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## **Hannah Arendt and the Sociology of Antisemitism**

*Dieser Artikel hat zum Ziel, mit Hannah Arendts Perspektive eines der letzten Tabus der westlichen Gesellschaft zu analysieren, nämlich Antisemitismus. Wenngleich Arendt – wie viele ihrer Weimarer ZeitgenossInnen – teilweise voreingenommen gegen die Sozialwissenschaften und die Soziologie im Speziellen war, arbeitete sie dennoch eine soziologische Analyse des Antisemitismus aus. Dieser soziologische Zugang von Arendt ist, gemeinsam mit den Arbeiten von Georg Simmel, Karl Marx, Werner Sombart und Juri Slezkine, Ausgangspunkt und Basis dieses Artikels. In einem Essay über Antisemitismus, geschrieben in den späten 1930er-Jahren in Frankreich, verortet Arendt die Entstehung des modernen Antisemitismus im Klassenkonflikt zwischen deutscher Aristokratie und Bourgeoisie. Juden und Jüdinnen wurden dabei als ultimative Außenseiter und Neulinge betrachtet, denen die Verhaltenskodizes, welche bis dahin als gesellschaftlicher Kitt dienten, fremd waren. Aufhänger der vorliegenden Analyse ist die soziologische Rolle des Geldes und seine Identifikation mit Juden und Jüdinnen. Ausgehend von Arendts Theorie des Antisemitismus soll somit ein breiter Bogen zwischen Modernität und Antisemitismus gespannt werden.*

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Is it possible at all to theorize antisemitism? And if it is possible what is supposed to be the role of Jews themselves in such a theory? Is it in any ways connected to what Jews as a collective have done or not? And if this is the case, do we not run the danger to “justify” antisemitism? And if not, do we need to construct a theory of antisemitic attitudes completely disconnected from Jewish behavior or action? Do the Jews have to be the passive victims of resentment and hatred against them to have a “correct” theory? This question becomes especially acute when one talks about contemporary expressions of antisemitism. Talk about current antisemitism is usually divided between so called alarmists and deniers (Fine 2009). After the Holocaust it is difficult to be an avowed antisemite. The resentment against Jews is too much connected with their destruction in Europe. Thus, antisemitism and the memory of the Holocaust have merged into one system of thought and practice and antisemitism has become a taboo of civilized society (Rabinovici/Speck/Sznajder 2004). Is this taboo being broken recently? And if yes, what are the reasons for that? Open antisemitism hardly exists anymore and if it exists it does usually outside the realm of legitimacy. Thus, to talk about antisemitism is to talk about something rather assumed and implicit than outspoken and explicit. It always moves around rhetoric of suspicion. To claim antisemitism is a claim which is based on what is “meant” and not what is “said”. Since there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, there exists an atmosphere of taboo and with it the assumed breaking of such taboos. This in itself could be considered radical thinking. The purpose of this paper is to make the implicit explicit, to display the taboo, to pull it out in the open and to demonstrate some thinking about Jews and modernity.

Radical thought not only presents itself as radical, but toys with the basic principles of modernity, unmasking them as repressive, and asks to break the last taboos. Part of this new radicalism is to make sure that the Jews, as victims of the planned attempt at their destruction, are written out of the account of their destruction and dissolved into the universal category of “human beings” (e.g. Agamben 1998; 1999). In this radical call for a normative universalism with regard to the Holocaust all particular aspects of the Holocaust should be dissolved. This intellectual project with its universalizing mechanism delegitimizes particular memories in the name of a greater good – humanity. The specific Jewish dimension of the Holocaust is not only dissolved, but also delegitimized as part of the Nazi racist project. In this assumed post-modern radicalism, while once having been killed only for being Jewish, after the Holocaust Jews were elevated to “human beings”. To emphasize their Judaism would be a concession to racist thinking (for criticisms of these universalizing tendencies see also Seymour 2008). In the same vain can a theory of antisemitism which takes Jewish action into account be conceived as justifying the same attitudes it tries to analyze. These taboos rely on the memory of historical or fictitious events, which reveal what happens when taboos are broken. They are based not on the hope of better times, but on the fear of worse ones. Historical memory is just as important as sociological imagination. The slogan “Never again” can also be based on the imagination of scenarios of madness. It is not only matter of hope for a better world, but of a fear that the world is getting worse. This involves not only the preservation of what we have but the fear of what will happen when home and livelihood are lost. This also means that this perception of fear includes the theory and practice of avoidance. It involves knowing what is possible and what on no account should become possible. It is a matter of judgment and the ability to distinguish good from evil. That of course also means that this fear includes a theory and practice of avoidance (of antisemitism, for instance). This is not, however, merely a mental attitude, it starts with the body and its vulnerability – its mortality. But this complicates judgment. In the age of radical liberation, intellectuals and non-intellectuals do not appreciate taboos. And often Jews are being accused to be the carriers of memory and that they impose those memories on others.

But not only antisemitism is at stake here. It is a matter, therefore, of taboos and of which taboos can and should be justified, if what is at stake are the basic principles of modernity. At issue is nothing less than the renewal of the much-maligned concept of humanity. Thus, antisemitism is not only of concern for the Jews. An almost ebullient cultural criticism, which declares the concepts “human being”, “humanity”, “freedom”, “individuality” to be Western mechanisms of repression, argues and criticizes within the horizon of a stable economic-technical civilization and society whose existence was never called into question. But is that still the case? Was it ever? When talking about antisemitism, what is at stake is the problem of a self-limitation of modernity: How are post-traditional, reflexive taboos made possible? Modernity must become aware of its own threatened modernity, of its own sacredness, which was destroyed in the Holocaust. That also involves the question of a transcendental horizon, which protects autocratic humankind from itself. If something becomes indelibly inscribed on the identity of a group, ethnic or national, then it is necessarily ringed round with taboos – and that is the simplest definition of the sacred. There are drawbacks to sacralization. The same passions that preserve memory against forgetfulness also defend it against desecration. And these same passions will get turned against any investigator that tries to examine the phenomena in question dispassionately. Any such investigation will be taken as an offence against memory and the group – specifically in this case, as the act of antisemitism.

Thus, to approach our subject, we need to work in a more circular form. I want to do this

through some of the work of Hannah Arendt, who has written about antisemitism before and after the catastrophe. The choice of Arendt is not arbitrary. Maybe more than any other thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the urgency of her thought regarding totalitarianism, democracy, critical judgment and evil has not lost its constant relevance for our times. Her being born Jewish, being engaged with the fate of the Jews which caught up with her life in Germany in 1933, her work with Jewish and Zionist organizations, her internal criticism of Zionism, her engagement with Jewish history and politics on a theoretical and practical level will make her a good companion for this article. However, this is not a paper about Arendt's political theory and the interpretation thereof.<sup>1</sup> Her political theoretical work written in the 1950s and 1960s is well known by now and established her reputation as one of the most important political thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less known are her writings on Jewish matters and her professional work with Jewish agencies and institutions which in my opinion laid the groundwork for her later theoretical work.<sup>2</sup> Throughout her life, growing up in Germany as a Jew, escaping Germany to Paris in 1933, leaving France in 1941 to the USA, her work with Jewish organizations, her political observations, her philosophical writings, she will be the embodiment and analytical prism, which will try to shed light on the possibilities and impossibilities of how Jewish intellectuals can critically deal with Jewish existence. This is not about essentializing her Jewishness, just the opposite. For Arendt, being Jewish was not a concern of religious practice, but a political identity. Throughout her work, Arendt was concerned about language and its appropriateness to express extreme experiences. What language do we need to speak and can we speak when we talk about the destruction of the Jews? She knew that this was a crucial question after she published her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* first as a series of articles and then as a book in 1963. The debate was also about the modes of "speaking" about the Holocaust. But even before, in the 1940s and 1950s, Arendt was concerned with the newness of antisemitism as a political ideology (Bernstein 1996, 48ff.). At the same time, she rejected so-called scapegoat theories of antisemitism. Her political view of the world did not allow her to perceive Jews as "innocent" victims, nor did she want to look at antisemitism as a timeless or eternal ideology. Something new was at play here.<sup>3</sup> Arendt was trying to understand the break with the past and at the same time to articulate the newness in her political writings. It was extremely important to her to demonstrate that the relations between Jews and non-Jews might have been a starting point, but very soon, ideology and reality are so mixed up that they can hardly be distinguished anymore. We will see how this "mixing up" of reality and illusion played a huge role in public perception about Jews and modernity.

The changes in her thinking were caused by what "ought not to have happened" (Arendt 1994, 14), as she explained so vividly in an interview with Günter Gaus in 1965). In the same interview Arendt explains her "before" and "after" understanding of antisemitism and the Holocaust: "Before that we said: Well, one has enemies. That is entirely natural. Why shouldn't a people have enemies? But this was different. It was really as if an abyss had opened. Because we had the idea that amends could somehow be made for everything else, as amends can be made for just about everything at some point in politics. But not for this." (ibid., 13–14) One can even hear a certain pride in Arendt's words that a people should have enemies and that one even respects one's enemies. This jives, of course, with her autonomous theory of politics, the basic point being here is that politics was something separate from, and opposed to, and in danger of being swallowed by too much involvement in economic life, where there are no enemies' just competitors. Arendt was a Zionist in her early age and probably remained sentimentally attached to Zionism throughout her entire life. She believed that Zionism was "the only political answer the Jews have ever found to antisemitism" (Arendt 1951, 120). She was arrested in 1933 when

she was collecting antisemitic propaganda materials in the library in Berlin. After her release eight days later she left Germany to Paris to continue working for Jewish causes and the Zionist movement. In 1941, after having been interned in a camp, she succeeded making her way to Portugal and left to the USA, where she continued working for Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, a Jewish organization with the distinct aim to recover Jewish cultural materials robbed by the Nazis and to bring them either to the USA or to Israel. Arendt was an engaged Jew, wrote in Jewish journals and newspapers, worked for Jewish organizations around 20 years of her life, even agitating for a Jewish army to fight the Nazis (for most biographical data see Young-Bruehl 1982).

This alone does not explain why she is so important to illuminate questions of antisemitism in our days. She has written about antisemitism, but so have many others (see Traverso 2004). Arendt will serve us here as the personification of an ideal in all its inherent contradictions. Looking at her thoughts on antisemitism, one can counteract current debates, where the particular experiences of Jews have been excluded. Arendt presents a competing historical version of the Jewish experience showing the value of the recognition of particularism in the context of ethno-cultural-religious diversity. This was already quite clear when she worked on her biography of Rahel Varnhagen. There, Arendt struggled with Jewish issues of assimilation and acculturation through analysis of the struggles of a Jewish woman in Germany during the Enlightenment. Rahel Varnhagen wanted to be both Jewish and German at the same time and tried in vain to escape her Jewishness. Arendt tried to link personal stories (the life of Rahel Varnhagen) with larger political issues of assimilation and emancipation. In the biography of Varnhagen, Arendt opened up questions of Jewish identity, which would occupy her throughout her intellectual career. Was the Enlightenment indeed the beginning of a successful integration of Jews into larger society? Could Jewish Emancipation provide the necessary protection for minorities? Her answers to these questions remained ambivalent and it was exactly this ambivalence which infuriated many of her Jewish interlocutors. It is also this ambivalence which makes her thoughts on the subject still relevant.

So, why does the name of Hannah Arendt provoke such resentment amongst some Jewish commentators even provoking some of them to accuse her of antisemitism as well? Sure, her account of the Eichmann Trial (Arendt 1963) was very critical of the Israeli leadership and the conduct of the trial, and even more critical of the Jewish leadership during the Holocaust, but would that be enough to explain the deep antagonism she evokes in some critics? Thus, one critical observer of Arendt's theories argues: "perhaps she had read too much antisemitic literature for her own good." (Laqueur 1998, 492) In a recently published essay in *Times Literary Supplement* Bernard Wasserstein pushes this point even further. He argues that Laqueur does not go far enough. Not only did she read too much antisemitic literature for her own good, but too much Nazi literature (2009, 14). Wasserstein goes on to analyze some of Arendt's footnotes in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which she published in 1951. One can detect there that she used some sources of Walter Frank, a Nazi historian and part of Nazi attempts to study the Jews in a pseudo-scientific way (see Rupnow 2008). Using Frank and other antisemites as sources for one's own study of antisemitism is indeed very unusual and uncommon, especially after 1945. Arendt is aware of this, of course, and does it in a conscious way. She calls him a convinced antisemite (Arendt 1951, 339) but also someone who "remained somewhat careful about the sources and methods" (ibid., 21). This is indeed a breaking of a taboo after 1945.

Arendt was using some of these sources as if her book was not published in 1951 but in 1931 and this seems to be part of the motivation of the attack on her. Wasserstein (2009, 15)

concludes his own analysis of her motivation with nothing less but character assassination: “it was symptomatic of a perverse world-view contaminated by over-exposure to the discourse of collective contempt and stigmatization that formed the object of her study.” But let’s look closer what it is Arendt actually quotes from Frank since this is a crucial point for our analysis of antisemitism. In the part of her book where she criticizes Jewish emancipation Arendt writes about Walter Rathenau, the Jewish foreign minister of the Weimar Republic who was killed by right wingers in 1922: “The last Jew who owned his prominence on the national scene to his international Jewish connection was Walter Rathenau (...). He paid with his life for having (...) donated his prestige in the international world of finance and the support of Jews everywhere in the world (...).” (Arendt 1951, 21) This is exactly the place where Arendt quotes an article by Walter Frank published in a Nazi journal dealing with so-called research on the Jews. And then she goes on to show that antisemitic governments could not have used Jews for the business of war since their connections were based on interdependencies. Wasserstein protests against this by claiming: “let us recall that it was precisely the accusation that Rathenau was an international traitor rather than a German patriot that formed the motive for his assassination by a right-wing fanatic.” (Wasserstein 2009, 14) True enough, but that sounds, of course, rather apologetic. Are we supposed to believe that Rathenau was a good German and his being Jewish just an accident of birth?<sup>4</sup> Arendt did not buy into this kind of emancipatory illusion. Right in the beginning of her book (Chapter One: Antisemitism as an Outrage to Common Sense) Arendt rejects so-called scapegoat theories of antisemitism. One does not choose one’s victim arbitrarily. She also rejects what she calls “eternal antisemitism” where Jew hatred is part of the natural order of the world. For her, both theories do not explain what is new about antisemitism: “The birth and growth of modern antisemitism has been accompanied by and interconnected with Jewish assimilation, the secularization and withering away of the old religious and spiritual values of Judaism.” (Ibid, 7) Arendt also looks at this from the sight of “after the catastrophe”, and there is no way that scapegoat theory can explain the extermination of the Jews (see also Bernstein 1996). It can also not explain that Jews were political actors on the European scene and that Jewish and European history cannot be separated.

All this makes her also a “cultural heroine” in circles critical of Israel and, in turn, a “cultural villain” in the opposite camp (see on this also Yakira 2006). Thus, the claims that Arendt’s arguments are somehow contaminated by antisemitic ideas just express an almost intentional misunderstanding of her perception of Jewish history and Jewish political action. This is not about blaming the victim, but about the responsibility of the Jews for their own history. As she put it: “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 into another and accepted responsibility for none.” (Arendt 1951, 8) This is a strong indictment about Jewish worldlessness.<sup>5</sup> But what does it mean?

Clearly, Arendt also has a political agenda. She looked for Jewish responsibility, the Jewish attraction to internationalism and interconnectedness and not to war. Clearly it is not an accident that Arendt wrote this book just after the Nazis and World War II had destroyed this German-Jewish world of educated and wealthy bourgeois like Rathenau. For Arendt, warrior ideals (which she, of course, also admired) would destroy everything that other people had built up for the sake of glory. But this was also very close to home. Again, we find in her approach to warrior ideals ambivalence. In the 1940s Arendt wrote articles in the German-Jewish magazine *Aufbau*, where she talks exactly about those Jewish warrior ideals. Thus, in an article published August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1944, entitled *A Lesson in Six Shots* (Arendt 2007, 217–219), she wrote about young Jewish girls,

Jewish partisans, who were proudly marching through the streets of Vilna. It was particularly one girl who caught her attention. Arendt lamented that she “does not yet know that we actually glory only in being victims, innocent victims, and that we celebrate her and those like her not as heroes but as martyrs” (ibid., 218). And her entire account of the Eichmann trial reads like she was embarrassed about the helplessness of the Jews. As opposed to this kind of warrior heroism, she put the strivings for wealth and commerce that was carried on by the citizens of towns, by Jews and by women, who counteracted the destructive force warriors with the quiet pleasures of enjoying material things. If we look at Weimar Germany for instance, we can find Jews like Rathenau, trying to work out economic and political arrangements which would connect Germany to England and avoid war. And there were others, like Rathenau, who were similarly between cultures and similarly regarded with suspicion. And they saw themselves playing the same dangerous game for the same high stakes: for the preservation of civilization and all that they had built. It was precisely the virtue of these Jews that they were between cultures. Arendt admired this being between worlds but was aware of its price as well. In the before mentioned interview with Gaus she said: “The specifically Jewish humanity signified by their worldlessness was something very beautiful (...). It was something very beautiful, this standing outside of all social connections, the complete open-mindedness and absence of prejudice (...).” (Arendt 1994, 17)

This is what Arendt meant. To be worldless gave the Jews their sophistication, their breadth of vision and their tolerance. Their culture came from many places, and, as it existed mixed in them, all of it felt familiar, as if it belonged together. In this they embodied the ideal of integration. It was inextricably part of their ideal of individual cultivation. Among Jews like this, rootedness – being fixed in one place and submerged one culture – was regarded as a limitation. And limited people could extend their boundaries only by war. Thus Jews were the avant-garde of modernity. Many Jews were not aware of those characteristics themselves or even rejected them. It were the enemies of the Jews who recognized them clearly since those enemies were also enemies of integration and cultivation. Thus, not only the enemies of the Jews drew a connection between the modern institution of money and the Jews. Arendt was not the only one who observed this. Theoretically, this connection was established by the Jewish sociologist Georg Simmel (1900) right at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Money is identified by Simmel as the means and expression of social abstraction. The abstraction of personal relations results in the much wider nexi of impersonal relations. Historically, money has been a universal solvent that has replaced personal obligations with services purchased on the market and thereby freed individuals from particular others by making them more dependent on the whole. But this replacement of one large, unbreakable bond by a thousand little bonds is not an imitation of freedom. For Simmel, it is real freedom, the history of an increase in the individual’s scope of action. At the same time, the extension of the money economy tends to erode inequality through the same process of making people substitutable. Thus, as not only Simmel observed, it suited Jewish political and social interests, Arendt criticized this in her analysis of the Jewish parvenu (1951, 56–68). It is hard to maintain the ideal of inequality – that some people were born to rule, and others born to serve – when people are functionally interchangeable. Money therefore tends to extend the concept of equality, in so far as the legitimacy of inequality was based upon a perception of essential differences in the person. Simmel’s thoughts in many ways parallel the antisemites of his time. One just has to look at Werner Sombart’s *Die Zukunft der Juden* (published in 1912) as just one example. Both Simmel and Sombart identified secularized Jews with commerce as the people that “reduce everything to money”. Both Simmel and the antisemites saw such Jews

as carriers of modernity. And naturally both thought it represented the break-up of the old society. The only difference was that Simmel thought the modern world was a good thing. Arendt, of course, was more ambivalent about this, had to be more ambivalent about this, living through the dark times half a century later than Simmel.

In an actualized form of Simmel's sociology, Yuri Slezkine (2004) argues along similar lines identifying the modern age as the Jewish age. Slezkine, writing from the Eastern European perspective, claims that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the Jewish century. He does not argue in terms of the Holocaust and the Jewish catastrophe but bases his reasoning on Jewish dispositions and experiences; by viewing Jews as carriers of modernity in terms of literary orientations, mobility and urbanity. Slezkine stresses the universal potential of the Jewish experience as a link to modernity. Again, we encounter the concept of "worldlessness" even though Slezkine does not use it. He demonstrates that the virtues of modernity are nothing other than Jewish virtues such as the intellectual achievement of globalization. In his presentation, Jews are not only revolutionaries, but they stand for a modernity, which is urbane, mobile, educated, articulated, intellectual and flexible. Slezkine (remindful of Simmel) describes a society of strangers, who perceive their alienation as an opportunity for liberation. With this Jewish history can be read as universal history. But more is at stake at this point. It is at the same time the Jewish refusal to succumb to an unconditional universalism and their preservation of particular attachments even in terms of the eternal versus the temporal which transformed Jews into exemplary carriers of a hatred of modernity directed against them.

We are back at the point where antisemitic arguments meet the analysis of the Jewish condition. Clearly, the antisemites agreed that being lost in dreams, arcades and commerce and being cut off from the land is bad not only for Jews but for the world. And furthermore, Jews were identified as being worldless and fluid. Antisemites considered the modernist project as something alien, and denounced it as Jewish, rationalistic, individualistic and secular. Wanting to make the Jews normal like all the others became a project pursued by those seeking assimilation as well as by Zionists. This included exercising sovereignty, power, and normalized means of actions of state and nation. What the antisemites (and many Conservatives) seemed to have understood is that honor and money, like fire and water, cannot exist together. They are the circulatory media of two very different systems of behavior that are distinguished in both our historical memory and in social theory. Economic behavior is supposed to be self-regarding, rational and calculative. Honorable behavior is supposed to be undertaken without thought of gain, to be based on intrinsic values, and to be other-regarding. In common parlance, to act honorably is to override one's personal interest and to act on principle. Honor is appropriate to a world of social hierarchies which no longer exist. Its attraction lives on even though the world it once regulated is dead. Modern Liberals had no use for honor.

Arendt was no liberal. Neither did she believe in the kind of liberal individualism so prominent in Anglo-Saxon thought. She was attracted to honor. She could not accept that Jews were helpless victims of resentment and hatred. She wanted them to be active participants as one means to restore their honor. On April 21<sup>st</sup> 1944, at the anniversary of Warsaw ghetto uprising, Arendt wrote a column at the *Aufbau* called *For the Honor and Glory of the Jewish People* (Arendt 2007, 199–201), where she proudly claimed that "honor and glory are new words in the political vocabulary of our people" (ibid., 199). Arendt was torn between the worlds of ancient warrior virtues, which also meant to be fixed in place and time and the worldlessness of liberal society. This distinction also corresponds to her dichotomy between Jewish pariahs and parvenus (Arendt 1951, 56–68). She was torn between these two types of "social climber" and "rebel" as

she also conceptualized in her study of Rahel Varnhagen who wanted to be both (see also Bernstein 1996, 17ff.). In many ways, Arendt had trouble comprehending the virtues of so-called soft power, but she was judging this, of course, also from a view trying to comprehend the catastrophe which befell the Jewish people. But it is important to emphasize how the concept honor is inextricably linked to inequality.

Charles Taylor (1992) makes this point quite clear in his extended analysis. For some to have honor, it is necessary that others must not have it. And when the currency of social life was honor, Jews were among those who were not allowed to have it. They were *unehrenhaft*, “not honorable”, and therefore *satisfaktionsunfähig* or “incapable of giving satisfaction”, that is, of demanding a duel to satisfy their honor (and the use of German here is, of course, not accidental). Arendt wanted to give the Jews what the radical antisemites denied them by using their vocabulary and turning it on them. With that she did not do anything else than what all Zionists had been doing over a long period of time. The bourgeois concept that is analogous to honor is the concept of “dignity”. Unlike honor, it applies to everyone. Everyone can have it, everyone can lose it, everyone can fight for it. It is an egalitarian concept, and it is therefore compatible with democratic society. And it is a universalist concept that is therefore compatible with money. Money makes very different things equal. That’s the whole point of it. And, the emancipation of the Jews was also granting them dignity at the same time via citizenship. Dignity is as abstract as money is. But it is also exactly what romantics of the left and right hate, often combined in their disdain for Jews resented about it. Similarly to Arendt, Marx was torn between analyzing the Jews as carriers of modernity and admiring and resenting them for it at the same time. The young Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (first published in 1844) expressed these thoughts and revealed a surprisingly similar romantic longing for a nobler past to those of more aristocratic origin:

*Money, then, appears as this distorting power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be entities in themselves. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy (...). Assume man to be man and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging effect on other people. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return – that is, if your loving as loving does not produce reciprocal love; if through a living expression of yourself as a loving person you do not make yourself a beloved one, then your love is impotent – a misfortune (...). (Marx 1978, 83)*

This longing for a past when personal relations were more “authentic” makes the desire for money out to be inauthentic by contrast and this makes the Jews inauthentic as well. Money can only be cast in the role of a depersonalizing agent, and thus as an agent of de-humanization. But despite the seeming paradox, it was all too easy to personalize this supposed agent of depersonalization. Conservatives constantly railed against the climbing bourgeoisie. And we all know about the identification of the Jews with money, which Marx himself mulled over in his essay *On the Jewish Question*, written a few years before the manuscripts just quoted. Arendt was part of this rather romantic perception of the meaning of high politics which denigrated commercial

activity as non- or pre-political. This is why she was so critical to what she called parvenus (see also Schwartz 1970). For her, these were Jews who were concerned with individual well-being alone. At times she grasped the revolutionary power of this and at other times she resented it.

Now, if this roughly lays out the relations between money, honor and the Jews in a world of class privilege, what are the corresponding terms for thinking about these phenomena in a world without aristocracy? I would like to suggest that our thinking has yet to catch up with reality on these matters, and that the attitudes just outlined continue to exist, with very little consciousness of their roots, in contemporary attitudes towards Jews providing some clues about the continuities of transnational antisemitism. And this brings us back to Arendt. As we said, she was neither content to be a Jew, nor to be a universalist. This is also the basis for Arendt's tense relationship with Jews and Judaism. And she was not afraid to break taboos even if it meant to take antisemitic arguments and turning them against those who use them. She looked at the diasporic Jewish people as a nation amongst other nations, as though they were a pre-modern medieval corporation. However, the Emancipation (as Arendt knew very well) and more than anything else, the French Revolution changed all of this. European Jews started to feel the strain between citizenship and loyalty. Within the bounds of citizenship Jews needed to maneuver their Jewish identities and loyalties. It was also exactly this tension between citizenship and humanity that troubled Arendt in her analysis of human rights in her 1951 study on the *Origins of Totalitarianism*. But the beginning of this modern story lies in France and its revolution. And this is another point where romantics like Marx and Arendt agreed (even though she did not agree with anything the mature Marx had to say about capitalist relations). For Marx the French Revolution was about making the bourgeoisie reign. For Arendt, the same revolution was about Jewish emancipation, meaning for her the end of significant Jewish collective existence and the beginning of bourgeois rule.

One of the defining moments in the debate during the French Revolution in the French National Assembly was whether Jews can be citizens or need to be treated like all the other foreigners. One of the more important speakers at the Assembly was Stanislas Marie Adelaide, Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, a liberal aristocrat, who argued for the inclusion of Jews and Protestants into the nascent French nation (he was killed during the storming of the Tuileries in 1792). On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1789, he gave a speech which became constitutive of Jewish modernity after the French Revolution. He defined the parameters of individual citizenship stating they should not be based on ethnicity, nationality or culture:

*Every creed has only one test to pass in regard to the social body: it has only one examination to which it must submit that of its morals. It is here that the adversaries of the Jewish people attack me. This people, they say, is not sociable (...). But, they say to me, the Jews have their own judges and laws. I respond that is your fault and you should not allow it. We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation. (...) In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen. (Quoted in Hunt 1996, 86–88)*

These words are a hope and curse at the same time. The Jewish exile can be over. Assimilation and civic equality become keys to the end of exile. Jews can stop being wanderers, they can be equal. This promise especially in Western Europe created the contradiction between nationalism as a universal force and the attraction of super and supra national modes of belonging – the modern form of life in exile. Clermont-Tonnere told the Jews that there was no room for particular wills within the general will of the nation. This was a truly revolutionary thought and has remained one of the integral aspects of being European; in fact the European project of unity is based on it. Europe's universal pride allowed Jews to be part of it as equals, to become integrated as Germans, French etc. but not as Jews (a nation within a nation). And this was, of course, the major antisemitic argument. The Jews are a nation within a nation and assimilated Jews frantically denied this claim. France is exemplary herein that it became the classic locus of the translation of emancipatory ideas into politics.

Emancipation did indeed emancipate (Birnbaum/Katznelson 1995). It released the Jews from the confines of their community and had them enter modernity as individuals – moreover as individuals who like all other citizens had to rely on the protection of the state. However, from this moment on, Jewish “difference” became a modern problem which had enormous political consequences in later centuries (Sutcliffe 2006). This was not only true for the Jews. The French Revolution did indeed try to dissolve all corporations in order to construct its new universal state. Citizenship promised to end the Jewish Diaspora and bring the Jews home, but not as Jews anymore, as citizens. Thus, citizenship was part of solving the Jewish problem. That's at least what the Jews in Western European countries believed and what the antisemites tried to deny them. The Jews were used to living in autonomous communities knit together by religious and community bonds. The revolution severed these bonds (nation within a nation) and provided universal citizenship in its stead, which is exactly also where Arendt's criticism of abstract universalism starts. With the destruction of these bonds, the question of Jewish solidarity and belonging became a predicament. Jews were provided “exit visas” from their “national and corporate” existence but not “entry tickets” into the societies they lived in (Bauman 1988). Existentially the question is to assimilate or not. But the intellectual puzzle is: can a Jew assimilate? Or aren't the two things opposed? So that the more you assimilate, the less you are a Jew. And if you still feel very much like a Jew despite assimilated clothes and manners and way of life, that's a sign that you haven't yet fully assimilated. Arendt's basic answer is: if it's not possible to be both, it's not possible for the Jews to exist. The Holocaust made it impossible for her ever to consider her Jewishness something secondary. It was, indeed, a matter of life and death. To give it up would be a betrayal of self and of millions.

Arendt experienced this personally in France during her stay there between 1933 and 1941. After being interned by the French as an enemy alien she fled to the United States. Her first publication in the US was about France and the Dreyfus affair – for many the beginning of the end of Jewish emancipation in the country of its invention. And not only that, the Dreyfus affair has turned into the symbol of European antisemitism. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew and officer, was falsely accused at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of treason. The French army, the last bastion of French revolt against the “liberty, equality, fraternity” of the French Revolution attacked the Jew Dreyfus as a foreigner, a man without honor, a member of a nation within a nation and hence a traitor to the army and its followers (including what Arendt called the French mob). The enemies of the Jews considered them the embodiment of the French Revolution using notions like equality to dominate and subject the “true” French nation. This essay was the starting point for a lengthy Arendtian project of criticizing the French concept of universal nationhood and almost

ten years later became the first part of her *Origins of Totalitarianism*. For many Jews (including the Zionists), the Dreyfus affair symbolized the beginning of the end of Jewish emancipation in Europe more than three decades before the Nazis came to power. Jews could not escape the dilemma of being a “nation within a nation”. In an era when modernity was also a transition from “community” to “society”, the Jews were accused of being a “nation within a nation”, still a close knit community, that thus undermined universal claims of citizenship and at the same time of taking advantage of the increasing privatization and commercialization of society. Thus, the Dreyfus affair was also a symbol of not only denying honor to the Jews but also dignity. The Jews were caught in a double bind, because they were thought of as too particular to be universal citizens and as too universal to transcend the bounds of citizenship to be particular citizens. This was not only a predicament for Jews as citizens. It also became a predicament for Jews as socialists, the second great promise for European Jews to leave the pale of the exile. In 1843 Karl Marx reflected on this already in his *On the Jewish Question* on the political emancipation of the Jews and why it had to fail. Marx did not believe that the Jewish problem could be solved through legal means. Equal citizenship was not the problem, capitalism was: “The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism”, and this statement became not only a battle cry for the enemies of the Jews, but for Jews themselves who saw in Socialism a secularized solution to ancient Jewish longings of salvation now termed “human emancipation”. Jews as Jews undermined this universal claim. Marx put the Jews center stage in the European drama of modernity. Jews became the symbol of all modern paradoxes. As a figure of particularity they undermined the universal claim of the Enlightenment, they turned into the outsiders of the Enlightenment still living in fantasy worlds of close-knit communities.

However, at the same time Jews were also the symbol of its contrary: trans-nationalism, homelessness, abstraction, multiple loyalties and the money economy. This defines the paradoxical situation of the Jews: their trans-nationality was particular and their particularity was trans-national. Again, it was Arendt who tried to re-cast this predicament as a virtue. When she criticized the Enlightenment as being hostile to Jewish experience, she sought a political Jewish solidarity transcending the solidarity of the nation (perhaps modeled on class solidarity). She believed in the “nation within a nation”: not the nation in the old medieval corporate sense but in a new political sense. This “nation within a nation” principle often prompted Arendt to argue for a Jewish army (as though the Jews were indeed a nation and had the power that the antisemites always assumed the Jews to have) before the foundation of the State of Israel to combat its enemies. As she stated many times: “If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew.” (e.g. Arendt 1994, 12) She adhered to this line of thought in her later practical and theoretical works. Her work on the *Origins of Totalitarianism* is about the Jewish condition in disguise and is a bridge between her earlier works on Jewish matters and her later work on universal matters, culminating in an account which purports to be both (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* published in 1963). Arendt was neither apologetic towards the Liberals who thought that Jews are like everybody else, nor did she buy into Leftist arguments that claimed some kind of affinity between fascism and capitalism, where antisemitism was just an arbitrary by-product (Postone 1986). She believed that the worldlessness of the Jews became their deadly fate. Deprived of citizenship, turned into stateless refugees, killed in the camps with no one to claim or protect them, they have become superfluous people.

Arendt has written another text on antisemitism. This essay (or maybe even book) was published only in 2007 in English translation as part of the edited volume of *The Jewish Writings*. It was written originally in German (still not published) during Arendt’s exile in France, prob-

ably in the last years of the 1930s. Like the first part of *Origins of Totalitarianism* it is called "Antisemitism" as well, but demonstrates a different approach. The reader of this book manuscript may be surprised. It had been written before the abyss of the Holocaust opened up for her and before the systematic destruction of the Jews took place. The analysis is less political; it lacks the attacks on assimilated and assimilating Jews characterizing her reading of antisemitism in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. It also stresses more continuity than a break with history. It seems that for Arendt, sociology before the Holocaust could still be relevant, a view she somehow gave up after 1945. Thus, this text is a much more sociologically inclined reading about Germany, German Jews, emancipation, and class envy. Similar to her other essays, the Jewish role in finance is still a focal point but it is looked at differently at that time. The essay also lays out her reading of Jewish history in a more concise way. She distinguishes between two readings of Jewish history which she both rejects: a nationalist and an assimilationist one. For her, both types are "characterized by their inability to come to terms with antisemitism" (Arendt 2007, 49). As she puts it: "Assimilationists were never able to explain how things could ever turn out so badly, and for Zionists there still remains the unresolved fact that things might have gone well." (ibid., 51) From there, Arendt develops a class based theory of antisemitism, which is the modern version of it, leaving religion behind. It is about the aristocracy trying to defend its losing power and interests and denouncing the Jews as carriers of modernity and capitalism. This meant that the bourgeoisie in order to cut off so-called Jewish traits from themselves (being "materialistic, unpatriotic, revolutionary, destructive, speculative, and deceitful and lacking historical ties to the nation" (ibid., 109), the bourgeoisie attached itself to these feudal arguments and the liberals' self-hatred became hatred of the Jews. With her arguments here, Arendt connected theoretically to the arguments of Simmel and Sombart.

We have turned full circle in our argument (while going backwards in time with Arendt). Even though Arendt wrote about Germany, we do have a European obsession here with the Jews and their relation to modernity and capitalism. This is what makes this reading relevant for modern times as well. And we are back to taboos which protect our symbolic boundaries. After the Holocaust, these taboos were solid walls, but in times of increased globalization, these walls are being torn down. Clearly, within Arendt's theory, morality is based on particularity and on identity. It is based on being able to look ourselves in the mirror and say that we have fulfilled the moral obligations that make us who we are. This above all means the special responsibilities we have to particular others who are linked to us through accidents of history and birth. That is why she thinks that her being Jewish is a matter of birth and therefore, a matter of course. To ignore the roots of responsibilities in identity is to misunderstand the basis of morality, and to sweep it all aside is an attempt to forget who you are – and to flee personal responsibility. Thus for her, a value-free description of antisemitism is wrong in itself because the Ought is immanent in the Is. Many Jews were outraged at the way she looked at facts which they felt tampered with sacred taboos. She was not willing to look at victimhood alone. She was trying to make explicit that there is an enormous difference between acting on values and being value neutral. For Arendt, there is no value-free description. There is only flight from one's identity. And this is the best we can learn from Arendt's ambivalence about the Jews: "An antisemite claimed that the Jews had caused the war; the reply was: Yes, the Jews and the bicyclists. Why the bicyclists? asks the one. Why the Jews? asks the other." (Arendt 1951, 5)

## NOTES

- 1 Many inspiring books have been written on Arendt's political theory. See especially Benhabib; 1996 Canovan 1992; Hansen 1993; Kateb 1983; and Villa 1999 amongst many others.
- 2 A groundbreaking work on Arendt and Jewish identity is Bernstein 1996. He dedicates an entire chapter to Arendt's theory of antisemitism as political ideology (46–70). See also Birnbaum 2008, 203–241. Arendt's writings on Jewish matters have been recently published in a compound volume edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman 2007.
- 3 Most of Arendt's ideas on this subject are formulated in the first part of "Origins of Totalitarianism". Since its publication, readers of this book try to make sense out of it. Besides Bernstein see amongst many others also Schulze-Wessel 2006 and Salzborn 2010.
- 4 Rathenau was, of course, always a controversial figure. Robert Musil in his unsurpassed portrayal of the end of the Habsburg Empire, "The Man without Qualities", based his portrayal of Dr. Arnheim on Rathenau (see Tihanov 2007). Arnheim/Rathenau was here portrayed as a man without (or with too many) qualities. Arendt may have agreed.
- 5 It is well known that Arendt had no patience for Freudian musings on the subconscious, even though her thoughts on worldlessness do display some similarities with Freudian notions of narcissism. Even more, Arendt's concept of "worldlessness" can be seen as a turn in psychoanalytical elaborations of the role of traumatic memories. Arendt felt no need to consider this kind of literature. Apparently, it was too "private" for her political views of the "public".

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