

HANNAH ARENDT'S EICHMANN CONTROVERSY AS DESTABILIZING TRANSATLANTIC TEXT

by

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The controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt's reportage on the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the subsequent book cannot be underestimated.¹ For Arendt personally, the trial was the decisive event in the second half of her life and amounted to nothing less than a second exile. On the world stage, it marked not only a critical turning point in international consciousness of the Holocaust, but also both initiated and reflected a critical shift in intra-Jewish representations and expression. Arendt's book could in fact be considered as a master text for Judaic studies in the second half of the twentieth century. To mention two of many possible consequences, the controversy may be seen as a pivot point from which the culture of the public intellectuals of New York argued itself out of the spotlight, as well as a primary catalyst for two of the most significant works on the Holocaust penned by women: Lucy Davidowicz's *The War against the Jews* (1975) and Leni Yahil's *The Holocaust* (1987).

For Arendt personally, the controversy was, in her words, "my war with the Jews."² The visceral reactions against her text, in some quarters, persisted until recent years. It was in fact not until the year 2000 that this book was translated into Hebrew. It can be argued that beyond Arendt's actual book on Eichmann, the controversy itself constitutes a text, and a destabilizing, transatlantic text at that. This "text" was not simply "lost in translation" among American, European, and Israeli cultures; it uncomfortably reasserted traditional intra-Jewish distinctions that were no longer applicable to a post-Holocaust refigured Jewish world. While the book was apparently a historical and intellectual debate about the appropriate conceptual framework for assimilating Eichmann's crimes and his trials,

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1. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

2. "I think the war between me and the Jews is over," See Letter 394, March 26th, 1966, in *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

many observers at the time remarked about the distinct inner-Jewish nature of the debate.³ Rather than a direct intervention into specific aspects of the controversy itself, this investigation takes the varying contexts of the commentators themselves as a starting point in order to demonstrate the crucial role played by differences in political and cultural background.

The controversy replaced the original text of Arendt's book, and became a text in its own right. Rather than a surface dispute of issues understood by all sides, the controversy unleashed an echo of friction of cultural styles that has implications for postwar European, American, and Jewish attempts at intellectual discourse across geographical and cultural boundaries. The series of axes upon which the controversy rotated were actually the restatements of misquoted and misrepresented arguments and details. What is at issue here is neither the question of a close reading of Arendt's report nor the issue of misstated facts and historical evidence in Arendt's account, but rather the contours of her argument itself and the trajectory of subsequent commentary and distortion.

More than just postwar transatlantic politics, the controversy had great implications for the place of the intellectual in the *public* sphere operating outside of institutional fealty. With greater import for the specific New York context, the controversy aggravated not only a fissure between the university-trained academics and the educated public, but also the culturally specific divide between intellectual leaders raised and trained in Europe and those of immigrant eastern European background who had come of age in the United States. The debate around Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may be seen as an American finale of the traditional European discord between a universalizing and cosmopolitan German Jewish perspective and an ethnically-grounded national and even nationalistic self-understanding, common in eastern Europe. While the mandate of tradition and the immediate postwar impact of the Holocaust kept these fault lines just barely under the surface during the Eichmann controversy, at times they took the form of outright expression. Some of Arendt's detractors even openly wrote of her striking omission and inability to hear the voice of eastern Europe.⁴ Ultimately, in this instance, the mediating factor of the transatlantic did little to alleviate the pressure on the misunderstandings that followed various discourses and exacerbated their consequences as they traveled between different geographical and intellectual groupings.

Two clusters of issues most clearly expose these fault lines of the intra-Jewish divides of cultural style and differing forms of narrating and representing the Holocaust. Very much informed by her Reform and heavily culturally invested north German upbringing, Hannah Arendt did not provide for any understanding of the Holocaust as a sacred, mysterious event whose victims may be seen as part of a religious history of martyrdom. Rather, through detailed analysis, Arendt insisted on the fundamental ambiguity of the event, as well as carefully detailed intra-Jewish differentiation based on class, geography, and culture. Before the

3. Marie Syrkin, "More on Eichmann," *Partisan Review*, 31 no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 253–55.

4. Lionel Abel, "More on Eichmann," *Partisan Review*, 31 no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 270–01.

Holocaust had gained widespread acceptance in the cultural imaginary as arguably the pivotal event in the twentieth century, Arendt was careful to puncture any sacred aura that would have rendered it outside of historical analysis and thus inscrutable. During the controversy Arendt was accused of trivializing the role of perpetrators such as Eichmann and even of shifting blame and responsibility onto Jewish victims themselves. This maximalist insistence on responsibility and indispensability of the Jewish councils and the replaceable bureaucratic function of murder managers such as Eichmann was the contentious pivot around which the controversy moved. Though Arendt repeatedly disavowed expressing the reproach—"why did you not resist"—she consistently and implicitly upheld the possibility of non-cooperation. The ambiguity of whether or not this distinction between cooperation and collaboration may amount to more than a semantic difference remained unclear and arguably aggravated the controversy.⁵

Arendt's reading thus obstructed a narrative of the Holocaust that would pit a mass of suffering Jews against fabulistic villains that had been common throughout Jewish history. Rather, her perpetrators were portrayed as the epitome of contemptible mediocrity, vacant of cultural specificity, while her Jews were clearly split between a knowing elite that had more often than not placed its own needs ahead of the vulnerable masses. The critical response to Arendt spoke in the language of ethnic solidarity that she had so apparently written out of her historical account. Due to its galvanizing effect, one may even see in the controversy the seeds of the cultural identity movements of both the New Left and the conservative religious revival that would emerge out of the late 1960s and the concomitant decline of the aristocratic language of German-Jewish universalism that had warily kept its distance from Zionism and East European diasporic nationalism. Even within the rarefied circles of the New York Jewish intellectuals, Arendt found herself isolated. With few exceptions, the only people to come to her defense were prominent Gentile intellectuals.⁶ Under the guise of both obeisance to traditionalism, Arendt's critics were in fact advocating a new form of ethnic solidarity, while essentially accusing her of having no sympathy for the attack on the collectivity of the Jewish people. Arendt sought to performatively preserve adamant forms of individualism that had been threatened by the atomization brought about by the pernicious underside of modernity.

5. The exact term employed by Arendt to illustrate her understanding was the possibility of doing nothing. Quite interesting is that in delivering her explanation in a famous letter to Scholem, Arendt makes one of her very few known recourses to Yiddish: "*Es gab keine Möglichkeit des Widerstandes, aber es gab die Möglichkeit, nichts zu tun. Und um nichts zu tun, brauchte man kein Heiliger zu sein, sondern man brauchte nur zu sagen: ich bin ein poscheter Jude und ich will mehr nicht sein.*" ("There was no possibility of resistance, but there was the possibility of doing nothing. And to do nothing, one does not need to be holy, one only needs to say, I am a simple Jew and I don't want to be anything more than that") see Marie Luise Knott, ed., *Hannah Arendt Gershom Scholem Der Briefwechsel* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 2010), 441. Interestingly that later in the letter Arendt actually does employ the English term (underlined in original) "non-participation."

6. For exceptional and anecdotal defense of Arendt coming from Jewish circles, please see, Marie Syrkin, *The State of the Jews* (Washington DC: New Republic Books, 1980), 411.

Arendt's conclusions about the nation-state as elucidated in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* foreshadowed her implicit skepticism about collective projects of identity. The bewildering over-determined point of intersection that lies at the heart of Arendt's conclusions in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* concerns the synchronous necessity and self-erasure of the nation-state. Much of the text is devoted to a narrative that charts the inability of the nation-state to provide and apply universal rights to the minorities in its midst. Arendt charted the decline of the nation-state but did not advocate for the viability of supra-national institutions. At the end of the narrative, she reached the startling conclusion that the State of Israel, exemplary in its exceptionalism, revealed that the apparatus of the state remains the only entity that could deliver on rights and protections. She wrote, "After the war it turned out that the Jewish question that was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved—namely, by means of a colonized and then conquered territory."⁷

The case of the insolubility of this specific question is over determined for Arendt in that her universal narrative of the decline of the nation-state hinges upon its failure, which largely consisted in its inability to incorporate and secure Jews. Arendt reached this conclusion immediately after the war, when she, perhaps along with many, was still in a state of shock over the revelation of the extent of wartime atrocities. That this conclusion could change, or that the premises upon which it was based could shift, thereby demanding a different conclusion, is in fact grounded in one of the few "fundamentalist" principles espoused by Arendt. This principle claims that personal and collective projects of identity should only be decisively binding under conditions of attack and persecution. In her address given on the occasion of her receipt of the Lessing Prize in 1959,⁸ she stated that one had to "resist only in terms of the identity under attack."⁸ This perforce insists on the contingency of identity within contexts of crisis. Arendt more or less repeated this sentence (to "resist only in terms of the identity under attack") in her celebrated German television interview of 1964 with Günter Gaus. In this instance, she explicitly named the identity in question as Jewish: "if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew."⁹

Identities, often construed as projects of collective imposition, are, as banal as it may seem, not always under attack. One could also formulate the same problem differently and posit that new attacks often require new identities. In this context, one could of course challenge this Arendtian principle based on the notion that many, if not most, attacks are conceived of, and articulated as "defensive measures." Nevertheless an attack, by its nature, is of limited duration, and therefore when it subsides so does the need for the reassertion of the identity undertaken to withstand it.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), 290.

8. Steven Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 5.

9. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 12.

Arendt's invocation of this principle is implicit throughout her responses during the Eichmann controversy. This consistency in her application of this principle of contingency is different from reading her career as a series of embraces followed by wild betrayals. It is the latter to which Gershom Scholem resorted after his contentious correspondence with Arendt, which must also have resulted in some degree of personal distress. The famous admonition of Scholem to Arendt, a base critique of the very premise and position from which the *Eichmann* text was written, was that she lacked *ahavat yisrael* (love of the Jewish people).¹⁰ From this perspective, it does appear to be a strange reproach from one towering Jewish intellectual to another; one would expect this between one grand *rebbe* and another, but not between Scholem and Arendt.

This charge by Scholem could be understood as a form of speaking in code. The assertion of national identity was for Arendt contingent on a state of crisis, and by the early 1960s, presumably for both Israel and the Jews, that transitory moment of defensive national validation had subsided. The restoration of stability carried with it the retraction of the nationally assertive. For Scholem, of course, who subscribed to no idea of contingency, the national remained an absolute and permanent position.

The dominant paradigm of Jewish collective identification in modern Europe is one of fracture, followed on its heels by privatization of practice and authority, denationalization, and, put briefly, other commitments ranging from conversion to renationalization. The war and its perceived concomitant collective assault on Jewish existence from a variety of powers froze, as if in midstream, those aforementioned trends. It also occurred arguably at a moment of unprecedented and heightened fracture after new nation-states replaced old empires, when the extreme pitch of ideological conflict increased between the polarities and varieties of nationalism and communism. The flash of interpolation incited

10. Just before this statement Scholem, who himself, unlike Arendt, was against the execution of the death sentence upon Eichmann (because he did not want to lighten the burden of the past upon the German people), states that the accent of Arendt's book is only on the point of the weaknesses of the Jews: "*In Ihrem Buch ist in allem Entscheidenden nur von dem Punkt der Schwaeche der juedischen Existenz die Rede, gerade wo es um Akzentuierung geht.*" Scholem then poses the rhetorical question of why Arendt's book leaves behind such feelings of bitterness and shame not with regards to its contents but rather with regards to the author herself. Scholem's answer is then precisely the question of the tone (which he deems "...herzlose, ja oft geradezu haemische Ton") which one may maintain is a category with not unimportant gender implications. Also of interest, is that Scholem makes his accusation in the context of a larger anti-leftist statement. It is finally in this context that Scholem makes his rhetorical leap for his key term "*Ahabath Israel*": "*Es gibt in der juedischen Sprache etwas durchaus nicht zu definierendes und voellig konkretes, was die Juden Ahabath Israel nennen, Liebe zu den Juden. Davon ist bei Ihnen, liebe Hannah, wie bei so manche Intellektuellen, die aus der deutschen Linken hervorgegangen sind, nichts zu merken.* See Knott, *Hannah Arendt Gerschom Scholem*, 429. Of note, is that in her letter of response about one month later, not only does Arendt dispute the claim that she "came out of the German left," but also beseeches Scholem to inform her of the history and origin of this "*Ahabath*" term. Finally, Arendt actually does not dispute in the slightest Scholem's claim, (with the implication that any kind of collective love is politically problematic) and states that were she to have such love, it would be "*suspect.*"

by the revelation of wartime atrocities threw the collective blanket of identity over all Jews. This coincided, or, better, overlapped, with the early stages of the struggle in the founding of the state of Israel. Paradoxically, the only previous phenomena that had come close to uniting almost all Jews, if still in the negative, was the emergence of the Zionist movement. Whether the ultra-traditionalists in Hasidic shtetls, the classically Reform in Berlin or New York, or the committed Jewish socialists or communists, whether they spoke Yiddish in Warsaw or Russian in Moscow, all could find a thin island of common ground through their shared opposition to Zionism. This context is necessary in order to understand how Scholem and Arendt addressed each other not only as opinion-making members of the Jewish establishment, but rather as fellow veterans of a “pariah” movement spearheaded by a youth in revolt.

The calculated Nazi revocation of Jewish emancipation and the subsequent assault on Jewish property and life triggered an international humanitarian crisis. It also awakened the sleeping giant of narratives of collective myth that were brought out to make sense of a new catastrophe that none of the previous frameworks had the power to either predict or explain. Whether through Zionist political narratives that sought to affirm the futility of diaspora existence or renewed reference within religious circles to the catastrophes of the destruction of the temples and the expulsion from Spain, such collective myths emerged with particular vigor in the wake of the Holocaust. Yet as these collective myths were rather readily harnessed to the structure of the nation-state, as is normative in modern Europe, they could not be returned from whence they came. The conditions and effects of the spread of such collective myth foster a tendency to absolutize the contingent, conveniently blur over uncomfortable power relations, and create or impose new identities on individuals.

The very fact of the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in its historical moment signaled that the sacral core that underpinned the new collective identity project of the Jews, namely the memory of the Holocaust as a sacred discourse, could be punctured.¹¹ The historical significance of the book’s release in 1963 is even more remarkable when bearing in mind that up until that point only one historian, Raul Hilberg, had even ventured to cover the complete subject matter in a scholarly fashion. And even Hilberg had notorious difficulties in finding a publisher and Jewish support. The framing of the victims as sacrificial objects in some larger scheme that could not be explained invariably invokes the theological. This has been the dominant form of collective memory on the part of the victims. The earliest adoption of the term *Hurban* by the victims themselves is a reapplication of the same that traditionally designated the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. In this instance one could cite the work of the

11. Sacral core may be understood as a concept related to what Giorgio Agamben has recently termed “the glory,” or the ceremonial and liturgical apparatus, often of divine character that accompanies power. Please see Giorgio Agamben *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) The classic iteration of this concept has its roots in Durkheim who came to the conclusion that through the “collective” and its rituals individuals worship society itself. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Yiddish writer Aaron Zeitlin who called Arendt “the devil’s representative [who] archetypically recast the Nazis as monsters and the victims as Tzadikim whose sacredness needed to be preserved.”¹² This theological element is embedded in each generation’s repetition of the concept of an eternal antisemitism that constantly seeks to make sacrifices out of Jews. This naturally overlooks the specificity of historical contingency and implicitly asserts a kind of collective innocence, even “worldlessness” of the Jews. As can be easily inferred, the framework presupposes and enforces a demonization of the Other as well as a collective culpability of the Other.

One may surmise that the temptation to surrender to a self-righteous cult of victimization is resisted only with greatest difficulty, as Arendt clearly struggled, whether in reference to the Holocaust or numerous other more recent calamities. The establishment of this discourse has reproduced itself in multiple contexts and a kind of competition or negative comparison between groups has ensued. While understandable as a response to a moral collapse as an attempt to rediscover a moral compass based on absolutizing the position of the victim, this dogma of the victim has precipitated a different moral collapse. In her rather aggressive and uncompromising analytics of the “final solution,” Arendt punctured the sacral core of Jewish victimhood, as well as the demonization of the perpetrators. She took aim at the Hegelian historical theodicy implicit in the trial and the concomitant self-serving justification of the Israeli state grounded in the Holocaust.¹³ Far from reproducing a sacral absolute of the Holocaust as an historical event, she delivered an innovative nation-state based narrative that conveyed the Holocaust as a multi-faceted variegated phenomena with implications far beyond the internal Jewish context. Based on Arendt's analytical examination of how the “final solution” was actually applied in vastly different regional contexts, one could parse out various genres of regimes of murder and order them in the following tripartite structure: murders out of xenophobia (to rid the internal national context of outsiders), murders out of Eurocentric imperialism (to remove foreigners from land designated for expansion), and murders out of “resistance” to communism (to eliminate enemies beyond the borders of the national). Furthermore, in her revealing analyses of exceptional cases, such as France, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Italy, Arendt demonstrated that the genocidal coalition of the Nazis was by no means as essential and unstopplable as it had been rendered in retrospect.

12. See Richard I. Cohen, “A Generation’s Response to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, 258.

13. See *Eichmann* introduction (5–11, in particular) “...how the Jews had degenerated until they went to their death like sheep, and how only the establishment of a Jewish state enabled Jews to hit back...” Notably, Arendt contrasts the “lessons” Ben-Gurion attached to the trial, to the entirely unforeseen (and unmentioned by Ben-Gurion), yet dramatic outcome that the trial would “trigger the first serious effort made by Germany to bring to trial at least those who were directly implicated in the murder.” (14) Finally in her most clear indictment of the “Hegelian” nature of the trial, on page 19 soon after followed by a direct reference to “an allusion to Hegel and the school of historical law,” Arendt states “For it was history, that, as far as the prosecution was concerned, stood in the center of the trial.” She adds, “This was the tone set by Ben-Gurion and faithfully followed by Mr. Hausner...”

Arendt's puncturing of the sacral core of the new collective identity of the Jews by interrogating this supposed collective innocence certainly has the effect of destabilizing imposed nationalist identifications. It should, however, not be confused with the question of social solidarity with which it was also bound up. Instead, one should keep separate her implicit call for the end of the Jewish national identification as a defense against attack and the long-standing "blind spot," which represents an historical difficulty to identify across class lines with the Jewish plight in eastern Europe.

While Arendt did at times curiously resort to theological language such as the "love of god," or even references to a "literalization of Hell," she did not stray far from a position grounded in Kant that allowed for no role of private faith in the public realm.¹⁴ While Arendt did complete her doctoral dissertation on *Love and Saint Augustine* and did even engage the theological concept of the "miraculous" to describe political action in *The Human Condition*, her use of theological vocabulary is not equivalent to a theological argument. Allowing the sacred access to the public sphere tends to validate the existing order, and therefore undermines the ability of individuals as political subjects in society to enact progressive change. And as the sacred is commensurate with the absolute, it does not provide for the kind of plurality that Arendt valued above all.

When considering the role of the sacred in the transatlantic context much is lost in translation. Arendt's bold and direct look at the Holocaust derives from a subject position in which the full secularization of society or the post-religious is both self-evident and beyond doubt. Yet due to basic foundational factors, such as the privatization of religion and its minimal role as a singular, corporate institutional authority in the United States, religion fulfilled an entirely different function. To some extent, religion fulfilled the role that philosophy had in Europe; it persisted as discourse to which one turned when posing larger questions. Such discourses of the sacred therefore continued to be considered as legitimate means to secure social peace and provide a level of ethical and social security. Arendt herself credited the failure of the French, as opposed to the American Revolution, to the attempt in the former to invoke a transcendent absolute in the formation of a republic. The investment of an event with a sacred aura was more a matter of providing it with some level of legitimate authority, rather than principally a means to close off other interpretations. The association of religion with conflict and corruption had simply not been internalized by large sectors of the educated American public.¹⁵

14. Susan Neimann, "Theodicy in Jerusalem," in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, 70.

15. Leon Botstein claims there is an implicit America-Israel contrast running throughout the Eichmann book and that her increasing sense of comfort in America is what made her even more doubtful about Zionism. Overall, Botstein asserts that Arendt found her concept of politics vindicated in the American political tradition, namely that of the flourishing of a "distinctly secular Jewish nation in a democratic Christian Diaspora," which runs counter to the historical logic of Zionism. Though Botstein remain ambiguous about the precise Christian nature of the American context, others have been more explicit. See, for example, M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme is Freedom: Religion Politics and the American Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1994), which argues that the unique

In Israel, by contrast, a kind of working truce was established between factions of a starkly bifurcated social order. The plausibility of such a truce between openly contradictory factions was enshrined by the aura of legitimacy that the sacred provided to the secular. This rather curious compromise was influenced by a government run by atheists who offered subsidies for religious Jews to study Talmud in lieu of military service.¹⁶ Indeed, the Israeli struggle for legitimacy, in which the Eichmann trial represents an important moment, is bound up with suffusing national aspirations with an aura of the theological. If Arendt's critique implicitly involved recognizing this reality, she was by no means being led by her own imaginings. Arendt's conception of the politically contingent nature of Jewish identity would perhaps inevitably bring her into conflict with a context that framed such identity as permanent and absolute.

Most national narratives of self-generation inevitably engage in a certain amount of mythologization. In Israel, the state is conceived of as the entity that both negates and transcends the Holocaust that metaphorically took place on "the day before" the state's inauguration. The sacralization of the Holocaust, which Arendt punctured, as well as her own Zionist leanings, played a role here. Her work represents a move against positioning the Holocaust as the telos of Israel's history, a telos that many observed to be as powerful as the narrative of the revelation at Sinai in traditional Judaism.

There is much evidence in Arendt's work that moralism derived from religious sources *outside* the public sphere are more or less irrelevant. For Arendt, moral emotions, such as feelings of guilt or antisemitism particularly related to the important question of determining intentionality, are deeply private and ultimately indecipherable. Internal moral feelings, even if they did exist, do not of themselves signify action or even the inclination to engage in action. One may surmise therefore that for Arendt, just as there is a distinction between cooperation and collaboration so is there also between non-participation and resistance. After all, Arendt alluded to Lessing who wrote that we, as humans, feel even something akin to passion for the evildoer,¹⁷ a point that was easily misunderstood and misrepresented by her critics. The idea that "Eichmann lives in all of us," that many people in the same circumstances could have acted similarly, that one need not be an antisemite or a German to commit the actions of an Eichmann, were construed

American attachment to freedom is based on on a morality inseparable from religion. More hyperbolically though evocative, is Norman Mailer's statement after an anti-war march on the Pentagon, "...we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ." See Norman Mailer, *The Time of Our Time* (New York: Random House, 1998), 1239.

16. See Steven V. Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law: Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Jewish State* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986) and Gershom Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011) all of which discuss at length the history and ramifications of this fateful compromise of Ben-Gurion with the religious sector.

17. Neimann, "Theodicy in Jerusalem," 81.

as trivializing his role. This marginalization of intentionality ruptures narratives of inherent antisemitism or a uniquely corrupted German culture that claims, in short, that evil is not based on structural conditions but rather produced by the actions of individuals. One can also see here the importance of the contingent that frames actions based on specifically political circumstances rather than on trans-historical identities. As such, Arendt argued for the replacement of moral intention by judgment, with actions as the ultimate measure of judgment. The move to the “banality” of evil is the strongest deflation of the sacral aura. To assert that evil is demonic renders evil mysterious and consigns it to the realm of the religious, rather than the political.¹⁸ The many attacks on Arendt, often triggered by her powerful position on this subject, were themselves moral demands deriving from an emerging Israeli-American transatlantic position that beheld the religious as the site of the moral and from narratives that still enshrined the sacral.

Arendt did sit in judgment of Eichmann and also condemned him to death. Yet she did not speak in the name of any court and certainly not of the Jewish people. The acerbic invective (or alleged acerbic invective as the very presumption of such may be viewed as highly gendered) that underlies the tone of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which so many found so problematic, derived from a very specific form of cultural criticism. She consistently rejected the “scapegoat” approach to Eichmann, and the attempts to connect him to incidents to which he had no relation. Further, she also removed from her discourse the role of antisemitism as a motivational field within Eichmann, just as she rejected the role of an overarching meta-historical narrative of antisemitism within the trial.¹⁹ Arendt seems to have understood Eichmann based on his “social situatedness,” the idea that he reflected and evolved from a particular social and cultural environment. This approach certainly enabled her a measure of familiarity that contributed to the alienation of readers who could not share her disposition. Indeed, Arendt spoke of Eichmann as one who emerged from a generally similar cultural and social sphere of German-speaking Central Europe. As with her puncturing of the sacral sphere, this other dominant element in her Eichmann text is also conceptually illuminated in its widest extent when placed in a transatlantic context. Beyond all other factors, Arendt’s cultural critique of Eichmann aggravated and inspired troubling reactions on the part of her American interlocutors, due in no small part to an inability to decipher the cultural code at work.

Arendt was fully a product of the historical trajectory of modern north German Jewish social and political life, typified as occupying a space “beyond Judaism.” According to George Mosse, the embrace of *Bildung* became a secular religion that bound Jews with the striving of the near-emancipated

18. Neimann, “Theodicy in Jerusalem,” 87.

19. The abyss, as she termed it, created by the “final solution” was not its status as the most extreme or unique manifestation of antisemitism in history, nor for the unprecedented number of victims, but rather for the advent of “‘corpse factories:’...es war wirklich, als ob der Abgrund sich öffnet...Dies hätte nie geschehen dürfen. Und damit meine ich nicht die Zahl der Opfer. Ich meine die Fabrikation der Leichen und so weiter...” Please see “Günther Gauss im Gespräch mit Hannah Arendt” October, 28th, 1964, Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg.

bourgeoisie and away from the popular pieties or folk traditions of the landed peasantry.²⁰ In its attempt to transcend difference in the wake of Enlightenment, this cultural move historicized and privatized Jewish subjecthood. This “*Bildung*” model of Jewish modernity inscribed notions of personal exceptionalism as it embraced a model of “betterment,” and difference based on learning and culture. The generation after the “autumn” of the Enlightenment in the first half of the nineteenth century fashioned new forms of Judaism, which claimed a universalism and a basis in reason beyond what any other religion could offer. Abraham Geiger, who worked to reincorporate Jesus within Judaism, famously proclaimed that for liberal Christians to be true to their own creed, they would do best to become Reform Jews.²¹ As a cultural and educational movement, the Enlightenment certainly spread throughout Yiddish-speaking eastern Europe, though largely without the component of inter-cultural dialogue with Gentiles to which it was inextricably tied in Germany. This misapprehension and even subtle hostility that governed the tenuous interrelationship between Germany and eastern Europe derived in no small part from the confused ethnic and national matrix, which often resulted in the imposition of national paradigms and finally the presence of large masses of Jews often on the margins of poverty.

The “blind spots” and counter-narrative of Enlightenment that developed an active discourse of bias and social practices of scorn against others was also passed down across the generations. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the culturally German Reform Jews was a disdain for traditional Jews of eastern Europe. What Norman Podhoretz referred to as “German Jewish arrogance,” though, is often overstated to refer to apparent disdain for any forms of organized Jewish life.²² The generation after Geiger displaced such “philosophical” aspirations into political programs often framed in terms of a loyalty to social democracy or liberalism. This was the generation of Hannah Arendt's parents and the milieu in which she was raised.

The other primary cultural and negative reference point for northern Germany was southern Germany, which includes what would later become the modern-day Austrian nation-state, a thoroughly Catholic environment without any of the historical leanings toward Protestant interiority and not anywhere nearly embedded in the legacy of the Enlightenment. Jews, one minority within an exceedingly diverse empire, lacked in this area a fully articulated stable and homogenous dominant reference group into which they could assimilate. Yet, as has become historical and even literary legend, they still possessed a great level of identification with the Habsburg monarchy as such. While in the North German context political and cultural identification were bound up with Enlightenment, emancipation and liberalism, in the South, and especially in Austria, the

20. See George Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

21. See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

22. Syrkin, *The State of the Jews*, 254.

period of liberalism and emancipation were truncated and severely embattled.²³ By the time of the modernist turn-of-the-century generation into which Arendt was born, the political had been subsumed by the theatrical as the progressive bourgeoisie engaged their primary energies with new developments in modernism.

New political movements in Vienna, referred to by Carl Schorske as “politics in a new key,” reflected a new approach of aesthetic politics based in the post-rational, the visual, and the theatrical. It may be argued that this form of aesthetic politics, which after all prefigured much of Nazi visual culture, was generally more compatible and influenced by Catholic culture, as broadly defined. It is generally agreed that the political progenitors and even silent mentors of Hitlerian antisemitism and politics generally were Viennese, such as Karl Lueger and Georg von Schönerer. Whether or not Catholicism in its theology or the Catholic Church as a structure either directly influenced or benefited from the rise of such politics, geopolitically speaking, the momentum of Nazism signified the “revenge of the Catholic south” that had been explicitly excluded under the Bismarckian *kleindeutsche Lösung* for unification and state formation under a Prussian Protestant aegis.²⁴

As Arendt acerbically wrote in her critique of Stefan Zweig’s *World of Yesterday* in October of 1943, Zweig had thought the Viennese were recreating Athens with their theater (i.e. a revival of democracy), but in fact it was just Hollywood (i.e. a deceptive world of appearances).²⁵ The strength of this pronouncement is that it also reveals a critique of the lack of interiority of social actors in that environment. (While Arendt argued against defining politics as a work of plastic art, which as she wrote tends to reify human thought, she did embrace the performative aspects of politics that made it for her, the exact opposite of an art.)²⁶ People like Stefan Zweig were ultimately driven by careerism and fame, she implied, and such personal priorities are inevitably anti-political and potentially blinding to reality.²⁷ Using the most damning judgment in the Arendtian vocabulary, people in this environment were *weltlos*, people who do not live in the world.

23. Hermann Broch referred to liberalism in Austria as *Gallert-Demokratie* or “gelatin democracy,” implying only a liberal veneer. As Michael P. Steinberg helpfully indicates, “The history of Austrian Jewish modernism runs through two, perhaps three generations; the history of German-Jewish Enlightenment and modernism courses through at least double that number” see his *Judaism Musical and Unmusical* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24.

24. On the topic of the complications in finding state forms for the German-speaking world, see Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century* (Berkeley: University of California: 2010); or for titles that have themselves become historic, Helmuth Plessner, *Die Verspaetete Nation* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966) or Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1984).

25. See Hannah Arendt, “Portrait of a Period.” *The Jew as Pariah*. ed. Ron Feldman. (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 112–21.

26. See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 253.

27. See “Stefan Zweig and Jews in the World of Yesterday,” in *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 317.

This southern German or Austrian context lacks some of the culture of optimism imbued with transformative potential passed on by the tradition of the Enlightenment and Reform in the pre-war era. Theatrical, career-driven action implicitly accepts the world as it is and seeks approval from the dominant social standards of the day. The opposite of fame in this context is disgrace; a feeling of shame and embarrassment in a theatricalized (in the sense of deceptive performance) manner resulting from not living up to the social dictates of the time. From this admittedly biased perspective, for the northern German, Austrian provincials were seen as lower class opportunists without much grounding in the ideals of Enlightenment.²⁸ It is admittedly an analytical leap to include Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann with her critiques of the behavior of some of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, in this case, Stefan Zweig, Eichmann emerged out of a social context that only someone like Arendt herself, born and raised in North Germany, could perceive from an up-close and personal perspective.

Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann as the paradigmatic expression of the *Schreibtischtäter* has become iconic and is at the heart of controversy created by the book. Her focus on the extreme careerism of the bookkeeper mentality and her ridicule at Eichmann's self-professed idealism are related to a certain cultural criticism (if not social snobbery) of a North German bourgeois toward a South German provincial petty bourgeois. Indeed, her description of Eichmann is of someone who is at once crass, ludicrous, and pathetic.²⁹ In her own words, Eichmann represented that most isolated of the bourgeois type, the philistine. While there has been recent literature to demonstrate that Eichmann was both a powerful force in his own right in the Nazi hierarchy and a raging criminal who had a profound anti-Semitic psychosis, Arendt was nonetheless right to insist on the unprecedented feature of Eichmann's character that derived from the workings of the totalitarian state.³⁰ The suggestion, quite common at the time of the controversy, that Arendt was trivializing the evil of the Holocaust by speaking about Eichmann's banality, could quite rightly be deemed a severe misapprehension if not borderline slander.³¹ The many protests of the alleged "downgrading" of Eichmann's significance, as referenced by Anthony Grafton among others, fail to see how this perspective has actually expanded the boundaries of guilt and responsibility and significantly accounted for the entirety of the genocidal coalition. Eichmann here is presented as a non-person, thoroughly disconnected from the consequences of his actions and capable of speaking and thinking only in clichés. Like a travel agent oblivious to the fact that the planes on which he is booking people are set to crash every time, this analytical premise has actually done more to spread the

28. For the most astute elucidation of this pre-war North/South German (Jewish) divide see the work of Michael P. Steinberg, in particular, "Hannah Arendt and the Cultural Style of the German Jews," *Social Research* 74 no. 3 (2007): 879–902.

29. Peter Beahr, "Banality and Cleverness: *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Revisited," in *Thinking Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, eds. Roger Berkowitz, et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 139.

30. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 338.

31. Richard J. Bernstein, "Is Evil Banal?: A Misleading Question" in *Thinking Dark Times*, 131.

guilt and accountability than a framework that ascribed responsibility to only a few demons at the top. Indeed, the Arendt controversy in West Germany actually led in some part to a new spate of war crimes trials targeting lower functionaries.

The prejudices and social biases reflected in Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial may be seen as "blind spots," as part of the symptomatic after-effects of the German Jewish Enlightenment. On one level they may themselves be perceived to be "banal," as something one could hear from any dentist in Haifa (or accountant on Bennett Avenue), rather than emanations worthy of a great intellect.³² Yet the fact that Arendt was clearly capable of generating profound intellectual work grounded in such cultural criticism is itself worthy of examination as a possible new genre of scholarly writing. The Arendt-Scholem exchange may now be seen in a new light. Their shared experience as young rebels in a minority movement of generational upheaval, stigmatized probably as much if not more by Communism than by their parents points to one formative context in which they lived and matured intellectually. A second context is alluded to in Scholem's accusation that Arendt lacked *Ahavat Yisrael*. It suggests that she reverted back to "old ways," failing to extend the requisite measure of solidarity to the *Ostjuden*.³³ After all, the leading political figures in Israel, as well as most of the prosecutors and witnesses against Eichmann, were east European Jews. Additionally, almost all of her Jewish interlocutors in the New York circle of public intellectuals were the children of East European immigrants. Some of them, most prominently Lucy Dawidowicz, actually imported and adopted East European diaspora nationalism into the American context. Arendt's denial of something like an ethnic collectivity defined by solidarity among Jews was perhaps the element that could be least forgiven in her discourse. In fact, one could argue that Davidowicz's *War Against the Jews*, with all its focus on intentionalism and specific German antisemitism, may be seen as the east European diasporic nationalist rejoinder to Arendt's German Jewish *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.³⁴ The crux of the contention is that Arendt's operation of the category of "Jewish" did not exceed the boundaries of the contingent in a circumstance of political resistance.

Underneath these political disagreements were cultural tensions that cannot be entirely discounted. The sacral discourse about the Holocaust was largely an east European phenomenon that represented the experience of most of the victims and survivors. Arendt's placement of the *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils or the Jewish municipal administrations formed by Nazi authorities to implement their policies) on trial has consistently been cited as the most charged element in the controversy, and was seen by many, in particular Scholem, as symptomatic of Arendt's own prejudice or lack of "solidarity" with Jews in a situation that could simply not be conceived by those not there. Arendt did not claim, first of all, that the Jewish elite was specifically corrupt, but rather that notions of privilege with

32. Omer Bartov, personal communication, November (2009).

33. Please see again the previously cited letter between Arendt and Scholem. Peter Beahr, "Banality and Cleverness," 139.

34. I would like to thank the invaluable help of Professor Nancy Sinkoff in generating these insights.

hierarchies of distinctions among Jews were a structural reality in post-emancipation Europe. Secondly, although elite Jews were not necessarily unfaithful to traditional values of responsibility, it was precisely their lack of skepticism and doubt (and by implication, their unwillingness to share decisions with the skeptics and doubters) that greatly worsened the lot of the Jews as a whole.³⁵ By implication, Jewish identity itself in politically contingent circumstances did not form bonds of solidarity that could override differences of class and politics. These social fractures were arguably more consistent and historically grounded than a discourse of identity that had imposed an erasure of such difference.

Yet critics have often overlooked that Arendt was just as harsh on German-Jewish Reform leaders such as Leo Baeck, to whom she once referred as the "Jewish führer."³⁶ In fact, there was a specific German-Jewish counterattack to Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as best represented by *In the Wake of the Eichmann Trial*, published in 1963. It featured some of the most eminent German Zionists such as Siegfried Moses, Martin Buber, and Ernst Simon. Furthermore, the *Judenräte* that has been most frequently pointed to in rebuke of Arendt is that of the West European community of Amsterdam that perished in such great proportions due to the *Judenräte's* meticulous records and apparently rather naïve cooperation with the Nazis.³⁷ Additionally, in her discussion of Croatia, Arendt, with great analytical invention, made the startling claim that assimilation in eastern Europe, when it was possible, provided a more secure guarantee for protection than it did in Western Europe.³⁸ Finally, Arendt was also one of the first few who insisted upon the absence of any German resistance to the Nazis and the widespread acceptance the regime enjoyed.³⁹ In fact, far from being hostile to the Israeli national agenda in the trial, Arendt made a striking case for the juridical capacity of Israel to serve as prosecutor of Nazis in the name of all Jews.⁴⁰ An irony of the entire controversy surrounding Arendt's work on Eichmann is that the portrayal of Arendt's critique (i.e. meek Diaspora Jews without the political steel of statecraft) fit the profile of a facile parody of traditional Zionist attitudes

35. Jose Brunner, "Eichmann, Freud and Arendt in Jerusalem: On the Evils of Narcissism and the Pleasures of Thoughtlessness" *History and Memory* 8 no. 2 (1996): 18.

36. Arendt applied this term only in the version of her account published in *The New Yorker*. It did not appear in book form. See Cohen, "A Generation's Response," 261.

37. See Council of Jews from Germany, eds., *Nach dem Eichmann-Prozeß – Zu einere Kontroverse über die Haltung der Juden* (New York: Council of Jews from Germany, 1963).

38. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 183.

39. The Eichmann text itself contains numerous references to the popularity of the regime in Germany and abroad and the lack of even a single instance where genocidal non-complicity was punished. See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 37, 103, 137 where she ironically remarks that "...no secret in the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such 'inward opposition'." Elsewhere, Arendt draws a parallelism between Jews and the SS, that both had the possibility for non-participation, in particular that the SS members did not have to fear punishment. See Letter 133, *Der Briefwechsel*.

40. Seyla Benhabib, "Identity, Perspective and Narrative in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," *History and Memory* 8, no. 2, (1996): 51.

towards the Diaspora that had been reproached for weakness and the futility of Jewish leadership.

Yet the perception on the part of Arendt's critics seems to have triumphed over trifling details. The appearance of an assault on the memory of the victims alienated Arendt from the organizations of the mainstream Jewish establishment, as well as from members of New York intellectual circles still sentimentally attached to an old world vision of east European Jewish life. As Anthony Grafton points out, the New York intellectuals were infused with a residue of Yiddish sentimentalism. They were by and large not at all students of Jewish history and generally disdained its study.⁴¹ Yet, they remained thoroughly imbued with the folk pieties of American ethnic pride, not at all incompatible with strident assimilationism. Fully aware of this, Arendt was said to have remarked that their ignorance became their chief qualification in their denunciations of her work.⁴² Arendt's advocacy of the contingency of Jewish identity emerged out of decades of intensive historical study of the Jewish past, which provided her with stores of knowledge that her detractors could not claim. Furthermore, a consistently understated element in this confrontation is the degree to which Arendt's critics may have been operating out of feelings of guilt for their own inaction during the Holocaust. Not only were most of Arendt's critics among the New York Jewish intellectuals the children of east European immigrants, some, such as Philp Rahv, were born there.

The controversy surrounding Arendt's Eichmann book as most often expounded in the voices of Jewish critics became dominated by overstatement and misrepresentation. An example of overstated criticism may be found in Lionel Abel's claim, for instance, that Eichmann comes off as more aesthetically pleasing than the victims and that Arendt sets a higher standard for the victims rather than for the perpetrators.⁴³ Oft-repeated accusations that Arendt downplayed Eichmann's role and instead heightened the culpability of Jewish leaders amounted to a picture that framed Arendt as spear-heading a vindictive campaign against the Jews.⁴⁴

Recent critical essays have contended that the Israeli prosecution exaggerated Eichmann's role in a manner inconsistent with the historical record.⁴⁵ Arendt apparently herself claimed that before she had seen the evidence she was under the impression that Eichmann was much more important than he actually was. These overstatements and misrepresentations were not so much grounded in what Anthony Grafton singled out as Arendt's apparent "poor grasp of her intellectual texture and

41. Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 279.

42. See Cohen, "A Generation's Response."

43. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 279.

44. See Yaacov Lozowick. "Malicious Clerks: the Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil" in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, 214; and Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 482.

45. Please see Ruth Bettina Birn: "Fifty Years After a Critical Look at the Eichmann Trial," [http://law.case.edu/journals/JIL/Documents/\(21\)%20Birn_Darby.pdf](http://law.case.edu/journals/JIL/Documents/(21)%20Birn_Darby.pdf), also Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 108.

style,"⁴⁶ but rather Arendt's audience's poor grasp of her culturally-grounded criticism, with Central European vectors eluding even her most careful readers.

Arendt's premise of analysis was ultimately lost in the transatlantic transmission and the ensuing controversy became symptomatic of her difficulty in integrating into the dominant discourses of American and New York Jewish intellectual society. For instance, it was held against her that she stood her ground and defended her views. She was accused of "smugness," and "insensitivity," comments that could be related to some not very well-disguised misogyny, and arguably differing gender politics between German and eastern European Jews.⁴⁷ Arendt's troubled process of integration in her new home, naturally raises the question of whether or not something like an intact transfer of a German-Jewish cultural collective would have been possible through emigration, a prospect Arendt would have likely not supported, these difficulties represent a transatlantic transfer of discourses originally at home in dichotomies between German-dominated Central Europe and Yiddish-dominated Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the Eichmann controversy was a result of the inability of certain cultural styles to translate, and on the other, it was the result of the fact that the cultural conflicts and tensions behind such styles translated all too well in the New World setting.

The secondary cultural divide in the transatlantic Eichmann controversy engaged Arendt's new-found proximity with an American subject-position and a greater distancing from the apparent trajectory of the Jewish state. Her inheritance of north German-Jewish norms may have predisposed her for some particular disdain for the largely Polish-Israeli leadership and trial prosecutors. As Leon Botstein has noted, Arendt went to Jerusalem to report on the judicial proceedings after a close and affectionate reading of America's political origins and their modern consequences.⁴⁸ While it may be somewhat of an overstatement to present Arendt as a thinker who castigated the Jews for failing to imitate America with its federal system designed to guarantee political equality to all its citizens, Arendt's critique of Israel inspired by her American experience does nevertheless present another factor in the analysis of the Eichmann controversy as a transatlantic text. Arendt implicitly interpreted the force of the Zionist logic and narrative that presented the Eichmann trial as contrasting with her American experience, which validated the possibility of a secular political order, and which also provided for the flourishing of a secular Jewish nation in a democratic Christian Diaspora.⁴⁹ A subtext here is that Arendt's marked discomfort with Israel may have been related to a parallel growing comfort with America. This may be ironic,

46. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 280; See also Bernstein, "Is Evil Banal?" 131.

47. On this point one may consult Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: the East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) or Daniel Boyarin *Unheroic Conduct: the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

48. Leon Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah: Politics, Jews and Hannah Arendt," in *Thinking Dark Times*, 171.

49. Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah," 94.

considering that enmity expressed against her views came from a circle of Jewish intellectuals in post-war America who had staked their careers and outlooks on a full validation of the American political experiment.

This apparent Israel-America tension felt among Jewish intellectuals is found most clearly in instances in which Arendt took issue with Ben-Gurion's instrumentalization of the trial for pedagogic purposes, the charge that would have likely not have been denied by Ben-Gurion himself, given his theatricalization of the trial.⁵⁰ The pedagogic framing of the Eichmann trial as a "teachable moment" for the younger generation did nevertheless carry a certain political logic and narrative. The multiple presentations on long-standing suffering and antisemitism, and the inability of European polities to protect their Jewish citizens, expounded that the logic of history and the collective experience of the Jews led directly to Zionism and nationalism in Israel. But Ben-Gurion's efforts succeeded only in imparting misleading "Hegelian" lessons that implied Eichmann was only an instrument of some foreordained destiny.⁵¹ Arendt, by contrast, tried to insist on the fact that the crimes of the Nazis could simply not be assimilated into either "atrocities of the past," or "current Jewish self-understanding, which ultimately reinforced each other."⁵²

While Arendt did regret the evolution of Israel along traditionally European nationalist lines, her embrace of the U.S. as a beacon of freedom of speech in the public sphere was also greatly tempered by developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵³ She may have seen the American political system as a way to prevent the totalitarian breakdown that transforms bureaucrats into mass murderers. Nevertheless, for all her demands that the Jews enter the "world," and become political, her disdain for Israel indicated that she could not fully divorce herself from the cultural norms of ethical superiority that has been the hallmark of the outlook of the "successful Diasporic" Jewish intellectual.

The final sundering in the transatlantic divide of the Eichmann controversy was accessibility of university intellectuals and scholarly discourses to the public sphere. In the 1960s, as is still the case until this very day in Europe, humanities professors were regularly called upon to comment on television and in mainstream newspaper editorials. While there may be no lack of transition vehicles for scholarly ideas that appeal to the elite, such as *The New Yorker*, or *The New York Review of Books*, intellectual arguments tend not to be embedded with much greater success in periodicals designed for a much wider readership. In his essay, Anthony Grafton, somewhat sentimentally, argued that the Arendt controversy occurred during an apex of the "golden age of magazines," which was also a "glamorous age for American intellectuals," when there existed "something like an intelligentsia."⁵⁴ As Grafton has suggested, the structure of the Eichmann controversy became the template for future media handling (or lack thereof) of new scholarly arguments. He outlined a three-step process, an

50. See Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*.

51. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 18.

52. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 267.

53. See Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah," 174–5.

54. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 286.

initial book is selected, its argument is then dramatized, and finally deployed within the news media. This process strongly mirrors Arendt's own account of the devolution of media in the fabrication of public opinion.⁵⁵ The Eichmann controversy could plausibly mark the beginning of the retreat of scholarly arguments from the broader public sphere except in sensationalized form, while also triggering a reaction on the part of scholars themselves to retreat even further from the public sphere. The Eichmann controversy was an unintended consequence of the failure of translation between its European, Israeli, and American vectors. Thus, today American intellectual discourse, as far as it can be said to exist in the public sphere as attended to by a wide reading public, is structured along a sequential series of controversies, with the Eichmann controversy probably ranking as the most visible, acerbic, and notorious public intellectual debate of the era.

The manufactured truth and misrepresentation that shaped the public understanding of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may in the end mirror Arendt's own aporia about the role of ideology. Nowhere in her Eichmann book did Arendt put forward a clear position on the question of whether the ideology of antisemitism was a function of indoctrination from above or whether Nazism *qua* totalitarian movement produced ideology through the fabrication of reality itself.⁵⁶ Similar ambiguity would reemerge during the Eichmann controversy, which resulted in a concerted assault on, and misrepresentation of, her work. Arendt carefully noticed that throughout the controversy, most of those attacking her book were actually dealing with a fabricated image of it and not with what she really wrote.⁵⁷

The controversy over Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* changed the way intellectual discourse is represented in the media and the way a mass reading public is informed of such debate. As Arendt herself noted, the public began to think that the arguments and statements *attributed* to her began to be confused with her *actual* statements and even with historical truth itself.⁵⁸ Ultimately the controversy has replaced the original book, as the master text of this subject, to which, as Arendt wrote, "there can be no good reply as it deals with a book no one wrote."⁵⁹

Such misrepresentation of the book is inextricably bound up with the book's status as a destabilizing post-war transatlantic document. Arendt deliberately accentuated the universalist aspects of the Holocaust as part of the general collapse of values under totalitarianism, which one would presume would enhance its ability to travel as a text. The results are well-known and cannot be underestimated. A concerted campaign to discredit her book was undertaken in the United States with counter-books, lectures, and proclamations issued by a wide variety of organizations. There is even evidence that a "campaign" did in fact

55. See Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971).

56. Richard King and Dan Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race and Genocide* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 161.

57. Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, et al. *Im Vertrauen: Briefwechsel 1949–1975* (Munich: Piper, 1995), 233–4, 238–9.

58. Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 511.

59. Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 487.

exist and that it was “concerted.”⁶⁰ In Israel, the book was simply not available in the Hebrew language; it had not been published in a translated form.

Arendt’s bold and direct analysis of the Holocaust forced a painful reconsideration of the momentary truce of solidarity provoked by the revelation of wartime atrocities. It was her own status as a transatlantic refugee that enabled her to write unbound from the specificity of any one subject-position, though one nevertheless highly informed by her German-Jewish conditioning. Her opponents reveled in a discreditation that fed the desired myths, providing precious little evidence to refute her.⁶¹ In fact, it may be argued that the gradual decoupling of Holocaust studies and Judaic studies may have been influenced by the controversy. This separation arguably alleviates the pressure to account for the question of Jewish action and involvement during the Holocaust.⁶²

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60. Cohen. “A Generation’s Response,” 259.

61. Cohen. “A Generation’s Response,” 277.

62. David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 166.