as Louis Ferdinand, rich bankers as Abraham Mendelssohn, famous writers and poets as Gutzmer and Schlegel, and notorious politicians as W. von Humboldt shared that space). Rahel’s salon was “naively undenominational”. Jews and non-Jews had tea and discussed literature, philosophy, spirituality, and also intimacy – the combination of mixed social, professional and ethnic backgrounds only counted if integrated into unique personalities, cultivated in the different strands of what European culture had to offer at that historical point.<sup>478</sup>

A “society outside society”, Rahel salon’s political significance was discussed by Arendt’s readers. Benhabib took it as feminine political alternative to the masculine model of the Athenian assembly, as “a space of sociability in which the individual desire for difference and distinctness could assume an intersubjective reality.”<sup>479</sup> For admitting members regardless their social position, and for being a reflexive and intimate space organized by women, it could be counted as an alternative both to social exclusion, and to the masculine, war-oriented elitism of ancient Greek politics. Villa rejected this proposal, since the salons “were nearly as exclusionary as the Athenian assembly”; one could only enter the salon if he or she shared “the intellectual, social, and romantic temperament of the group”.<sup>480</sup> In my view, Rahel’s salon stood as a pre-political social space – not as a simple association of “like attracting like”, and not as a political space (it really lacked openness and equality, as Villa noted, and it also demanded a shared

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>477</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 18

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Benhabib, op. cit., p. 29

<sup>480</sup> Reviewed by Dana R. Villa, ‘Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*’, *Ethics* 108, no. 4 (July 1998): 819

examination and exploration of private life). Still, it was a subversive experience, in which individuals could experience freedom from social-norms and freedom for interaction with peers. It was nonetheless a *social* experience, as it “represented a short period of flowering German-Jewish social relations”, coincident with a growing number of mixed marriages.<sup>481</sup>

This social dimension is important to understand what accompanies Arendt’s appreciation of Rahel: her criticism of Rahel. Arendt held that Rahel was unsuited to political action: “she could neither choose nor act”, only let “life rain upon” her, showing no appreciation of public and historical conditions, and no real engagement with these political realities (“Facts mean nothing at all to me”)<sup>482</sup>. When she decided, she decided to “live life as if it were a work of art”<sup>483</sup>, relying on what Arendt regarded as a romantic illusion (“the great error” of romanticism, to be precise): the possibility of creating one’s own personality, of reinventing oneself in accordance to a supposed authentic inwardness, or, worst, in accordance to social standards. “Like all parvenus, she never dreamed of a radical alteration of bad conditions”, so she decided to *change only herself*.<sup>484</sup> Here Rahel began a “violent mania for social-climbing”.<sup>485</sup>

Rahel’s assimilation, in Arendt’s exposition, touched the main aspects of the Jewish story of adaptation in Europe. Rahel believed that “only understanding despots can help us [Jews]”, and celebrated that a people who had been only robbed could be at least used as instruments and source of money – a tribute to court and financier Jews.<sup>486</sup> She also accepted the illusion of self-cultivation as a way of reversing prejudices, and showing to a society dominated by the values of nobility that ex-Jews could achieved privileged positions, not by birth-lineage, but “for themselves by their own powers”.<sup>487</sup> Assimilating to dominant religious and class German traditions, to which historical anti-Semitism had been mixed, she also assimilated to established prejudices, coming to play for a while that “sport of good society, the ‘modern hatred of Jews’” (she referred once

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<sup>481</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 18

<sup>482</sup> Quoted by Arendt, RV, p. 91. Also: “Rahel’s struggle against facts, above all against the fact of having been born a Jew, very rapidly became a struggle against herself.”

<sup>483</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 81. It is important to recall that Arendt’s original subtitle reads “a biography of a German Jewess from the Romantic period” [*Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik*]

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., p. 239

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p. 244

<sup>486</sup> “For such rulers had ultimately, at the end of the most evil times, found a use for those who had never been used before, or only been used as victims of robbery. Out of need for money they had helped the outcasts of history enter history; and those outcast included Rahel and all her kith and kin.” Arendt, *ibid.*, p. 240

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

to the Jews as “this...deservedly despised nation”).<sup>488</sup> She became, as a parvenu, ready to adapt tastes, desires, life<sup>489</sup>, believing that the easiest escape from political oppression and social insult was through a whole redesign of one’s identity. This parvenu drive for assimilation can be perceived by the parvenu himself as a voluntarist performance of self-creation and self-imagination. However, for Arendt, the process only reveals the parvenu (the ex-pariah) state of domination, for her self-creation is nothing but a self-domestication, a conformation to the prevalent social forms:

“Those who are resolutely determined to rise, to ‘arrive’, must early accustom themselves to anticipating the stage they hope to attain by simulating voluntary appreciation; must early set their sights higher than the blind obedience, which is all that is demanded of them; must always act as if they were performing freely, and as their own masters, the things that are in any case expected of hirelings and subordinates. This fraud seldom has any direct influence upon their careers, but it is of the greatest value for social successes and for positions in society. By this fraud the pariah prepares society to accept his career as a parvenu.”<sup>490</sup>

Rahel’s career into “social fraud”, into wearing a “social dress”, and abandoning her “truth”, resulted in an escalation towards “rank, marriage, change of name...the illusion of a native place.”<sup>491</sup> In a completely artificial move, she had risen to a position in the “natural” society of her environment, as a baptized, respectable woman, now with access to the “understanding despots”, for she was married to a diplomat – who, in Arendt’s analysis, came as a political coward, a man whose diplomatic missions were conceived to achieve nothing but a compliment or a decoration from his superiors. For Karl Varnhagen, literature and politics were only “instruments for social advancement”.<sup>492</sup> He also demanded his wife’s adaptation to social respectability, which implied, most significantly, Rahel’s abandonment of old friendships, specially of those “disrespectful” women, as Pauline Wiesel.

But here came the turning point in Rahel’s social escalation. “I cannot”, Rahel wrote, “sin and lie along with it [society]”. A sudden reverse-transformation occurred when Rahel had finished her transformation into a respectable woman. *One cannot escape Jewishness [Judentum]* was the final chapter of Rahel’s biography, the chapter in which Arendt analyzed a typical pariah-backlash. When Rahel reached her social “goal”, she

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., p. 253, 255

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., p. 241

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., p. 237

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., p. 246

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., p. 238



rebelled.<sup>493</sup> She became a parvenu, but could not avoid thinking, feeling, expressing as a pariah. She rebelled against the woman-function: "...now I have to behave toward people as if I were nothing more than my *husband*; in the past I was *nothing*, and that is a great deal."<sup>494</sup> It is better to be nothing than fulfilling a role. It is better to go unnoticed, to remain invisible to society, than to fake reactions, to behave respectably, to suppress emotions and opinions so not to defy conventions. Rahel compared her assimilated life to that of "a poor worker who loses himself in the operations of life all week long and perhaps on Sunday can come close to its real essence."<sup>495</sup>

Rahel's Sunday came late. She was married, socialized, baptized, and she was also becoming older, and her origins, her youthful years, her time of spontaneous and free thoughts, affairs, friendships had past. So her return to pariahdom was firstly an imagined return to a lost condition. As an act of rebellion, she resumed her friendship with the "disrespectful" Pauline (which had remained unmarried, outside society). She recovered the disinterested contemplation of those "true realities", of those objects, experiences, and faces outside social connections and orientations: "a tree, a ride, a smell, a smile". This rediscovery of humanity, or this longing for a humanity never found in social artificialism, was due to the pariah's spontaneous lack of prejudice, of her almost unaware playful-morality, which takes "too much consideration for a human face", and lives by a "...gratitude, excessive attachment, [which] is the typical vice of the pariah, who feels obligated even by a casual word". This pariah, by her experience, and by a combination of feelings, memories, and unforced principles, settles her own terms of relations with others, as Arendt noted with a bit of irony (towards those unending discussions on moral issues):

"This sensitivity is an emotionally exaggerated understanding of the dignity of every human being, a passionate comprehension unknown to the privileged. In a society based upon privilege, pride of birth and arrogance of title, the pariah instinctively discovers human dignity in general long before Reason has made it the foundation of morality."<sup>496</sup>

The more Rahel tried to transform, the more she felt impelled back to her pariah condition. This movement was conditioned by external circumstances: the parvenu experiences social insult, for she is merely an arrivist, a recently-arrived, who is trying to

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<sup>493</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 245

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., p. 246

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p. 248

hide her non-noble origins. Becoming Varnhagen, Rahel was addressed by her former friend, Karoline Humboldt, as *Sie*, a formal reference that barely concealed the contempt for Rahel's arrival (W. von Humboldt himself observed in a letter: 'There is nothing the Jews cannot achieve').<sup>497</sup> The creation of a social character outside her "truth" turned out to be much more shameful than the "greatest shame" of being born a poor *schlemihl* and Jewess. Also, her pariah-backlash was determined by the external circumstances of facing other Jews, especially non-assimilated, non-Berliner Jews, to whom the parvenu felt, in contrast, like a "Grand Sultan".<sup>498</sup> A deluded parvenu would conclude that she is an instance of progress, that she is the first of a new generation of regenerated. A conscious pariah, as Rahel became, would acknowledge that there was more honor in those who stayed behind, who did not betray her people just for becoming the last-comer to society.

This was another of the lost illusions of assimilation: that "Jewishness" (*Judesein*) could be regarded as a mere defect, as a personal bad trait to be extirpated through acculturation and education. *Being-Jew* became a personal question, depending on one's ability to overcome or hide that "misery of birth", like the "lame man's too-short leg".<sup>499</sup> But, as physical defects are hardly invisible, the existence of a differentiated people could not simply be undone by the constructive-destructive mentality of assimilation. Rahel started then to fight for her "stolen" existence. One way of doing this was embracing her condition as a Jewess, thus accepting that she could not belong to a society which did not accept herself neither her "backwards" coreligionists. She came back by replacing the parvenu's introjected anti-Semitism with a renewed philosemitic admiration, a renewed concern for that "...great, gifted nation that went far in the knowledge of God."<sup>500</sup>

Here, we can see how some elements of Arendt's late political thought were explored, still in a non-categorical way, in Rahel's biography. Rahel did not act politically – she did not "choose", she did not care about facts, she wrote only letters (private documents), and she never thought of changing "bad conditions". But she did change *herself*, she did produce a new identity, she became, in short, her own author. The first movement (politicization) would mean public appearance, and interaction with others. The second one (self-recreation) implies an exclusive concern with oneself, and placing oneself as a "work of art" in accordance to pre-established social forms/models.

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<sup>497</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 239

<sup>498</sup> "Every Berlin Jew felt like a Grand Sultan in contrast to his poor, backward co-religionists." Ibid., p. 250

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 251

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., p. 256

Rahel thought it would be easier to change herself than to participate in a change of politics. For Arendt, the latter is indeed difficult: politics requires persuading others, beginning events that no one can control. But changing oneself, for Arendt, was actually more problematic – if not impossible. Firstly, because it entailed a deep moral-psychological process of disintegration and depersonalization, in order to become the new, imagined person. This imagining and self-designing an identity that would fit to social expectations implies, per force, the loss of one's unique existence (the loss of the condition "...of living as a distinct and unique being..."<sup>501</sup>).

The conclusion seems quite simple: you only assimilate to be accepted. But this means that society does not accept your former self and, probably, won't accept the falsification of your former self into the new one. Why would you want to be accepted by a society that does not accept you? In Rahel's and Heine's cases, as we saw, to not "starve", to undo a "defect" that blocked social integration, to work and live in peace. But Arendt alerted that peace won't come if one accedes to an exclusionary society. This society will only grow stronger in its prejudices, in its longing for "equality", in its intolerance to unequal and abnormal elements. By changing yourself in order to assimilate to a certain society, Arendt warned, you may nurture the social flaws of that society, which can turn later into political regulations. It's not even that you don't change society: you reinforce its prejudices, thus leaving unchecked and uncontested early forms of exclusion and dehumanization which can grow even stronger.

Rahel tried to be the author of her new identity, but, as "nobody is the author or producer of his own life story"<sup>502</sup>, she felt trapped in a sort of social tragedy, in which the Jewish fate haunted her. This destiny was not only a matter of some Gods of Accident reappearing during the execution of her plans. It was a matter of a historical and social "destiny", or, to interpret Arendt's terms, of historical and social grounding-conditions of Rahel's existence. Here, we must consider important distinctions and points in Arendt's approach. Answering to Jaspers, whom had found Arendt's characterization of Rahel's Jewishness as too "fundamentalist" (Jaspers rather saw the *Judesein* as an "accidental" feature), Arendt introduced the distinction of "fatefulness", as different from a "fundament" (or, one could say, an "essence"). She added that this "fatefulness arises from the very fact of 'foundationlessness', only occurring outside the idea of a fixed-

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<sup>501</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 178

<sup>502</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 184

deterministic Judaism.<sup>503</sup> To understand this provisory distinction (Arendt herself admitted she was not wholly “conscious” of it while working in Rahel’s text), I propose to rely on Arendt’s “grounding-conditions”, which were precisely formulated, as I presented before, with the influence of Jasper’s limit-situations (Ch. 1).

As I am arguing in this work, humans can deny limit-situations, as humans can try to undo grounding-conditions of life. Political organizations can, and normally do, deny the fact of plurality. Through intricate psychological mechanisms, people deny limit-situations as, for instance, death and guilt. And some people can successfully assimilate to external social or ethnic identities, as they can even reshape their individual identities out of self-conceived images. There is no legal, moral, nor even an ontological barrier to assimilation or self-creation. But there are consequences. Arendt indicated personal-psychological, socio-historical and political consequences of this early denial of plurality and uniqueness through assimilation.

In this sense, embracing the “fatefulness” of certain individual-historical conditions is a matter of possibility; as, on the other hand, is it possible to deny systematically given-conditions by assimilation, suppression of memory, self-denial, reality-denial, rationalizations and conscious or unconscious forms of lie. Here we can appreciate this matter from a different angle. It is quite surprising that Arendt used seemingly cognitive and legal concepts to refer to Rahel’s career as a parvenu – “fraudulent self-identification”, “true realities”, “real essence”, “lie along with [society]”. These rigid terms, indeed, indicate a solution less complex than Arendt’s own view. She did not think of human beings as determined by “real essences”, which they must discover in order to fulfill their “real possibilities”. But the cognitivist-epistemological analogy can be further explored in its unexpectedness. A classic definition of truth is the correspondence between a worldly state-of-things and the intellect (or related subjective propositional/symbolic representations of this state-of-things). In this line, a psychological-subjective sense of falsehood could be *felt* or *perceived* by the detachment of the subjectivity from its external reality (Rahel’s conclusion that she could not “sin or lie” with society). This a romantic-subjective-inward criteria, which is nevertheless relevant, for Rahel adopted this standpoint. Moreover, a person can *lie*, in this sense. In Arendt’s political interpretation, lying is different from holding a rationally false

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<sup>503</sup> Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers: *correspondence, 1926-1969*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. 1993, p. 11

statement, for the latter can be refuted in logical terms. Saying that  $2 + 2 = 5$  or that *a square is round*, or that *black is white* is plainly false and ineffective. Its falsehood can be verified by self-evident criteria, so no one can be persuaded of its illogicality. A lie, differently, explore alternative possibilities of human existence; it denies portions of visible, living realities, whose truthfulness is not logical or self-evident, but dependent on human recognition and political establishment (“Poor reality, dependent upon human beings...”).<sup>504</sup>

Rahel did not explicitly lie (or made a fraud) by using fake documents and living parallel lives. She, however, denied a series of life-conditions, or facts of life, trying to suppress them, in order to become a “new” person. She succeeded in creating a new persona: one of the capacities of lying, according to Arendt, is to generate real consequences. But the problem is how long one – person, social group, political community – can sustain its scheme of deceptions:

“A person probably can defy a single fact by denying it, but not that totality of facts which we call the world.”<sup>505</sup>

The “totality of facts” is incompatible with the parvenu belief that she can fabricate her world by reshaping her identity. Here, Arendt indicated the limitations of introspection: the *sensation* of untruthfulness – of a robbed existence – could only arise within the interaction with an external reality, that reappeared to Rahel as a “fateful” remembrance of who she was – that is, of the life-conditions denied by her. Reality, as Arendt point out, is established and experienced with others, within external conditions. The constructivist assumption can only work if a whole human reality is controlled and involved in a web of “deceptions”, so as to satisfy the designs of its “author”. Rahel’s illusion of a free self-creation thus collided with the “conditioning force” of external reality: with social insults that remembered her origin; with the encounter with non-assimilated Jews, who still appeared as a social and historical group; with the need to associate with “enemies” of her former people, thus experiencing social humiliation. The parvenu needed to dress a costume, but “through every hole in his costume his old pariah existence could be detected.”<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 92

<sup>505</sup> Ibid, p. 93

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 257

When Arendt wrote, thinking of Rahel, that “there was no escape, unless it were to the moon”<sup>507</sup>, she meant: there is no escape *for the parvenu*. Whenever the parvenu goes, she is haunted by the shadows of the pariah (affective memories, origins, spontaneous relations). The parvenu role works only for a while. But here a true liberation starts, so one doesn’t need, for the sake of liberation, to go to the moon (let’s remember that, decades later, Arendt would write that a literal form of world alienation is aiming to escape to the sidereal space). What seems to be an irresistible destiny haunting the parvenu becomes a *fateful-condition* for the pariah’s liberation – even if, in Rahel’s life, it only meant liberation from social prejudices, and not an effective political emancipation. Rahel’s rebellion coincided with an acceptance of her difference, and so with a transformation of “difference from being a source of weakness and marginality into one of strength and defiance.”<sup>508</sup>

Hence, Arendt, the author of the ‘new beginnings’, did not say that a person is imprisoned by his or her living-conditions (the community in which is born, the physical skills, the color of skin, the way of talking and thinking, the historical context etc.), but that one can only be free by acting upon and from these conditions. Arendt wrote that men “disclose” their unique selves by showing to the world “who they are”, so that revealing “actively their unique personal identities”.<sup>509</sup> Assimilation is the opposite of active disclosure, since it means closing oneself in a fabricated identity, an identity produced in accordance to a reified social-image. It is made from an illusion of repetition, since it pre-supposes an accepted model of social behavior. Through action, though, in Arendt’s terms, one appears confirming its uniqueness, bringing up a new face and a new dimension of humanity. If we think on the background of Rahel’s story, we can understand how Jews tried to disappear as Jews, how they tried to un-make their Jewishness, instead of appearing as themselves, and actively confirming their uniqueness. This, as Arendt insisted, was not only a matter of cultural pride, but of appreciation of a political reality, and acceptance of the fact that being-Jew was a reality under political attack.

For Rahel, the moment of rebellion, the moment of fortification of the person and of its appearance in its own terms, came when she began, anew, to write letters with

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Benhabib, S. ‘The Pariah and Her Shadow: Hannah Arendt’s biography of Rahel Varnhagen.’ *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb., 1995), p. 11

<sup>509</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 179

Hebrew characters (as she did when a child), when she self-declared as a “fugitive of Egypt and Palestine”, and understood that the “misery of her life” had been the source of meaning, and the conditioning force of everything that happen to her (including of what she did by trying to deny it). And, as Arendt significantly ended her biography, she could only die, reconciled as a pariah, “with peaceful heart”, when she found another pariah who could be her heir, a pariah who had promised, in that “bad times”, that “the Germanic rabble will hear my voice ring resoundingly in German beer halls and palaces.” Heine, a pariah who Arendt would analyze a decade later, and who we will discuss soon, was the inheritor of a pariah-Jewess who had asked (“No philanthropic list, no cheers...no mixed society, no new hymn book, no bourgeois star...”) only for someone, as Heine and Arendt did, to “say it very soon. But as you do, the text from my old, offended heart will still have to remain yours.”<sup>510</sup> Disclosing the pariah tradition was part of Rahel’s testament.

### **5.6 Exceptionalization and atomization**

Let us shift, for a while, to the politico-historical background of assimilation in Europe. Arendt did not say that Jews assimilated because the state demanded. In fact, she pointed that the most traumatic episodes of anti-Semitism and assimilation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the “century of the parvenu”)<sup>511</sup> related to revolts of several social groups against the state. Since Jews were seen as protected by the state, with which they supposedly had a privileged relation, attacks on the state sometimes were commuted into attacks on Jews.<sup>512</sup> The perception that the state was separated from society related to the perceived estrangement between social groups and Jews. While society complained that the state did not answer to its demands, Jews were regarded as “a state within the state”. In this context, the decline of European Jews, for Arendt, coincided with the “complete breakdown of state worship”.<sup>513</sup>

So, although Arendt elsewhere identified forms of autocracy (as, for instance, government by decrees, complemented by the use of bureaucratic apparats) as one of the historical origins of totalitarianism<sup>514</sup>, she stressed the interaction between Jews and society as the main source of Jewish assimilation and depoliticization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other authors, differently, stressed the role, specially in Prussia, of a certain monarchic

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<sup>510</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 259

<sup>511</sup> Arendt, ‘Active Patience’, TJW, p. 140

<sup>512</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 59

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Arendt, OT, Imperialism – Continental Imperialism: the Pan Movements. For instance, pp. 318-19

authoritarianism combined with a rigid bureaucratic apparatus designed to enforce orders and to control public discussion, while liberalizing socio-economical life. In this context, political sphere would be closed, but private and economic spaces were freed from traditional regulations. Jewish emancipation, in this line, could be understood as socialization, that is, as occupation of private and economic positions, but with no political participation whatsoever.<sup>515</sup> If we accept Arendt's claim, this explanation may capture some important historical trends – reduction of Jews to private spaces, Prussian traditional authoritarianism, bureaucratism, cult of obedience etc.-, without pointing to two decisive phenomena: the decline of the state and the rise of the social.

A further comparison can be done between Arendt's perspective and Otto Bauer's *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* [*Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, 1907]. Bauer was one of the leading figures of Austrian-Marxism, a writer and politician involved in the complex questions of the multi-ethnic Austrian state in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *The Question of Nationalities*, his first important treatise, he presented an economic-historical analysis of emerging national claims in the geographical and the jurisdictional limits of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. He did so breaking with some of Marx's views on the question of nationalities. Bauer fundamentally defended the legitimacy of nationalities, and its irreducibility to atavistic forms of identifications solvable within the scheme of economic developments.

Indeed, confronted by the national problem in the multi-national, pluri-ethnic Austrian state, Bauer defended a relative national autonomy *within* the state. This autonomy – nationalities would become “legal entities” – would grant to nationalities – to Poles, German, Slovaks, Czechs, Magyars etc. – a relative political, juridical and economic power over their jurisdiction. This jurisdiction, moreover, would not be defined in territorial terms (there would be no geographical division); rather it would work as a “personality principle”, as an association of individuals identified with a certain nationality wherever region they lived within the state. This jurisdiction would have autonomy over matters of education and culture (for instance, establishment and administration of schools, museums, academies, theaters etc.), so as to preserve and promote the uniqueness of national cultures. The nation, as a legal entity, would also have

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<sup>515</sup> Sorkin describes it as “state intervention in civil society in the name of social liberalization”. Sorkin, op. cit., p. 25



the right to appeal to state-justice over questions such as national defamation and persecution.<sup>516</sup>

Bauer's articulation of the "attempt of the Austrian nations to find a legal code for their existence"<sup>517</sup> was, among other questions, due to what he called the *centralist-atomist* configuration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal state. According to this conception, the modern state, grounded on liberalism, had turned into the "...only *one* free independent power, the sovereign state", complemented only by a "mass of unorganized individuals".<sup>518</sup> State's sovereignty could not be checked by any other source of political power, since lonely and disarticulated individuals could only enjoy limited civil rights – which, by the way, were founded and protected by state's tutelage. For Bauer, this specific process was explained by an economic continuity between the absolute monarchical state and the liberal state. The overthrow of kings by bourgeois revolutions and constitutions did not change the process of atomization, that is, of concentration of politics into the single hands of the state.

According to Bauer, this dynamic was conceived to facilitate and simplify the capitalistic process of production into a unified social functioning: "the large capitalist enterprise united the isolated workers as its workers in the work of the society".<sup>519</sup> This sentence and Bauer's general analysis are strikingly close to Arendt's interpretation. Bauer defined Hobbes and Rousseau, with their defense of a sovereign ruler or a undivided will, and their suspicion of civil partial-associations, as the theorists of the *centralist-atomist* model.<sup>520</sup> According to him, this model instituted a relation absent in the medieval feudal state, which "recognize a wide range of associations of individuals", and allowed alternative centers of power – as seigniorial and cooperative associations – to celebrate laws that were "not derived from the state".<sup>521</sup> In replacement of these several sources of power and legality, the modern state centralized the political and juridical process, leaving to individuals limited economic rights, and civil liberties that were almost ineffective in contrast to state absolute power.

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<sup>516</sup> "...if someone appoints the Czech nation as his heir, the will is invalid: the law recognizes no one who could claim the inheritance. If someone insults the Polish nation, the nation cannot institute proceedings against him: there is no one who would be legally entitled to institute such proceedings." Bauer, op. cit., p. 222

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., p. 221

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p. 223, 224

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 224

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., p. 223

To be true, the medieval system was no democratic model for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it had a complex configuration of power, and an estimation of regional, specific traditions and specific economic relations, in a centrifugal operation, later undermined by the centralization of power and atomization of individuals characteristic of modern states. The problem of nationalities [*Nationalitätsfrage*] emerged within this central-atomist context. According to Bauer, as the state was the single source of power, nationalities started to compete for influence over the state. As they were not juridical entities, with no specific rights, the quest of nationalities was organized via the individual, civil right to form political parties. National parties competed among each other to “conquer the state”, to use Arendt’s terms. Because they had no national power for themselves, nationalities organized in parties (and later in movements) struggled over seats in the Austrian parliament, and over general state-command. In this scenario, the victory of one nation implied necessarily the defeat of others nations, as it occurred with the control of German bourgeoisie over the state’s structure in West Austria, and the control of other nationalities (over defeated nationalities) in other regions: “The struggle of the nations for influence over the state now necessarily becomes a struggle of the nations against one another.”<sup>522</sup>

Bauer defended, so, the recognition of nationalities as *intermediary entities*, as alternative centers of power between the sovereign state and the atomized individual. In his view, granting powers to nationalities would demobilize their competition for the state-power – and so their mutual hatred. There would be no subjugation of one nationality by other through the use of the state structure. Now, Bauer comes very close to Arendt’s concern, considering both her analysis of ethnic rivalry in pre-1933 Europe, and her critique of Jewish assimilation. Indeed, one of the implications of Arendt’s defense of the emancipation of Jews *as Jews* was this, a political-juridical recognition of Jews as a distinct, legal entity within a federal system.<sup>523</sup> Jewish politicization could imply the entrance of Jews, as a distinct political people, in a structure of mediation and negotiation with other European peoples, on the basis that Jews were not necessarily alienated from others, neither necessarily identical to other peoples.

I have been discussing, in the previous sections, the specific relation between Jews and non-Jewish society in the assimilation process. How does society – or the social – fit

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 227

<sup>523</sup> Arendt, ‘The Minority Question’, TJW, p. 133

to this question between nationalities and the state? Well, Arendt's anti-socialism referred precisely to this emergence of national-societies, or socialized ethnicities. As I mentioned before, the emergence of large-scale, national societies coincided with the decline of specific class, religious, regional associations. The competition between nationalities in Austria only proved that these ethnic groups were the main factors of identification in that scenario (which only became more explosive with the emergence of what Bauer called "nonhistorical" nations, also claiming state power). So, now we can understand that the decline of the state, for Arendt, did not imply the decline of centralization. Indeed, the emergence of the "organic nation", with its hostility towards the state as a space of rights, discussions, procedures, safeguards etc., created a more radical threat to groups and individuals falling outside that organic nation. (It is not simple coincidence that the *Austrian* branch of the pan-Germanic movement was one the most important sources of Nazism).<sup>524</sup>

The failure of assimilation, thus, can be examined with this background. Within it, Jewish assimilation could never succeed: Jews had become individuals – journalists, philosophers, lawyers, physicians -, but these were solely liberal-professional designations with a weak sense of social belonging. By becoming individual journalists or doctors, they were not becoming Germans, or French, or Poles. They tried to break with their national-association precisely when European peoples were redesigning themselves as national-associations (or "organic nations"). The path of conversion, name-changing, intermarriage, social escalation etc. would be soon reverted into suspicion, insult, contempt, or whatever accusation that brought up the concealed Jewish origin of the assimilated.

Assimilation's demand – "to conform through differentiation and distinction"<sup>525</sup> – led the individual ex-Jew to a solitary position. The way of exceptionalization would have catastrophic consequences. The framework of assimilation had divided Jews into several classifications of exceptionality: useful vs. useless; protected vs. unprotected; educated vs. backward; Western vs. Eastern; local vs. foreigner; secular vs. religious etc. The presupposition of exceptionalism was in no way a gradual, spontaneous, unforced fluctuation of identity. It presupposed the *rule* of a despicable, anachronistic *Judentum*. The *exception confirmed the rule*: Jews, as a distinct people, were incompatible with

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<sup>524</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 311

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., p. 84

modern national societies. The assimilated Jew described by Joseph Roth, who wraps the Torah in a newspaper to go to the synagogue, or who runs away when his religious cousin arrives in Paris from Poznan, tried to prove his exceptionality by hiding from the rule – and, so, helping to hide any form of visible Jewish existence, either social or individual. He so blamed the Jews that instantiated the ‘rule’ – his cousin from Poznan - for not having yet being transformed into an exception.<sup>526</sup>

In this process, the *Judentum* – families, clubs, schools, synagogues, newspapers – were emptied by the escape of these exceptions, or turned into exceptional associations which tacitly contributed to the process of invisibility (Gabriel Riesser is one pariah’s exception to the “exceptional”: when Western Jews began to self-designate as *israelitisch* or *mosaisch*, to conceal the pejorative term *Jew*, he founded a newspaper called *Der Jude*, asking “Should we deny this ancient and honorable name in order to please those who hate it?”)<sup>527</sup>. The exceptions, though, as we saw, arrived to nowhere – to no new class, no new nationality, no new family. Even if they arrived, they could not undo the marks of their escalation, the fact that they were *converted*, or *inter-married*, or that they still carried a “Mosaic belief” within their heads. Their option was, as Karl Kraus formulated, between hiding their origins and hiding their people (“betray with the secret of his origin the secret of his people”).<sup>528</sup> Struggling between differentiation and acceptance, between individualization and association, between eating as parvenus and starving as pariahs, between arriving and staying, “the way of the pariah and the parvenu were equally ways of extreme solitude”.<sup>529</sup>

These “free-floating individuals”<sup>530</sup>, who tried the path of assimilation, lost their old bondages, and helped to dissolve the already weakened institutional position of Jewish associations and groups. By becoming atomized individuals, Jews lost the few political potentialities that they had of “disclosing” who they were and who they could be

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<sup>526</sup> “In the case of many or even most Western Jews, they attempted to replace the lost or diluted faith of their fathers with a willful blindness, which I describe as a superstitious belief in progress. Some of them unfortunately gave the temptation to blame Jewish immigrants from the East for the expression of anti-Semitic feeling. It is an oft-ignored fact that Jews, too, are capable of anti-Semitism. One does not want to be reminded by some recent arrival from Lodz of one’s grandfather from Posen or Katowice. This is the unworthy but understandable attitude of an insecure middle class just scaling the steep ladder into the echelons of the upper middle class, with fresh air and scenic views. At the sight of a cousin from Lodz, one may easily lose one’s balance and fall”. Roth, op. cit., p. 122

<sup>527</sup> “[Riesser] acknowledged the hatred that was bound up with the use of the name, but it was the anti-Semite, not the Jew, who needed to change. ‘Is it not the responsibility of those who hate’, he asked, ‘to fight against the hatred and cast it off, if it is ever to end?’” Gay, R. op. cit., pp. 149-150

<sup>528</sup> Quoted by Arendt, OT, p. 85

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Feldman, ‘Introduction...’, p. lxvi

in their own terms. Jews were not absorbed by historical or nonhistorical social-nationalities, as they would not have a nationality of their own to protect themselves during the national struggles to come. The backlash of particularism after the illusion of Enlightened assimilation (before they were “human too”, now they were “artificially” assimilated) inclines one to accept the apologetic argument of “no way out”: before, the problem was that we, Jews, were different; now, the problem is that we, Jews, are trying to become equals. But there was alternative to assimilation. The alternative, for Arendt, was to embrace the “fatefulness” of the Jewish condition, making from it a clear statement for Jews as an European entity along with other groups, cultures, and nations. Contrary to what is claimed by fatalist accounts of Jewish accommodation, this political acceptance of the Jewish condition was possible, for the Zionists themselves, and also some Jewish socialist and other cultural groups, provided examples of it.<sup>531</sup>

There is, finally, what one could call a paradox in this debate. Assimilation is broadly understood as adjustment or conformation to a certain group. But Arendt stressed the “solitary ways” of the exceptional ex-Jewish Jew. How can one assimilate (be incorporated to a group or a community), and remain a solitary individual? This is precisely one of Arendt’s claims concerning the failures of assimilation. Jews were not assimilated. They only tried to assimilate, and, by trying, they helped to dissolved their own community. We could think of different levels and models of assimilation. One thing was an attempt of assimilation to a Western nationality (a sort of assimilation to *particular-particularism*); another, an attempt to assimilate, for instance, to a Bolshevik identity, to the idea of the Bolshevik Russian as a “Universal Human Being” (an assimilation to *particular-universalism*) – as one ex-Jewish poet celebrated “Now I am tall - and the rabbi is small”.<sup>532</sup> Bolshevik Jews (from a point only Bolsheviks), for instance, denying their parents’ religiosity or their petit bourgeois mentality, could find a new family and a new community with the comrades of the Komsomol, within the group-orientation of committees, party-sectors, branches of police, propaganda departments etc. They were not isolated.

But, in accordance to Arendt’s political critique, the main problem of assimilation was the gradual destruction of Jewish communities (long before the physical destruction of its individual members in the genocide). Politically, individuals with no roots, with no

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<sup>532</sup> The poem, from Mikhail Svetlov, is quoted by Slezkine, op. cit., p. 227

communitarian basis, with no basis for organized actuation, are defenseless atoms. From a different angle, the inhumanity of assimilation was implicit in its conceptual denial of plurality. As Arendt stressed, plurality is not a simple multiplicity of indistinct individuals. Human beings are unique, and this also means that they exist, relate, establish meaning and build their lives in unique communitarian and group formations. Moreover, as the process of assimilation was lived in specific ways by each Jew, these models and mechanisms were superposed to the point of ambiguity and confusion in concrete lives. One individual could run through different layers of assimilation, as the attempt to cover Jewish “nakedness with the fig leaf of a different nationality”<sup>533</sup>, convert to another religion, focus on an individual-liberal career (assimilation to *universal-particularism*), aggravating his sense of confusion and isolation. Solitude and atomization could be experienced in different ways. Even in the closed model of assimilation to the “universal revolutionary” of Bolshevism, which offered a more rigid structure of integration, an ex-Jew needed to undergo a complex repression and concealment of his origins, being in no way immune to denunciations of the pariah-skin which appeared through the holes of his assimilation’s dress.<sup>534</sup>

### 5.7 Jewishness as a Vice

Grounded on the premise that *Jews are human*, Enlightened assimilation validated hidden premises and practical consequences: that Jewish and human identities were not coincident; that humanization of Jews required an abandonment of Jewishness; that this process of “humanization” was in no way immediate or easily achieved, as some Jews were condemned to remain as Jews by their inability to be educated or transformed; that Jewishness, being reduced to the mere *belief* in norms of Judaism, could be experienced only subjectively and privately, having no political significance; that Jews should arrive as pure individuals or as individuals integrated to non-Jewish identities; that the normal assimilation-path became the escape from Jewish normality (that is, exceptionalization via double differentiation); that exceptional, assimilated Jews tacitly accepted the vision of a debased *Judentum*; and, finally, that exceptional Jews were mostly not absorbed, but isolated in the end of the process.

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<sup>533</sup> Arendt, ‘With Our Backs to the Wall’, p. 164.

<sup>534</sup> Arendt ended the Preface to Part three of OT (Totalitarianism) mentioning the “last compliment Stalin paid to his late colleague and rival [Hilter]”: the development of an ideological anti-Semitism following the “Nazi pattern of a Jewish world conspiracy in the sense of the Elders of Zion”. Arendt, OT, p. xlviii

One consequence was that the assimilated became an actor. The term *actor* may led to some conceptual confusion, given the positive meaning Arendt ascribed to the term itself, and to politics as a “space of appearance”.<sup>535</sup> Traditional philosophical frameworks established the distinction between appearance/inauthenticity/error/falsehood x essence/authenticity/right/truth, leading to a general dismissal of all phenomena in favor of “hidden”, introspective authentic-truths. As it is known, Arendt refused this framework, and recovered the specific dignity and freedom of a phenomenal, apparent sense of being. Opposed to an important part of the philosophical tradition, Arendt wrote that appearing and being, actually, coincide: in a most vivid and concrete sense, reality is what appears to human beings. In these terms, appearing-beings can be said *actors* of a human *drama*, disclosing their selves within the world of senses, sounds, faces, and interactions.<sup>536</sup> Now, one could ask why did Arendt criticize assimilation as a sort of theatrical actuation, coming to state that,

“Jews are human beings, not professional actors who constantly have to change identities in order to be happy. And only under inhuman conditions do human beings attempt to change the color of their skin or the shape of their noses or the number of letters in their names.”<sup>537</sup>

So, we could have here two senses of being an *actor*.<sup>538</sup> In order to distinguish both, and to grasp Arendt’s critique of assimilation without redefining her own terms, we can indeed rely on the very concept of appearance. Assimilation was a phenomenon, and so it displayed an “appearance” of certain social and historical relations. But, as we’ve been discussing, it could be criticized by Arendt for being a controlled, restrictive mode of appearance, leading ultimately to the disappearance of Jews as distinct individuals and of the *Judentum* as a distinct community. Assimilated Jews tried to appear as non-Jews, thus removing from visibility an important aspect of their condition. They were still living, human beings within certain social interactions, but their humanity and vitality had been undermined and repressed, for they needed to control and restrain their own mode of appearance. They did not reveal, but concealed themselves. Their appearance

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<sup>535</sup> “...the actor, the doer of deeds...” Arendt, HC, p. 178. For the section on Power and the Space of Appearance (28), see Arendt, HC, p. 199

<sup>536</sup> For an analogy between the political ‘space of appearances’, the performance of power and performative, non-productive, arts like dance and theater, see Arendt, HC, p. 207.

<sup>537</sup> Arendt, ‘The Return of Russian Jewry’, TJW, p. 173

<sup>538</sup> In *On Revolution*, Arendt elaborated a triple distinction between the dramatic persona of Greek culture, the modern “persona” with its “legal personality” and simply the “hypocritical” actor, who enacted any role almost naturally, instinctively. Arendt, OR, pp. 97-98

was literally theatrical, for it was determined by given roles and functions, within a certain social script, which presupposed an authorship of a determinate social scheme. There was no room for alternative scripts, not even for improvisation. Their stories, in short, were written by others (even by impersonal others), and, as actors can “be” several characters in a single life, as they can play different roles to which they are trained, assimilated men and women nurtured a belief in a theatrical acceptance of externally designed roles. As an actor makes his “real” self to disappear in order to become his “role” or “character”, assimilated men concealed their Jewishness in order to behave in accordance to socially defined identities.

Now, in a positive sense, human beings are also “actors” revealing their unique identities, their unique sense of being in the world and appearing to others. This interactive appearance of human beings enacts an indeterminate web of stories. But, in this picture, there are people and persons, and not only roles and social characters. Indeed, in the German text of *Vita Activa*, Arendt used *Person* instead of agent/actor.<sup>539</sup> Here we could differentiate between being a *Person* and being a social-persona, the latter understood as an adaptation of individuality to a social “mask”. In a world of people and persons, and not only of roles, there is a plurality of spontaneously, historically formed groups, and a plurality of individuals revealing their distinctive way of belonging to these groups, cultures, associations. No story is previously written, for stories emerge from these living, infinite interactions. In a similar way, there are no single author imposing anticipated roles, characters and ends to these stories, since men and women are active-actors capable of beginning new courses of actuation and embracing unexpected life-circumstances. Human beings, in this depiction, *appear* to others by sustaining their unique living conditions; they do not adulterate these conditions to disappear into fictional, theatrical roles imposed by dominant social standards.

The assimilated-actor accepts a character that is imputed to him. He so regulates his own life and choices and words in accordance to this – explicit or imagined – attributed identity. In other words, he is subjected to live his life in accordance to an idea. He must *fabricate* himself in accordance to that idea. The agent-actor (the *Person*), differently, accepts the conditions that life has given to him, and starts his own, open, unpredictable story by embracing his unique sense of existing among others. His life is a

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<sup>539</sup> See, for instance, Chapter 5, section 24: *Die Enthüllung der Person im Handeln und Sprechen*. Arendt, *Vita Activa*, p. 213. The English version reads “The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action”. Arendt, HC, p. 175



biography, not a fiction written by others. Now, as actors are required to live in the imprecise borders of different identities, or even in the dissonant accumulation of characters by the same person, exceptional-assimilated Jews needed to develop a specific form of ambivalence, which can be, in broad terms, presented as a contrast between external adjustment and inner disintegration. Privatization of Jewishness led, according to Arendt, to an actual transportation of the Jewish *problem* from the streets to home, to privacy and also to the individual psyche. As the *Judenfrage* lost its “political significance”, as it was repressed from a public matter to the obscurity of private spheres, it started to “haunt” the private lives of assimilated Jews.<sup>540</sup>

This emotionalization turned the Jewish “problem” into something even more unsolvable, for a matter supposedly of rights and political stabilization had now to be psychologically approached, repressed, concealed, or even integrated by a weakened ego which feared giving public appearance to an unaccepted dimension of his existence. This innermost attempt of being a Jew “at home”, besides confounding the psyche, also intoxicated private relations (friendships, love-affairs, marriages) with the residues of an unsolved political issue. Bringing Jewishness to privacy, assimilated men and women could not eliminate the “Jewish problem” from their minds, their thoughts, and certainly not from their private-selves accessible to their intimate relations. Jews actually became actors, needing to control their moves and words, to behave in a certain way to please society, to entertain those who did not want to meet a common Jew nor a common man. To the inner, psychological confusion, assimilated Jews added a confused evaluation of social approval, for, as actors, they could be fascinating and repulsive at the same time, they could be admired only because they were strange:

“Concentration on an artificially complicated inner life helped Jews to respond to the unreasonable demands of society, to be strange and exciting, to develop a certain immediacy of self-expression and presentation which were originally the attributes of the actor and the virtuoso, people whom society has always half denied and half admired. Assimilated Jews, half proud and half ashamed of their Jewishness, clearly were in this category.”<sup>541</sup>

The “complexity of inner life” was aggravated (“artificially complicated”) by an oppressive social system demanding ex-Jews to behave as exotic strangers, simultaneously accepting and rejecting their strangeness. It was, as we saw, no demand

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<sup>540</sup> “...political problems were distorted to the point of pure perversion when Jews tried to solve them by means of inner experience and private emotions”. Arendt, OT, p. 86

<sup>541</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 86

for full depersonalization, but for an ambivalent double-differentiation, for a subtle redesigning of Jewish strangeness into an individual, exotic strangeness, on the basis of an attraction-repulsion dynamic. Lacking a clear directive of adaptation, these non-Jewish Jews testified how destructive social forces can be. The “authority” of the social was not concentrated in one man or one clear group, but diluted into a combination of visible and imperceptible mechanisms of adjustment. Psycho-historians and sociologists of modern masses pointed to this compliance to norms which are not necessarily declared, nor forcibly imposed by a central authority, but voluntarily and unconsciously promoted by group values and social self-regulations. This is another perplexity of the process of Enlightenment, for, having declared man’s capacity to speak and act for himself, it actually inaugurated forms of submission, and destruction of individual independence, which tended to be imperceptible, thus more dangerous.

David Riesman, in *The Lonely Crowd*, a book that Arendt studied for her conceptualization of mass societies, distinguished three types of personalities in accordance to the willingness to adapt or not to certain social contexts. The *adjusted* is the one who is directed by surrounding traditions, by norms presented by family and smaller groups, by regulations introjected to his conscience, or even by more general, universal “other-directions”. Among those who do not adjust, there are the *autonomous* and the *anomic*. The autonomous is a not a pure self-referent individual, but someone capable of accepting social norms, and conforming to it, on the basis of his choice and evaluation. Autonomous men and women guard a critical distance to their social environment, being capable of “transcending their culture”, and even refusing it. The anomic is the one who breaks down, socially or psychologically, in his attempt (and failure) to conform. He experiences non-adjustment by refusing social regulations, or by over-respecting it and becoming internally deregulated.<sup>542</sup>

As a general image of the contemporary man’s search for conformity and acceptance, Woody Allen’s *Zelig* provides an extreme and caricatured case of someone who, willing to conform (it all started with Leonard Zelig’s fear of admitting to colleagues that he had never read *Moby Dick*), loses even his physical identity when he encounter others to whom he adapts immediately. In a more complex way, assimilated Jews in Europe had their ethnic-national origin added as a particular factor to the general

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<sup>542</sup> Riesman, D. Glazer, N. Denney, R. *The Lonely Crowd: a study of the changing American character*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1961, pp. 243-44

mechanism of pure social psychology. They developed specific Jewish psychological “qualities”, and a typical mental complexity, as a result of the psychologization of a condition which had been defining their visibly strange identities. This internalization of Jewishness to the “unpredictable laws”<sup>543</sup> of passions and emotions could foster a productive “identity confusion”, which Erik Erikson defined as an important factor for the creativity of writers and artists from minority groups.<sup>544</sup> It could also lead, as it did with “average Jews”, according to Arendt, to “an empty sense of ‘being different’, which later was interpreted in many psychological variations as innate strangeness.”<sup>545</sup> Or it could simply infuse a sense of disorientation. Kafka, perhaps a combination of all these private experiences, famously expressed his “sense of nothingness”, in the letter to his father, in which he also complained to him: “I could not understand how, with the nothing of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not making an effort (for the sake of piety at least, as you put it) to cling to similar nothing.”<sup>546</sup>

Like actors and other marginal figures, “half denied and half admired” by society, Jews “became people with whom one hoped to while away some time.” They felt in the center of an almost complete reversal of the principles and aims that animated bourgeois revolutions in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century: defense of equality was replaced by fascination for strangeness, as “boredom to economic saturation and general indifference to political questions” became marks of a decaying society:

“Bourgeois society, in its search for entertainment and its passionate interest in the individual, insofar as he differed from the norm that is man, discovered the attraction of everything that could be supposed to be mysteriously wicked or secretly vicious”.<sup>547</sup>

This was a presage to the doom, according to Arendt. As a “culturally approved fantasy”<sup>548</sup>, this temporary contact with Jews was analogous to limited permissions for vicious experiences, for small escapes from social norms and conventions. The exceptional Jew, in this context, became the “exotic” Jew, when Jewishness was “perverted into a vice”, and the “Enlightenment’s genuine tolerance and curiosity for everything human was being replaced by a morbid lust for the exotic, abnormal, and

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<sup>543</sup> Arendt, OT, 86

<sup>544</sup> Erikson, E. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968, Chapter IV – Identity Confusion in Life History and Case History

<sup>545</sup> Arendt, ‘Privileged Jews’, p. 30

<sup>546</sup> Kafka, F. *I Am a Memory Come Alive: autobiographical writings*. New York: Schocken Books. 1977, pp. 13, 15

<sup>547</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 87

<sup>548</sup> Riesman, D, op. cit., p. 86

different as such.”<sup>549</sup> It was the outcome of a process which had started with the rejection of the anachronistic *Judentum* (and the religious, long-bearded Eastern Jew) as incompatible with educated and emancipated societies: now a decadent, bored and quasi-nihilistic society, playing in the edge of its major crisis, had developed a little and temporary fascination, combined with rejection, for that individual, mysterious man who carried the innate defect of Jewishness (“a cheerful little anomaly”, as Primo Levi put it)<sup>550</sup>. It marked a complete deterioration of the Jewish condition. It went from a separated community to atomized, weakened individuals, trying to elaborate psychologically the conflict about who they were and who they should be. The lack of a political-social structure had transmuted into a loss of psychological and inner structure, into confusion and, in some cases, into a “sense of nothingness”. Instead of having produced proud and active citizens, the *Judenfrage* generated neurotic individuals.

### **5.8 ‘Bloodless destruction before bloody extermination’**

How can we understand Arendt’s claim that “1933 is simply the natural outcome of 100 percent Jewish conformity with the German people”?<sup>551</sup> How can we comprehend the relation between assimilation, held by many as a necessary condition for integration, and exclusion, isolation and, finally, genocide? One can accept the claim that assimilation resulted from a naïve drive for integration; but how could it be that it paved the way for total disintegration? In what follows, I will try to answer these questions, exploring Arendt’s assertion that “The terrible and bloody annihilation of individual Jews was preceded by the bloodless destruction of the Jewish people”.<sup>552</sup> I will try to make more explicit the claim that assimilation was, indeed, one of the origins of totalitarianism.

Arendt proposed a stronger mutual influence between modern events, such as, on the one hand, the Enlightenment, the emancipation and the plea for equalization, and, on the other, the destruction of humanity by an unprecedented scale of social violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this, Arendt did not share the view of authors such as Elisabeth Roudinesco, who, even though assumedly influenced by Arendt, criticized the idea of a continuity between Voltaire, Robespierre, Hitler and the Gulag, that is, the idea that the

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<sup>549</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 87

<sup>550</sup> “Thinking back in later years to the time of his youth, he [Primo Levi] would speak of being Jewish as ‘a cheerful little anomaly’ occasionally disturbing his relations with gentile friends.” Howe, I. ‘Primo Levi: an appreciation’. Levi, P. *If Not Now, When?* New York: Penguin, 1995, p. 5

<sup>551</sup> Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 53

<sup>552</sup> Arendt, ‘The Moral of History’, p. 315

evils of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were somehow a product of Enlightened modernity. Roudinesco, in particular, saw more similarity between Nazism and medieval Jew hatred, both proposing persecution and exclusion on the basis of innate qualities. In Roudinesco's view, the modern theory of "regeneration", based on the universal rights of man, may have its "inner contradictions", but any claim of justice and democratization should recognize its belonging to the tradition inaugurated by the French Revolution and Enlightened thinkers.<sup>553</sup>

Arendt suspected any theory of "continuism". Nazi anti-Semitism was other than religious Jew-hatred, and also other than anti-Semitism of early nationalists. One aimed to conversion in an universe ruled by God. The other aimed to expulsion in an universe ruled by nations. Finally, the totalitarian one aimed to extermination in a universe ruled by racial-biological laws. Arendt avoided, moreover, reducing the question to a mere dispute of dualistic forces – the darkness of middle ages *versus* the lights of modernity; the backwardness of religion *versus* the progressivism of Enlightenment -, which would be a simplistic version of a theoretical politics of *for* or *against* certain tendency. These models of anti-Semitism could be compared, but not identified. Indeed, as we saw, 20<sup>th</sup> century genocide, for Arendt, could only develop within these "inner contradictions" of modern humanity reaching its point of exhaustion. This did not lead Arendt to reject the modern idea of a common humanity. Neither did she try to recover religious tradition, for its end, or at least the end of its political and moral dominance, was a consumed fact. Arendt was simply aware of the unexpectedness of historical processes, of how an epoch which started discussing equality and tolerance could end up promoting exclusion and extermination.

So her own terms were exaggerated in the assertion that 1933 was a *natural* outcome of assimilation. To be sure, Hitler was not a natural effect of Mendelssohn, neither Stalin was simple product of Marx, nor Nazism was a simple development of the universal rights of man etc. But 1933 was neither a simple return to obscurity, a simple decay to medieval times (a popular description of any tendency assumed as "irrational"), as Nazism was not a simple deviation of a flawless emancipatory movement, a sudden incarnation of demoniac forces in Enlightened Europe. To begin with, assimilation, as an answer to the modern idea of equality, was an early form of dehumanization. As Arendt stated, only "under inhuman conditions" human beings try to alter their bodies, their skin,

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<sup>553</sup> Roudinesco, E. op. cit.

their names, their personal and group appearance in order to be accepted. In this line, Arendt indeed ascribed a “continuity” between leftist (or progressive) and rightist (or conservative) arguments, for instance, in modern France, where writers such as Fourier and Giraudoux fused medieval libels with modern images to depict Jews as “barbarians” delaying progress or promoting degeneration.<sup>554</sup>

The framework of adaptation to modernity – via education, exceptionalization, regeneration – established a narrow definition of what meant being human. It discarded the compatibility of humanity and Jewishness. Instead of a plurality of human groups and a plurality of unique individuals, modern society demanded functionalization and adjustment to convergent economic, social, and cultural forces that dominated European societies. The one-sidedness of modern equality neutralized inequality and difference, reducing it to private, invisible spaces, or simply accepting it as momentary sources of usefulness or entertainment. Jews, divided in several groups, embodying conflicting images – piety and greed, spirituality and materiality, cosmopolitanism and parochialism etc.-, remaining as a transnational group in an age of ethnic-national closure, represented an overwhelming obstacle to some of the aims of Enlightened modernity: equalization, secularization, nationalization, individualization. They hardly fit into simplistic schemes of modernity.

Jews were thus transformed “from a people into a problem”<sup>555</sup>, to be solved by a society now governed not by God, but by human efforts. The existence of Jews became a “question” of social regulation, a matter of public policy, an issue demanding a “solution”, as if the tension around the existence of a distinct group could be simply exhausted by a decisive – “final” – approach to that problem. Originally, hence, the *Judentum* was marked by Enlightened thinkers as an anachronistic association, thus assimilation to the framework of Enlightenment meant, per force, assimilation to anti-Semitism. Like Rahel Varnhagen, who “assimilated to her enemies without being accepted by them”<sup>556</sup>, most ex-Jews tacitly accepted or consciously embraced predominant prejudices against their former people. In the past, Jews converted to Christianity normally needed to embrace anti-Judaic articles of their new dogma. In modern assimilation to classes, nationalities and social norms, individual Jews needed to

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<sup>554</sup> “For the more liberal or radical writer it had become almost a tradition to warn against the Jew as barbarians who still lived in the patriarchal form of government and recognized no other state.” Arendt, OT, p. 60

<sup>555</sup> Gay, R, op. cit., p. 146

<sup>556</sup> Arendt, RV, p. 253

reject the *Judentum*, by distancing themselves from ostensible forms of Jewish-difference.

This attitude strengthened enemies and weakened Jews. It not only left national and social forms of anti-Semitism unchecked. It reinforced the conviction that the problem of Jews was the very existence of visible, backwards, barbarian Jews resisting the forces of modernity. The fact that some Jews became exceptionally educated – following Mendelssohn’s exceptional example – did not serve to “educate” their host society, neither to persuade anti-Semites to leave their prejudicial views. Indeed, in the context of education and acculturation, anti-Semitism would undergo a lethal transformation because of the realities created by assimilation. Many Jews changed, proving that they could be *normal*. Anti-Semitism also changed, assuming new premises on Jewish *abnormality*. The program of education was so one-sided: it were Jews who needed to be reformed, not society. Indeed, Jewish reformation meant nothing else but meeting the standards of a prejudicial society.

Meanwhile, Jews only exacerbated their political inability. Moved by a “*fear of admitting that there are and always have been divergent interests between Jews and segments of the people among whom they live*”<sup>557</sup>, average assimilated tried to prove their complete equivalence with other peoples. They expected to realize the principle of equality, not through the equal right to speak and participate as unique beings, but through the social opportunity of becoming “normal”. They started to fall upon “the nakedness of an entire class of people who no longer believed in defending themselves”<sup>558</sup>, who responded to every attack not with political organization, but with discretion, order, with more education, more individual escapes, and more self-disapproval of “anachronistic” Jews. The political and social consequences could be chronologically felt until final destruction: first, de-association from an ethnic and national association (from the *Judentum*); then, practical dissolution of communities, followed by the weakening of inner bonds of solidarity; next, the atomization of assimilated Western Jews, and the exposure of un-assimilated, Eastern or religious Jews, who were left without their leaders and without the old closure of ghetto institutions. (By the way, Arendt refused the argument that the destruction of Jews was shocking because it aimed to exterminate a higher culture and individuals as Albert Einstein. Hers was an anti-utilitarian position:

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<sup>557</sup> Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, p. 51

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., p. 53

the attempt to destroy the “little”, the non-exceptional, useless Jews was equally or even more revolting).<sup>559</sup>

Finally, assimilation caused multiple backlashes. First, the backlash of “dissimilation”. Assimilated Jews, having failed in completely detaching themselves from Jewish origins and Jewish relations, founding no easy arrival to non-Jewish society, facing the persistence, through new forms, of modern anti-Semitism, created a new identity – liberal, urban, individual, modern, secular, but still Jewish. Shaved, elegantly dressed ex-Jews embarked on trams in Berlin and joined cafes in Vienna with the company of other men, citizens, friends – also ex-Jews. As Richard Wolin put it, the German-Jewish dialogue was in practice a monologue.<sup>560</sup> Jews were no longer a religion in the vicinity of Christianity. They were no longer a state inside the state. They were now individuals taking over modern society, spreading everywhere as journalists, as bankers, physicians, scientists, and husbands to non-Jewish wives, and as artists and writers, and as degenerate painters. Their rapid “integration” to society, or their sudden arrival to different social ranks created new problems, and new forms of denunciation – something that opened Arendt’s eyes to the contemporary illusions of *social* integration.<sup>561</sup> Jews were too close from non-Jews – and still strange. They became familiar strangers. Sometimes they entered, or infiltrated the social “body” by inter-marrying, converting, changing names, thus, “falsifying” a belonging to a social-body now threatened by their advance, and by the resulting identities and forms of life created by this advance.<sup>562</sup>

In this context, the idea of racial anti-Semitism found a fertile soil. As Jews were no longer a visible, separated entity, now anti-Semites had the trouble of finding Jews everywhere, of suspecting those half-Jews, ex-Jews, assimilated, who artificially concealed their mysterious origin. The effort of exceptional Jews in denying the background of a debased *Judentum* helped to create the belief on a communal entity fixed in metaphysical terms (later the Jewish *spirit* or the Jewish *race*). Jews gradually became a “principle”, a “communal entity”, a collective thing (*the Jews*), as expressed by

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<sup>559</sup> “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 the little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius.” Arendt, *Eichmann and the Holocaust*, pp. 84-85

<sup>560</sup> Wolin, R. *Los hijos de Heidegger: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2003. cap. 2 e 3.

<sup>561</sup> See Arendt’s defense of “social discrimination” in ‘Reflections on Little Rock’, in: *The Portable...*, pp. 231-246

<sup>562</sup> Developing further this topic, Slezkine argued that Jews did more than to assimilate: they created a specific modern identity. Slezkine, op. cit.



Grattenauer's reference to "the Jew everywhere and nowhere". Hence, being Jewish became "an inescapable fact"<sup>563</sup> even for the assimilated, for the one who tried an individual *escape*. The later hysteria around examination of family ancestry (the need to prove that one had no grandparent with Jewish "blood"), the attempt to undo the problem of the *Mischling* (half- or quarter-Jew) by confining him into the German people *or* the Jewish people, were radicalized developments of the extrapolation of anti-Semitism from a religious feeling or a limited political view to a generalized social attitude.<sup>564</sup>

The later identification between society and politics promoted political discrimination as a form to undo the traumas of social assimilation (and also of dissimulation): in 1933, Jews were removed from the state, and also from the "soil" of the country; in 1935, Jews were removed from society, as society entered private spheres to prevent mixture of "blood and race", to forbid racial intercourse and intermarriage; finally, between 1939 and 1945, Jews were gradually removed from streets, buildings, cities, until the final attempt of removing them from the face of the earth. Now not on the pretext of their difference, but of their threatening equalization, not by the fact that they were mysterious strangers, but because they were normalizing their strangeness (or infusing their "foreign spirit" into normal society), the Jewish question was approached by a radically new solution. Assimilation, understood as the "disappearance of the Jews' separate existence", as the bloodless dissolution of Jewishness, would be finally replaced by the drive to destroy Jewishness through the physical killing of its individual members – pariahs, parvenus, and average Jews alike.

### **5.9 Conclusion: Assimilation, why not?**

Arendt's critique of assimilation arises several perplexities. Are not alteration, self-creation and even disappearance of certain forms of life unavoidable consequences of freedom? Did Arendt defend a Jewish identity on the basis of a stubborn cultural pride? Moreover, what's the difference, if there is a difference, between her view and a multicultural defense of "cultures" against the threatening forces of a liberal, homogenizing, atomizing modernity? On a positive way, isn't assimilation indispensable to the creation of a common life, a common language and a common political ground?

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<sup>563</sup> Arendt, 'Antisemitism', p. 94

<sup>564</sup> "political antisemitism developed because the Jews were a separate body, while social discrimination arose because of the growing equality of Jews with all other groups." Arendt, OT, p. 69

How could *Ostjuden*, dressing black, speaking Yiddish, with no civic education and no secular knowledge, become European citizens?

Again, I do not intend to present Arendt's perspective in a frame with no ambivalences. In fact, in a letter to Erich Cohn-Bendit, Arendt used assimilation with two senses: one, a positive sense, as the "process of making Europeans out of the masses of Eastern Jews"; another, a negative sense, which grounded her critique, as "Assimilation in the old style", which "leads irreversibly to baptism and to its own absurdity".<sup>565</sup> In the first sense, the process had no "moral ambiguity and dishonor". But what is precisely the difference, and how does it work in Arendt's political thought? Outside Arendt's terms, where does it stand the line between an understandable process of acculturation, which Hegel, discussing the emancipation of Jews, called *Ausgleichung*, an adjustment of ideas, attitudes, dispositions<sup>566</sup>, and the infamous *Gleichschaltung*, that "same-fication" (insufficiently translated as "coordination"), which Nazis promoted from 1933, invading every sphere of life under its domains?

In the difference between "political assimilation" and "assimilation in the old style", and perhaps between *Ausgleichung* and *Gleichschaltung*, lies the core of Arendt's perspective on political – and also human – identity. First, this identity arises as a capacity, as a possibility of action. Human identification is not an immediate given. Arendt explained the "twofold character" of plurality – "equality and distinction" [*Gleichheit* and *Verschiedenheit*] – exemplifying it with the conditional purpose and functioning of speech: as men are equal, they can achieve mutual understanding by speaking to each other; as men are different, they need an ongoing exercise of speech, they need to talk constantly to each other, in order to explain their reasons, needs, plans, views, in a process also open to misunderstanding. It is an identity conditioned by active speech, and so by limited, contingent comprehension, thus also establishing a limited and contingent identity.<sup>567</sup> Arendt, in this line, replaced a common nature (either rational, biological, national etc.), by a common speech (*Sprache*), conditioned both by the activity of speaking, and by the specific linguistic-worlds created by historical languages.

As an example of her own perspective, Arendt *was* German as long as she spoke German, and thought German words, concepts, expressions. In short, she was German as long as she experienced the German language. Arendt and Jaspers constantly discussed

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<sup>565</sup> Arendt, JW, p. 131

<sup>566</sup> Hegel, op. cit., § 270, p. 410

<sup>567</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 175; Arendt, *Vita Activa*, p. 213

group-identity and people-essence in their letters, often in disputed terms. Arendt manifested her skepticism concerning Jaspers' use of the expression "German essence" [*Deutsches Wesen*] in his book about Max Weber (the German essence being "rationality and humanity" [*Vernünftigkeit und Menschlichkeit*]). For Arendt, Jaspers seemed to relate world-building tasks (as establishing culture, making public use of words, creating spaces of freedom) with a national-essence. That was unacceptable for Arendt ("...*Freiheit nicht mit Deutschheit identifiziert darf...*"), for, by offering a definition of *what* Germaneness is, Jaspers may have attached exclusive attributes to a certain people (could 'humanity and rationality' be specific national qualities?), preventing other people and other attributes of participating in this German essence. Arendt meant clearly that, if there was such a thing as a German essence and a German destiny [*Schicksal*], she could not be invoked as an instance, as a participant of it, for she was an un-typical German, she was Jewish.<sup>568</sup>

By politically and publicly assuming her Jewishness ("...*ich als Jüdin...*")<sup>569</sup>, Arendt did not mean that her whole identity was defined by that belonging. She also experienced a certain Germanness by her participation in a linguistic community of German speakers: "For me, Germany is the mother-tongue, the philosophy and the poetry."<sup>570</sup> Stating this in 1933, Arendt seemed to subscribe to a culturalist view: speaking, thinking, reading in a certain language makes one member of a linguistic community. But, even in this early definition, Arendt held a *pluralistic* definition of culture: a dialogical use of a certain historical language (*Sprache*) as a means of communication, creation, signification. The producers of culture are individuals and specific groups who establish, by linguistic and symbolic description, expression and representation, what they feel, think, and imagine. The anti-migrant cliché which recommends "*respect to culture*" distorts the phenomenon of culture as if it were a noise-code enforcing silence after 22pm. In Arendt's vocabulary, the world can be seen through plural angles – so culture can be, and normally is, established by diverse voices and views. Indeed, the point is not that culture is established regardless the background of its producers, but that the richness and diversity of their backgrounds – the fact that German-

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<sup>568</sup> Arendt, *Wahrheit Gibt Es Nur...*, pp. 17-19. Again, Arendt presented this view before the consolidation of Nazism: the referred letters are from January (1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>) of 1933.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*

Jews, protestant Germans, atheist Germans, Germans from Bavaria and from Saxony, male and female Germans – made of culture a phenomenon of co-participation.

Moreover, this participation in a certain culture is not a fixed “destiny”. Arendt’s early culturalist view on *Sprache* was later complemented by a political comprehension of speech. She *became* north-American by understanding and accepting a new constitution, a new set of laws, and also by learning English. As she was not wholly determined by a specific national-belonging, she could embrace a new political fatefulness, in a different world-organization. This “new beginning” was even more plausible in the United States, a geopolitical space “independent of a homogeneous population and of a common past”<sup>571</sup>, a country where, as Michael Walzer put it, the term “American” designates a political adjective for citizenship, not for “nativity or nationality”. In this structure, citizens are “allowed to remember who they are and to insist, also, on *what else they are*.”<sup>572</sup> There, Hannah Arendt could be a unique intellectual woman of German-Jewish origin with north-American address and passport. She did not need to forge a new identity in order to become American: the adjective “American” accepted complementary identification nouns – Jewish-American, African-American, Irish-American etc. To be precise, these were matters beyond words and identity-definitions, they were matters of experience: as an American Jewess born in Germany, Arendt could preserve her a linguistic-mental world, insisting, decades later, that she “came”, in a way, from “the tradition of German philosophy” and that the German language had remained with her.<sup>573</sup>

In this context, Arendt’s experience in a non-national (or multi-national) state – in fact, an *union of states* – led her to point to the structure established by north-American revolutionaries as an exemplary one. Political pacts among groups with different religious, cultural, ethnic backgrounds had established an “artificial” identity between these “naturally” different associations. By saying that “American society is artificial ‘by nature’”<sup>574</sup>, Arendt meant to praise, not to despise it, for politics requires an artificial effort of stabilization and equalization of groups and individuals which can be regarded as different “by nature”. Speaking, in this sense, is an activity indispensable to this

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<sup>571</sup> Arendt, ‘Reflections on Little Rock’, p. 233

<sup>572</sup> Walzer, M. ‘What does it mean to be an ‘American’?’. *Social Research*. Vol 71: No 3: Fall 2004, p. 636

<sup>573</sup> Arendt, ‘A letter to Gershom Scholem’, *TJW*, p. 466

<sup>574</sup> Arendt, H. *Is America By Nature A Violent Society?: ‘Lawlessness Is Inherent In the Uprooted’* *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Apr 28, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* pg. SM24

“artificial” identification. Arendt realized that the more a community imagined itself in natural, biological terms – relying for that on invisible-immediate attributes as blood, soul, spirit etc. -, the less it resorted to speech for mediating interests, discussing aims, and establishing meaning collectively.<sup>575</sup> That was not the case of the United States, whose political identity was a product of action, of words and deeds, and not a deterministic given.

Now, how could Arendt’s Jewish identity – or, more properly, the experience of her *Jewishness* – enter this debate? As I have been presenting, Arendt criticized European Jews for not assuming politically their Jewish-condition, for not appearing as Jews. But Arendt herself, in important passages of her work, identified Jewishness with “those qualities which usually can become articulate only in the sphere of private life and must remain unqualified, mere existence in all matters of public concern”. When displaced persons of Jewish origin lost every legal status, they were left only with the “mere existence” of their Jewishness, almost as natural as the “shape of our bodies”. In these passages, Arendt defined “difference as such” and “individuality as such” as private givens, being elements of “those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act...”.<sup>576</sup> A similar point was made by Arendt in her famous letter to Gershom Scholem. Addressing her “Dear Gerhard” (Gershom Scholem’s German, pre-Zionist name, the name *given* to him by his parents), Arendt insisted that belonging to the Jewish people was not a matter of decision for her. Her Jewishness was one of those “indisputable facts of my life” (“*unbezweifelbaren Gegebenheiten meines Lebens...*”), which “has been given and not made”. For that, “for what is ‘physei’ and not ‘nomo’”, for what is physical and not a rational construct, Arendt had a “basic gratitude”, and no will of changing or disclaiming it, and others of these kind of “facts”.<sup>577</sup>

Now, a reader will surely ask if there is an inconsistency in Arendt’s approach. Wasn’t Jewishness one of the main elements of the *public* experience of Jews in Europe? Wasn’t it, in other terms, the main source or their political identities – or at least of their political troubles? How come Arendt simply stated that it was a private data, a quasi-natural given? From a different angle, how could a physically-given attribute become an object of political concern, if politics, also in Arendt’s definition, is a space of alteration and negotiation? I think that this perplexity illustrates how Arendt’s approach was less

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<sup>575</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 318

<sup>576</sup> OT, pp. 394-395

<sup>577</sup> Arendt, ‘A Letter...’, p. 466; Arendt, *Ich will...*, p. 32

schematic than critics believed. It also shows that her distinctions did not work as rigid categories. In the same letter to Scholem, Arendt referred to this “basic gratitude” for these physical givens of life as a “prepolitical” attitude, which only “in exceptional circumstances” has “political consequences”. One of these exceptional circumstances were precisely “the circumstances of Jewish politics”.<sup>578</sup> Twentieth century politics indeed had been defined by “exceptional circumstances”. So, for Arendt, individuals are not necessarily defined by certain features of their identities, having to behave in accordance to it. Her argument is not that Jews are only Jews, and blacks are wholly defined as blacks, and women must behave as women, and individuals fall under strict defining categories. Her point was a *conditional* one: under certain circumstances, a part of one’s identity, an aspect of what one *is* (as opposed to what one *does*), may become a political target. In such a case, a basic-life-condition is under attack.

We can discuss her perspective by contrasting it to that of an orthodox Hassidic-Jew. It is not a random comparison, for Hassidism is also deeply marked by the traumas of assimilation and genocide. Its mindset is defined as reactive answer to the Enlightenment and the Holocaust. Ultra-orthodox Judaism is a radical denial of the offers of modernity: orthodox adopted the dark clothes of Eastern Europe when most secular Jews ran into the fashions, ideologies, professions of liberal modernity. Orthodox refused secular studies, clinging obstinately to the sources of Jewish teachings and norms – or of what they assumed as its sources -, establishing a strict communitarian-closure in order to avoid the risks of assimilation. Later, the experience of genocide only reinforced the fervor and piety of ultra-orthodox: they should live a separate existence, a sort of restoration of the distinct Jewish ghettos and shtetls, where a pure relation to God could be preserved. So they live in New York, Paris, Sydney as if they were in the old communities of Galicia and Bessarabia, speaking a particular language, following different codes, and having a limited, only necessary, contact with non-Jewish forms of life.

Arendt’s perspective, as I have been presenting, is also an answer to assimilation and to genocide. But it is strikingly different from that of ultra-orthodox. In broad terms,

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid. To illustrate her point, Arendt offered the example of Kurt Blumenfeld, of whom Ben-Gurion complained for not having changed his name nor emigrated to Palestine; Arendt then asked “Isn’t it obvious that Blumenfeld did not do so for exactly the same reasons that had led him in his youth to become a Zionist?” Arendt was also speaking for herself: she had been a German-Zionist in order to preserve the Jewish dimension of her German existence; and not to fabricate a new identity (name changing became a mark of one’s entrance to Zionism) as most Zionists, Scholem included, had done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The charge is that Zionism also demanded a sort of assimilation, of fabrication of identity.

we can compare both answers relying on the private/public distinction. Accepting Arendt's claim that the Jewish condition – as the Black-condition, or the Woman condition – is natural or quasi-natural, I argue that Arendt worked on the “political consequences” of the Jewish question, proposing a public approach to it, while ultra-orthodox defended a re-privatization of the Jewish condition. As Jews were reduced to nothing more than their Jewishness, as this given-condition became the sole factor of identification, specially for anti-Semites, Arendt observed that truly political reactions required externalization, the public appearance of Jews as Jews. Any other reaction would be worldless, that is, unpolitical, for it would try to conceal the problem at stake, that of coexistence and acceptance of Jews as a part of human plurality. Ultra-orthodox, on the other hand, reacted inwardly, defending a protective shrinkage to clearly defined limits of separation between Jews (rigidly defined according to orthodox dogmas) and “Goyim”. As non-political citizens, they rely on the state and on public law only as means to preserve their separate existence and their particular norms. They reinforce the particular “private-difference” of Jews by making it even more private, more detached from the public, while Arendt argued for the transformation of Jews into world-citizens, along *with* others.

The conditional argument of Arendt was defined by Benhabib as political, not ontological.<sup>579</sup> In these terms, to be Jewish did not mean a substantial predefinition of one's attributes, and one's functioning in accordance to these attributes, neither a “privilege” of “a specific form of historical identity” demanding permanent recognition or protection. Assuming Jewishness meant a political answer only in a realm where being-Jew was under attack. Arendt reminded that a society attacking a condition that constitutes one's basic sense of existing among others could not be appeased by assimilationist strategies. Politically speaking, that society was wrong, and not Jews themselves. M. Hull defined this conditional attachment to certain conditions attacked or oppressed by others as the transformation of a given *private* issue into a political *personal* question. The *person*, as a source of political power and public affirmation, can only be effective if it upholds his or her *appearance*, his or her basic life-condition, especially if it is under attack in a specific political conjuncture. If Jewish communities are persecuted, Jews need to speak out as Jews. If the right to vote is denied to a woman, her public answer as a woman becomes a political act. If blacks are disproportionately targeted by a

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<sup>579</sup> Benhabib, op. cit., p. 38

form of social violence, then blacks lives, and not merely human lives, should be discussed. The “political climate”, thus, conditions concrete actions, especially when certain aspects of identity are fundamentally assaulted. Assimilation is no political answer, for it relies on “abstract and anonymous identifiers [that] encourage the suppression of difference.”<sup>580</sup>

Arendt avoided to be rigidly identified under a fixed *what*-attribute, as if her whole biography, and all of her acts and thoughts, were a direct product of this identification. She even shunned away from excessive publicization of certain features of her being: she almost declined a position in Princeton, when that university worked with the press to publicize the fact that she became the first woman to teach there. She did not want to be depicted as an “exceptional woman”.<sup>581</sup> Speaking of the Jews who supported her Eichmann report, Arendt defined them as Jews “like me – Jew with no strong connections to the Jewish community, for whom, however, the fact of their Jewishness is not a matter of indifference.”<sup>582</sup> Arendt wrote so much about Jewish affairs not because of a static cultural pride, neither because of a subjective need to elaborate her identity. She did it because the Jewish question, the matter of Jews’ existence and location in the world, became a central issue of world politics. The Jewish condition, in her work, was not conceptualized in itself, but in its relation to the political developments of the crisis of modernity and the decline of humanity.

In this line, Arendt could be regarded as a precursor of a “politics of identity” only of this term does not presuppose a closure of one’s norms, ideas and attitudes within a single group-determinant. If identity is “the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense”<sup>583</sup>, Arendt’s actor is not encapsulated into a single source of identity, from which he would accordingly develop a particular ideology, and a permanent mode of behavior. In fact, as I am arguing, Jewishness – *Judesein* – was for Arendt more than a predicate, a general quality of a group of individual objects. It was a life-condition experienced in plural ways within the historical drama of modern Europe. It was not a matter of conceptual definition (politically speaking, the unending religious discussion of what defines being a Jew did not matter), but a fact of

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<sup>580</sup> Hull, op. cit., p. 137

<sup>581</sup> Young-Bruhel, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*, p. 272

<sup>582</sup> Arendt, ‘Answers to Questions...’, p. 483

<sup>583</sup> Taylor, C. ‘The Politics of Recognition’, in: *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*, hg. v. Amy Gutmann, Princeton 1994, pp. 33-34



experience which conditioned Jewish and non-Jewish families, groups, associations and political communities.

In this line, it is possible to argue that R. Bernstein, in his important *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, insists in a topic which Arendt could not, and did not want, to address. Bernstein complained that Arendt was satisfied with the fact of Jewishness, but never seriously discussed its meaning. In his own words,

“Sometimes it seems as if Arendt simply takes the existence of the Jewish people as a historical fact and then concerns herself with the social and political questions about the history, responsibility, and destiny of that people. But this is to avoid the question of Jewish identity, not to answer it. It is not satisfactory to fall back upon the “factual” existence of the Jewish people. For, to use her own, later terminology, this does not illuminate the *meaning* of being a Jew.”<sup>584</sup>

It is true that Arendt never proposed a definition of the meaning of Jewishness, neither did she ascribe a strict significance to Judaism. Sometimes, she suggested that the pariah was her model for Jewish existence. Then, she declared that pariah and parvenu qualities are found in every oppressed people. She did recognize particular features (historical and conceptual) of the Jewish people – the idea of being chosen by God for a moral mission, the historical-political condition of a de-politicized diaspora, the position of a “minority per excellence” in the European context etc. She offered so several meanings, several interpretations of what meant to be a Jew, that is, to be Jew of this or that kind (German or Polish, rich or poor, assimilated or Zionist etc.) in determinate historical conditions. Yet she never engaged in a dogmatic discussion of what is the correct form of being Jew. As she distrusted the idea of a German essence, of a classificatory distinction between American and “un-American” behaviors, she also refused the idea of a un-historical, abstract Jewish normative-essence. Arendt’s non-essentialist (perhaps not exactly “anti-essentialist”) perspective was grounded on her very attempt to discuss the *vita activa* with the “eyes unclouded” also by approaches of strict intellectual definitions. She was interested in the actions and inactions of Jews, and not in what is the idea of “Jew” in general. Jews are historically conditioned beings, capable of “beginning”, of “affecting and being affected”, interpreting and discussing their tradition, of doing things and saying words, establishing unique ways and plural possibilities of disclosing who they are concretely.

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<sup>584</sup> Bernstein, R. op. cit., p. 27

We saw that Arendt regarded the modern priority of truth over people as an early form of dehumanization. Europe spent centuries discussing the truth or the falsehood of this religion over that religion, and then it stated the falsehood of religion in general, and in all these theoretical disputes truth and dogma had achieved a priority over people and existent forms of life. Arendt could not incur in the same method regarding Judaism. Her criteria to judge Jews was political – she was interested on how Jews acted, or did not act, when the Jewish condition entered the political stage. Even her clear political condemnation of parvenus and assimilated would never reach the absurd conclusion that they were not Jews. Her problem was not that they did not follow some religious norm, that they were not born to completely Jewish mothers, that they dressed in this or that way, that they knew or not knew enough Jewish books. Her problem was that they “no longer believed in defending themselves”. In her view, they were political “traitors”<sup>585</sup>, not religious apostates.

Still relying on the distinction private/public, a normative discussion on the essence of Judaism can be taken as a private matter. It is a matter for Jewish theologians, to be presented in the private spaces of synagogues, and Jewish clubs and houses. The specific debates on the meaning of festivals, of sacred texts, of habits, concern primarily the internal relations of Jews among Jews. In this line, *Judaism* (as an *-ism*) can be regarded as a private, inner-oriented, system of beliefs, norms and traditions, differently from *Jewishness*, as a visible life-condition, appearing distinctly to others, within external historical and political circumstances. One could argue that what Jews constitute internally will be reflected in their external relations – in the line that the private and the public (or the internal and the external) are not isolated, but in mutual influence. As I am arguing, Arendt tried to establish possible realms of differentiation, in order to avoid totalistic interpretations of reality. She complained against the “growing incapacity for making distinctions”, whose “result is a generalization in which the words themselves lose all meaning”.<sup>586</sup> But this, I also argue, did not led her to a dogmatic fragmentation of reality into isolated, incommunicable pieces. Private and public are related, but not identical. Historical definitions of Judaism may shape the way that one discloses its being-Jew. But, for the sake of preserving difference also in a conceptual level, I defend that the inner space of Judaism (the cultural rituals, the familiar relations, the spiritual

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<sup>585</sup> Arendt, ‘The Minority Question’, p. 131

<sup>586</sup> Arendt, ‘A Reply to Eric Voegelin’, p. 162

elaborations) is distinct from Jewishness as a political, active way of being-Jew among others.

In specific Jewish terms, Arendt's position was, again, not without ambivalence. She criticized official orthodox Judaism for their inactive belief on the protective "barrier of the Law" and the omnipotent power of the "vengeful God of Israel".<sup>587</sup> She also criticized Reform Judaism for helping to establish "a religion that no one believed in any longer", for having "destroyed the legends of its founding". The result of this kind of Reform was an emptied people with no pride of its heroes. While "Christian humanity has appropriated our [Jewish] history for itself..., there is paradoxically a growing number of those who believe they must replace Moses and David with Washington and Napoleon".<sup>588</sup> Elsewhere she described the "curiously mixed tendencies" of Reform Judaism: "toward liquidating Judaism and yet preserving it".<sup>589</sup> This seemingly indecision between strict conservatism and loose reformism mirrored Arendt's attempt to avoid the extremes of complete separation and complete identification, of, in other terms, alienation and assimilation. Jewish politicization, in this sense, could only occur with the active embrace of Jewish past and Jewish heroes as unique stories and examples of a plural humanity ("because Washington's and Napoleon's heroes were named Moses and David.").<sup>590</sup>

Arendt aimed at a politicized Jewishness, conscious of its difference, and also of its interrelatedness with other people. So she claimed a "Passover story" capable of teaching the "difference between freedom and slavery"<sup>591</sup>, and a Jewish school, which, avoiding the "principle of racial purity" ("prepared to accept half- or quarter-Jews...and everyone who has been forced to its arms by the political situation"), would work on an inclusive, not purely religious platform ("*...built upon the very broadest basis*"). In that school, established upon the historical condition according to which "[o]ur children will not be able to grow up either in the ghetto or among the German public", the history of assimilation and of antisemitism would be taught, in order to help the "coming generation" to "judge their environment and themselves". The students of this school would form a "self-consciousness" independent from "ethical command".<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Arendt, 'Moses or Washington', TJW, p. 150

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p. 150

<sup>589</sup> Arendt, 'Jewish History, Revised', TJW, p. 303. In that passage, Arendt admits that the Reform movement "was not a mechanical assimilation to the ideas and demands of a foreign environment..."

<sup>590</sup> Arendt, 'Moses or Washington', p. 150

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Arendt, 'Against Private Circles', p. 20

In the short commentary *Creating a Cultural Atmosphere*, Arendt, adapting Elliot Cohen's terms, proposed a "culture for Jews", as opposed to a strict "Jewish culture". Assuming that "culture is by definition secular", she tried to respond to the conditions in which culture-oriented Jews needed to abandon Judaism in favor of a non-Jewish, non-religious, purely secular culture. The task of creating an "atmosphere" in which Jews could creatively appropriate the content and symbols of Jewish concepts and stories would imply a breakaway from the "monopoly of rabbis" and also from the sterility of formal Jewish scholarship. Jewish tradition would be so "discovered and dealt" in a fresh way, "in our own terms", by a people to whom tradition "no longer constitutes a holy past or an untouchable heritage". Along with pious orthodoxy and formalistic scholarship, folklore was also criticized by Arendt for its particularistic self-reference: "The cultural value of every author or artist really begins to make itself felt when he transcends the boundaries of his own nationality". This "transcendence" would not mean a purely universalistic notion of culture: Arendt exemplified her claim by defending the "rescue of Yiddish writers", that is, of writers produced by a specific regional milieu, who should not "remain lost to culture generally". In this "culture for Jews", secular and religious writings could be equally appropriated by active thinkers, writers, and artists, in their "own terms", that is, reflecting their own personal voices, regional nuances, and specific situations. Arendt, in this defense, mentioned the Yiddish writers of East Europe, the pre-Israel renaissance of "Hebrew literature", and the political freedom of American Jews, who could work without the pressure for assimilation. This pluralistic view of a "culture for Jews" would be sustained not by "circumstances beyond the control of the Jewish people, but upon their own will" (she wrote that in 1947).<sup>593</sup>

So *Jewishness* was not a fashionable term coined by Arendt to refuse the past and the content of Judaism in favor of a simply factual recognition of Jews. Instead of a radical reform, or even a radical denial of Jewish tradition, Arendt worked with the aim of an active endurance of tradition, or of the plural traditions, established by the Jewish people in history. Again, avoiding the extremes of, on one side, a deterministic, static folkloric or religious heritage and, on the other, an abstract escapism of assimilated towards an "universal" culture, Arendt proposed that being-Jew was a condition not to be imitated, not to be denied, but to be consciously appropriated – or acted upon. Here, the distinction

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<sup>593</sup> Arendt, H. 'Creating a Cultural Atmosphere'. Commentary (pre-1986); Nov 1947; 4, 000005; Arts Premium Collection, pp. 424-426

between the burden of tradition and the force of the past has a specific relevance, for that was a people trying to restore not only its culture, but its individual dignity and its capacity to act and to participate within a pluralistic framework of humanity. In this inclusive view, the normative aspects of Judaism are less important than the performative deeds and words of Jews who are conscious citizens, and actors grounded on possibilities for recreating the force of their past into an open present.

In this perspective, the figure of the pariah is exemplary. The pariah reclaims his tradition, or redefines his relation to group identities, thus allowing the world – or specific aspects of the world – to be seen from a different angle. Regarding this debate, Nikolas Kompridis protested against Benhabib’s presentation of the “claims of culture” for providing a fragile basis for the preservation of cultures. Accordingly, Benhabib had provided three normative criteria for a free and just organization of cultures: “(1) egalitarian reciprocity, 2) voluntary self-ascription, and (3) freedom of association and exit”. In special, Kompridis held that the last item – the possibility of “exiting” a culture – made no sense, and provided no normative basis for defending cultures: “Isn’t obvious by now that the identity that we are is not something we can change overnight, not a ‘construction’ we can take apart and put back together at will?”<sup>594</sup> In her defense, Benhabib resorted to the figure of the pariah:

“I certainly did not mean to suggest that you can stop being an African American or a Jew or an Indian simply by exiting your community of birth; obviously you cannot leave your skin behind, but you can take leave of your religion and your ethnicity and try to pass as white, assimilate, dissimulate, or, more positively, a ‘self-conscious pariah’, in Hannah Arendt’s words.”<sup>595</sup>

Had Benhabib relied more on Arendt’s terms, she could have declared that the pariah is not exactly a mere “positive” choice along with other options of “exit”. It is an authentic performance of a person *who* refuses to be a mere instance of the *what* – attributes or norms – that defines his group, class, tradition. This means rebellion only in situations of oppression. Otherwise, it means disclosure of who someone is through a unique mode of embodying given-life-conditions, of appearing, actively and linguistically, in a certain tradition and within certain political context. Benhabib

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<sup>594</sup> Kompridis, N. ‘Normativizing hybridity/Neutralizing culture, in: Political Theory 33 (2005). p 327

<sup>595</sup> Benhabib, S. ‘The ‘claims’ of culture properly interpreted. Response to Nikolas Kompridis’, in: Political Theory 34 (2006), p. 386

reminded the “possibility of narrative resignification and reappropriation”.<sup>596</sup> The pariah does that not out of a normative prescription, but because he or she cannot accept depersonalization, assimilation, and deformation, that is, he can only act, and be free, by assuming his body, understanding his situation, and embracing the limited – though not restricted – range of possibilities offered by his unique sense of existing among others.

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Arendt reaction’s to assimilation could open a larger chapter considering social engineering, artificial reproduction of nature, scientific intervention on human biology and chemistry and so on. Indeed, in his *Against Perfection*, Michael Sandel reminded Arendt’s natality (and “the contingency of a life’s beginning that is not at our disposal” and the “mystery of birth”), while discussing phenomena as diverse as actual fabrication of super-athletes, and the new generation of parents who, through medical control, intend to fabricate children in accordance to imagined models.<sup>597</sup> In popular mass culture, identity fabrication can be exemplified with the extreme, and jocose, case of Michael Jackson’s alteration of his skin-color. Now, there are several nuances and different implications between the discussion of voluntary plastic surgery, social assimilation and the forced medical experiments on concentration camps. But the background is similar, as in these cases human conditions are equally disposed by the subjective will to fabricate new life conditions.

Peg Birmingham, discussing this tension between the givenness of birth-conditions and the possibilities open by natality, stressed the un-fixedness of Arendt’s person. She suggested that Arendt’s reference to her Jewishness as a ‘physis’ must not be understood as a substantial nature, as if the “self is given as a fixed or unchangeable datum”. Emphasizing the “mysterious gratitude” which arises from the ‘givenness’ of life-conditions, Birmingham proposed to take this ‘physis’, this constitutive givenness, not as nature, but as the “origin of human existence”.<sup>598</sup> Birmingham recalled Augustine as the source for Arendt’s thoughts on the condition of natality. If we go back to Arendt’s dissertation on Augustine, we can read her interpretation of the role of memory as the center of the self. “The search for the origin”, Arendt interpreted, “begins with

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<sup>596</sup> “Cultures which are subject to decentering, reflexivity, and pluralization can regenerate from within themselves novel semantic resources of resistance.” Ibid., 387

<sup>597</sup> Sandel, M. J. *The Case Against Perfection: ethics in the age of genetic engineering*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 82

<sup>598</sup> Birmingham, op. cit., p. 76, 79, 113

recollection from dispersion”.<sup>599</sup> Differently from the desire, which is directed towards an absent object, located only in the future, memory and remembrance trace man – “man who was created and did not make himself”<sup>600</sup> – back to his own ‘*whence*’, to the location from where his existence evolves towards an indeterminate future. The original given rescues the self from “dispersion”, thus giving to it a center from which he can exist and act with others, within the world. Instead of the will’s fragmentation between its self-desires, self-projections, and images created by it-self, which are all necessarily absent, Arendt’s given-conditions, the conditions of birth, of early experiences and formative memories stand as the original natality from which an unique biography can be experienced and performed. In other words, the self does not make it-self. It is formed by realities given to him-self, starting with the reality of a given body.

We can shift this analysis to the etymology of power in Arendt’s reflections. Arendt related power to potentiality and possibility. This could be verified by the etymological correspondence of the verbs indicating possibility and the noun indicating the experience of power – in Latin languages, with the verb *Poder* (*eu posso, tu podes* etc.) and the noun *Poder*, in Portuguese (*Poder* also in Spanish; *Pouvoir* in French); and in German as well, for, according to Arendt, *Macht* “derives from *mögen* and *möglich*, not from *machen...*”.<sup>601</sup> Moreover, Arendt detached freedom from the traditional connotations of free-will and right behavior. Freedom, as an external experience, could not be placed on the self-referent will, neither in the cognitive space. *I will* and *I know* were not verbal indications of the performance and experience of freedom. That could only be referred by the *I can*, which launches the *I* to the possibilities of concrete, living interactions. As Arendt avoided a repressive interpretation of political power, this “I can” is not strictly limited to the *do* and *not do* of positive legislation. It is limited by given conditions, from which the *I can*, nevertheless, actualizes hidden possibilities through its externalization in reality. I can *only* do (I can only explore the possibilities of power), when I am grounded on given life and world conditions:

“The necessity which prevents me from doing what I know and will may arise from the world, of from my own body, or from an insufficiency of talents, gifts, and qualities which are bestowed upon man by birth and over which he has hardly more power than he has over other circumstances; all these factors, the psychological ones not excluded, condition the person from the outside as far as the I-will and the I-know, that is, the ego itself, are concerned; the power that meets there circumstances, that liberates,

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<sup>599</sup> Arendt, H. *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 48

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49

<sup>601</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 200

as it were, willing and knowing from their bondage to necessity is the I-can. Only where the I-will and the I-can coincide does freedom come to pass.”<sup>602</sup>

*I truly can* do something, if I embrace what is given (body, talents, gifts, qualities, and historical, social, political circumstances as well). Jews could, and can, be free, along with non-Jews, only if they embrace their Jewishness. This, as I am arguing, does not mean a necessary destiny (Hitler, for instance, affirmed that a Negro or a Chinese will never become a German, not even if he learns the German language).<sup>603</sup> Jewishness, along with other given-conditions, is rather an origin *whence* one can disclose a life-story. By centering her politics on the *human conditions* of plurality, natality, the givennes of the body and its qualities, Arendt made us think about the political and human consequences of rejecting life-conditions for the sake of life-survival and life-adaptation. Wolfgang Heuer rightly pointed that, after the stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arendt established as political criteria not the opposition between life and death, but that between humanity and inhumanity.<sup>604</sup> Recalling the Jewish “will to live”, we have seen that Jews, from the early efforts of assimilation to their horrific end in ghettos, cattle-trains and camps, experienced things worse than death. In this context, the terms *political* and *human*, in Arendt’s thought, became mostly interchangeable, and assimilation became an early example not only of depoliticization, but also of dehumanization.

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<sup>602</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Freedom?’, BPF, pp. 158-159

<sup>603</sup> Hitler. *Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition*. Band II. München-Berlin: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016, p. 997

<sup>604</sup> “O totalitarismo, com suas técnicas de desumanidade e extermínio, mostrou que a alternativa dos homens na sua existência terrena não é vida ou morte, mas humanidade ou desumanidade.” Heuer, W. ‘Corpo e Vida: a crítica de Hannah Arendt à modernidade científica.’ *Physis - Revista de Saúde Coletiva*, Rio de Janeiro, 20 [ 2 ], 2010, p. 543



## CHAPTER SIX

### *NOBODY RULES, NOBODY SUFFERS: DEPERSONALIZATION*

#### **61. Becoming nobody**

Another of Arendt's strong claims was that most events – and specially evil events – of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not be understood in terms of individual psychologies, personal decisions or particular acts. Indeed, the unprecedentedness of such social and historical crimes, and of the means used in pursuing and normalizing these crimes, derived from the de-individualization suffered by the supporters – one would say 'vehicles' – of these processes. Though Arendt ascribed to the principle of leadership [*Führerprinzip*] an essential role in shaping totalitarianism, she did not reduce those phenomena to Hitler or Stalin, as if, by their mendacity, their ability to cheat or manipulate, they were the single causes of the destruction of humanity. Indeed, one of Arendt's criteria to distinguish totalitarianism from mere tyranny was that, while tyrants dominate ruled-subjects from "outside", imposing orders and forcing compliance through explicit violence or coercion, "totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within."<sup>605</sup>

For Arendt, a radical aspect of totalitarianism was that it abolished the distinction between ruler and ruled, between commanding and being commanded, through an unprecedented identification between the masses and the leaders: "the totalitarian leader is nothing more nor less than the functionary of the masses he leads".<sup>606</sup> In totalitarianism, we no longer have an individual who, keeping a relative distance to the social context, resists, despises, ignores, or even complies to dominant forms of behavior out of fear and external pressure. We have instead a circularity between masses and leaders, between groups and those who personify the group's will. Both, leader and masses, can only create a sense of existence through their mutual reinforcement: "Without him [the leader] they [the masses] would lack external representation and remain an amorphous horde; without the masses the leader is a nonentity".<sup>607</sup> This situation created a new social atmosphere in which behaviors could no longer be understood in terms of particular and individual inner psychology and subjective intentions.

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<sup>605</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 426

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

In this context, depersonalization becomes a central topic to grasp Arendt's placement of the person – *who acts* – at the originative center of human action. Arendt understood that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, de-individualization and depersonalization enacted not apathy and paralysis, but violence, cruelty and destruction in unparalleled scales. That this de-individualization led to an active voluntarism was “only seemingly contradictory”, for, as Bakunin “confessed”, it started with a decision: the decision to abandon individual decision: ‘I do not want to be *I*, I want to be *We*’.<sup>608</sup> The voluntary decision to leave the individual self, thus doing or suffering things that the individual self would not do or suffer in non-totalitarian contexts, became one of the sources of the shocking inhumanity created by totalitarianism. To be sure, to speak of a “nobody” is misleading, because the *body* was there, but not the person. Indeed, the body was still there as a source of force, of support, and sometimes even of specific decision-making. But the body had lost its separateness as a distinct, irreducible, responsible person. This sort of depersonalization is a condition for the “fungus” of totalitarianism to spread on the “surface” of society, regardless any strong root in evil individual psychologies.

The phenomenon of depersonalization can be regarded from different angles, as it reached different social and historical groups. According to the sociological classification of Raul Hilberg, *victims, bystanders, perpetrators* (and its subcategories: the old functionaries, the newcomers, the bearers of burdens, the zealots, the Jewish leaders, the refugees etc.)<sup>609</sup> suffered different degrees of this uncoupling of the person from its political, social and personal basis. At the beginning, one found diverse events, and social and psychological mechanisms, as the elements which contributed to this self-loss: the traumas of First World War and the bloody experience in the front; unemployment and general economic crisis; the confusion generated by assimilation to and exclusion from ethnic societies; the dissolution of moral standards and the decline of ‘respectable’ bourgeois values; the breakdown of class society into a mass of atomized individuals, longing for a redemptive re-orientation in life.

If we move back to the stories of assimilation of *We Refugees*, we find Arendt's description of the displaced-condition, specially of Jews as refugees, who, still insisting in the appeasing tactics of assimilation, and pressured even more by the surrounding political hostilities, refused their conditions as Jews, thus, as refugees. As we saw, still

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<sup>608</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 432, 434.

<sup>609</sup> Hilberg, R. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe 1933-1945*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992

insisting in compliance to standards of respectable national societies, they (Arendt addressed her reader as “We”) tried “to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles”.<sup>610</sup> Arendt described “that Mr. Cohn from Berlin, who had always been a 150 percent German”, but in 1933 had to find refuge in Prague, becoming then “convinced Czech patriot”. When in 1937, the Czech government, under Nazi pressure, expelled its Jewish refugees (“disregarding the fact that they felt so strongly as prospective Czech citizens”), Mr. Cohn went to Austria, and “to adjust oneself there a definite Austrian patriotism was required”. After the annexation of Austria, he went to Paris. “Having already acquired a great skill in wishful thinking”, Mr. Cohn believed that “he would spend his future life in France”, and thus attached himself to an imagined belonging to a certain French tradition. Yet the unrecognized fact of his existence was the determinant factor of his fate: “As long as Mr. Cohn can’t make up his mind to be what he actually is, a Jew, nobody can foretell all the mad changes he will still have to go through”.<sup>611</sup>

*Kafkaesque* became a synonymy of a bizarre, absurd situation, which does not restore to ultimate reasonable explanations, either legitimate or understandable within humane motives. Not coincidentally, Kafka, as we shall see soon, became, through his characters and his own experience, an exemplary pariah, who elaborated the sense of displacement in a meaningless, human-less order, where one cannot even live a normal existence. Mr. Cohn could be simply a K. trying to adapt to the prevalent order:

“He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains.”<sup>612</sup>

But he – even though he was an ordered and respectful individual – was rejected by the political order, by any political order, due to the absurd character of the social and political system, which disregarded every level of Mr. Cohn’s existence. Arendt, in this line, identified the beginning of the end of humanity with a creation of a disordered political order, marked by the “decline of the Nation-State” system. The end of the First World War had “exploded the European comity of nations”, showing the destructive consequences of national competition, and also dismantling political structures and spreading an unemployment that “seized...whole nations”. The disintegration of states, the political vacuum created by massive war, the atmosphere of “everybody against everybody else, and most of all against his closest neighbors – the Slovaks against the

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<sup>610</sup> Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, TJW, p. 270

<sup>611</sup> Ibid, p. 271

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., p. 272

Czechs, the Croats against the Serbs, the Ukrainians against the Poles...”, generalized the pariah-condition through the generation of what Arendt called the “scum of the earth”. Groups who “were welcomed nowhere and could be assimilated nowhere” formed contingent of superfluous people with no social belonging, no political location and no juridical protection – shortly, homeless, stateless, rightless. Arendt stressed how these people, being innocent from a criminal point of view, harmless from a political one, and peaceful from a social perspective, were expelled and forced by events which had the “expression of some unredeemably stupid fatality.”<sup>613</sup>

Instead of reshaping the political system of Europe in order to include the diversity of people living in its geographical limits, political actors only aggravated the problem of ethnic animosity by introducing the “nation-state principle” everywhere, in replacement to old multi-ethnic empires, in some cases in regions highly mixed from an ethnic-national point of view. The new political order created “state people” that would control politically the destiny of “minorities”, or “nationally frustrated people”, which in some cases amounted to almost 50% of the state population (mostly in East European states). National minorities had only two choices: “assimilation” or “liquidation”.<sup>614</sup> Assimilation, given the emergence of ethnical-racial determinism, and considering, in some cases, the “numerical and cultural weakness of the so-called state peoples”, became an ineffective path. So the established order produced a problem it could not, by its very nature, solve: the lack of political representation, and later the lack of a juridical-structure to masses of minorities. The international mechanisms created to protect these minorities – the League of Nations and the Minority Treaties – were mostly controlled by agents thinking and acting in terms of “national interests” – and not of “common interests of minorities”, much less in terms of human rights -, so they became gradually ineffective. Mobilization around human rights was virtually absent.<sup>615</sup>

In a nationalized Europe (fragmented along with lines not representing the diversity of the “interregional character of the minorities”), one could only be a citizen if one belonged to a recognized, state-owner nationality. National right and national interests became exclusively valid over abstract human rights, and even also over civil, individual rights. This created an absurd situation in which an individual could be only counted as a person or a “human being” if he belonged to a recognized nationality. From

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<sup>613</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 349, 350

<sup>614</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 357

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., p. 358

this *conquest of the state*, as a space of rights and citizenship, *by the nation*, as a group of ethnic belonging, a series of Kafkaesque situations followed. Mass denationalizations created within a few days millions of people (“...millions of Russians, hundreds of thousands of Armenians, thousands of Hungarians...”), who, by living outside a state controlled by its nationality, could suddenly lose propriety, jobs, rights, and documents. Jews, the “minority per excellence”, felt under the category of “undeportable”, for “there was no country on earth in which they enjoyed the right to residence”.<sup>616</sup>

Joseph Roth described this new nomadic wandering of Jews through a senseless bureaucratic system as follows:

“It’s almost a metaphysical affliction: You’re transient and you’re stuck; a refugee and a detainee; condemned to rootlessness and unable to budge.”

(...) And they also wander from one branch of officialdom to the next, from the local police station to the central police headquarters, from the tax inspectorate to the National Socialist Party offices, from the concentration camp back to the police, and from there to the law court, from the law court to prison, from prison to the house of correction.”<sup>617</sup>

From a different angle, Jewish refugees became finally “pure human beings”: they were left only with a naked existence, without the qualifications of a job, a class, a recognized name, a passport, a political right etc. In this context, Arendt reminded that the worst thing was to remain an “innocent”. Unlike the refugee and the rightless, a criminal still had a juridical existence, and an obvious home in the world (the prison). He still had rights, and he was still part of a certain juridical system, as he was integrated to a political structure which recognized him as a legal person. The “rightless” had nothing but its mere body. And being a body with no rights could be worse than being nothing, for one becomes vulnerable to manipulative and abusive acts outside a legal and political system. That was the case of refugees who could only find a “home” in internment camps, and, while in their wandering transit, were handled by policemen of others’ states, being thus susceptible to abuses and mistreatment that could not be legally contested neither politically controlled.

What is left from “humanity” – or, legally, from the “Rights of Man” – in a nationalized order that created millions of de-naturalized, de-nationalized, superfluous men and women? Nothing besides the mere body, the crudeness of a purely natural existence. Today, the claim of Human Rights is established. Sometimes it is even

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid., p. 361

<sup>617</sup> Roth, J. op. cit., pp. 127-128

manipulated for multiple aims, being predicated of a variety of politically sensible demands. But, originally, Arendt related it to a specific condition of superfluity, of total powerlessness. Under conditions in which the individual is determined by circumstances way beyond his participation, circumstances which he cannot grasp, he even transcends the condition of a mere body into a no-body, for the last resort of his dignity, the control over his body-needs and body-processes, is lost with the loss of a private space. He becomes an object determined by the occasional passions of solidarity, or rather determined by the bureaucratic and “legal” forces of border policemen and functionaries of internment camps.

Arendt stressed this gradual production of worldlessness as a historical-political origin of totalitarianism. The political order of Europe, redesigned after First World War, pre-conditioned its own destruction. The creation of masses of deprived, uprooted men provided to totalitarianism, and to the specific totalitarian social-engineering, those millions of lawless bodies that would undergo measures of dehumanization. In this line, the formulation of human rights proved, simultaneously, the limits of philosophical abstraction and the primacy of political action. Assuming that basic rights were ontologically attributed to every individual, the philosophy of human rights became nothing more than an emptied ideal, which, moreover, ceased to speak even as a regulatory principle to that epoch. If “the Declaration meant that he [the individual] could carry his dignity within himself”<sup>618</sup>, it fostered illusion and isolation, as the individual believed in the permanence of his status, regardless the contingencies of political action.

Historically, though, individuals lost their “humanity” when they lost their polity. They lost their rights when they lost their belonging to a nationality. And they lost their dignity when their people (their “nation”) was transformed into a mass of unorganized bodies. Jews, being culturally and politically destroyed by the contradictions of emancipation and assimilation, became then a mere collection of disoriented individuals, in some cases incapable of articulating their Jewishness, the same condition that had put them into displacement. The 20<sup>th</sup> century showed to Arendt that losing politics may signify the *loss of a home*, meaning the “loss of the entire social texture”, the loss of an address, of social relations, of a space of privacy, of a “distinct place in the world”, a loss even more shocking as “it was a problem not of space but of political organization”; and

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<sup>618</sup> Parekh, S. *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: a phenomenology of human rights*. New York: Routledge. 2008, p. 22

also the “second loss”, that of “government protection”, or the *loss of a polity*, now even more disturbing because there was no right of asylum, no effort of assimilation or acculturation, no effort of “naturalization” that could ever absorb millions of innocent people, who had been displaced because their group-condition did not fit into the new order.

Arendt stressed that what was taken as absolute human rights were indeed “rights of citizen”, which, despite being historically and politically defined (as the rights to life, liberty, propriety, happiness etc.), were dependent on the attachment of an individual to a concrete community. These rights made no sense, they became completely ineffective, outside a polity. Moreover, certain circumstances could remove some rights of an individual without making him a rightless body, as Arendt exemplified in contrast:

“The soldier during the war is deprived of his right to life, the criminal of his right to freedom, all citizens during an emergency of their right to the pursuit of happiness, but nobody would ever claim that in any of these instances a loss of human rights has taken place”.<sup>619</sup>

The rightless who Arendt had in mind suffered, differently, a complete loss of humanity. He experienced “absolute rightlessness”.<sup>620</sup> Even a slave still had a social role, and so “a place in society” and a residue of humanity.<sup>621</sup> That was not the case of the rightless. So, Arendt worked on a “phenomenological rehabilitation of the common world”<sup>622</sup>, for the sake of relocating individuals within webs of historical and political interactions, in which rights are to be translated into concrete conditions, not empty ideals. Human rights are ineffective, and politically misleading, if postulated as ontological qualities of isolated individuals. That is why Arendt reframed “human rights” as an object of politics, not of moral philosophy. Indeed, the loss of humanity chronicled by Arendt reached a point that no “natural law” had before predicted in its positive items, and that no tyrant tried to “take away”<sup>623</sup>: a “loss of the relevance of speech”, “the loss of all human relationship”, and “of some of the most essential characteristic of human life”. Perishing in camps and “holes of oblivion”, they were lost to the world in a literal sense, that is, lost as bodies with visible faces and audible voices.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 386

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., p. 389

<sup>622</sup> Parekh, op. cit., p. 5

<sup>623</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 388

<sup>624</sup> Writing about a system that would perfect the internment camps, Anne Applebaum defined the Soviet Gulag (the system of “labor camps, punishment camps, criminal and political camps, women’s camps,

For Arendt, this very sense of existing among others is more fundamental than any discussion on any positive value. Becoming a “scum” did not mean losing a specific cause of justice, but losing all qualifications to a dignified human existence. An individual or a group transformed into an *absolute* pariah, meaning absolute exclusion of a human community, does not lose one or two positive rights, but the very the possibility of reclaiming *any* right. In this context, the basic human right, for Arendt, was the right to action, the right to exist within a human community, to be counted as some-one. The *right to have rights*, the right to have “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective”<sup>625</sup>, precedes every positive rights as the beginning of one’s political life. It means, in other words, the right “to belong to some kind of organized community”. As Arendt concluded that mere body-survival is not equal to a human existence, the right to have rights can be read as the right to exist within a humanly created structure of power – in short, the *right to exist politically*.

For Seyla Benhabib, Arendt answered to the perplexities of the Rights of Man with a “frustratingly ambiguous” formula:

“...if we have a right to have rights, who could have removed it from us? If we do not already all have such a right, how can we acquire it? Furthermore, what is meant by ‘a right’ in this formula: a legally recognized and guaranteed claim by the lawgiver? Or a moral claim that we, qua members of a human group, address to our fellow human beings, to be recognized as their equals? Clearly, it is the second, moral, meaning of the term *rights* that Arendt has in mind.”<sup>626</sup>

Once more, I think that Benhabib misses an important element of Arendt’s reformulation. Arendt stressed the exhaustion of the “very language” and the theoretical framework of the Declaration of Rights: its assumption of rights “inalienable”, “given by birth”, based on “self-evident truths” was no longer valid from a political point of view. Indeed, it implied “the belief in a kind of human ‘nature’” from which stable laws could be deduced. But the modern process of worldlessness, of alienation from the world and also from the earth, turned the framework of “human nature” into a highly questionable one, to say the least. “Man-made instruments”, following from man-made philosophies of domination, placed man as the master of nature, in a context in which unpredictable technological processes could end up destroying nature itself (Man “has been alienated

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children’s camps, transit camps”) as “almost a separate civilization”. Applebaum, A. *Gulag: a history*. New York: Anchor Books. 2004, p. xvi

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Benhabib, S. *The Reluctant...*, p. 185



from nature”).<sup>627</sup> Moreover, the lawless experiments of totalitarianism, disposing of human “nature” as if it were a plastic material to be re-fabricated, has put a question mark in the capacity of law, whether natural or artificial, in limiting human domination and self-inflicted degradation. The language of natural law thus became highly problematic:

“How should one be able to deduce laws and rights from a universe which apparently knows either the one nor the other category?”<sup>628</sup>

Benhabib seemed to demand what Arendt could not offer, a purely rational prescriptivism. One could ask back to Benhabib: how would one *persuade* contemporary masses regarding the logical or epistemological quality of this or that norm? Why would any foundational moral theory prevent a similar political destruction? Did not European humanity have plenty of well-grounded systems of morals, ethics, laws etc.? Benhabib seems to struggle to get rid of the Platonic model in which a rational ontology is grasped by the philosopher, who then orients a multitude of citizens in accordance to rigidly-grounded laws.

This is not to say that Arendt’s formula is not “ambiguous”. But it is certainly not “frustrating”, for it is grounded on the experience of political power as synonymous of possibility. We can think of this formula once more with the stories of European Jews in mind. The catastrophic period for European Jewry began *after* the proclamation of universal rights. Jews could even enjoy some assumedly “human” rights – of property, movement, and even of opinion –, in determinate periods, but mostly as the result of concessions by monarchs interested in economic favors. There was no action, no political mobilization, no popular legitimation for the inclusion of Jews as citizens. When Jews became stateless and rightless, removed from their respective polities, they could even rely on some fragmented rights – they still had a limited right to preserve *life*, to *think* whatever they pleased –, but these isolated rights made no sense, for Jews were now mere “human beings” living in camps or in transit-roads, detached from spheres of justice and public deliberation. Despite their bodily endurance, they became, politically, nobodies.

The *right to have rights* is thus a right to *begin*, for, differently from a regulative end, it allows human plurality to constitute itself openly, within the contingent, imperfect, always troubled conditions in which political communities find themselves historically. From the point of view of the pariah, with its meaning reformulated by Arendt after the

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<sup>627</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 390

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *right to action* presupposes not a subject of pity, neither an abstract-individual receiver of “ontological” rights, but some-one *who can act*, in his or her own terms, within his or her specific historical community. It is, in short, also the right to “start a rebellion”, to actively participate in the creation, reformation or augmentation of political communities and cultural traditions. It means, finally, the political confirmation of one’s existence as a unique person entitled to pursue a meaningful life – and all the qualifications and experiences (...“a profession”, “a citizenship”, “an opinion”, “a deed by which to identify and specify himself”...) <sup>629</sup> that some-one *can* have starting from the basic right to exist politically with others.

## 6.2 From Powerlessness to the Illusion of Omnipotence

Rethinking the experience of *power*, Arendt tried to avoid two extremes: the feeling of powerlessness and the illusion of omnipotence. I say illusion, for Arendt stated that only an exclusive god could be omnipotent. In polytheism, “even a god, no matter how powerful, cannot be sovereign”. In a reality constituted by the presence of others, “sovereignty is possible only in imagination”. <sup>630</sup> The illusion of omnipotence or sovereignty can only be forced into the world generating consequences as exclusion, domination, alienation. For Arendt, power is “limited” by “the existence of other people”. Indeed, thinking of the intangibility of linguistic-symbolic human power, Arendt stated its “boundlessness”. But power is only boundless, creative and generative if it is shared: “power can be divided without decreasing it”. <sup>631</sup> Reading this line with our historical background, one can say that Arendt struggled against the tendencies of helplessness and despair, which could lead to cynicism and distrust on power; but she also struggled against the mythical, hubristic fabrication of an illusionary omnipotence. Historically speaking, both extremes, as the stories of totalitarianism showed, were intimately related.

Totalitarianism, with the omnipotent belief that *everything is possible*, started with deep experiences of powerlessness and self-confusion. As one of the historical conditions for totalitarianism, imperialism was portrayed by Kipling’s *Kim*, from which Arendt took the defining legend of men living expansionist adventures overseas. Arendt described the

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<sup>629</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 395

<sup>630</sup> Arendt, HC, pp. 234-235. Arendt, commenting on traditional recommendations to overcome the ‘weakness’ of plurality with the ‘untouchable integrity’ of sovereignty may end not only in self-domination but in “arbitrary domination of all others” or, as in the Stoic solution, in “the exchange of the real world for an imaginary one where others would simply not exist.” Ibid., p. 234

<sup>631</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 201

life “through danger, fear, constant surprise, utter lack of habits, constant preparedness to change their identities” experienced by men who left the stability of home to explore life outside conventional standards and roles. In this “Great Game”,

“Life itself seems to be left, in a fantastically intensified purity, when man has cut himself off from all ordinary social ties, family, regular occupation, a definite goal, ambitions, and the guarded place in a community to which he belongs by birth”.<sup>632</sup>

Soon, Arendt explored how this self-less game, this immersion in an experience in which the *I* did not play a central role, attracted T. E. Lawrence in his military service in Arab lands. “Pretending to be an Arab, he could only lose his ‘English self’ and was fascinated by the complete secrecy of self-effacement...”. Lawrence, experiencing war and rebellion in Arab lands, came to lose his personality, his ego-qualities, in that “mysterious alliance with forces necessarily bigger than himself”. After immersing in a sort of purified intensity along with Arab insurgent groups, T. E. Lawrence, then Lawrence from Arabia, found boredom and disorientation in his way back to England. He “came home with an obsessive desire for anonymity and the deep conviction that nothing he could possibly still do with his life would ever satisfy him.” He became, according to Arendt, a “phantom” when the “force” and the “role” to which he had submitted in distant were removed from him.<sup>633</sup> Judging by T. E. Lawrence’s example, Arendt declared that the “pride of Western man”, and I would add the very concept of man, began to dissolve when he “no longer counts as an end in himself”, and decides simply to ally with “the secret forces of history and necessity – of which he is but a function.”<sup>634</sup>

First World War, related to imperialistic events, shaped not a generation of pacifists, but rather a mass of men who abominated the values of “respectable society”, and came to embrace “[d]estruction without mitigation, chaos and ruin” as “supreme values”.<sup>635</sup> They yearned “for anonymity, for being just a number”, forming thus a group of men who no longer felt bounded by the interests of class, of parties, and even of nationality. That was a mass of men who were forced by the events outside “that specific class articulateness which is expressed in determined, limited, and obtainable goals”. They no longer fitted into family, professional, municipal, trade, traditional-party

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<sup>632</sup> OT, p. 284

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-287

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., p. 288

<sup>635</sup> Ibid., p. 430

structures.<sup>636</sup> They wanted to overcome tedium by surrendering them-selves to processes which would made them think “in continents” and feel “in centuries”.<sup>637</sup> Marked by the experience of struggle and death in war, of adventure and pillage in imperialism, without the old alternative of escaping “into exotic lands” and becoming “dragon-slayers among strange and exciting people”, the generation of the front yearned for a historical mission that no *realpolitik*, and no civil society, could offer:

“There was no escape from the daily routine of misery, meekness, frustration, and resentment embellished by a fake culture of educated talk; no conformity to the costumes of fairy-tale lands could possibly save them from the rising nausea that this combination continuously inspired.”<sup>638</sup>

Authors such as Erich Fromm, Robert J. Lifton and Eric Hoffer, working on the level of psycho-history, tried to understand these men not by their individual psychological past (personal childhood and personal traumas), but through the interplay of social phenomena and ego-processes. Lifton, after studying the mechanisms of “totalism” in China, referred to this dialectic between powerlessness and desire for omnipotence, characteristic of the modern mass man: “Feeling himself unable to escape from forces more powerful than himself, he subordinates everything to adapting himself to them.”<sup>639</sup> Fromm presented a tension formative of the modern individuation: on the one hand, the “growth of self-strength” is achieved by the formation of an organized personality, integrated by an individual mode of thinking and willing, which stands as a separated, conscious and reflexive whole. It is the constitution of personal potency. This process has its “negative” side: individuation also creates isolation and extreme forms of separation, estrangement between the self and surrounding worlds, which leads to a feeling of powerlessness and fear, *Angst*, or anxiety concerning the fragile structure of individual life and its limited possibilities. It is the weakening of personal potency. The experience of submission (to “forces more powerful than himself”) may provide a secure shelter against solitude and anxiety, but it is only an illusory security, for it demands the abolition of self-integrity and extinction of the sense of one’s *own* life.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> OT, p. 407

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., p. 414

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., p. 433

<sup>639</sup> Lifton, R. J. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: a study of ‘brainwashing’ in China*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p. 423

<sup>640</sup> Fromm, E. *The Fear of Freedom*. Routledge. 1984. Hoffer spoke of the impulse towards self-withdraw of mass man: “The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready is he to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race or his holy cause.” Hoffer, E. *The True Believer: thoughts on the nature of mass movements*. Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1980, p. 14

Arendt acknowledged this relation between losing interest in “own well-being” and removing “all the worries and cares which make human life troublesome and anguished”.<sup>641</sup> She did not, however, ground the whole totalitarian process on a psychological essence, as if every individual psyche was predisposed to totalitarian submission. She stressed that those inner mechanisms could only be understood in their interaction with specific, visible social and political events. Along with the traumas of war, and the high-scale unemployment and economic crisis, she placed the dissolution of traditional parliamentary multi-party politics, and the abandonment of social-bourgeois values of respectability, self-interest, and also “apathy and even hostility toward public life”.<sup>642</sup> Democratic-bourgeois “illusions” ended with the “explosion” of interwar traumas: the assumption, for instance, that politics was a necessary burden to organize private life and that neutral masses were one of the pillars of democratic stability. They ended with the formation of inarticulate masses who despised traditional politics, rejected established-social standards, and disregarded personal life.

“The breakdown of the class system meant automatically the breakdown of the party system”.<sup>643</sup> The decline of class membership and class identification around specific goals was met by a larger crisis of the political system, in which traditional parties ceased to appeal to “neutral supporters”, “members from the younger generation” and masses in general. Parties were soon transformed into radicalized movements, becoming “more and more psychological and ideological in their propaganda, more and more apologetic and nostalgic in their political approach.”<sup>644</sup> The *Weimar Republik*, “a republic without proper instructions for use” (A. Döblin)<sup>645</sup>, was an exemplary period in a negative sense: hundreds of political assassinations, daily political fights on the streets, no recognition of political authority (small republics were proclaimed and dissolved within days). Established political forms and paths became highly distrusted, as society broke apart into disoriented individuals:

“The fall of protecting class walls transformed the slumbering majorities behind all parties into a one great unorganized, structureless mass of furious individuals who had nothing in common except their vague apprehension that the hopes of party members were doomed,...that all the powers that be were not so much evil as they were equally stupid and fraudulent.”<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>641</sup> OT, p. 413

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, p. 410

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., p. 412

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

<sup>645</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 355

<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

Though Arendt indicated similarities between Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism, she stressed one important difference regarding the formation of mass societies in both contexts. While in Germany historical circumstances (post-war economic recession, social convulsion and democratic apathy) dissolved class-society into mass agglomeration, in Russia the conditions were “fabricated” by Stalin through measures of expropriation, purge, expulsion, imprisonment and killing of entire sectors of the population, between the late 1920s and 30s. Stalin destroyed political diversity by centralizing power within a party-bureaucracy; liquidated, for ideological reasons, “the property-owning classes, the new middle class in the cities, and the peasants in the country”, promoting artificial famine; forced collectivization of factories and farms, confiscation of grains, goods and instruments; and executed or enslaved millions of “class aliens”, and members of groups as the old bureaucracy, the urban middle-class, the kulaks, the technical professionals etc. Those who were not killed neither deported to the Gulag were left as atomized individuals facing the overwhelming force of the Soviet government.

Arendt reminded that this process was even more outrageous since it was not justified by any political *raison d'état*, nor by any economic calculation (indeed, the purges and confiscation were “disastrous for the Soviet economy”). Being a “rational” ideologue and a cold calculator, Stalin aimed at the total domination of society. And, for that purpose, it was no longer possible to admit “the autonomous existence” of any activity, any group, any individual. The atmosphere of purges, denunciations and loyalty-test divided the whole population in two classes of “whisperers”, to use Orlando Figes formulation: those who whispered to denounce and those who whispered to not be heard.<sup>647</sup> The transformation of friends and relatives into “enemies” led “one to avoid all intimate contacts” in order not to be accused, and not to involve relatives in accusations of conspiracy, counterrevolutionaries activities, class sabotage and so on. Autonomous family and social life ceased to exist.<sup>648</sup>

To understand the “total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member” of totalitarian movements, one must pay attention to this multi-

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<sup>647</sup> Figes, O. *Sussurros: a vida privada na Rússia de Stalin*. Tradução: Marcelo Schild e Ricardo Quintana. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2010

<sup>648</sup> Arendt, OT, pp. 418-423.

sided formation of the atomized, lonely individual. This multi-sided process disallows any monolithic interpretation of totalitarianism. We can see here the interplay of historical circumstances, ideological amalgamation, political decision, psychological conflict, economic breakdown. I opted to focus on the self-effacement, the phenomenon of depersonalization, as both a motor and a result of the emergence of “superfluous” men who would serve to execute *and* to suffer the totalitarian destiny. That is why Arendt remarked that the “man-destroying machinery” of totalitarianism can only succeed in lands with massive populations, suffering from rapid demographic growth and social dislocation. It can then implement its “negative population policy” – purges, robbery, deportation, concentration, annihilation etc. -, causing thus “great losses in populations”, as results from so-called necessary measures deriving from ideological premises.<sup>649</sup>

However, before executing/suffering these losses, the masses were mobilized, from within, as active vehicles of what history ought to perform. The jump from powerlessness and atomization into omnipotent mobilization (following the sudden “appetite for political organization”<sup>650</sup>) was a sort of existential backlash: missing all affective links, rejecting daily personal goals and meaningful tasks, abhorring traditional social-political activities, the mass-man found in totalitarian movements an ultimate “place” in the world. Totalitarian movements created a fictional representation of everybody through the activation of an impersonal entity: the race, the class, the revolution etc. The result, as Arendt stressed, was not so much an horde of fanaticized (re-moralized) members prone to execute orders out of a new idealism. “Idealism”, for Arendt, “foolish or heroic, always springs from some individual decision and conviction and is subject to experience and argument”.<sup>651</sup> It springs, in other words, from a distinct person related to others in a context of experience. Totalitarian loyalty and mobilization were rather product of a selfless ideological-system that glues in de-individualized members with no personal conviction and no “capacity for experience”.

Lifton indicated that “brainwashed” consciences are not characterized by fanaticism and certainty, but by an encompassing sense of unreality, of a fundamental doubt on the substance of ideas, perceptions, and even personal sentiments.<sup>652</sup> Arendt, in

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<sup>649</sup> Anne Applebaum argued, in the article ‘Understanding Stalin’ (The Atlantic, November 2014), that Stalin’s decisions were not informed by inner fanaticism neither by a “madman” psychological structure, but by his pursuing Marxist-Leninist ideology to “its ultimate conclusions”. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/11/understanding-stalin/380786/> (access: 2018)

<sup>650</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 407

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., p. 402

<sup>652</sup> Lifton, op. cit., p. 45

the same line, noted that these depersonalized mass men were organized not by specific opinions, common interests, or articulated principles. Their organization derived from the “sheer force of numbers”, which created an “impermanence”, a malleability independent of specific ideas and objectives. What counted was the mobilization, the “perpetual-motion mania”. What functioned as amalgamation were ideological “goals” involving human beings and the Earth as a whole, goals “emptied of all concrete content”, to be pursued by pure execution, with no space for reflection and discussion.

From these stories and conclusions, one can move away from common perplexities raised by readers of texts as *The Human Condition*, in which Arendt supposedly sustained an outdated praise of personal excellence and heroism. Personality and political courage were thought by Arendt in contrast to events that shaped totalitarianism, with the formation of the “scum of the earth” and the mobilization of masses craving for power. Different from the liberal-individualistic answer to the collectivistic impetus of totalitarianism, Arendt worked on a more subtle reevaluation of the person within political interactions. Defending a sort of “individual without individualism”<sup>653</sup>, she criticized both the apathetic self-reference of the bourgeoisie, and, more decisively, the in-human processes that instilled that totalitarian “virus” within a system that functioned by its own, almost impersonally.

Arendt’s description of atomization and abandonment helps her reader to formulate a theory of personality: one which is rooted in the world, attached to a social texture (family, friends, professional and cultural relations). Instead of “heroes” with no personal ideas, no egos, and no practical accountability, merely mobilized around fictional realities and mystical goals, she thought of responsible citizens acting towards visible and concrete aims. Arendt knew that tedium and loneliness, contemporary phenomena of mass societies, when added to a profound sense of powerlessness, create politically dangerous configurations. Against the seduction of ideology and totalistic mobilization, she did not offer “fairy-tales”. Neither did she preach absolute re-individualization through cynicism. She rather trusted the *possibilities* of rooted and socially based individuals in joining and enjoying the deliberative, linguistic-symbolic excitements of a public life, leading to world-care, not to world-destruction. In short,

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<sup>653</sup> Pertille, J. P. ‘Revisitando Hegel à luz de Hannah Arendt’. In: Danilo Vaz Curado de Menezes Costa; Paulo Albino Pimentel Jr.; Adriano Silveira Silva. (Org.). *Dialética e Metafísica: o legado do Espírito*. Recife, 2010, p. 60



Arendt worked on the very difficult project of transforming the mass-man, without the old expedients that fomented his alienation from power, into a responsible *who*.

### 6.3 Layers of depersonalization

Let us focus a little more on the perpetrators of totalitarian crimes. Now, I intend to interpret Arendt's assertions that "the greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons."<sup>654</sup> In the Nuremberg trials, Hans Frank, general governor of occupied Poland, said that everything that had happened was "Germany's guilt".<sup>655</sup> Eichmann told the judges in Jerusalem that he had been "a tool in the hands of stronger powers and stronger forces, and of an inexorable fate".<sup>656</sup> For Arendt, these justifications were more than strategies of defense. Adherents to totalitarian movements escaped from accountability long before the trials, during their affiliation to the movement, the party and the bureaucratic schemes that formed totalitarianism.

However, to accept the formulation of "Nobody's crime" does not imply a simplistic version of "cog" or "wheel" theories, according to which Nazi functionaries and executors were nullified agents, simply behaving as small parts of a mechanical system. Arendt would agree with Primo Levi that "excessive simplifications" weaken historical testimony.<sup>657</sup> She never simplified the terms of mass participation and popular support to totalitarian regimes. Blindly obedient, wholly passive subjects do not represent the nuanced picture on the diversified archetypes, social mechanisms, and political events that led mass men to behave as vehicles of the forces of Nazism. I believe, hence, that a complex approach to depersonalization, even when the subordinated individual decided and displayed some degrees of initiative, can bring further comprehension to that social legalization and normalization of crime in gigantic scales.

So there is an encompassing tension in Arendt's approach to totalitarian crimes, which can be summed up as follows: were they supra-human or simply human crimes? Arendt sustained that totalitarian crimes could not be integrated into a reasonable system of crimes and punishments. They exceeded personal human motives – as sadism, perversion, ambition, envy, rage, revenge -, and could not be understood in terms of a specific relation between killer and killed, between thief and robbed object/person. For

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<sup>654</sup> Arendt, H., 'Some Questions of Moral Philosophy', in: *Responsibility and Judgement*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003, p. 111

<sup>655</sup> Hilberg, R. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders...*, p. 49

<sup>656</sup> Lipstadt, D. *The Eichmann Trial*. New York: Schocken Books, 2011, p. 115

<sup>657</sup> Levi, P. *The Drowned and the Saved*, pp. 9, 11

Arendt, that crime could be hardly punished as it could be not understood, for the victims were completely innocent and, moreover, nothing of their personal acts, historical records and individual situation were taken into consideration by those who attacked them. In 1946, discussing Karl Jaspers' *Die Schuldfrage* (translated to English as *The Question of German Guilt*), Arendt reminded that all gassed victims were innocent (completely non-guilty [*Unschuld*]), so their suffering could not be comprehended as a punishment, legal or not, to something they had objectively done or intended to do. The “disgusting usurer” [*wiederwärtigste Wucherer*] and the “newborn child” [*neugeborene Kind*] were equally innocents, equally de-humanized and murdered by assassins indifferent to their personal stories.<sup>658</sup>

More than one century before the Nuremberg trials, Hegel systematized the idea of right. Just in the first part of his *Philosophy of Right*, the Abstract Right, he approached the “personality” [*Persönlichkeit*] as one of the pillars of his system: a person freed to exercise his will, to create works of its own, to engage in physical and sensible relation with objects, to take propriety of things (and also of one's own body and own being), to enter contractual relations with other persons - all these experiences grounded a juridical order oriented to freedom and justice. So the basic notions of illicit, fraud and crime stood as specific attacks (contradictions) to these “moments” in which juridical persons gained their integrity and security as free members of a community of justice. Punishment, in this sense, could never be determined in abstract, for juridical sentences must refer to individual cases, to whom and what has been damaged, whom provoked harm, how he did it etc. Moreover, punishment does not arise from a moral or psychological sentiment, but it is an act within the system, a sort of restoration of the original state of order, by negating the original negation (the one promoted by the criminal) of what is right.<sup>659</sup> Crime, furthermore, within a juridical system, was primarily a harm directed against the concept of *Persönlichkeit*, against the integrity of one's propriety, body or spirit. Identifiable persons, as assaulters and assaulted, were required for the system of justice to make sense.

Now, totalitarian crimes extrapolated this structure of right in several ways. I emphasize here the destruction of personality not only in a physical sense, but in its very concept, in its juridical and political meaning. There was no personal – concrete-factual

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<sup>658</sup> Arendt, *Wahrheit Gibt Es...*, p. 65

<sup>659</sup> Hegel, op. cit., *Das abstrakte Recht*, pp. 115-210

– relation between assaulter and assaulted. Moreover, attackers did not create a law of “exception” (or contradiction) to the system in accordance to their particular will, an exception that could be punished, denied and neutralized by the system. The system itself, through ideological and linguistic redefinition of what was right, incorporated crime, expropriation, subjugation as “necessary” measures for its functioning. It, thus, collapsed the distinction between the justice of the system and the illegality of individual acts perpetrated within the system. Seen from outside, the system as a whole was criminal. Seen from inside, the system presented itself as total justice, necessary and evident. Here, the case was not that of classic tyrannies persecuting specific individuals because of their specific acts. It was a system that functioned on a de-individualized, de-factualized basis (there was no trial, orders were secret, victims had no names, bodies were destroyed etc.), so challenging traditional interpretations and evaluations of what constituted a crime and what were the reasonable ways of punishing it. In this sense, it created an “abyss” for human comprehension, and also for juridical comprehension, standing as crime beyond understanding. That “crime without a name” (Churchill) collapsed the very order of right and justice.<sup>660</sup>

Arendt tried to balance her analysis between the in-humanity of the system and its crimes, and the “humanity” of its perpetrators. When Jaspers reprehended Arendt’s emphasis on the in-human form of totalitarianism, she conceded that one must be careful to not explain away the events by reducing them to demoniac, metaphysic, super-natural principles. That would make unaccountable the human beings who supported totalitarianism. Still, the problem that Arendt faced could be summed up as follows: that “monstrous” system could only be formed with the support and the coordination of ordinary individuals. Indeed, as Hilberg noted, “when a process cuts into every phase of human life, it must ultimately feed upon the resources of the entire organized community.”<sup>661</sup> Every sector of German society (or, in Arendt’s terms, masses of men coming from all social backgrounds) was implicated in the totalitarian destruction. The regime not only rested on massive popular support, it rested on the coordination of all spheres, associations, professions and governmental agencies. In some way or another,

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<sup>660</sup> Arendt wrote to Jaspers in 1946 as follows: “*Das heist, diese Schuld, im Gegensatz zu aller kriminellen Schuld, übersteigt und zerbricht alle Rechtsordnungen*”. Arendt, *Wahrheit...*, p. 65

<sup>661</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, p. 640

the civil structure, the army, the industry, the party shared a function on the process of definition of victims, expropriation, concentration, destruction.<sup>662</sup>

The coordination of all available human forces created hence an “organism” which transcended normal measurements of life based on acts of individuals or individually-based groups.<sup>663</sup> The shocking paradox was that this organism, and its inhuman crimes, could only be sustained with the participation of atomized individuals. These individuals, however, if analyzed *individually*, would hardly seem maligns, or specifically fanatical anti-Semites.<sup>664</sup> In politically stable contexts, they would be ordinary truck drivers, traders, workers, shipmen.<sup>665</sup> Again, reminding the difference of method and historical context, one could think of Freud’s effort, in dialogue with Gustave Le Bon, to understand this radical transformation of the individual when he joins a mass. The transformation is not induced by an inner motive, but by mechanisms enacted, socially, by the mass-reorganization. Joining the mass, the individual does not necessarily relaxes its moral controls, giving it away to base passions. It may also perform “moral duties” and other selfless acts out of this insertion into a larger mass. The point is not losing self-controls, but losing the very sense of one-self. He may alienate the inner mechanisms of his self to the whole group, adapting to a sort of external super-ego, embodied in the mass or in the figure of an appointed leader.<sup>666</sup>

I rather call attention to the layers of depersonalization, which helped perpetrators to rationalize the acts performed by them as not exactly theirs. Together, these strategies of depersonalization helped them to accept their roles, and mitigate their acts and their eventual moral conflicts. They formed what, decades later, the social psychologist Stanley Milgram called “agentic state”, a situation in which someone transfers his acts to an authority (not necessarily a human authority) outside himself.<sup>667</sup> These steps of

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<sup>662</sup> Hilberg, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>663</sup> “Their [totalitarian leaders] art consists in using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalized them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by individual experience.” Arendt, OT, p. 473

<sup>664</sup> Claudia Koonz argued that “antisemitism played little role in attracting voters to Nazism”, and the Germans, in general, embraced antisemitism only because they embraced first Nazism. Koonz, C. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge: Belknap Harvard, 2003, p. 10

<sup>665</sup> Browning, C. R. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. London: Penguin Books, 2001

<sup>666</sup> Freud, S. *Psicologia das massas e análise do eu e outros textos (1920-1923)*. Trad.: Paulo César de Souza. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2011

<sup>667</sup> In his most famous experiment, in which he asked participants to apply electric shock in other participants whenever they failed in answering memory-questions, Milgram and his team used the following sentences to keep the compliance of participants: “Please continue”, “The experiment requires you to continue”, “It is absolutely essential that you continue”, “You have no other choice but to continue”.

depersonalization, of regarding oneself as disconnected from one's capacity to choose or to begin something of his own, also help us to contextualize Arendt's long struggle to *uncouple politics from necessity*. The sense of irresistibility, in that context, can be analyzed in two dimensions: 1) ideological/mental and 2) practical/procedural. Ideologically, totalitarian execution was taken as the very expression of reality's development, as the unfolding of a necessary process determined by the fundamental - historical or natural - law of reality. Totalitarian leaders no longer behaved as conventional politicians trying to convince people to follow their ideas or to accept their proposals. Hitler put himself above the conflictive opinions characteristic of mass democracies, identifying his will with the will of an all-determining metaphysical entity ("I follow", he once said, "the path assigned to me by Providence with the instinctive sureness of a sleepwalker.").<sup>668</sup>

So, the executor could, *a priori*, transfer his acts to the movement itself. The movement, on its part, embodied the leader's will. The leader, finally, followed the commands passed by reality itself. This simplistic, circular relation could only be formed with this creation of a "region removed from experience", or a reality removed from reality - a fictional reality, in short. To be clear: this fictional reality was taken, in the totalitarian context, as reality itself, as a sort of supreme reality beyond empirical evidences. But it was fictional nevertheless. The fictional reality was based on lies or false images or, at best, gross exaggerations. It held, for instance, that everything opposed to the movement was due to a single force - the Jewish influence/spirit, the counter-revolutionaries etc. Indeed, Nazis not only denied factual reality, they proposed an inversion of it: attack on Jews was a form of defense, for, in accordance to the Nazi image of a Jewish conspiracy, Jews controlled capitalism and communism, and every government opposing to Hitler. So destroying Jews was a way of defending the "body of the People" [*Volkskörper*]. Nazis talked among themselves about the "Jewish will for total annihilation" [*totaler Vernichtungswille der Juden*].<sup>669</sup>

To this fictional formula of *attack is defense*, Nazism added, in their struggle against Jews, an aspect of *cosmic justice* and *natural necessity*. As Jews were defined as "criminals by nature", their destruction, the destruction of that "pseudo-people"

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Milgram mentioned that, in the agentic state, "the person becomes something different from his former self, with new properties not easily traced to his usual personality". Milgram, S. *Obedience to Authority*, p. 143

<sup>668</sup> Domarus, M. *The Essential Hitler: speeches and commentary*. Ed. by Patrick Romane. Foreword by Charles W. Sydnor, Jr. Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2007, p. 22

<sup>669</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction...*, p. 655

[*Scheinvolk*], would not be seen as “no loss to humanity”.<sup>670</sup> Indeed, Jews were taken as a factor destabilizing the ecology of reality (T. Snyder), or simply preventing the development of humanity to its perfected form. So the question of cosmic justice could also be taken as a matter of human health, or “political hygiene” [*politischen Hygiene*].<sup>671</sup> These ideas can also be condensed by what Hilberg called the “jungle theory”, a radical application of what Arendt, in slightly different terms, called the “unnatural growth of the natural”. Grounding politics on raw nature, Nazis normalized death and struggle as intimate expressions of organic life (“Whoever tired of the fight went under”).<sup>672</sup> Paraphrasing Snyder: politics was nature, and nature was struggle.<sup>673</sup> Arendt summed up this conjunction of cosmic justice and natural necessity referring to murderers who “do not really murder but execute a death sentence pronounced by some higher tribunal.”<sup>674</sup>

However, Arendt also reminded that these analogies and ideas, the “content” of totalitarian ideologies, were not exactly new. What was new was the totalitarian “organization”, designed precisely to translate the “lies” and the “fiction” of the *Weltanschauung* into a “functioning reality”, building up a “society whose members act and react according to the rules of a fictitious world”.<sup>675</sup> Once the fictional narrative of ideology is accepted as the ultimate representation of reality, the movement is called to unfold this reality in accordance to its “laws” – the necessary laws of cosmic justice, of natural survival, of protective attack, of defense of blood and honor etc. In this “region removed from experience”, no personal motives and no psychological inclinations are relevant.

Indeed, Arendt, along with others historians and chroniclers of the genocide, insisted in two points regarding the majority of perpetrators: one, they did *not* answer to psychological-personal drives, so they did *not* have pleasure in the task; two, they did *not* act to make profit. In fact, personally, if one’s thoughts, feelings and inner conflicts were considered, they would indicate “*benign*” instincts. Let us remember the Ukrainian volunteers whose bodies trembled before they shot women and children into collective pits.<sup>676</sup> Personally, they did not want to do that – but it was needed. Regarding the non-

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid., p. 656

<sup>671</sup> Hilberg, *A Destruição...*, p. 1273

<sup>672</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction...*, p. 662

<sup>673</sup> Snyder, T. *Terra Negra: o holocausto como história e advertência*. São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras. 2016, p. 16

<sup>674</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 610

<sup>675</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 476

<sup>676</sup> Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims...*, p. 61

economic logic of the destruction, one could only think of the costs of the genocide (including the hardly calculable loss of the Jewish labor force, which was destroyed, not explored). The cost of destruction surpassed all the material gains. The orientation was synthesized by Himmler when he said to the SS that they had a “moral right vis-à-vis *our* people to annihilate [*umzubringen*] *this* people which wanted to annihilate us. But we have no right to take a single fur, a single watch, a single mark, a single cigarette, or anything whatever.”<sup>677</sup>

From a psychological-moral point of view, eventual conflicts of conscience followed an inverted relation between commands and instincts. As Arendt noted, they resisted the temptation *not* to rob, *not* to kill. The formal relation of morality was still there: there was the command, and the feelings resisting command. But now the content of command indicated an act in open contradiction to old morality (“...they had been subjected to a school in which current morality was turned upside down”)<sup>678</sup>. Indeed, the sophistication of the destruction – it started with “task-units” (*Einsatzgruppen*) killing, individually, groups of men, women and children, and ended with the impersonal methods of gas trucks and chambers – served the purpose of mitigating the “moral conflict” and psychological disintegration of the perpetrators. “These men are finished [*Sie sind fertig*] for the rest of their lives”, von dem Bach famously said to Himmler, complaining against the methods of killings in which the killer had to face his victim. The SS deserved disciplined, not neurotic servers.<sup>679</sup>

In this line, the extermination camps, where no one actually killed the victims with their own hands, and where everything was executed in a cold, efficient manner, were a microcosms of the structure of depersonalization and withdraw from responsibility. As I mentioned, the mental pattern was established by ideological accounts over the necessity of the events. In “moral” terms, the individual needed to overcome, in a higher level, the “weakness” of Judeo-Christian morality (which forbade assassination) and, in a lower one, its own debased impulses, malign or benign.<sup>680</sup> In terms of execution, the perpetrators had a whole structure which facilitated his escape from accountability. The process of destruction was, as long as possible, hidden: orders were secret, evidences were destroyed, extermination camps and ghettos were built outside Germany, in the

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<sup>677</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction...*, p. 647.

<sup>678</sup> Levi, P. *The Drowned and The Saved*, p. 97

<sup>679</sup> Hilberg, *op. cit.*, p. 646

<sup>680</sup> Hilberg, *A Destruição...*, p. 1256

country side of occupied territories. Moreover, everyone who felt implicated in the mass crime (by supporting it, by doing something, by simply observing something) was dragged into its “open secret”, joining a sort of collective loyalty shared by the producers of that “unwritten page of History”, as Himmler phrased it. In this sense, no criticism, internal or external, and no social conversation on the extermination was ever brought to public. Pragmatic criticism on specific methods were accepted. But the totalitarian goal of destruction stood beyond questioning. “Don’t think about it, my dear”, recommended a Nazi officer to his fiancée, who had heard rumors about the extermination going on in deep Poland.<sup>681</sup> Moreover, the bureaucratic use of euphemisms – “final solution of the Jewish question” [*Endlösung der Judenfrage*], “SB – special treatment” [*SB, Sonderbehandlung*], “evacuation” [*Aussiedlung*] etc.<sup>682</sup> – helped the “desk murderers”, through the linguistic concealment of emotions and meanings carried by direct, more human words, to detach themselves from the reality of those crimes.

Arendt referred to totalitarian organizations as providing “protective walls which separates them [members of totalitarian movements] from the outside, normal world”.<sup>683</sup> This was not a simplistic separation. It was rather a “carefully graduated hierarchy of militancy”<sup>684</sup>, in which one level is more or less fanatical, more or less ideological, thus establishing pales of absorption into the totalitarian secret and its functioning. This gradualness, nonetheless, worked within those “protective walls”, physical and ideological, preventing any contact with non-totalitarian world. Within the scheme of bureaucratic execution, the “protective walls” were provided by the parallel and convergent arrangement of functions. Everybody was in charge of some specific point of the operation, but none, except the *Führer*, the *Volk*, Nature or History, was in charge of the whole operation. “I wasn’t involved in that sense...Not in the operational sense”, said Franz Stangl about his early role, before Treblinka, as a security officer in the Euthanasia

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<sup>681</sup> That was a 40 years old man from Bremen, member of the Order Police [Ordnungspolizei] in the Baltic, answering his wife about the rumors of mass killing of Jews heard by her – he would tell her “a little bit of the truth...Only you must give it no thought, there is no point to it”. He admitted that Jews had “no future” in the world, but asked his wife to avoid thinking about that; that needs to happen: “*Liebe H., mache dir keine Gedanken darüber, es muss sein*”. Browning, *C. Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 151-152

<sup>682</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction...*, p. 652

<sup>683</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 479

<sup>684</sup> Ibid, p. 481



(“mercy killing”) Program. He was responsible for supporting, but not doing the killings.<sup>685</sup>

Behind the smoke of omnipotence, there was, again, powerlessness. As none could claim what they did as their own acts, they regarded any resistance, or any desistence, as simply irrelevant, incapable of making any difference. Becoming part of a totalistic atmosphere was like being a “drop in wave” – and a drop cannot resist a wave.<sup>686</sup> Besides the subdivision and fragmentation of functions, there was the perception that one was always surrounded by someone else in the bureaucratic structure. Someone always had superiors “doing more than he”, and subordinates “who were ready to take their place”.<sup>687</sup> The accumulation of agencies, the subdivision of groups, the multiplication of branches, and the constant distribution of new roles created a fluid bureaucracy, characterized not by a static rigidity, but by an “organized” flow. The result was, in Hilberg’s terms, an “autonomous” process, unstoppable from within.<sup>688</sup>

In this sense, the common justifications of the followers-of-orders is weak and incomplete. They were not simply following orders. First of all, as Arendt always stressed, a member of the Party, an SS officer and most supporters with active roles could refrain from their positions without punishments. They could say that they were psychologically unfit to a certain job. They could ask to be removed to a different function. With this, they would lose prestige within the Party, but nothing more. Moreover, historians showed that totalitarianism was not a system of detailed top-down orders, as in a traditional military organization. Arendt indicated that pan and totalitarian movements replaced the concept of law, with its public dimension of deliberation, revision, publicization etc., by direct decrees. Decrees are manifestations of a single, one-sided will – the will of the leader, speaking for the tribe. Raul Hilberg described the “atrophy of law” in Nazi totalitarianism in the following development: laws were replaced by decrees, and then by simple announcements; later, local announcements were done in accordance to “presumed needs”; finally, written (but not public) directives were replaced

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<sup>685</sup> In his interview to Gitta Sereny, Stangl, in a way typical of totalitarian perpetrators, said that he would not discuss his work at home; that he couldn’t eat when he was told the nature of the job to be done; that the “fors” and “againsts” of the Programme were discussed only internally, not externally; that he was responsible “for everything being correctly done” (meaning, lying to the families that “the patient had died of a heart attack or something like that”). Sereny, G. *Into that Darkness: an examination of conscience*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983, pp. 55-58

<sup>686</sup> Hilberg, op. cit., p. 661

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

by oral orders and by “basic understandings”, dismissing explicit orders or explanations.<sup>689</sup>

It is very likely that Hitler never wrote a formal order to kill the Jews. He only expressed his desire. Arendt noted indeed that a “chain of commands” tends to stabilize in a certain structural order. Defined orders would limit the unrestricted malleability of the movement, its ever expanding characters. The “supreme law” of totalitarianism, its single law in fact, was the “never resisting, dynamic ‘will of the Führer’”.<sup>690</sup> And this “will” was, as I am stressing, an atmosphere, a totalistic atmosphere, and not necessarily the manifested and registered will of the man called Hitler. In this line, Kershaw stressed how the “little Hitlers and Himmlers”, the local commanders of the SS, took initiative trying to “anticipate” the will of the Führer.<sup>691</sup> These improvisations were, retrospectively, always justified, as the movement was, *a priori*, always right. They were backed by the infallibility of the movement. As Hilberg noted, in the same direction of Arendt, these decrees, resolutions and local decisions were not seen as coercive, external sources of power, but as “expressions of will”.<sup>692</sup>

Thinking of totalitarian perpetrators, Arendt celebrated the prevalence, even in mass societies, of the court of justice, an institution “where all justifications of a nonspecific, abstract nature – from the *Zeitgeist* down to the Oedipus Complex – break down, where not systems or trends or original sins are judged, but men of flesh and bone like you and me...”.<sup>693</sup> Courts are places of *judgment*, where even attenuating circumstances and detailed contextualization do not remove from the judged its capacity to determine his own acts. Part of Arendt’s judgement, intimately related to what was discussed and exposed in the post-war courts, involved a re-personification of those depersonalized beings, who had put themselves outside the scope of freedom and responsibility.

#### **6.4 Depersonalization of Victims**

After the First World War, Adolf Hitler argued that Jews were the ultimate cause of the German defeat. At that period, Hitler started to work on his distinction between *emotional* anti-Semitism [*Antisemitismus des Gefühl*] and *rational* anti-Semitism

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<sup>689</sup> Hilberg, *A Destruição....*, pp. 54-55

<sup>690</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 477

<sup>691</sup> Kershaw, I. *Hitler*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. 2010, p. 497

<sup>692</sup> Hilberg, *op. cit.*, 1234

<sup>693</sup> Arendt, ‘Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship’, *Responsibility and Judgement*, p. 21

[*Antisemitismus der Vernunft*]. The former indicated the traditional hatred, and similar feelings, felt by individuals against particular Jews, as subjective explosions in violent, though limited, pogroms. The latter, rational anti-Semitism, derived not from rage felt within body-emotions. It was a “rational” principle derived from the very essence of Jews, and the negative role this “essence” played in historical reality. Hence, a struggle against the essence of Jews (their race, spirit, influence etc.) should not result from irrational feelings of angry individuals. It should be a “legal” and necessary one, emerging as a purely reactive consequence of the harmful role of the Jewish substance.

In 1933, the German physicist Max Planck confronted Hitler’s worldview in a private conversation. Addressing Hitler, Planck recalled the case of Fritz Haber, a Jewish-German scientist who, through his experiments and inventions, such as the synthesis of ammonia, helped German military efforts in the First War (indeed, Haber became an inflexible nationalist, who believed that science should serve German interests. Einstein, his former colleague, distanced from him). So Haber was an empirical evidence against Hitler’s claim – like thousands of German Jews who, in one way or another, behaved as extraordinary or average Germans during periods of war and peace. Hitler, however, replied that he had enough of those distinctions between individual Jews, and “that a Jew was a Jew..., and now he was going to proceed against all of them.”<sup>694</sup> Hitler was no longer interested in making specific distinctions between positive and negative Jews – all those distinctions which had been instrumental to forms of anti-Semitism grounded on the possibility of a Jewish “regeneration”. All Jews, for Hitler, were the same. They equally shared a “criminal nature”.

Among the enemies of Nazi totalitarianism, most categories were defined regardless individual acts or personal opinions. Someone was persecuted not because of what he or she did. Targets were defined in accordance to physical, psychological or ethnic qualities. They were “objectively” targeted in accordance to what they were and carried within. Hilberg classified three types of “enemies”: people with diseases or physical disabilities; people considered socially or politically dangerous; and members of “target-nationalities”.<sup>695</sup> Only among the second group there was a margin of self-determination, and a verifiable connection to individual acts. Political opponents, conventional criminals, work-shy individuals and some of the a-social elements were

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<sup>694</sup> Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims...*, p. 13

<sup>695</sup> Hilberg, *A Destruição...*, p. 1237

defined not by “nature”, but by their specific patterns of individuation and their personal choices. It was not the case of the two other groups. Disabled, sick, psychologically or physically ill, “unfit” individuals were targeted because of the shape of their bodies and the constitution of their physiology. They were what Nazis called “miscarriages of hell” [*Missgeburten der Hölle*]<sup>696</sup> – mentally-ill, tuberculous, alcoholic, crippled, handicapped men and women, and children, considered “unworthy of life”, and “handled” with by the Euthanasia Program.

Among the target-nationalities, there was a rank determining the “objective” position of each group according to a racial scheme. In the higher level, along with ethnic German, constituting the Aryan universe, there were Scandinavian, Dutch, Flemish people. Going down, there were Czechs, French, Greeks, and, finally, the lower strata of European races, as Russians, Poles and Ukrainians, unfit to Germanization and, in accordance to Nature’s design, fit to be expropriated, explored and subjugated. Below Poles, there were Roma and Sinti, classified in general as “asocial”, and subjected to racial laws similar to those who affected Jews.<sup>697</sup> In the bottom of the racial scale, outside the scope of humanity, as sub-humans (*Untermenschen*), there were Jews, “criminals by nature”. These groups were what Arendt called “‘objective enemies’ of History or Nature, of the class or the race.”<sup>698</sup>

In this sense, totalitarian movements were machines designed to de-pluralize humanity, committing crimes which extrapolated the civic relations between individuals, and entered the realm of human relations between peoples, nationalities and social groups. Arendt characterized this need for “new obstacles that have to be eliminated”<sup>699</sup> as intrinsic to totalitarianism, to an extent that “...as soon as one category is liquidated, war may be declared on another.”<sup>700</sup> The “logic” of movement and purification requires external groups which cannot be “Aryanized” (or “humanized” in racial terms), deserving to die. That’s the only way of sustaining the perpetual “growth” of the totalitarian organism. In USSR, the old ruling class was purged, then kulaks became the new target, and, after that, specific nationalities and certain geographical groups were defined as opposing the flux of revolution. Jews, in special, ceased to be a cultural or national group. They became instead, as Arendt noted, a “principle”, a metaphysical object. Submitted to

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<sup>696</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction...*, p. 643. Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, p. 1070

<sup>697</sup> Hilberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 1239-1243

<sup>698</sup> Arendt, *OT*, p. 610

<sup>699</sup> Arendt, *OT*, p. 556

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*

fictional “objective” criteria of racialization<sup>701</sup>, Jews entered the biological politics of Nazis as a negative collective-organism whose function was to contaminate the racial ecology.

To use Arendt’s vocabulary: the plurality of their “*who*” – the unending variety of personal stories performed by individuals as Rahel Varnhagen, Heinrich Heine, Moses Mendelssohn, Gerson Bleichroder, the little Mr. Cohn, the forgotten pariah and the assimilated parvenu, the *West* and the *Ostjude*, the religious and the secular, the captain Dreyfus, the prime-minister Benjamin Disraeli and the revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the “disgusting usurer” and the “newborn child” -, everyone (alive or dead) who formed the Jewish people was reduced into a *what* – a defined set of qualities, an abstract object with pre-determined attributes. They disappeared to the human world way before the actual disappearance of their bodies in extermination camps, as they lost their faces, names, and they capacity to constitute individual biographical paths. As even Jewish children were inflicted by the “criminal nature”, the people as a whole was marked to be confined, degraded, expropriated, and finally annihilated.

Regarding this ideological de-humanization, the historian Claudia Koonz recalled the memories of a former Hitler Youth [*Hitler-jugend*] member, who watched the Gestapo taking away all the Jews of his village, including Heinz, a boy who was his friend. Instead of lamenting the deportation of his friend, the *HJ* member simply reasoned “What a misfortune Heinz is Jewish.”<sup>702</sup> Arendt noted that ideology blocks one from experiences of life. In this case, the *HJ* teenager neutralized his feelings, and the affective memories related to the experience of friendship, for the sake of an “idea” – the idea that Jews were necessarily evil. He could not invalidate his ideological reasoning based on his experience of life, on the positive, empathetic relationship he had established with Heinz. The compulsion of ideology assumed a force of “reality” stronger than the reality of one’s personal emotions and stories. As ‘objective enemies’ were removed *a priori* from the definition of humanity, all human affections towards them (sympathy, indifference, admiration, curiosity, and even resentment and hatred) were replaced by the impersonal function ascribed to their “essence” according to a totalizing ideology.

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<sup>701</sup> Hilberg showed the basic fallacy of the supposed “scientific” methods of racial classifications of Nazis: individuals were defined as Jews (or half, or quarter Jews) in accordance to their grandparents. But the Jewishness of grandparents was defined in accordance to their belonging to the Jewish religious community. Hilberg, *A Destruição...*, p. 66

<sup>702</sup> Koonz, C. op. cit., p. 5

One of the most important references concerning this topic, among all the sources and findings of my years of research, is Emil Fackenheim's emotional lecture at the University of Oregon, in a 1996 seminar entitled "Ethics After the Holocaust". Fackenheim proposed a specific human ritual as the "beginning of human civilization": the funeral of individual human beings. Breaking with the past, pre-historical habit of leaving dead corpses in open field, to be eaten by animals and exhausted by putrefaction, men and women decided to acknowledge the humanity of those who passed away by making them specific memorials. Human graves paid a tribute to human individuality and uniqueness: "This is a person. He is or was unlike any other." For Fackenheim, contrastingly, human civilization came to an end when Nazis tried to exterminate even Jewish ashes, for "even the Jewish ashes contaminated the world". By using ashes to "trample on", by mixing it with sand, or throwing it away into rivers, they denied Jews not only the right to live, but the right to die humanly.<sup>703</sup>

This collapse of civilization, or historical tradition – for what many regarded as "human nature" was in fact a "nature" historically constituted around principles and practices which had "civilized" man, including the memorization of the dead - grounds Arendt's assertion that the living-dead of the camps had undergone an experience worse than physical finitude: total oblivion.

"The real horror of the concentration and extermination camps lies in the fact that the inmates, even if they happen to keep alive, are more effectively cut off from the world of the living than if they had died, because terror enforces oblivion."<sup>704</sup>

For Arendt, one of the origins of totalitarianism was the ethnical competition, and its reorganization in a geo-political order that, as we have seen, displaced millions of people. Totalitarian realization, on its turn, required a deepening on the losses of the individual – loss of governmental protection, loss of nationality etc. – towards a fundamental loss of his own existence, of his own person. Arendt called it the "deaths" which an individual suffered before his actual physical death. It was a process of gradual *disappearance* of Jews and other objective enemies. It was not the natural disappearance of bodies affected by diseases or by aging, but the politically-human disappearance of groups dominated, manipulated and destroyed. Arendt stressed that totalitarianism is only implemented when it executes its ideology into reality. In this sense, the Jewish metaphysical "principle/attributes" of criminality, degeneration, pollution etc., held by

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<sup>703</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfxy58FA\\_4A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfxy58FA_4A)

<sup>704</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 580

the Nazis as axiomatic, came into being in the *Lager*, where Jews were mixed with conventional criminals, turned into a band of miserable living-corpses, demoralized, decaying, struggling for every inch of bread, and agonizing in in-human conditions. The central myth of Nazi ideology was produced.

This leap from ideology into reality required the camps as a central institution of totalitarianism – an institution designed not to explore, not to reeducate, not to punish, but simply to destroy human beings. The first step of destruction was the death of the “juridical person in man”. Objective enemies had no documents, they were not backed by any recognized rights, and the camp itself felt outside the “normal penal system”. That was the death, in other terms, of the formal personality. Without documents, without a name and an identity card, those men and children lost their capacity to do something, to act, even if acting criminally.<sup>705</sup> The objective enemies, called “pieces” [*Stücke*] by the SS officers, “renamed” by numbers, were now lawless bodies “most suitable [group] for thorough experimentation in disfranchisement and destruction.”<sup>706</sup>

The second step towards total disappearance was to kill “the moral person in man”.<sup>707</sup> For Arendt, the removal of those bodies from a human community made moral initiative impossible. With no public space for testimony and discussion, with no remaining instinct of justice to appeal to, camp inmates had no meaning and no purpose for acts of rebellion, resistance and martyrdom. The “organized oblivion” emptied conscience, for there was no moral alternatives in a place where written and spoken words, where “Grief and remembrance”, where reflection and thinking were forbidden or simply destroyed. Primo Levi insisted throughout his work that only the “worst” could survive the camps. A survivor needed to be stripped from every moral reserve, from every principle or ideal, to had a minimal chance of outlasting the *Lager*. Those were, for Arendt, “conditions under which conscience ceases to be adequate and to do good becomes utterly impossible...”<sup>708</sup>

This moral annihilation was perfected by the fact that victims were forced “to behave like murders”, to be implicated in their own crimes, being compelled to denounce their compatriots, to throw them into chambers, or to trigger the buttons of machines of assassination, thus “blurring the line” between “the murderer and his victim”.<sup>709</sup> This

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<sup>705</sup> OT, p. 586

<sup>706</sup> Ibid., p. 588

<sup>707</sup> Ibid., p. 591

<sup>708</sup> Ibid., p. 593

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

complete demoralization meant the very death of death. Arendt had already indicated this totalitarian tendency of robbing the dignity and the meaning of death in her early article “*Not One Kaddish<sup>710</sup> Will Be Said*”, written in 1942, even before learning about the implementation of killing camps. She referred to dead who “leave no written wills behind, hardly so much a name”.<sup>711</sup> By intending to kill not only bodies, but a whole group – with its symbols, memories, rituals, traditions, and personal stories –, Nazi totalitarianism had distinguished itself from the vilest aggressions in history, for it denied the participation of victims even in historical records. While “Achilles set out for Hector’s funeral” and “the Church kept its heretics alive in the memory of men...”<sup>712</sup>, the Jewish death was planned to “seal the fact” that Jews had never existed, never appeared.

The last step towards total disappearance was the death of man’s “unique identity”. It was the destruction of concrete personality. Arendt ascribed this process to the “tortures” designed not to kill the body, neither to extract a confession, but simply to annihilate someone’s presence. The transport in “cattle-cars”, the absence of minimal hygienic conditions, the shaved heads, the “grotesque camp clothing”, the medical “experiments”, all the manipulations of the body and its emotions – and the exploration of “its infinite possibilities of suffering” – had no purpose but equalizing all men as “beasts” or “ghastly marionettes”.<sup>713</sup> Viktor Frankl recalled how the *Muselmänner* (in the camp jargon, the living-dead), marching with no soul behind their eyes, with no trace of visible human emotions, resigned to die soon, were already lost for life, even before the concretization of their deaths.<sup>714</sup> Arendt referred to these men as examples of human beings transformed into a “human animal”, lacking the spontaneous responsiveness of vivid animals. They only “reacted”, they ceased to affirm their identity, their unique existence, “without protesting”<sup>715</sup>, for they were already destroyed.

Here, Arendt linked this personal uniqueness with man’s spontaneity. No human response was ever possible in the camps, according to Arendt, “For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man’s power to begin something new out of his own resources”.<sup>716</sup> Man, removed from his own individuality and uniqueness, becomes finally a no-body, incapable of even suffering his own death. Life was finally de-

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<sup>710</sup> Jewish prayer recited in funerals.

<sup>711</sup> Arendt, TJW, p. 163

<sup>712</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 592

<sup>713</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 597

<sup>714</sup> Frankl, V. E. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press. 1985

<sup>715</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 597

<sup>716</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 596



constructed. A new form of being was fabricated by totalitarian masters. Nazis tried to master, control and destroy what depended, for Arendt, “on forces that cannot be controlled by the will”. Arendt stressed that uniqueness is “shaped in equal parts by nature, will, and destiny”, all those interactive realities and forces which were in part given to, in part acted upon by individuals, and whose ultimate resources (inner feelings and thoughts) could be preserved even in isolation. But not in the camps, whose sole purpose was the destruction of every stratum of human existence.

Jews, transformed into One Jew, collectively disappeared in the trains, where they were “glued to each other”, and in the “gas chambers which, if only because of their enormous capacity, could not be intended for individual cases but only for people in general”.<sup>717</sup> Vassili Grossmann, in his report from Treblinka, recalled how people were cut off from “freedom, home, country, belongings, letters, pictures of beloved ones”, then from “mother, wife, son”, and then from documents and name; in the barracks, cut from the “sky, stars, wind and sun”, until the last “circle of Hell”, the gas chambers, where, without oxygen and with broken bones, pressed against each other, covered by a “deadly sweat”, they “died as if they were one single person”.<sup>718</sup> This was not the death of the soldier, of the condemned criminal, of the oppressed martyr, of the conquered hostage. It was the disappearance of a whole people.

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<sup>717</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 588, p. 594

<sup>718</sup> Grossman, V. ‘O Inferno de Treblinka’, *A Estrada*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2015, p. 155

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ‘AN EMANCIPATION OF HIS OWN’: WILL THE PARIAH APPEAR?

#### 7.1 Stories *versus* Ideology

We will see soon that one of Arendt’s clearest redefinitions of the pariah relied on four figures, three of whom were story-tellers: Heine, Chaplin, Kafka. The fourth, Lazare, can be said also a teller, and a spectator, of political stories. *Story-teller*, along with *political thinker*, was one of the self-descriptions Arendt preferred, as she sought to ground her words on enacted experiences. As we have seen, the process of depersonalization, along with the emergence of a radical-banal evil<sup>719</sup>, depended on ideological reasoning. Ideology, in Arendt’s sense, neutralized feelings, destroyed autonomous thoughts, invalidated moral evaluations, as it operated as a purely mental, self-sufficient system, independent of thinking human beings. Developing a single idea via logical implication, ideology was completely immune to experiences, opinions, and judgements of a plurality of actors. It moved circularly, within a tautological whole.

For Arendt, philosophy was definitely not ideology, but they shared disturbing similarities. In its canonical method, philosophy aimed to form a pre-experience (*a priori*) body of knowledge, grounded solely on mental “experiences”. Based on rational-logical necessity, it would dismiss the personal voice or the particular view of the philosopher, for the philosopher does not speak with his own voice, but from an “universal” viewpoint. Philosophy aims to abstract – to extract from what is unique– general conditions which function as a common denominator above temporal and contextual variations. In its attempt to organize knowledge, philosophical classification aims at confining the real in unequivocal categories. It usually dismisses lower methods as exemplifications, for examples, always particular, lack the generality and unlimited validity intended by philosophy.

Arendt also regarded as wordless, that is, as unpolitical, the so-called social sciences. Based on abstract types, defined by statistical calculation of dominant qualities or patterns of social groups, these “sciences” are “by no means a harmless scientific

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<sup>719</sup> I agree with R. Bernstein’s observation that there is more continuity between Arendt’s elaboration of a “radical evil”, in OT, and her reference to a “banal evil”, in her Eichmann report. The emphasis, in the first, was on the “superfluosness” of mass man, while in the latter she emphasized the “thoughtlessness” of an emblematic perpetrator. The absence of “evil intentions” in individual psychologies was already compatible with her thoughts on the “radical evil”. Bernstein, R. J. *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, p. 124

ideal”.<sup>720</sup> They may inflict a double political “harm”: by turning political processes into predictable and knowable objects of “science”, and by extracting this scientific stability from qualities verifiable in social *majorities*. Indeed, it is properly called a *social science*, for the social, as we have seen, aims at uniformity and predictability. From a political point of view, though, the social and its “large numbers of people” shows an “irresistible inclination towards despotism”, especially the despotism of “majority rule”.<sup>721</sup> Social types and dominant social trends, deduced from mathematical calculations (“quantitative methods”) or by the definition of the what-ness, the common attributes of individuals coded or labeled in the same categories, “aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal.”<sup>722</sup> Automatism, behaviorism, conformism are both “scientific” and “social”, for they neutralize the unpredictability and spontaneity inherent to human plurality.

There is an irony at this point. Social (or human) sciences claim to deal with empirical reality. As opposed to philosophical speculation, theological dogmatism, ideological self-closure etc., social sciences would focus on the real, on what really is there, concrete reality. But Arendt indicated that social sciences carry within unrealistic premises and powerless conclusions. They depict only a small parcel of reality. Indeed, they reduce or even falsify reality by producing an “object” which exists only in terms of social abstractions and groups comparison. They have little to offer to the political, in Arendt’s sense, for the political is the space of concrete persons, a space where unique agents perform indeterminate acts. A race or a class could be a proper object to the science of society, but no race neither class has ever acted on history without the enactment of stories by actors and persons, who transcended the abstract denominator of their social groups. Indeed, a science of social behaviors and patterns relies not only on a-political, but on an anti-political world-picture, in which humans are taken as explainable objects, as predictable, thus, as controllable beings. Its methods can be, as they actually are, appropriated by techniques of domination and manipulation, based on the determination and anticipation of certain reactions to predefined stimulus.

Arendt moved away from this modern obsession with objective ideas and scientific models, which dismissed individuality and “non-behavior”. She moved closer to stories of life and public experiences. In this sense, “experiences” meant for her almost

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<sup>720</sup> Arendt, HC, p. 43

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid., p. 45

the opposite of “experiments”. Experiences are not produced by techniques of “management”. They are enacted by spontaneous (that is, non-coerced, non-controlled) political agents interacting with each other. They relate to contingent, possible actualizations of what was not necessary, so they cannot be foretold, anticipated by theory, ideology or models of predictability. They do not relate to the simplicity of well-defined ideas, but to the complexity of human characters, always shaped by multiple emotions, by plural interests, by non-identical intentions. No analytical fragmentation, in Arendt’s view, would be ever capable of reducing a person to a stable object or to a single intention. Complete stabilization would mean the death of the individual’s vitality.

Moreover, what is decisive in stories of life is not the dispute over cognitive values, not the truth or the falsehood of this or that idea, but the detailed appearance of someone, his spoken words, his relation to others who are also acting, speaking, deciding, and thinking. World War II, for instance, could be said a battle between ideas only in a reductive sense. Even if it was presented by Nazis as a cosmic conflict, it was in fact the result of “webs of relationships” consolidated by the words pronounced by Hitler, by his megalomaniac and also ideological decisions, by what Frenchmen did, and specially did not, by what Churchill, who “mobilized the English language”, said and decided to do, and how he persuaded his compatriots to act, and so on. Arendt affirmed that history, with its “follies and vanities”<sup>723</sup>, was nothing but a collection of stories.

She also went back to the Aristotelian definition of stories and artistic plays as “imitations of action”.<sup>724</sup> According to Aristotle, “drama” and “practice” were intimately related in Greek etymology: to act was “*dran*”, for Dorians, and “*prattein*”, for Athenians.<sup>725</sup> Moreover, for Aristotle, poetry and theatrical representations would be a form of “delightful learning”, in which the spectator learns something, grasping its meaning by seeing and hearing, even if seeing and hearing “painful objects”. In this line, the ancient-modern gap can be illustrated by the original meaning of theory, almost the opposite of its modern resignification: while Greek *theoria* meant “looking at”, modern theory implies something purely “rational”, detached, and different, from “practice”. “Seeing” was indeed the first experience exemplified by Aristotle in his famous opening of *Metaphysics*, in which he compared man’s propensity to learn with man’s delight in

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<sup>723</sup> Arendt, ‘Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World’, *Men In Dark Times*, p. 91

<sup>724</sup> Aristotle, Poetics, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle...*, 1448a1

<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 1448b1

using his senses.<sup>726</sup> Arendt noted this, along with her observation on the “Hebrew truth, which was heard”<sup>727</sup> and the experience of telling and *hearing* stories as the supreme source of wisdom in the Jewish tradition. Not coincidentally, she quoted in the same passage Kant’s critique of judgment, grounded, as we saw, on sensible and imaginative capacities to see, feel and speak about aesthetical experiences.

Stories, in this line, are the locus of uniqueness. They are eminently political, for the “personal element in man”, its *daimon*, “can only appear where a public space exists.”<sup>728</sup> This political space of stories (“which extends far beyond what we ordinarily mean by political life”<sup>729</sup>) shelters personal uniqueness in two senses, one related to the unique way of doing, and the other to the unique way of telling what was done. While philosophy aims at establish compelling reasons and general truths, while ideology assumes to have found the “key” to reality, and while social sciences search for patterns of explanation, causation and certainty, story-telling moves in the imaginative space of wisdom and wonder, of identification and estrangement. It seeks to establish meaning, and also to dispute and amplify meaning. If ideology, and philosophy and social sciences in lower degrees, aim at offering a final depiction of reality, or a compelling reason to “solve” a problem, or to “conclude” a mental process, story-telling and story interpretation move in the sphere of what can be “spoken about”, of what is inherently tied to public and open forms of political, social and cultural conversations. Moreover, if ideological fictionalization replaces reality with frozen images, stories aim at reestablishing reality in its complexity, in its several dimensions and multiple angles. In stories, the pretension of knowing all at once is replaced by seeing, contacting, feeling, grasping one’s presence: Jews, kulaks, whatever group or individual is not be defined as objects from “the world of sheer mental effort”<sup>730</sup>: they are rather humanized as living persons, not identical but not radically different from other actors living the drama of life. If the *Hitlerjugend* member payed attention to his story with Heinz, he would have discarded the grotesque falsehood of the Nazi premise that Jews are “criminals by nature”. Story would have defeated ideology.

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<sup>726</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in: *The Complete Works...*, 980a25, p. 1552

<sup>727</sup> Arendt, H. *The Life of the Mind*. New York : Harcourt, 1978, p. 111

<sup>728</sup> Speight, A. ‘Arendt on Narrative Theory and Practice’. *College Literature*, Volume 38, Number 1, Winter 2011, pp. 115-130

<sup>729</sup> Arendt, ‘Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio’. *Men in Dark Times*, p. 73

<sup>730</sup> Arendt, H. ‘Washington's ‘Problem-Solvers’ - Where They Went Wrong’. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Apr 5, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 45

Standing somewhere between the mere facticity of events and the detached explanations of periods of long duration, stories have another political implication: they may change patterns of behavior. As we have discussed, Arendt left untouched the minimal basis of “bare facts”. “Facts are beyond agreements and consent...”.<sup>731</sup> I indicated, however, that her view did not imply a belief on an independent objectivity of facts – for facts need to be established and interpreted in a community of shared meaning. As an example of her view, she mentioned the period of Jewish secularization, when Jews lost “their faith” on a sacred beginning and culmination of history, so “Jews lost their guide through the wilderness of bare facts”. Without exemplary and foundational stories, without interpretative or inspirational principles, there is only random pragmatism and even systematic confusion, “for when man is robbed of all means of interpreting events he is left with no sense whatsoever of reality”.<sup>732</sup>

So the entry-point to the collection of stories forming history is already an exercise in *political possibilities*. Arendt praised the historian, and her friend, Salo W. Baron for having challenged traditional meta-stories of Jewish historiography – in particular, the emphasis on suffering. His “anti-lachrymose” view, emphasizing factors others than tragedy and persecution, intended “to unlock hidden and undiscovered doors of Jewish history” and to establish elements that “had remained unexplored or unappreciated”.<sup>733</sup> What was crucial, he did it relying on *facts*, not only on newer principles or ideas. Telling forgotten stories, or telling stories from different narrative angles, make us challenge that tendency of freezing living experiences in rigid *Weltanschauungen*. Moreover, a renovated story-telling reminds us of “hidden traditions”, suppressed memories and unexpected events, whose significance point to the originative plurality of human experiences, as human beings are not tied to necessary plots and predetermined scripts.

## 7.2 Disclosing the pariah

Telling pariah-stories was one of Arendt’s way of exploring and pointing to new possibilities. Replacing the historiographic principle of passive-objectivity with a combination of story-telling and story-judging, Arendt’s approach to the experiences of anti-Semitism, imperialism, totalitarianism ran parallel with her claim for a “new law” to

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<sup>731</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 236

<sup>732</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jewish state’, p. 378

<sup>733</sup> Liberles, R. *Salo Wittmayer Baron: architect of Jewish History*. New York: New York University Press. 1995, p. 345

guarantee human dignity. As we have seen in this work, her pariah-stories were accompanied by several interpretations: Jewish passivity, the decision of Jews of staying out of history, was interpreted with the principle of interaction. It was taken a combination of external forces limiting the paths opened to European Jews and, on the other side, inner tendencies of Jewish communities, like the inability for political articulation. In general terms, Arendt described and criticized the emphasis, running throughout 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, on economic and social forms of relations between hosts and pariahs. From a Jewish angle, this led to models in which emancipation was mistaken as assimilation – conformation to society. Instead of praising assimilation as an example of the (“famous and infamous”) Jewish adaptability and respectability, she considered it one of the main factors to the destruction of Jews. It reinforced homogeneous social forms (in which anti-Semitism remained unchecked) and destroyed the already fragile political institutions of European Jews. In broad terms, after centuries, the pariah lost even his precarious instrumental status of tolerated, becoming simply the “scum of earth”.

Facing the “end of humanity”, Arendt not only vindicated a “new principle”, but worked deeply on new understandings and new terms for dealing with “the elementary problems of human living-together”.<sup>734</sup> One of her early indications of the renewed principles and examples that would become central to her work was her article *The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition*, first published by the magazine *Jewish Social Studies* in 1944. The text is itself an example of Arendt’s proposal to regard the past, and its forgotten possibilities, as a “force”, not a “burden”, to inspire new modes of human actualization and political organization. Arendt’s resignification of the pariah was already an active attempt to begin anew, starting with a new look on what is normally taken as a frozen, static collection of necessary occurrences, the past. She refused Weber’s “objective”, neutral sociological description of a people outside society, outside politics, only inside a fragile economic relation. She searched instead for political, or pre-political, examples of pariahs who, in some way or another, rejected the oppressive outcast-conditions. In this sense, Arendt referred to the “pariah as a human type – a concept of supreme importance for the evaluation of mankind in our day”.<sup>735</sup> In broad terms, the reorganization of humanity required the appearance, the disclosure of the pariah, his rescue from the “holes of oblivion” where he radically disappeared.

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<sup>734</sup> Arendt, ‘What is Authority?’, p. 141

<sup>735</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jew as a Pariah: a Hidden Tradition’, TJW, p. 276

This *hidden* tradition has a double meaning. Pariahs were hidden by “other peoples” who had taken the “credit” for great Jewish writers, giving in “return” more anti-Semitism (Jews were “acclaimed father of every notorious swindler and mountebank”).<sup>736</sup> Kafka became a strict Czech writer, Heine a national poet of Germany, and Lazare, unorthodox compared to most Zionists and French socialists, simply forgotten: “Even his memory has faded”.<sup>737</sup> When recalled by Europeans, they were put on lists of individuals who “might conceivably claim Jewish descent”, but who were no longer alive. Lists were actually “mass graves for the forgotten”. When recalled by Jews, they normally served “assimilationist propagandists” or “parochial records” trying to prove Jewish geniality. Their authentic uniqueness was concealed both by “other peoples” that erased their specific Jewish character, and by Jews who tried to normalize them as cases pro-assimilation.

However, their meaning, for Arendt, rested on their refusal to assimilate to “other peoples”, “to ape the gentiles” and “to play the parvenus”. They “did the most for the spiritual dignity of their people”, for they rejected at the same time parochialism and abstract universalism. They “were great enough to transcend the bounds of nationality and to weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of European life...”.<sup>738</sup> They were a counter-example to assimilation, examples of what emancipation “really should have been – an admission of Jews *as Jews* to the ranks of humanity.”<sup>739</sup> “[F]rom Salomon Maimon in the eighteenth century to Franz Kafka in the early twentieth”, they existed in a “variety of forms”. Against the anti-Semitic “principle” of Jewish corruption, against the premises of an abstract assimilation to universalism, against the restricted imagination of the parvenu, the *Jew as Pariah* provided “an alternative portrayal of the Jewish people”.<sup>740</sup> They were not imagined as an “ideal type”; they rather existed in “historical actuality”, as examples of who Jews had been, and who others Jews could have taken as example.

The four pariah selected by Arendt were writers and artists. Since they could not be free as Jews, as themselves, their emancipation came by “the sheer force of imagination”. Since world-structures could not accommodate their condition, they performed a unique, extra-political experience of emancipation: “they started an

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid, p. 275

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., p. 286

<sup>738</sup> Ibid., p. 275

<sup>739</sup> Ibid.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid., p. 276



emancipation of their own, of their own hearts and brains”.<sup>741</sup> They relied on words, thoughts, images to judge the tendencies of their contexts and refuse participation in the dominant social trends of their epochs. They underwent so, as pariahs, a *political* transformation, from passive members of a sociologically-described group into unique voices reflecting the experience of oppression, criticizing their societies from a estranged position.

### **7.3 Heinrich Heine and Bernard Lazare: nationalism meets humanism**

The first pariah analyzed by Arendt was Heinrich Heine. Actually, according to his birth certificate, Harry Heine. He experienced formal assimilation (conversion and name-changing), but he regretted it, referring to the “Jew in me that can never be washed off”.<sup>742</sup> Unlike assimilationists, he was not ashamed of his *Judesein*. Indeed, Judaism did not mean for him a theological system, a biological essence, nor “some extraordinary, mystic power”. Heine’s definition of Judaism meant the “homespun Judaism of everyday life”: the Jewish faces, names, sounds and images, and the Jewish food. Arendt recalled Heine’s singing of the “Schalet”, a Jewish stew made of meat, potato, beans and barley, which could have worked as a true approximation of people, for it would happen around the table:

“*Schalet, shining gleam from Heaven,  
Daughter of Elysium!* –  
Schiller’s ode would sound like this if  
He had ever tasted schalet.”<sup>743</sup>

Heine did not hesitate in embracing the warmth of Jewish circles, that atmosphere of closeness and human affection, which Arendt regarded as typical of pariah societies. The atmosphere became especially warm on Friday evenings, when the “Princess Sabbath” is transmuted, by magic, from a “hairy monster” [*Das behaarte Ungeheuer*] into an “enchanted princess”. The Jewish weekend, the moment of rest, family reunion and prayer, was for Heine a magical moment when the dog becomes a man, when the monster becomes a princess, when Jews are allowed to enter a dignified form of human existence. Despite its economic successes, Jews were social and political “dogs”, they suffered not necessarily a material, but certainly a spiritual humiliation six-days a week. But not on Friday, a day Heine described not without his typical humor:

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<sup>741</sup> Ibid., p. 276

<sup>742</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 131

<sup>743</sup> Heine, H. op. cit., p. 653

“Human now, with human feelings,  
Head and heart uplifted proudly,  
Dressed in clean and festive clothing,  
He goes in his father’s mansion.”<sup>744</sup>

This humored praise of Jewish tradition – better said, of Jewish things, flavors, experiences – contrasted to the parvenu acculturation, in his ironic advise to his “good wife”, who had never heard of Jewish poets:

“I’d advise you, my beloved,  
To make up what you’ve neglected ,  
And to learn the Hebrew language;  
Drop the theater and concerts,

Go devote some years of study  
To this subject – you’ll be able  
To read all of them in Hebrew,  
Ibn Ezra and Gabirol”.<sup>745</sup>

But the “human existence” – the Friday evening – of Jews fades away (“His name is Israel. A witch’s magic [*Hexenspruch*] / Has transformed him to a dog.”). Arendt located in Heine the pariah’s “attitude of denying the reality of the social order and of confronting it, instead, with a higher reality”.<sup>746</sup> Heine’s higher reality, according to Arendt, was *natural* reality, assumed as a realm untouched by the injustices of that human artifice, a realm where all men were born equal, and whence Heine could criticize – indeed, mock – society, and its “slaves and tyrants” as both “unnatural”. Reflecting a sense of powerlessness, Heine attributed to a “magic” force that transformation of Jews (“dogs”) into humans. Arendt also related this mixture of rejection and powerlessness, this “lack of social roots”, this distrust in the possibilities of actual change within given societies, to “the Jewish tendency towards utopianism”.<sup>747</sup> What, according to Arendt, rescued Heine from becoming an unhappy consciousness, from becoming a frustrated revolutionary or an ineffective publicist, was, simply, his “creativity”.

Heine kept himself distant from doctrines and dogmas. Mocking himself for having embraced once more the “old superstition” (the belief in a “personal God” but remaining “free from any attachment to a Church”), Heine declared his willingness to

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid., p. 651. “Mensch mit menschlichen Gefühlen / Mir erhobnem Haupt und Herzen / Festlich, reinlich schier gekleidet / Tritt er in des Vaters Halle.” Heine, op. cit., p. 360

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., pp. 671-672

<sup>746</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jew as a Pariah...’, p. 280

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

“make peace with God and the world” while promising to burn his own offensive poems, for “It is better for the verses to burn than the verse maker”. Heine knew that his positions would bother schools of German thought: the “high clergy of atheism” and his former colleagues, the Hegelians, trained to endure “the vertiginous mountain-paths of the dialectic”.<sup>748</sup> He also replied to anti-Semitism not with apologies, with serious disputations, with theological demonstrations, but with his “fearlessness” and “divine impudence”<sup>749</sup>, with mockery, again, as in *Disputation*, when he gave voice to a rabbi who argued with a priest over the accusation of Deicide:

“That it was the Jews who killed him [Christ]  
Is a hard thing to say now  
Since the *corpus delicti* vanished  
Three days afterward somehow.”<sup>750</sup>

Arendt observed that “laughter does not kill” and “mere amusement” is insufficient to change a social order.<sup>751</sup> But the poet task in not to start a rebellion, but to inspire it. In this sense, Heine accomplished something big. When assimilated Jews avoided any mention to Hebrew words (when they shaved they beards, ran away from their cousins recently arrived from Poznan, when they replaced the word *Jude* in their newspapers), Heine practiced “that true blending of cultures of which others merely talked”. Combining critique and irony, idealism and mockery, he mixed Hebrew, Yiddish and German words, as in his celebration of the *Schlemihl* (“We are descended / From Schlemihl ben Zuri-shaddai”<sup>752</sup>), an Yiddish word for the “unlucky”, a word that entered the German vocabulary through a novel of the writer Adelbert von Chamisso. Because of this, we learn from Heine’s mockery, “Schlemihl...got German Civic rights – I mean the *word* did.”<sup>753</sup> Through Heine, at least Jewish words could be emancipated.

Speaking “the language of a free man”<sup>754</sup> (Arendt also placed him “among the most uncompromising of Europe’s fighters for freedom – of which, alas, German has produced so few”)<sup>755</sup>, Heine built his politics with laughter as an instrument. Singing in

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<sup>748</sup> Heine, op. cit., pp. 694-695. “die schwindligsten Bergpfade der Dialektik.” Heine, H. *Ausgewählte Werke*. Lingen Verlag Köln, p. 396

<sup>749</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jew as a Pariah...’, p. 281

<sup>750</sup> Heine, *The Complete Poems*, p. 684

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280

<sup>752</sup> Here, according to Arendt, Heine replaces the biblical character Shelumiel ben Zurishaddai by his fictive “Schlemihl ben Zurishaddai” (p. 277). “Shelumiel” derives from “Shalom”, meaning something as “peace of God”. “Shelumiel”, in Ydich, means “fool” and “unlucky”, a character always fooled by the destiny.

<sup>753</sup> Heine, op. cit., p. 673

<sup>754</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 283

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282

the “sleepless night of the exile”, the actual exile in France or the imaginary exile of the “lord of dreams”, he made fun of religious men, of Prussian censors, of French culture, of German “spirit” (“Oh German soul, how nobly you soar – At night when you are dreaming”), especially of the German aim at hegemony and organic unity, which could only be achieved in the “airy realm of dreams” [*Luftreich des Traums*], abstract imagination and fictitious sovereignty:

“But in the airy realm of dreams  
 Our sway is uncontested  
 Here we exist unfragmented [*Hier üben wir die Hegemonie*]  
 And rule without a murmur [*Hier sind wir unzerstückelt*]  
 The other nations of the earth [*Die andern Völker haben sich*]  
 Developed on terra firma. [*Auf platter Erde entwickelt*]<sup>756</sup>

His winter’s tale to Germany rendered him the label of anti-German, pro-French (the offenders did not have the trouble of reading his remarks on French culture on those days), and his Jewish condition made him an “unknown author” in Nazi anthologies. Heine, however, was not pro or contra this or that nation. He was in favor of the *Schalet*, the Shabbat dinner, the “German air” and “Rhine’s water flowing”, the German language (hearing it, his heart “began / To bleed away with pleasure”), in favor of the freedom to think and read whatever pleased him (“My head is a twittering nest of books / Good enough to be confiscated.”), and of “A newer song, a better song” that would announce a new world to be built, the “Kingdom of Heaven on earth” – *Wir vollen hier auf Erden schon / Das Himmelreich errichten*.<sup>757</sup> And, anticipating the rage of chauvinistic Germans, he, who self-declared “the free Rhine’s much freer son”, announced that he would “respect and honor your [German] colors when they deserve it, when they are no longer a pointless or servile triviality”. Bringing closer nationalism (or, in his words, *his* patriotism) and humanism, Heine proclaimed that “the whole world will become German” if the “black-red-gold flag” was turned by Germans into “the banner of a free humanity”.<sup>758</sup> That did not happen, as we know it, but Heine, the lord of dreams, proved that the pariah’s voice, flowing from the realm of imagination, challenging from outside social standards and dominant values, can bring, with its mockery and its colorful images, a sound, coherent, realistic (*ideal-realistic*) political message.

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<sup>756</sup> Heine, op. cit., p. 496. Heine, *Ausgewählte...*, p. 409

<sup>757</sup> Heine, *The Complete...*, p. 484. Heine, *Ausgewählte...*, p. 401

<sup>758</sup> Preface to *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (Germany: a winter’s tale). Heine, *The Complete...*, p. 482

Bernard Lazare, the second pariah-form approached by Arendt, was also a nationalist-humanist. Indeed, we find in Lazare much of what Arendt would rework in her context, especially in her takeover on Jewish matters. Both shared impressive similarities. They refused both the abstract utopianism of world-socialists and the chauvinistic closure of tribal nationalists, who practiced, according to Lazare, a national-egoism [*“égoïsme des nations”*]. Against assimilationists, they proudly defended the national character of the Jewish people. Against anti-Semites, they freed Jews from Jewish stereotypes, challenging prejudicial models sustained both by Jews and their enemies. They understood the Jewish Question in its political dimension, and demanded more than economic opportunities and social tolerance. They requested rights and platforms for action. Both defended federal structures, and a basic civic solidarity among peoples and individuals searching for freedom. They fundamentally praised plurality and diversity as the “richness of humanity”,<sup>759</sup> and rejected dogmatism and ideology (“...*et moi que ne suis orthodoxe en rien”*)<sup>760</sup> as obstacles to a free, uncompromised dedication to political affairs.

In specific terms of Jewish politics, both belonged to the Zionist opposition. Lazare broke with Herzl when the latter met the Ottoman Sultan Abd-ul-Hamid for diplomatic conversations, after the Sultan having slaughtered thousands of Armenians. Zionist leaders, supposedly acting in terms of a “*politique pratique* (realpolitik)” betrayed not only the causes of others, but their own cause, their own significance as leaders of an oppressed, persecuted people: “this people, bleeding from its wounds, was put to the feet of a Sultan covered by the blood of others”.<sup>761</sup> That kind of political articulation, “ignoring the means employed”, only repeated the strategies of sovereign, self-interested political bodies. For Lazare, Jewish emancipation implied not the configuration of a simple Jewish nationalism, but of a *new* nationalism, one that would imply not only a geographical migration, but a political and spiritual one. This new nationalism would require “raising the arm” against persecutors, and not “shaking hands” with them. In Arendt’s way, Lazare’s Zionism was a Zionism erected on principles of justice and freedom – for Jews and others.

Indeed, this critical Zionism was, like Arendt’s, a result of Lazare’s description and judgement of Jewish types. As Arendt decades later, Lazare grounded his analysis

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<sup>759</sup> Lazare, B. ‘Le Nationalisme Juif’, in: *La Question Juive*. Paris: Éditions Allia, 2012, p. 152

<sup>760</sup> Ibid., p. 151

<sup>761</sup> Lazare, ‘Le Congrès Sioniste et Le Sultan’, *La Question Juive*, p. 200

not on fixed, predetermined types, but on alternative models formed within Jewish interactions. Lazare's contempt for the parvenu was even stronger than Arendt's. But it was also "politically immanent", for his case was not simply liking or disliking the social-climber, but pointing to its political deficiencies. In his early article *Juifs et Israélites* (1890), Lazare depicted two, almost opposite, figures: the *Jew*, always searching for a rapid fortune and a rapid escalation in whatever position, whatever profession, and the *Israelite*, a pacified type, seeking dignified roles and producing relevant tasks. This simplistic distinction, still grounded on some of the prejudices of Enlightenment (as the negative connotation of the word *Jew*), almost bordering self-hatred, was nevertheless already relevant, for it pointed to the basic problem of un-political leaders conducting the destinies of Jews – the problem of a people "leaving itself to be led by undignified men" ["...de se laisser diriger par des indignes..."].<sup>762</sup>

The distinction would be refined years later, in articles such as *Le Nationalisme Juif* (1898), in which the author deepened on the political problems of the *parvenu* and its project of assimilation. The fundamental problem of the parvenu was then that he denied the common past and the common bond of the Jewish people. He assumed it as dissolvable in his entering to another people or another society. He denied, in short, the Jewish people its existence. However, according to Lazare there *is* a Jewish people – "*Il y a une nation juive*".<sup>763</sup> Anti-semites were right in affirming the unsolvable bonds of the Jewish people. But they were wrong in projecting against it the essence of corruption. Jews are the result not of a fixed dogma, not of a racial predetermination, but of common stories, traditions, since nations are unified by juridical codes, by habits and by ideas, by a distinct name and a shared group-consciousness. Translated to Arendt's terms, a people is a historical result of its works and its actions, of its words and its deeds. Away from seeing it as a fixed continuum, Lazare regarded the *political* constitution of the Jewish nation as requiring a "revolution among ourselves".<sup>764</sup>

This specific revolution would turn the "unconscious pariah" into a "conscious" one.<sup>765</sup> This awareness – becoming "conscious" – is political, not philosophical: it does not arrive at a superior reality presented by pure thought, but it requires a confrontation with the apparent, public reality. There, the pariah would find the reality of its oppression

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<sup>762</sup> Lazare, 'Juifs et Israélites', *La Question Juive*, p. 28

<sup>763</sup> Lazare, 'Le Nationalisme Juif', *La Question Juive*, p. 141

<sup>764</sup> Oriol, P. 'Avant-Propos', in: Lazare, *La Question Juive*, p. 9

<sup>765</sup> "*D'un paria souvent inconscient, elle fera un paria conscient.*" Lazare, 'Le Nationalisme Juif', p. 146

and exclusion, without the escapisms of assimilated (towards pure universalism) or of orthodox (towards pure particularism). By becoming a “conscious pariah”, he becomes “a rebel against” its condition – “the champion of an oppressed people”, in Arendt’s words, or “the soldier of human justice and fraternity”, in Lazare’s.<sup>766</sup> He or she discovers the duty of the pariah according to Lazare: “it is a duty of every attacked human being to defend himself.”<sup>767</sup> Arendt added to it the political imperative that Jews, when attacked as Jews, should defend themselves as Jews.

The language of defense and rebellion did not imply violence, at least not in times when the paths for speech, initiative and persuasion are still open (violence, Arendt reminded, implies powerlessness, despair, impossibility to act). So, in this sense, for Lazare the sentence “I am a nationalist” [*Je suis un nationaliste*] did not mean a specific claim to particular goals. It simply meant “I want to be a fully free man, I want to enjoy the sun, I want to have the right to human dignity.”<sup>768</sup> This national-humanism implied, in Lazare’s terms, an *internationalism* (different from world-socialism), in which nations would be established not by diplomatic interests and opportunities, but by a “human fraternity”. The suspicious of utopianism in Lazare’s message can be mitigated by his defense of human variety, with its prevalence of national and individual differences. Individual, national, political, economic, aesthetic variances were expressions of diversity, “*la richesse humaine*”.<sup>769</sup>

Lazare’s project and vision failed in some significant ways. First, perhaps still grounded on a late Enlightened optimism, he predicted that Western Jews would be never be locked up in ghettos again, and that an “Armenian Solution” to the Jewish Question was unlikely.<sup>770</sup> More fundamentally, he did not see his ideal of a Jewish nation – emerging from grassroots mobilization, through the politicization of masses, with the preference of political and moral principles over pragmatic and diplomatic considerations – fully realized. The dominance of the parvenu, and the illusions of assimilation, were kept intact until the coming of the 1930s. Arendt attributed this failure not to Lazare’s vision, not even to the force of the parvenu, but to the pariah’s incapacity to become “conscious”, to start a political struggle. The pariah, and especially the poor Jewish masses of the East, became a “*schnorrer*”, a traditional beggar of Jewish villages. That

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<sup>766</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 283. Lazare, op. cit., p. 154

<sup>767</sup> “...je estime que le devoir de tout être humain attaqué est de se défendre.” Ibid., p. 148

<sup>768</sup> Ibid., p. 150

<sup>769</sup> Ibid., p. 152

<sup>770</sup> Ibid., pp. 145, 147

is, most Jews simply accepted the standards of instrumentalism and assimilation, of coordination from above and orderly waited for better conditions to be handed out to them, not reclaimed neither made by them. Lazare did not live to see two radicals, almost opposite developments of this scenario: the genocide of European Jews and the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East. But, as he dealt with the circumstances and the factors which created the Jewish “problem”, and as he offered principle-anchored judgements to this situation, his was a meaningful failing, as the one Arendt ascribed to K., one of the pariahs we will discuss in the next section:

“But though his purpose remained unaccomplished, his life was far from being a complete failure.”<sup>771</sup>

#### **7.4 Chaplin and Kafka: the common man, and the little man, in a meaningless world**

Although Charlie Chaplin’s biographical background is a mystery, Arendt took him as another pariah-figure, another Jewish one, whose Jewishness – a condition that Chaplin himself eventually assumed, despite the lack of evidences of his real origin – grounded Chaplin’s artistic elaboration of the “entrancing charm of the little people”.<sup>772</sup> According to Arendt, Chaplin’s “own childhood had taught him two things”: a Jewish experience – the traditional fear of the “cop” – and a “Jewish truth” – that “the human ingenuity of a David can sometimes outmatch the animal strength of a Goliath”.<sup>773</sup> Chaplin’s pariah, his “little man”, is “virtuous” only insofar as he stands in contrast – even if an almost unconscious, involuntary, only improvised contrast – to an absurd order, whose “law” oppresses guiltless men and women, kids and girls, creating so “outlaws” who only want basics goods of life, like a home, a meal, a decent job. This accidental hero is no example of Greek virtues: he has “a thousand and one little failings”, he is “forever clashing with the law”, he becomes a guiltless suspect, and also an innocent rebel, almost unaware of the meaning of his subversive deeds. He combined, according to Arendt, “fear and impudence”: “fear of the law as if it were an inexorable natural force”, and that jumbled courage, that “ironic impudence in the face of its [law’s] minions”, that mocked resistance against the law-enforcers.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 295

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*



Indeed, Chaplin reflected the “hard and real” modern world, in which innocents, still humanized men tried to find a way of living within societies whose authorities and standards became gradually senseless. In *Work* (1915), Chaplin is used as a horse-traction to a poor cart, and his sole privilege, as a horse, is to kick a policeman who blocks his way. Grotesque, animal-like waiters are the incarnation of authority in *Immigrant* (1917), in which Chaplin, recently arrived to the US, tries to escape the “law” of the restaurant where he eats with no money to pay. He had given some money away to a migrant woman in need. In the closing of the First War, Chaplin created peace, in *Shoulder Arms* (1918), not through force and blood, but through his typical innocent, harmless artfulness. As a soldier in the beginning incapable of following the rhythm of a military march (he can't keep his feet straight), he almost accidentally (not with full courage, but with a random luck) finds an opportunity to imprison German officers and the Kaiser himself, putting so an end to the war.

Arendt indicated that, as Chaplin sharpened the critic tone of his comedy, as years passed by, his popularity began to decline, for masses were no longer interested in finding relieve in laughter. His masterpiece *Modern Times* (1936) came as a light, a dim light, when the darkness of technological control and human superfluity began to produce its worst outcomes. With scenes that could work as animated prologues to Arendt's *The Human Condition*, the movie depicts a little man reduced to a little function with no time to scratch himself, to talk with others, to swat a fly (little tasks which are human). He cannot stop working in his assembly-line, for any delay impairs other workers' productivity (it is a collective synchronization) and weakens the “labor force” upon which the industry – and the manager's profit – depends. His time to rest is controlled by the manager, who is now working on a “lunch machine”, which would feed the workers *during* their work, so no break for eating would be needed. It is a proper image for Arendt's concern with the fusion of the natural and the artificial, the unnatural combination of *work* and *labor* under conditions even more inhumane than those experienced by animals in the wild nature.

Tired, with his body movements totally conditioned by the work-routine, the little worker has no time, no energy, no wisdom for protesting against his condition. When he protests, he does it accidentally, trying to give back a fallen flag, and unknowingly leading a mass of unemployed men. Again, he was jailed with no guilt. The rhythm of his mechanic oppression only changes when he finds the warmth of a girl with whom he falls in love. “Where do you live?”, he asked her; “No place – anywhere”. The “law” of modern

times imprison innocent workers, kills unemployed fathers, and chases pure orphans for the sake of a meaningless, absurd “order”, in which struggling for a decent job, for a home, a plate of food seems to be an impossible, heroic task. “What’s the use of trying?”, asks the girl. Chaplin’s hero – according to Arendt, “poor in worldly goods but rich in human experience”<sup>775</sup> – carries a melancholic message, trying not to give in to despair.

In that sense, without giving in, in *The Great Dictator* (1940), Chaplin still tried to recover what Arendt called “the simple wisdom philosophy of the ‘little man’”, by stating great and simple words as “In this world there is room for everyone”, by reminding that dictators, who are “machine-men with machine-minds and machine-hearts”, will “die”, while soldiers are “not machines, you are not cattle, you are men!”, the only men capable of creating a “decent world”, a world with less national barriers and more human solidarity. Chaplin’s ultimate appeal - “Do not despair” - was late. In Arendt’s regard, at that time “came the change”, and the little man ceased to be funny, ceased to accept fun and comedy as little remedies for life troubles and social injustices: “the little man had decided to be a big one”. In Arendt’s interpretation, the decline in Chaplin’s popularity (“This was not the idol of the thirties”) was mainly caused by the willingness of the little men to become a depersonalized part of a “Superman ideal”.<sup>776</sup> Chaplin’s pariah-evaluation was again unpopular, falling “upon unresponsive audiences”, and politically accurate, trying to speak to human ears over lost dimensions of their own humanity.

In 1944, the same year Arendt wrote her article on the pariah, and also on subjects as minorities and racism, she published a “reevaluation” of Franz Kafka in the magazine *Partisan Review*, for the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Kafka’s death. In the article, Arendt explored the tension between the deformation of the social-world and the estrangement felt by someone who wants to have a normal life, to do no harm. When social structures lack reasonable-reasons legitimizing them, when the order of reality seems to be built upon mysterious but necessary forces and authorities, whom no one is able understand or to contact, the man of “goodwill”, trying to live a normal life, becomes a complete stranger. This is, according to Arendt, the underlying motive of *The Trial* [Der Prozess], in which K. hires an advocate who recommends “to adapt oneself to existing conditions and not to criticize them”. What matter is not the truthfulness or rightfulness

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<sup>775</sup> Ibid., p. 288

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

of the social order, but to “accept it as necessary”. If the social-world remains as a necessary force standing beyond the quest for reasons, for meaning, for discussion of truth and justice, then silence or simply “lie” become “universal principles”. Lying becomes a necessity, a sort of “divine law”, and the trial, once the realm of justice, leads to nowhere, only to an unending series of deceptions and delays.

Kafka’s experience with the bureaucracy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, according to Arendt, grounded his depiction of a world “whose senseless automatism has the privilege of ultimate decision”. In a context where interpretation of justice is replaced by regulations and mechanic procedures, instituted in anonymous routine, “a man caught in the bureaucratic machinery is already condemned”.<sup>777</sup> Man, applying or obeying what seems to be necessary resolutions coming from nowhere, becomes, in Arendt’s words, “a functionary of necessity”.<sup>778</sup> By adjusting to an unstoppable system, working as a “machine”,

“man becomes an agent of the natural law of ruin, thereby degrading himself into the natural tool of destruction, which may be accelerated through the perverted use of human capacities.”<sup>779</sup>

Here Arendt anticipated her analogy between necessity and nature, with the emphasis on the declining tendency of natural processes – the “ruin” of the natural. Naturalization of social processes is related, for Arendt, to social decay, to world’s destruction, as human beings use their “perverted capacities” to accelerate a assumedly blind, irresistible functioning. In this line, Arendt rejected psychological and religious interpretations of Kafka (suggested, for instance, by her friend Walter Benjamin ), for the sake of a social-political evaluation of Kafka’s strange, absurd stories. Kafka’s “hero” has no name, his characters “lack...detailed characteristics”, they are nobodies, only identified by a “role” or a “job”, which are nevertheless “indefinite”, providing to them no specific place in the world, no substantial existence. In this depersonalized society, freed from human characteristics as names, individual qualities, spontaneous acts and vivid emotions, “characters” aim “at some kind of superhuman perfection”, living “in complete identification with their jobs”.<sup>780</sup> In depicting the main aspects of a completely depersonalized society, dragged into an absurd world where the absurd is done and

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<sup>777</sup> Arendt, H. ‘Franz Kafka: a revaluation’, in: *Essays in Understanding: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1994 , p. 71

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74

<sup>779</sup> Arendt, ‘Franz Kafka...’, p. 74

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75

supported by human capacities, Kafka chronicled a collapsing world, even anticipating the darkness that came into being only a decade after his death, when victims would not be able to escape from the haunting-dogs of necessity:

“The dogs are still playing in the yard, but the quarry will not escape them, never mind how fast it is running through the forest already.”<sup>781</sup>

In Arendt’s view, Kafka broke with the “realism” of traditional novel, which was based on “acceptance of society as such” and “submission to life as it happens”.<sup>782</sup> Kafka’s work of art fitted the contemporary world, where “real event, real destinies, have long surpassed the wildest imagination of novelists”.<sup>783</sup> He inaugurated a “documentary novel”, in which artistic imagination seeks to portray the structure of reality, with an accentuation of its most grotesque aspects. But this does not imply a “realism”, as if reality is contained into a predictable and limited object. Kafka’s approach meant indeed rejection of reality, as “he was not fond of the world as it was given to him”, and thought that no escape – not even into nature, as Heine imagined – could ever match the fundamental need to alter social-political reality. Kafka’s “documentary”, hence, is a novel about action, indeed, about the permanent attempt to act against the tendencies of a dehumanized and functionalized society. K.’s cry “I want my rights” is heard as a song of non-acceptance, of denunciation against the meaninglessness of social-reality.

K.’s cry is nowhere louder than in his attempt to achieve a normal existence in *The Castle* [Das Schloss], “the one novel in which Kafka discusses the Jewish problem”<sup>784</sup>, according to Arendt. Lacking visible attributes, a name, a place to return and a place to go, “the hero is plainly a Jew”, in Arendt’s words, for “he is involved in situations and perplexities distinctive of Jewish life”.<sup>785</sup> First of all, he is a rootless pariah:

“I shall tell you something of what is keeping me here: the sacrifice I made to get away from home, the long hard journey, the legitimate hopes I had as a result of being taken on here, my total lack of assets, the impossibility of my now finding another suitable job back home...”<sup>786</sup>

Beyond his almost anonymous designation (K.), the hero is only identifiable for reclaiming a job which had been promised to him, the job of land surveyor. But he cannot confirm his job – hence, his existence –, for he has no access to the authorities of the

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<sup>781</sup> Kafka, F. *The Zürau Aphorisms*. London: Harvill Secker. 2006, p. 44

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jew as a Pariah’, p. 290

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

<sup>786</sup> Kafka, F. *The Castle*. Penguin Classics. 2015, p. 70

Castle (which stands upon a distant hill), neither to any representative of the constituted power. His attempts to speak to someone in the castle are regarded by the villagers as impossible, for the authority “doesn’t even speak to people from the village, never has done, not even to someone from the village”. K.’s insistence in confirming his job, his permit to stay, and his normal existence within the boundaries of the village is defined as “awkward and childish” by a landlady who never met someone willing to change the way things are:

“I’m not denying it’s possible, sometimes, to achieve something even completely contrary to regulations and in defiance of tradition, I’ve not experienced anything of the kind myself, though there are said to be instances of it happening, that’s as may be, but it certainly doesn’t happen the way you’re going about it, by constantly saying No, no, and taking anyone’s word for anything, ignoring even the best-intentioned advice.”<sup>787</sup>

Almost every topic of Arendt’s elaboration of the Jewish question is transformed into art by Kafka here. The “hero”, coming from a long journey and a distant place, only wants to survive with dignity in a new territory. He takes authority and justice as serious institutions, but he can only receive from them empty promises, invalid documents, finding no way of directly appealing to responsible incarnations of authority. As justice is unachievable, as no pariah can “enter” the law, what is left is simply the illusion of justice, that is, bureaucracy (“Nowhere before had K. seen officialdom and life as interwoven as they were here”<sup>788</sup>), which only deals with “remote, invisible matters”, while “K. was fighting for something of the most lively proximity, namely himself”.<sup>789</sup> The people, the villagers, are hostile towards him, seeing his request for “the essentials of life” as a strange attitude<sup>790</sup>. The villagers also lack access to power, but they are nevertheless satisfied with the current order, and prone to justify and guard it (“Only a complete outsider could ask your question. Are there control authorities? There are nothing but control authorities”<sup>791</sup>). Instead of justice, the only thing that K. may expect, according to the people, is the favor of being temporarily tolerated. Social reality and social actors, fluctuating around impermanent roles, within an incomprehensible order where no one occupies a permanent space, expels the pariah, as he cannot be absorbed, that is, assimilated by the people, and not even rightly protected by the Castle. He stands alone:

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<sup>787</sup> Ibid., p. 49

<sup>788</sup> Ibid., p. 56

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., p. 55

<sup>790</sup> Arendt, ‘Franz Kafka’, p. 73

<sup>791</sup> Kafka, op. cit., p. 62

“You’re not from the castle, you’re not from the village, you’re nothing. Unfortunately there’s one thing you are, though, namely a stranger, an outsider, someone who’s constant source of trouble...”<sup>792</sup>

The trouble comes because he is willing to confront the absurd social-order with common sense affirmations such as: ‘I’ve not made this endless journey to be sent back again now’. Arendt, who lamented the lack of Jewish action but also comprehended the overwhelming obstacles to it, could only appreciate the rebellion started by the pariah’s strange words: ‘I want no favors from the castle, I want my right’.<sup>793</sup> An order which denies a peaceful pariah his entrance to justice (not supreme justice, but the justice of a documented existence, a regular job and a place to rest) can only be seen as mysterious. Jews claimed for nothing more than a normal existence, for what was “natural”, “normal” or basic of life. At the end, they were engulfed by a process they could not understand, neither resist, a process with semblances of justice and authority, which only fostered injustice, destruction and a seemingly necessary ruin. In *Before the Law* [Vor dem Gesetz], Kafka revisited the impossible attempt to act and to achieve justice, depicting a common man from the country who waits his entire life in front of the building of law. The building is guarded by a mysterious, “powerful”, richly dressed gatekeeper, who repels the common man with vain promises (“It is possible...but not now”) and enigmatic threats (“If it tempts you so much, try it in spite of my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper.”). The common man did not expect that situation, for “the law should always be accessible for everyone”.<sup>794</sup> But he nevertheless decided to respect authority, and wait for “a permission to go inside”. He waited his entire life before the law, until the gatekeeper granted him only the “right” to ask something – why no one else tried to enter the gate during all those years, since “everyone strives after the law”? “Here”, the gatekeeper replies, “no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I’m going now to close it.”

With an enigmatic note lamenting inaction (“this entrance was assigned only to you”), Kafka presented to his reader the paradoxes of action and change in contexts which, inspired in Arendt, one could call of crisis of authority and end of justice. How can one expect the permission of an inaccessible authority? How long should one wait

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid., p. 47

<sup>793</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>794</sup> In the original: “*das Gesetz soll doch jedem und immer zugänglich sein*”

for participation in power? When, in which conditions, will someone feel impelled to take the destiny into his hands, to make justice himself, to decide that he is entitled to rights, regardless permissions and favors, regardless what designated authority dictates? One of the striking characteristic of Jewish inaction was its absolute respect to constituted order, its belief in the stabilization of the world around acceptable levels of normalcy. Kafka's fundamental question, then, was how "normal" is to behave normally, respectfully, orderly before an excluding, oppressive order? Moreover, how should one aim at integration and assimilation to a village that is hostile to oneself?

For Arendt, Kafka was guided by "the perception of this truth": "Men's lives must be normal, not exceptional". Also according to Arendt, this truth was responsible for making Kafka a Zionist.<sup>795</sup> The abnormal position of Jews as pariahs in other societies, as K.s trying desperately to find a regular job and a residence permit, would be abolished if Jews were transformed into a "people like other peoples". Arendt noted that Kafka "could scarcely have wished to become a nationalist". As a major European poet, he wanted to be a "human being", not a member of ethnic society. But "It was not his fault that this society had ceased to be human...".<sup>796</sup> Zionism was a logical solution in a world where normal existence could only take place in national communities.

Kafka, indeed, accepted the fact of his Jewishness, and of the Jewish condition, without paying too much attention to the deeper meanings of Judaism. Departing from his "sense of nothingness"<sup>797</sup>, he complained against his father's attempt of making him to "cling" to the "nothing of Judaism" both seemed to share.<sup>798</sup> Years before, he referred to the "dark complexity of Judaism", recalling the "boredom and the pointlessness of the hours in the synagogue".<sup>799</sup> As Jews, however, existed historically regardless the complexity or simplicity of its religious system, Kafka saw in Zionism a possible platform for justice. He did so without any enthusiasm, as one can read his account to his fiancée of his attendance to the Zionist Congress in 1913:

"I went to the Zionist Congress this morning. I have no real contact. I feel it in certain respects, also for the entire concept, but not for the essential part."<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>795</sup> Arendt, 'The Jew as a Pariah', p. 295

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> Kafka, *I am a memory...*, p. 10

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., p. 147

<sup>800</sup> Ibid., p. 96

To Greta Bloch, he referred to his “non-Zionist (I admire Zionism and am nauseated by it), nonpracticing Judaism”<sup>801</sup>, and two years later he called Felice Bauer “to come to terms with Zionism”.<sup>802</sup> He did not seem to celebrate Judaism, as Heine did, neither did he embrace an active Zionism, as Lazare, but he nevertheless accepted his *Judesein* and the Jewish condition of masses waiting for justice to come from an unjust system. He was another non-dogmatic pariah, who refused the binary logic of simplistic identifications, when he commented attempts of classification of his prose:

“And incidentally, won’t you tell me what I really am: in the last *Neue Rundschau*, *Metamorphosis* is mentioned and rejected on sensible grounds, and then says the writer: ‘There is something fundamentally German about K’s narrative art.’ In Max’s [Brod] article on the other hand: ‘K’s stories are among the most typically Jewish documents of our time.’

A difficult case. Am I a circus rider on 2 horses? Alas, I am no rider, but lie prostrate on the ground”.<sup>803</sup>

Much has been written about Kafka’s complex character, about the experience of “his exile”, on “the most forgotten alien land”, “one’s own body”.<sup>804</sup> If we follow Arendt’s perspective on this pariah, Kafka’s complex subjectivity is not solely the result of an inner-psyche, of a complicated relation with his father. Aiming at a “normal existence” in an abnormal, corrupted social-world aggravated Kafka’s “sense of nothingness”, of dislocation and estrangement. He could not feel at home in a world where it was necessary to engage in meaningless jobs, necessary to conform to a “senseless automatism” of bureaucracy and absent authority, to adapt and to constantly wait for an unresponsive social order, but where it seemed not necessary, where it was indeed impossible, almost absurd, to claim for a dignified existence, within a framework of justice and freedom, to his pariah people. Kafka’s ideal of hero, a hero trying to survive in this absurd village, could only be “exhausted” like a “gladiator”, whose job had been cleaning a corner of his office.<sup>805</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid., p. 111

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>803</sup> Ibid., p. 148

<sup>804</sup> Benjamin, W. ‘Franz Kafka’. In: *Illuminations*. Pimlico, 1999, p. 122, 128

<sup>805</sup> “His exhaustion is that of the gladiator after the combat; his labor was the whitewashing of a corner of the wall in his office.” Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms*, p. 34



## FINAL REMARKS

Instead of summing up all the topics this work has developed, in this final section I will explore some of its findings, taking the pariah, and its related themes, as a “human type” important, as Arendt put it, for the revaluation of mankind “in our days”, meaning not only 1944, but also our present days. Is the pariah an example to our epoch? My general answer is yes, for, as I have argued, we are still living in Hannah Arendt’s world. Most of the problems approached by her are still around us, though in different circumstances, in some aspects more stable, in others more threatening. What makes her thought so interesting to be actualized is that our circumstances are also new, resulting from the reinforcement, but also the decline, of tendencies she has envisioned, with new developments she could not foretell.

I will divide my final remarks into three cases, which will be dealt not in a conclusive way, but in an exploratory one: *the case of multiculturalism*; *the case of nationalism*; and *the case of mass societies*:

### *The case of multiculturalism*

In this work, I tried to avoid, as long as possible, references to authors and concepts from cultural studies. The reason is that it is a field on its own. Moreover, it is a field whose terms are far from being consensual and whose claims are diffuse. To begin with, *culture* itself lacks a clear definition. Is culture related only to ethnic and religious ideas and practices, or nationality, class-association, gender-identification, as any group-formation can be said generative of cultures? In this line, what are exactly the demands of culture: end of specific modes of political oppression, preservation of differentiated cultural symbols, reversal of social inequalities?<sup>806</sup> A Catalan struggling for independence, a LGBT demanding social recognition and a Rohingya applying for asylum are equally fighting in the field of culture?

Hannah Arendt offered no manual to approach these questions. She dealt with issues taken nowadays as cultural ones, but in a very specific context: a non-democratic one, in which a particular story unfolded a novel form of political domination. Can Arendt’s ideas and lessons, in this line, be simply transported into democratic contexts,

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<sup>806</sup> Song, Sarah, “Multiculturalism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/multiculturalism/>>

in which diversity seems to be a principle much more accepted than it was in the early 1900s? That's a more difficult question. To try an actualization of Arendt's terms, we can restrain this discussion by focusing it on the issue of refugees and displaced persons, on which she has written very clearly. According to an estimation of 2016, more than 65 millions people live currently as displaced persons in the earth, as groups and individuals forced away from their homes by political crisis and conflict. Among these, 22,5 millions are refugees (persons fleeing armed conflicts and persecution), and around 10 millions are stateless, that is, individuals who are not recognized as citizens by any state, thus lacking access to rights, juridical protection, state-backed institutions of health, education, security etc. In Arendt's sense, they lack a community where they can appear as persons. This situation is mostly created by political problems, not natural ones, as ethnic conflicts in Africa and religious and civil wars in the Middle East and Arabia. They are not incidental problems, hardly explainable by evil intentions of this or that governor. They are rather structural problems, generated by specific institutions and forms of "organization".<sup>807</sup>

The existence of these millions of displaced proves one of Arendt's point: that plurality is a *fact*, regardless the acceptance and accommodation of this fact by prevalent political frameworks. These millions are existing bodies, living under in-humane, or not fully political, conditions. So the argument for refugees is not primarily a moral one – a matter of compassion, an *ought* to be forced as a perfective duty. Since humanity has now become a *fact*, a global community whose interactions are experienced and felt everywhere by large populations, the case of displaced persons is a political issue in Arendt's sense. It concerns living experiences, it demands judgment, action and commitment, it is open to contingent difficulties and decisions, and it is, on grounding terms, an issue concerning human beings striving for a stable place on earth. It is a matter of sharing the earth and human-political frameworks with individuals who are already among us. Here what is required is something much more basic than the claim for "recognition" of cultures or groups within a polity of rights. We deal rather with groups with no voices, no faces, no rights whatsoever, in the search for a minimal political stabilization.

From the perspective of cultural struggles, Arendt's approach can be said insufficient, for it defends "only" equal rights, "only" granting of citizenship for one to

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<sup>807</sup> source: <http://www.unhcr.org> (access 2018)

share a community of action. Although she defined plurality as the condition of politics, she did not work on specific “group-differentiated rights” (Kymlica)<sup>808</sup> in terms of a positive political discrimination intended to preserve, to foster or to counter social and cultural practices. As we have seen, plurality pervades both the political and the social, being a condition that is more given than created by human artifice. Plurality plays a definitive role in the political, for human beings can only be citizens as unique individuals, formed by different historical, social and familiar contexts. But politics, in Arendt’s terms, is the space where plurality comes together to mediate their differences, to exchange views, to mobilize around public issues, and to build and re-build their common world. Self-reference and absolute-difference are properly displayed in private and social spaces, where affinity and similarity, where “like attracts like”, promotes “natural” and social forms of discrimination.

Defending a Jewish politics, Arendt never thought of self-referent, folkloric groups oriented only to preserve their culture. She envisioned a platform whence Jews could act with others, struggling against their *political* persecution. The *right to have rights*, translated to the Jewish problem, implied the politicization of a before insular, public-shy community, which had suffered political attacks because of their lack of rights, their inability to judge and reluctance to act. It never meant an attempt of ending social or historical anti-Semitism, or, positively, promoting universal compassion towards Jews. It meant granting Jews a political locus and a political voice to defend themselves and to exist among a plural humanity. It meant, in other words, entering political history, not creating an utopian harmony. Arendt’s view can be seen as insufficient regarding political struggles of groups that already have rights, existing in democratic contexts, and using these rights to reclaim more “differentiated rights”. But, from the perspective of displaced persons, Arendt’s *right to have rights*, her defense of politicization, of insertion into political conditions, makes all the difference for masses who are living as the “scum of the earth”, in shelters, camps and state borders. Granting rights and citizenship, as we discussed, means granting humanity to them. It also means granting them the capacity to *begin*, to explore the possibilities of an active life. Seeing refugees and stateless as

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<sup>808</sup> Song, Sarah, “Multiculturalism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/multiculturalism/>>

potential agents is different from seeing them as objects to be protected or simply tolerated.<sup>809</sup>

Now, I remember one discussion, last year, in Fred Dewey's working group in Berlin, when one member – a writer originally from north Scandinavia – accused Arendt of displaying an *Eurocentric* approach. Could Arendt defend plurality and be Eurocentric at the same time? Is there an Eurocentric bias on what she said and wrote? Moreover, are authoritarian, anti-political and a-political forms of organization – let us say a theocracy in Middle East, a monarchy in Africa, a dictatorship in Asia – authentic expressions of human plurality? Or did Arendt think of an “Europeanized” plurality, based on “Western” forms of organization, such as democracy, citizenship and civil liberties? A first answer is *yes*, Arendt's perspective is European. But this answer requires a series of qualifications, for Arendt never worked on an anthropological project of comparison between civilizations.

Her project can be said Eurocentric, meaning that the center of her approach was Europe (or Western tradition). Instead of a clash of civilizations (grandiose terms she would certainly avoid), she was preoccupied with the self-induced collapse of European civilization. She even observed ironically that Europe produced a form of persecution and destruction in which one could find “no longer any ‘uncivilized’ spot on earth” to escape.<sup>810</sup> Moreover, for her, Europe (Western tradition) did not mean a reified entity, an object with all positive or all negative predicates. It was a collection of concepts, experiences, stories and actors, which could be said formative of several traditions within a larger tradition. So, relying on Greek democracy, north-American revolution, German and French writers and artists, Arendt was certainly European. But she was a critical and conscious one: she was an European pariah. Relying on her experience as a German-Jewish woman, she recovered European experiences and principles – the *polis*, the division of power, the *Persönlichkeit* – to criticize authoritarian and destructive trends created by Europe itself: nationalism, imperialism, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism. By being grounded on European experiences and ideas, she was not fixed in a static position, as one is conditioned, but not asphyxiated by one's context.

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<sup>809</sup> Heuer, W. ‘Europe and Its Refugees: Arendt on the Politicization of Minorities’. *Social Research*, Vol. 74, No. 4, Hannah Arendt's Centenary: Political and Philosophical Perspectives, Part II (WINTER 2007), p. 1172

<sup>810</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 388

So, when Arendt judged other “cultures” – she said, for instance, that in “the lands of traditional Oriental despotism, in India and China...” there has been a “contempt for the value of human life”<sup>811</sup>, and that African tribes “behaved like part of nature”<sup>812</sup>-, she did not opine out of anthropologic ignorance. She was being “politically immanent”. European totalitarianism was even more shocking because it destroyed the principle of personality, which seemed consolidated in Western tradition as in no other geopolitical context. Saying that indigenous tribes were “natural”, she did not disdain them as backwards (a bias that would imply an identification of Europe with progress). She simply judged that they had no political organization, no freely chosen and freely controlled framework to act upon. Hence, her judgment spring from the view point of political action and freedom. One could even say that there are civilizations which are more natural, more exotic, more spiritual, healthier, and happier than Europe. Arendt, however, thought in terms of freedom and action, in that interplay between creating a human world and acting upon it, between creating stability and promoting change.

I remember the Scandinavian poet saying that his native region was organized by families who maintained an intimate, ritualistic relation with their natural landscape. Life was oriented to subsistence and preservation of tradition. It is a beautiful form of life, but hardly a politically free and active one – for it shapes a community of repetition, not of action. It is assumed as a necessary and self-evident form of organization, perhaps with little space for inner differentiation. With Arendt, one could say that a historicized humanity is a collection of experiences, institutions and examples, which can serve to inspire or to repulse political actors regardless their geographical location. To criticize and reclaim certain principles, transforming so human communities in spaces not of necessity, but of freedom, is a political attitude in itself, an attitude which renders human being as agents in their contexts. If politics really started in ancient Greece (way before the establishment of the modern concept of Europe), its incorporation by different geographic and temporal contexts shows us that human beings are not imprisoned in cultural walls: they are capable of judging and beginning new experiences of coexistence.

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<sup>811</sup> Arendt, OT., p. 407

<sup>812</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 251

### *The case of nationalism*

This is not to say that there is no tension in Arendt's grounding-condition of *plurality*. This tension is felt in her approach to the question of nationalism. Arendt is normally (and rightly) considered a strong critic of nationalism. As we have seen, nationalism generated political and spatial exclusion. It subordinated justice and freedom to the so-called interests of homogeneous nationalities, leaving groups of individuals and minority-nations with no political voice and, sometimes, with no place in the world. As a result from nationalist competitions, ethnic groups monopolized the state for their own ends, destroying spaces of universal citizenship and plural deliberation, fostering so an atmosphere of ethnic suspicion and hatred inside and outside borders.

However, as we saw, totalitarianism – and the end of humanity – coincided with the decline of the Nation-State order. Racial imperialism is different, in some aspects deeply different, from nationalism. In this line, Margaret Canovan even asked: “is there an Arendtian case for the nation-state?” Canovan presents not only one, but three cases. First of all, she reminds that Arendt estimated the role of the nation-state as a “fortress”, as an entity spatially and institutionally *limited*. To that she opposed the “motion-mania” of imperial and totalitarian regimes (Arendt, for instance, argued that Mao's China did not seem to walk a full-totalitarian path, for it was still bounded by “national interest”<sup>813</sup>). Secondly, the feelings and ideas promoted by nationhood can mobilize popular power, providing energy for sustaining political institutions. The role of nationhood as a “mediator between the personal and the political”<sup>814</sup> would be crucial for fostering the sense of “We”. Last, Arendt's defense of human rights was concomitant to her suspicion of an international state. Canovan argues that nation-states are platforms for stability and protection of humanitarian institutions and agents, in a sort of positive embodiment of the paradox human rights *versus* national rights. Nation-states are not necessarily indifferent to human rights. In some cases, they rather appear as proponents and defenders of ideas and institutions of international justice.

Canovan's takeover, especially in the last case, is stimulating, for it points to what I called the tension in Arendt's approach to the phenomenon of nationalism. Canovan rightly observes that Arendt was not simply “in support of universalist

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<sup>813</sup> Arendt, OT, p. xxxii

<sup>814</sup> Margaret Canovan (1999) Is there an Arendtian case for the nation-state?, Contemporary Politics, 5:2, p. 109

cosmopolitanism”.<sup>815</sup> But I believe that Canovan’s emphasis is weakened by the very formula she uses in her question, the *nation-state*. Two of the positive aspects presented by Canovan – institutional-geographic limitation and human rights protection – are guaranteed, in Arendt’s terms, more by the *state* than by the nation. Multi-national states and other polities lacking a strong sense of nationhood can and, I add, normally do limit expansionistic adventures and protect issues of justice and right. The second case, that of mobilization of political feelings, is more difficult. It relates to a problem for which Arendt had no simple solution: how to politicize people without relying on mythical, fictional identifications and other signs and images that imply immediate, total communion. Arendt worked on distinctions such as tribal and traditional, or inner-oriented and external forms of nationalism, the latter related to historical, state-limited nations grounded on objective memories. These people did not need fictional factors of identification to imagine themselves as a nation. Later, Arendt even distinguished between legend and ideology, the former being related, even if in a ludic and imaginative way, to factual experiences of foundation.<sup>816</sup>

But the core of the issue is that Arendt rejected nationalism (as Canovan herself acknowledged, her “cases” did not mean an “endorsement” of nationalism)<sup>817</sup>, while keeping a reluctant approach to the phenomenon of the nation-state. This reluctance can be found in her approach to Zionism. In my view, Arendt was a *melancholic Zionist*, to borrow Benhabib’s expression.<sup>818</sup> This position does not derive from personal mood, neither from an exaggerated negativity (self-hatred) or enthusiastic support (self-love) to the Jewish politicization represented by Zionism. As I will try to show, her approach to Zionism evolves consistently – as her approach to the issue of nationalities –, in accordance to the immanence of her political categories. In my reading, this is another evidence of Arendt’s coherent (though not systematic) development from historical and political commentaries of the 1930s and 40s to the consolidation of her political thought, worked on the 50s and 60s.

As I presented in this work, Arendt’s critique of assimilation, her early politicization as a Jew, and a large extent of her political insights and lessons resulted from her affiliation with German Zionists, in the late 20s and early 30s. But, before

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid., p. 116

<sup>816</sup> Arendt, OT, p. 272

<sup>817</sup> Canovan, op. cit., 116

<sup>818</sup> Benhabib, S. *Hannah Arendt und die Melancholische Denkerin der Moderne*. Suhrkamp, 2006

moving on, let us ask the question: what was Zionism? In short, Zionism was an intellectual and practical current, born within European Jewish communities, to address the pressing issues of the Jewish question. Many Jews answered to the political and social dilemmas presented by modernity by choosing specific, late-modern shapes for their identities: some assimilated, some felt back into orthodoxy, others became revolutionaries. Zionism was a secular-political alternative for Jews who wanted to become active members – to enter politics, as Arendt would say – in their communities or in communities to be created. Importantly, they wanted to do this as Jews.

In this sense, Zionism was itself an example of how a certain tradition can be re-appropriated, or re-enacted; how, in this case, Jewish tradition could break up with its past passivity to foster a new form of organization. (Referring to diasporic Jews, Leo Pinsker mentioned “This ghostlike apparition of a people without unity or organization, without land or other bond of union, no longer alive, and yet moving about among the living.”)<sup>819</sup> Zionism intended to foment a specific awareness, and commitment of Jews as active Jews. Gradually, it defined its immediate practical goals (organization of youth movements, revival of the Hebrew language, expeditions to potential regions of immigration) along with theoretical discussions on its ultimate purposes – the creation of a party, a movement, a state? So, in broad terms, Zionism established a tradition of itself, within which several parties and groups, according to their political leanings, their regional origins, their views etc., subdivided in different camps: right, left, labor, revisionist, secular, religious, agricultural, urban, Western, Eastern etc. Arendt was a German Zionist, and German Zionists were, as Amos Elon put it, notable more for their cultural and philosophical self-awareness as Jews than for their actual willingness to move to Palestine and build a new home there.<sup>820</sup>

But the fact that Arendt never really considered migrating to Palestine did not prevent her of going there, keeping informed about there, and constantly writing about events of that region. It did not prevent her of understanding the passions and ideas moving Zionists, neither of celebrating part of their achievements. To begin with, relying on the perplexities of the Rights of Man, Arendt wrote that Zionists willing to migrate from Europe to Middle East were not moved by fanaticism, but by “pragmatism”. After being destroyed as European “cosmopolitans”, after having experienced humiliations and

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<sup>819</sup> Quoted by Graetz, op. cit., p. 159

<sup>820</sup> Elon, op. cit., p. 291



violence in the hands not only of Germans but of most European peoples, Jews could only conclude that their human rights, their human status, depended on the constitution of their own “natural” polity.<sup>821</sup>

Moreover, Arendt celebrated the basic will to act of Zionists, to take the destiny in their hands and *do* something. They differed from traditional Diasporic Jews, who normally relied on a distant past and wished a Messianic future. They were also different from assimilationists, who believed in social integration, in the training of Jews to become productive or extraordinary members (the “salt of the earth”) in their present societies. They also distinguished from “internationalist revolutionaries”, who “transferred their hopes to the progressive forces of history which would solve the Jewish Question automatically”.<sup>822</sup> Finally, they differed, of course, from orthodox, with their religious quietism and inwardness. Compared to utopian, messianic and assimilationist tendencies, Zionism even offered at some point, in Arendt’s view, a “sound nationalism” and a “sound realism”.<sup>823</sup>

Zionist’s “furious will to act at any price” was mostly infused by a new type of Jew, an intellectual who, despite having financial stability, felt dislocated from gentile and Jewish-diasporic societies, longing for a radical redesign of his life. His “personal problems could be solved only by a reorientation of the Jewish people as a whole”.<sup>824</sup> These intellectuals, journalists and writers like Herzl and Pinsker, were “crackpots”, trying unfamiliar paths to questions unsolved by established political means. They finally understood the Jewish question as a political one, demanding action and initiative, open involvement, publication of pamphlets, realization of assemblies and gatherings, requiring courage and boldness to start something. They attempted to change the Jewish condition “by direct political action”.<sup>825</sup> Arendt could not leave unnoticed this Jewish disposition to respond to human events and begin a new path.

Moreover, if one recalls abbe Maury’s discussion with Robespierre, centuries before, when the French monk accused Jews of being essentially tied to certain roles and

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<sup>821</sup> Commenting the “unanimous rejection by Jewish refugees in an Italian DP camp of an offer of mass naturalization by the Italian government”, Arendt noted: “it would be a serious mistake to interpret this behavior simply as another example of fanatic nationalist sentiment; these people no longer felt sure of their elementary rights if these were not protected by a government to which they belonged by birth.” Arendt. OT, p. 382 f. 47

<sup>822</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jewish State’, p. 381.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., p. 377

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

activities (“Will you make them soldiers? Will you make them artisans?”)<sup>826</sup>, the Zionist enterprise in Palestine was an dignifying answer, for Jews proved themselves free from deterministic and biological stereotypes held by European anti-Semites. In the *yishuv*, the pre-state community, Jews became peasants and laborers, they built farms, bridges, roads, cities and small villages, embracing every sort of social and economic role. They were bankers and truck drivers, journalists and cooks. That enterprise, which Arendt referred in 1948 as “the great hope and the great pride of Jews all over the world”<sup>827</sup>, was an example of a group of people *building a world*, a human artifice, out of their collective initiative and their personal resolve.

It could also be seen as an experience in the *right to have rights*: the basic right of being reincorporated to a part of the Earth where one can labor, work, and act. Jews labored the soil, worked on infrastructure, memorized an old culture but also created a new one, and established new institutions. In fact, Arendt praised one of these new institutions, the *kibbutz*, as “one of the most promising of all social experiments made in the twentieth century”.<sup>828</sup> Those agrarian, collective communities, remaining outside the influence of daily politics and “the more noxious ideologies of our times”, could experiment and create a “new form of ownership, a new way of family and child education”. Trying to begin something on their own terms, focusing on practical matters in a creative way, they realized “new laws and new behavior patterns, establishing new customs and new values, and translating and integrating them in new institutions”.<sup>829</sup> The kibbutz model was a “hope” for those Jews and non-Jews “who have not and never will make their peace with present-day society and its standards”.<sup>830</sup> The practical and symbolic importance of the kibbutz to the consolidation of Israeli identity was an ultimate proof of a Jewish capacity to being anew, to explore unseen possibilities.

Arendt’s enthusiasm was, of course, due to the fact that her people, at that time still living the consequences of displacement and annihilation in Europe, could start a pariah’s world-building in another part of the Earth. Zionism had enacted a “revolution...directed not only against a system, but against a destiny”, in Ben-Gurion’s

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<sup>826</sup> Against Robespierre’s proposal of turning Jews into citizens, Maury argued that Jews were essentially traders [sont “*uniquement occupés du commerce*”], having no past as laborers, not even under king David neither king Salomon. Asking “*En ferez-vous des soldats? ...En ferez-vous des artisans?...*”, the abbe never saw a General in the world capable of making Jews fighting on the Shabbat. Robespierre. *Pour le Bonheur et pour la Liberté: discours*. Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2000, pp. 29-30

<sup>827</sup> Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland”, p. 394

<sup>828</sup> Ibid., p. 395

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

words<sup>831</sup> (although Arendt disliked him, his sentence is very much in tone with her essential comprehension of Zionism). That experience also provided a larger example to Arendt's political theory, in which the historical and the conceptual were intimately related in an experience of displacement and replacement, of movement from passivity to "direct action" and world-involvement. But political events always bring up some "plagues", as they are not pure products of an infallible intellect. In the case of the Jewish experience in Palestine, and the soon consolidation of the State of Israel, these were, according to Arendt, problems of structure and also of contingency.

Despite praising Herzl's resolution to act, and also his open defiance of parvenus and assimilated, who thought in economic and social categories, and not in political terms, Arendt was very critical of some tenets of his worldview. First of all, Arendt said that Herzl understood some political mechanisms of anti-Semitism, but he then derived from it fixed premises, as he believed in reality as having an "unchangeable structure, always identical with itself".<sup>832</sup> This fixed reality was, in his eyes, the reality of stable nation-states living side by side and taking care of their own interests. The aim of Zionism would be, thus, "finding a place within the unchanging structure of this reality", and so creating a polity that "would be able to develop their own isolated organism".<sup>833</sup> This thesis of separatism was related to the role of anti-Semitism, as a negative force, in Herzl's worldview. His thoughts were reified in a soft-ideology which assumed anti-Semitism as an "eternal" force of history, which would be nevertheless solved with the creation of a Jewish state. As Herzl interpretation was based on pre-racial, merely national forms of anti-Semitism (typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), he "logically" concluded that anti-Semitism only endured because Jews lived as foreigners in other's states. Anti-Semites simply wanted Jews to go somewhere else. That was true regarding "traditional" anti-Semitism (most Polish anti-Semites, for instance, were in favor of a Jewish state)<sup>834</sup>, but not of the "new sect of racists whose loyalties and hatreds did not stop at national borders."<sup>835</sup>

So Arendt held that Herzl's Zionism was isolationist and utopian. From relying on fixed premises and fixed ends, he disconnected from living realities and possible goals, thus assuming that a Jewish state would create a state of harmony, for Jews and anti-Semites. More profoundly, the future-optimism was grounded on a present-pessimism, or

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<sup>831</sup> Quoted by Graetz, *op. cit.*, p. 159

<sup>832</sup> Arendt, 'The Jewish State', p. 382

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>834</sup> Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 82

<sup>835</sup> Arendt, 'To Save the Jewish Homeland', p. 383

simply fear, as Herzl's history was basically reduced to this tension between Jews and anti-Semites. This pessimism hid a basic powerlessness, camouflaged by the aspiration to sovereignty: if Jews were surrounded by anti-Semites, they could trust nobody and enter no alliance with others. These premises were soon to create an illusionary sense of power grounded on fear and distrust. Arendt conceded that this reactive position was *understandable*, especially regarding the "fantastic injustice"<sup>836</sup> which Jews had suffered in Europe. But here the interaction between comprehension *and* judgement appears again: she could comprehend a psychological and political pattern of behavior after the catastrophe (retraction, distrust, fear, and the will to live only among Jews), while judging it as *politically problematic*.

The consequence of Herzl's view was that Zionism could only be realized in the form of a nation-state, a Jewish state. For Arendt, this demand, at Herzl's time (19<sup>th</sup> century), "seemed neither doctrinaire nor utopian". Indeed, for the epoch, national self-determination was "almost self-evident justice."<sup>837</sup> But this was not the case of the 1940s, a decisive period for Zionism, and a period, according to Arendt, "when the whole concept of national sovereignty had become a mockery".<sup>838</sup> Arendt, as a Zionist ("of sorts")<sup>839</sup>, criticized a view that would become dominant among the Zionist movement and the Jewish masses, the Herzlian one. She belonged to defeated, marginal groups within the movement: she came from the German Zionists, who suffered an "irreparable loss of prestige" after Hitler, and allied with groups which proposed bi-national and federal models to shelter the Jewish *home* (not the Jewish *state*) in Palestine. Arendt favored Zionist parties as the *Ihud* [Unity], organized by figures as Judah L. Magnes, Ernst Simon, Henrietta Szold, Martin Buber, and she also supported the role of "loyal opposition" played by anti-nationalistic, Zionist-Socialist groups as *Hashomer Haza'ir* and *Ahdut Avodah*. The *Ihud*, for instance, advocated the foundation of a bi-national state with political spaces equally shared by Jews and Arabs.

These groups and these views, mostly during the period when the news on the Final Solution spread around the world, were gradually supplanted by what Arendt called the "growing unanimity"<sup>840</sup> achieved by Herzl's Zionism. Politically, the consolidation of

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<sup>836</sup> Ibid., p. 391

<sup>837</sup> Ibid., p. 383

<sup>838</sup> Ibid., p. 384

<sup>839</sup> Ascheim, S. E. *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: intimate chronicles in turbulent times*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 42

<sup>840</sup> Arendt, 'To Save the Jewish Homeland', p. 390

unanimity came in the Biltmore Conference, in 1942, in New York, when the proponents of a Jewish state (“Commonwealth” was the actual term) defeated the proponents of bi-national and federal options. Arendt, familiar with the traditional plurality of opinions within Jewish circles, lamented that “Jewish businessmen”, normally indifferent to politics, “Jewish philanthropists”, initially reluctant in helping to build a community in Palestine, “the readers of the Yiddish press”, who had been looking to the USA as the “promised land”, and several groups within worldwide Jewish communities united “in the firm conviction that a Jewish state is needed”.<sup>841</sup> This was an unacceptable turnover for Arendt, as “unanimity of opinion” destroys the “fact that we are different by nature and by conviction”. This closure within mass-unanimity, in Arendt’s eyes, related to the separatism implicated by Herzl’s Zionism. Although she distrusted an abstract universal revolution, Arendt always thought of Jewish emancipation as requiring an articulation with other groups and nationalities struggling for justice or freedom. She followed, again, Lazare, who had broken up with Herzl, when the latter met the Turkish Sultan for political negotiations, despite the news of Turkish violence against Armenians.

Being self-oriented, nationalism is not necessarily aggressive, but it is essentially indifferent to others. It rests on the illusion of sovereignty: that one’s existence is “unrelated to all other events and trends”.<sup>842</sup> Arendt criticized the Zionist establishment for acting exactly like old fashioned nation-states, guided by the classic *raison d’etat* principle. In this sense, the Jewish state *assimilated* to the old nation-state order, struggling for the *normalization* of a once pariah-cosmopolitan people, which carried a specific message of justice.<sup>843</sup> This radical pragmatism, in Arendt’s view, turned to be “unrealistic”, for it disregarded the “only permanent reality”, a reality beyond ideologies and specific political decisions: “the presence of Arabs in Palestine”.<sup>844</sup> Instead, Zionists searched the support of “super-powers” like England, the USA, the USSR, while gradually seeing Arabs as essentially political rivals and ethnic enemies, thus giving up in principle any form of cooperation. For Arendt, again, it was *understandable* that, coming from past oppression, Jews (in the aftermath of genocide) and Arabs (after imperialism) developed a tendency “to shut themselves off from the rest of the world and

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<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> Arendt, ‘The Jewish State’, p. 384

<sup>843</sup> “She turned this myth on its head: Zionism is the real assimilation, whereas Diaspora is anti-assimilation, or dissimulation, a term she did not use.” Zimmermann, M. ‘Hannah Arendt, the Early ‘Post-Zionist’’. In: *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, p. 191

<sup>844</sup> Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, p. 394

develop nationalist superiority complexes of their own.”<sup>845</sup> But, politically speaking, this tendency was *wrong*, for it disregarded the very fact that Jews and Arabs existed simultaneously in that land. In this sense, an “Arab-Jewish cooperation” was “not an idealistic daydream but a sober statement” of the fact that Jewish and Arab aspirations were entangled, that the option of sovereignty was illusionary and “suicidal”, and that any military victory would create a self-destructive status quo for both parts.

Moreover, a cooperation would “show the world that there are no differences between two peoples that cannot be bridged”.<sup>846</sup> Arendt refused the idea that there is an *essential* animosity between Arabs and Israelis. She relied on the principle of indeterminateness (nataality) of human interactions: there is no natural law forcing up conflict between the two people. Indeed, Arendt still believed, in the 1940s, that, despite the tendency of the Jewish community in Palestine becoming a “small warrior tribe”, a modern Sparta, and despite Arab nationalism assuming an “increasingly fascist coloration”, a political elite in both sides, acting with responsibility, with no desperation and no fanaticism, could still work on more cooperative political configurations.<sup>847</sup> So Arendt defended as “axiomatic criteria” to judge the situation in Palestine the following: the establishment of a Jewish “homeland”, instead of the “pseudo-sovereignty of a Jewish state”; “a solid basis of Jewish-Arab cooperation”; “elimination of all terrorist groups”; immigration of Jewish displaced persons to Palestine; “local self-government and mixed Jewish-Arab municipal and rural councils”.<sup>848</sup>

One could easily argue, especially with today’s eyes, that Arendt’s proposal was too optimistic, hardly achievable. How would a people coming from the experience of total failure of integration and assimilation trust the possibilities of a new pluralistic adventure? As Arendt herself recognized, sovereignty and self-orientation seemed more “logical” and “natural”. Moreover, why would one trust the possibilities of a federated or bi-national system in lands marked by experiences of imperialism, subjugation and ethnic animosity, with no democratic tradition whatsoever? These are questions which Arendt did not ignore. They also resemble the kind of reasoning that proposed “no way out” to European Jews faced by the assumed *necessity* of accommodation and assimilation. Arendt always considered alternative configurations. Her *ideal realism* worked against

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<sup>845</sup> Ibid., p. 396

<sup>846</sup> Ibid.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., p. 397

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., p. 401

tendencies which she assumed as politically destructive (as undermining conditions for plurality and political coexistence). So, against the suspicion of being “utopian”, Arendt defended only a “tentative effort” of cooperation. She observed, ironically, that it was “no time for final solutions”. Since “politics seldom offers ideal or eternal solutions”, she defended an experiment in co-participation: in that context, specifically, a trusteeship, backed by the US, Great Britain and the United Nations, supporting a “federated structure” with “Jewish-Arab community councils”, working on “the lowest and most promising level of proximity and neighborliness”. The aim was “pacification and nothing more”.<sup>849</sup>

In 1948, Arendt judged that it was “still not too late”. Today the situation is quite different. Some of the tendencies indicated by Arendt aggravated: Israel is “surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population”, “physical self-defense” and “military strategy” are priorities over “social experiments” and the free development of culture and political thought. Palestinian Arabs are even more alienated from the exercise of political power, and Palestinian leaders have institutionally embraced terrorism as legitimate politics. Both sides see each other, increasingly, through de-humanized, ideological representations. Conflict seems to be rooted in *necessary* causes. However, as Arendt reminded, no political process is doomed to be fatal. There are indeed, hidden or apparent, counter-tendencies, explored and still unexplored possibilities, to create political approximation rather than exclusion. As Canovan argued, a sovereign state is not necessarily unjust. The State of Israel, in its actual shape, despite being a *nation*-state, is also a democracy with Arab parties, civil liberties, and levels of economic prosperity reaching its Jewish and non-Jewish citizens.

Fundamentally, however, Israel can hardly escape the logic of majority-minority, and the feeling of non-Jewish groups (and also some excluded Jewish groups) of living almost as second class citizens, under differentiated duties and rights, due to a confusion between citizenship and ethnic affiliation. The very formula *Jewish democracy*, or Jewish state, contains the inner contradictions, and the competing tendencies within Israeli politics and society: on the one hand, the inclusive, egalitarian, democratic Israel, the Israel of LGBT rights, of the Supreme Court, of pro-peace groups, of cross Jewish and Arab civil-social interaction, the Israel of cultural and political pluralism; and on the other, the chauvinistic, self-centered Israel, moved by the principles of fear and self-

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<sup>849</sup> Ibid., p. 400.

defense, and ruled by religious and nationalistic forces grounded on ethnic exclusivity. A status quo based purely on self-defense and occupation of hostile neighborhoods would be called by Arendt as political unsustainable, regardless the illusion of inner peace among Israelis. This is the peace of citizens who can live in relative security and prosperity in their streets, but need to conceal their Israelis identities when travelling abroad, for they cannot appear as Israelis to the world.

A former European pariah-people built so a sort of “pariah-state”, as Feldman observed,<sup>850</sup> which did not solve the problem of anti-Semitism. It did not find so far a stable place within the “family of nations”. Assuming the concept of nationhood, the pariah-people generated its own pariahs. These consequences were not due to an essential Jewish malignity or stupidity, greed or selfishness. They resulted from the choice of problematic political frameworks and concepts. Some basic psychological and social reactions, both from Jews and Arabs, entered in a process of mutual determination with other-alienating institutions and mentalities. But this process, again, though rigidly rooted in ideological views, and in memories of terror and pain, is neither necessary or irreversible: differences are not biologically fixed, and the very experiences of *promising* and *forgiving*, defined by Arendt as essentially political, can enact new political tendencies in the region.<sup>851</sup>

A few years before Arendt’s commentaries on Palestine, Joseph Roth, who also opposed the ideology of nationalism, wrote the following lines, concerning the wandering of Jews for a new political home:

“In seeking a ‘homeland’ of their own, they are rebelling against their deeper nature. They are no nation, they are a kind of supranation, perhaps the anticipation of some future form of nation.”<sup>852</sup>

Arendt did not give up of thinking of Jews, and other pariahs, as a sort of political and social vanguard, carrying principles and examples for this “anticipation of some future form of nation”. Her reluctance concerning nationalism can be explained through the stories of these pariahs. It also explains her melancholic takeover on the Jewish politicization. As Beiner rightly summed up, she “wanted Jewish politics but not Jewish

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<sup>850</sup> Feldman, R. Introduction..., p. lxiii

<sup>851</sup> Ezrahi, Y. ‘Arendt’s Banality of Evil Thesis and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. In: *Thinking in Dark Times*, pp. 153-157

<sup>852</sup> Roth, J. ‘Wailing Wall’, in: *What I Saw: reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2003, pp. 47-48



nationalism”.<sup>853</sup> This position resulted not from any insensibility, neither from an abstract utopianism, but from the political stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we can apprehend from her analysis of Zionism, she did not think in terms of an abstract cosmopolitanism,<sup>854</sup> as if every city and town should be Berlin, London or Toronto, and as if every Jew should migrate to multi-national states as the US or Switzerland. Looking closely to contingent, mutable realities, she was open to diversified manifestations of human plurality, while grounding her thoughts on facts as the existence of others and the inexistence of emptied spaces on earth.

In this line, Arendt was not against *nations*. Indeed, important questions of her thought evolved from the factual existence of historical and cultural nations. She was against *nationalism* as a self-referent system of ideas and attitudes. If grounded on the illusion of sovereignty, nationalism becomes necessarily unrealistic and worldless, for it separates itself from the interactions of a globalized humanity. Arendt never demanded an immediate identification of nations and groups (that would deny the very fact of plurality), but she politically expected that groups and nations, if they wanted to ground their actions in the reality of plurality, would acknowledge that they *must* live with others, because they *do* share the earth with others. The political fallacy of insular communities derives from their sense of remoteness and separateness, as if they were independent from larger political structures. Similarly, nationalism based on homogeneous (unanimous) images and ideas of itself is per force exclusionary, working against the fact of plurality. They tend to create unstable orders, for they produce internal and external pariahs, people with no political presence.

Regarding the argument that nationalism provides a basis of energy and emotions to sustain institutions, it can be said that, depending on the shape of that nationalism, these energies can end up undermining democratic institutions, by conquering them to specific nationalistic feelings and purposes. To this point, the distinction between *demos*, “the nation as a self-governing democratic body of citizens who may or may not be ethnically homogeneous”, and the *ethnos*, “the nation as an entity that is ethnically, linguistically, or religiously homogeneous”, is instructive.<sup>855</sup> This is not simply a matter of random choice between empirical alternatives. Arendt noted that the more a community imagines

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<sup>853</sup> Beiner, R. ‘Arendt and Nationalism’, in: The Cambridge Companion..., p. 49

<sup>854</sup> With her non-utopian, prudent look onto historical configurations, Arendt noted that “The abolition of war, like the abolition of a plurality of sovereign states, would harbor its own peculiar dangers.” Arendt, ‘Karl Jaspers: Citizen of The World?’, *Men in Dark Times*, pp. 93-94

<sup>855</sup> Benhabib, S. *The Reluctant...*, p. 43

itself in natural, ethnical terms, the less it requires political processes as public deliberation and mediation of differences; inversely, in a *demos* related by world-institutions (and not identified by “nature”), political experiences, as the ongoing participation through argumentation and group-formation, through judging and acting, foment the *constitution* of a people.

Thinking of our days, the present backlash of nationalism – the electoral manipulation of a nostalgic nationalism in the US, the growth of nationally-centered parties in Eastern Europe, the movement towards British isolation, both phenomena undermining a federated Europe, and the reuse of arguments of national sovereignty everywhere, with a decisive political threat to global matters such as the crisis of displaced persons and the ecological emergence, which cannot be solved in the framework of national interests – is not necessarily a counter proof to Arendt’s position. Firstly, because there was in Arendt some margin of acceptance and understanding of the role of national-identities in a pluralistic world. The problem starts when these nationalities regard the world as beginning and ending within their particular borders. In these cases, when nationalism puts itself above the political frameworks in which people can cooperate with each other, Arendt’s case becomes even more relevant, for she used to work against what was seen as inescapable trends.

### ***The case of mass societies***

In a lecture at the University of Berkeley, in 1955, Arendt referred to politics through the metaphor of an “oases” which stand in contrast to the “desert-world” and “desert life” created by modern conditions.<sup>856</sup> Oases, as spaces of colorful vitality disrupting the undifferentiated landscape of desert, are capable of arising “passion” and “action”. Indeed, the oases only exist because there is a political passion, courage, lying “at the root of action, of becoming an active being”.<sup>857</sup> In contrast, “adaptation” and “escapism” are behaviors that establish the desert as a necessary landscape, the only possible home for human beings. Arendt related this preparation for desert-life with modern psychology, with its focus on the inner individual – with the desert inside – and the elaboration of internal mechanisms to conform to social reality. This desert-world, according to Arendt, “menaces us not only with no-thingness but also with no-

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<sup>856</sup> “The History of Political Theory”, consulted as the epilogue to Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 201

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202

bodyness”.<sup>858</sup> The problem is not only nihilism, the belief in nothing, but the passivity of no-bodies in sustaining a meaningless and dehumanized world.

For Arendt, desert-life does not mean tedium. The conditions of desert may create “sandstorms”, of which totalitarian movements were only the most radical expression of the arid social forms promoted by modern mass societies. The pariah, as we saw, cannot adapt to the desert. In the stories of European Jews, we saw that there were larger efforts of assimilation to excluding and oppressive societies, instead of attempts to create small oases of citizenship and dignity. The effort of assimilation ended up contributing to form a huge sandstorm in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arendt’s quest for the political activation of the pariah ran parallel with her concern with the sandstorms, the destructions and ruins, that may be caused by the “perverted capacities” of depersonalized individuals engulfed in pathological societies.

Here, if one looks closer to the conditions of the desert-world of mass societies, the meaning of the pariah and the meaning of politics come together. In *Society and Culture*, Arendt listed the following attributes (or lack of it) of the mass man:

“his loneliness...regardless of his adaptability; his excitability and lack of standards; his capacity for consumption, accompanied by inability to judge or even to distinguish; above all, his egocentricity and that fateful alienation from the world...”<sup>859</sup>

Under the agitation of modern societies, with its endless interactions of social media and the overwhelming flux of isolated bits of information, runs the deeper currents of confusion and hysteria. The rejection of authority and tradition created a desert which nevertheless promotes the storm of socially-exchanged prejudices, slogans, images which claim truth in a skeptical universe. Social interactions and social shares, mostly related to subjective affinities and temporary impressions, are easily consumed and exhausted, only reinforcing the loneliness of crowds. The sense of impermanence and mutability, politically verified by the rapid fluctuations of the “public opinion”, are socially complemented by functional relations determined by momentary “values”. This, as Arendt noted, does not lead necessarily to political inertia. There may appear a simulacrum of political participation through the public invasion of ideology-based and image-made statements. The modern “confirmation bias”, the tendency to seek for additional information, interpretation, ideas that confirm one’s initial belief, retro-alimented by internet algorithms, is only one actualization of Arendt’s diagnosis of the

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid., p. 204

<sup>859</sup> Arendt, ‘Society and Culture’, p. 278

modern withdraw from the world to the subjective-mind.<sup>860</sup> In this context, daily politics became a sort of civil war between particular groups, a dispute for space among self-oriented associations, to be fought with the new weapons of mass communications.

Mass men are being dragged into politics without leaving their “shields from experience”, still closed in “pseudotheories” and worldviews, or at least still relying on fixed prejudices. Arendt noted that prejudices are necessary, for no man can “form an original judgment about everything”.<sup>861</sup> Prejudices – statements passed by without reexamination and further study – were regarded by Arendt as “natural” in the social realm, with its inherent habit of discrimination in terms of affinities and its assumption of “values” and “standards” which are immune to judgement and critical thinking. But this is the social. One of the “task of the political”, for Arendt, is “to shed light upon and dispel prejudices”, and “to train people to be unprejudiced”.<sup>862</sup> We’ve seen how Jews and other pariahs were blocked from politics by prejudices, images and ideologies that falsified their experiences and “ossified” them into dehumanized objects. They could not act, and they could not be truly judged and appreciated because of the images made of them. In this line, Arendt noted that prejudices, if they enter the realm of politics, become dangerous, because they “make both judgment and genuine experience of the present impossible”.<sup>863</sup> The political significance of the pariah, in this regard, is to break up the “shields” of prejudices and images with new forms of human interactions.

With an emancipation on his own terms, the pariah defies conventional standards and dominant prejudices with his voice and his presence, that is, with his original judgements and originative deeds. We deal here not only with a new idea that is brought to the public, but with a new face, *who* adds his view into the political texture. In this line, Jerome Kohn even noted that “being a judge and a conscious pariah...are virtually synonymous”.<sup>864</sup> Let us consider the context which Arendt regarded, that of the collapse of tradition and the desert of depersonalized, automatized societies. The pariah does not come as an authority from above, grounding his acts and words on ultimate criteria for truth or goodness. He comes *from outside*, from experiencing oppression and dislocation,

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<sup>860</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset famously described the “hermetism of the soul” and the “renunciation of the common life” characteristic of modern masses, with their aversion to “all forms of intercommunion”, from “objective standards” and “conversation” to parliamentary politics and science – and other realities outside them. Ortega y Gasset, J. *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993, p. 74

<sup>861</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 99

<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid., p. 101

<sup>864</sup> Kohn, ‘Preface...’, p. xxviii

thus regarding a corner of experience which remains ignored by the larger society. Or, in “his becoming an active being”, he may put himself, willingly, outside society, outside social standards, values and prejudices, becoming a sort of voluntary pariah, who is more concerned with presenting an original judgement than with adjusting to a certain role or function of the prevalent society.

Along with Arendt’s critique of modern mass societies, came her evaluation of mass democracies, with its favored form of organization, that of government and representation via the party-system. Arendt reminded that modern democracies relied on the authoritarian tendency to administer people and human affairs as if they were things to be managed in accordance to objective and irrefutable needs of society. In this context, modern parties tend to become autocratic structures, claiming infallibility, presenting policies and programs assumed as necessities, to be executed by society and for society. The only thing that the citizen can expect, in this system, is to achieve “a certain control” over the execution of party-programs and government-policies, or to be “represented” in the process. For Arendt, it was clear that no one can be represented: only social interests and social moods could be barely “ascertained objectively”, and said to be represented in an abstract level. Mass democracy, then, becomes a clash of interests – normally private interests translated into the interests of “group of voters”, which tend to force their “interests” over other groups’ preferences. Arendt compared these political relations with those of “blackmailing”, “forcing obedience”, of ruling in accordance to “at least supposedly, in the interest of the many”.<sup>865</sup> Mass democracy, in this context, tends to create passive relations, depoliticizing its citizens, which are regarded as objects with interests to be administered or desires to be attended. In this scenario, political leaders do *not lead*, but *follow* what is “objectively” defined by polls or experts as the preferences of the masses.

Even modern revolutions could not break with this attempt to represent and to govern others. The “fear of the new”, for instance, was for Arendt one element in the actuation of the “professional revolutionaries”, like Marx and Lenin, who regarded the revolution as a process to be controlled, and power as a reality to be created by force – using so the old categories of absolute command. In this line, the “name ‘Soviet Union’” became a “lie”, for the soviet system, the experience of councils – of workers, artists,

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<sup>865</sup> Arendt, OR, p. 261

peasants, students – was brought into “impotence” by the one-party dictatorship.<sup>866</sup> In Arendt’s view, the party-system and the one-party-dictatorship were equally inappropriate to deal with modern political problems, such as public alienation, decline of authority, social automatism, and individual withdraw from responsibility. In a sense, they reinforced these problems.<sup>867</sup> So, for Arendt, adequate to the “federal principle, the principle of league and alliance among separate units”<sup>868</sup> was the experience of the “councils”, the local assemblies of political participation and deliberation, typical of revolutionary moments as the *commissions* in Paris in 1848, the soviets of 1917, the *Rätesystem* created after the First War in German cities, the councils of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and other locally-enacted gatherings of citizens.

What was truly political in the council experience, according to Arendt, was not its capacity to solve problems neither to execute resolutions. There, “people who belonged to no party”, who “crossed all party lines” could come together “to act and to form opinion”.<sup>869</sup> Flesh and bone citizens could enter power, experiencing action and forming their own judgements and opinions through public debate and deliberation. This no party-system, democratic or authoritarian, could do: represent one’s opinion, one’s own deeds and words in a public venture. In a framework like that of councils, one becomes a “participator”, not a “represented”. He counts as someone *who* is more than a vote, a statistic in a social trend, a member of a class of interest. Arendt took the opposite path of contemporary political theorists who assume that political institutions must be larger and larger in order to absorb millions and billions of human beings. For Arendt, expert decision, mass representation, diplomatic negotiations share the tendency of washing away citizens from spheres of power.

Arendt refused to comply with the necessity of modern patterns, and their capacities to foment “sandstorms”. She recalled the elemental insight that freedom “has always been spatially limited”. Border of territories, walls of cities, and even international treaties establish spatial and institutional limits that create the “space of appearance” which Arendt understood also in literal terms: a space to be, to exist, to move and to speak among others. As most of our actual political institutions seem to be unable to solve the problems created within their own framework – why would, for instance, the party-

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<sup>866</sup> Ibid., p. 250

<sup>867</sup> For a critique of the politically noxious role of parties, see: Weil, S. *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*. New York: New York Review Books, 2013

<sup>868</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 259

<sup>869</sup> Ibid., p. 255, 259

system, created in the context of class-societies, be adequate to a society lacking class-structure? -, new political “oases” can only be established from outside the political status quo. Not every dissent, not every independent citizen can be said a pariah, but certainly pariahs – political, not only social pariahs – can start small revolutions with their participation in public affairs through alternative channels and renovated power-experiences. As Arendt recalled, this requires the “courage”, the voluntary resolution to act and to take care of public matters, to be “self-selected” among those who are politically responsible. The pariah, with its capacity for independent rebellion and original judgement, is an example to recover a republican spirit in times when the common matter is mostly corrupted by the political establishment itself. By challenging mass societies, pariahs per force challenge the political structures created for its social functioning.

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In this work, I have chosen an interpretative and explanatory approach to Hannah Arendt’s topics, and to related ones, preferring a positive dialogue with her terms, texts and examples. I did not try to problematize every concept or insight of Arendt, for she never aimed at building the vision of an universe with no “holes”, as Heine put it, or a scientific body analytically formed by logical units. Some of the perplexities in her thought are too obvious to be mentioned, especially if we remain aware that she sought “unfamiliar definitions to familiar words”. She did not take, for instance, representative democracy for granted; she avoided the correspondence between power and violence; she tried to think beyond the limits of the modern state; refused grounding political debates on an economical struggle between capitalism and communism. Arendt is of no help for a political scientist seeking tips on how to win an election, neither to a politician willing to mobilize the masses at any cost. She avoided the pseudo-scientific language of “human sciences” working, on the image of modern engineering, to “solve” problems objectively. By rejecting the dominant political notions and slogans of our epoch, she risked being called, as she was indeed, a nostalgic, outdated and utopian thinker.

So the pariah can find himself as a melancholic figure, sometimes misunderstood by masses, perhaps too idiosyncratic to influence the game of politics, and certainly ineffective to produce certain social results. But that was ok for Arendt. She insisted that political speech, even political theoretical speech, was oriented to persuasion, to the possibility of a general “voice”, in Kant’s terms, not to an absolutely universal rule. In thinking of “oases” and “islands”, she knew that most part of human lives are spent in the

desert of necessities, in the oceans of needs, in the darkness of private emotions and feelings. Rejecting trends, unanimous opinions, and social moods was not a problem for Arendt – it was rather a political attitude in an age of thoughtless masses. Freedom is a possibility.

Contrary to the opinion that Arendt’s political thought was useful only to totalitarian or proto-totalitarian situations<sup>870</sup>, some observations must be made. Even if the reality of the *Lager* and mass executions seems to be historically distant, totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian methods are still around us. Those who simply assume that there is no alternative to the terms and solutions held by the political *status quo* are deaf and blind to the most evident realities presented by public events everywhere: the crisis of party-representation; the backlash of mass hysteria and mass irritation disguised with national, racial, chauvinist slogans; the growth of ideology-based movements and groups replacing persuasion and open-mindedness with terror and indoctrination; the naturalization of corruption as an abstract crime inherent to a social epoch, whose distinctions between private and public are ultimately dissolved; the danger of nuclear solutions to problems created by the diplomatic inability in tackling and mitigating political tensions; the reality of refugees, displaced and stateless persons, who become living-bodies with no faces, with no place in the world; the ever-growing crisis of natural environments, resulting from an uncontrolled invasion of the natural by the artificial, a sort of “virus” reproduced by actual patterns of production and consumption. It was no accident that *The Origins of Totalitarianism* became a bestseller after Donald Trump’s election. Arendt’s corpus is a substantial piece of political thinking, profoundly relevant for our days.

With the eyes in the catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arendt did not use the terms “ruins”, “hell”, “desert” in a strictly allegorical sense. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, politics may become not only the realm where we define what life means, but if it means anything at all. I assume that the different, though related, meanings of the pariah as it was presented by Hannah Arendt – from the social outcast to the “scum of the earth”, from the rightless to the one who starts his own emancipation – are tied to the criteria offered by her for evaluating our political situation: are we, politically speaking, including more people? Are we creating world-institutions adequate to plurality? Are we enabling more people

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<sup>870</sup> G. Lebrun argued that Arendt’s terms are only adequate to think totalitarian politics, being ineffective if compared to modern liberal philosophies in contexts of normalcy (“Não existe mais um discurso político que possa seriamente convidar os homens a abandonar sua preocupação com a segurança e o bem-estar”). Lebrun, G. *Kant e o Fim da Metafísica*, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002, p. 57



and more groups to act? Are we making more room for symbolical, political, artistic “new beginnings”? Choosing the entry point of action and history, that is, describing and judging how the pariah appeared and disappeared in historical interactions, Arendt avoided a cold philosophical discussion on the logical – or illogical – relation between, let us say, identity and difference. Placing the pariah as an example for humanity, she definitely demonstrated, in historical and political interpretative terms, how world commonality can only make *political* sense, can only be integrative, real, experiential, and more stable, when it bridges the spaces between different, unique individuals, associations, groups, nations.

Arendt’s friend and former student Leon Botstein, giving voice to many of her interpreters, indicated that she “never overcame the conflict between her idealized notions of common citizenship, natality, and solidarity, and her idea of an uncommon individuality.”<sup>871</sup> As I tried to present in this work, she not only overcame this “conflict”, she made it a relation central to her thought. There is no conflict between the political interactions intended to bring together people who are unique and singular. Arendt’s project was mostly devoted to inspire and to realize human realities that, by not sacrificing what Lazare called the richness of humanity, its diversity, can establish better institutions and forms of relations for the permanent question of “human living together”.

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<sup>871</sup> Botstein, L. ‘Liberating the Pariah: Politics, the Jews, and Hannah Arendt’, in: *Thinking in Dark Times*, p. 174

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