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ZION'S REBEL DAUGHTER

Hannah Arendt on Palestine and Jewish Politics

BOTH DURING HER lifetime (1906–1975) and posthumously, Hannah Arendt's reputation has been based largely on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963); perhaps supplemented by *The Human Condition* (1958), for a more specialist readership. The first book, which shot her to fame, remains an enormously powerful but uneven work, lacking any introductory overview or methodological statement. Though initially conceived during World War Two as an analysis of 'racial imperialism', Arendt changed her mind several times about its overall form: the strikingly original opening sections on antisemitism and imperialism were all but completed two years before she decided—in 1948, at the height of the Cold War—to draft the long final section on 'totalitarianism', equating communism with fascism. The second book, her report on Adolf Eichmann's trial, won her a different sort of notoriety, along with virtual excommunication in Israel, and demonstrated the intellectual courage she showed throughout her life.

What has been largely hidden hitherto, however, is her body of work on antisemitism, Jewish politics and the Zionist project, mainly written during the 1930s and 40s, long before *Eichmann in Jerusalem* appeared. The publication of *The Jewish Writings*¹ now allows the reader to reconstruct in detail the historical development of her ideas on Zionism; it is probably the best single bloc of writing—the most concrete, level-headed, powerful and prophetic—that Arendt produced. Half of the material has never appeared in English before, and about a fifth is previously unpublished anywhere. The variety is impressive: in terms of genre, there are lengthy scholarly essays, short journalistic interventions, major review-articles,

conference papers, letters and interviews. In terms of theme: history of European Jewry, Middle East politics, Judeocide. Texts originally written in German or French appear in excellent English translation. The collection represents a qualitative as well as quantitative advance on the only previous selection of these works, published by one of the editors in 1978 and now long out of print.² All in all, it is a major extension of our knowledge of Arendt's work and thought.

Königsberg to Paris

Arendt came relatively late to the subject matter of *The Jewish Writings*. As she famously told Karl Jaspers, as a young woman she had 'found the so-called "Jewish Question" quite boring'.³ Arguably, it was not until 1933, the year she turned twenty-seven, that her political thinking on these issues really began to crystallize. As a child, though 'my mother would have given me a real spanking if she had ever had reason to believe that I had denied being Jewish', the matter was 'never a topic of discussion'. The secular, middle-class Jewish environment in Königsberg in which Arendt grew up, before and after the First World War, had been relatively secure; the city's working-class Jews lived on the other side of the river, to the south, and the two communities seldom mingled. Her parents, social democrats, were non-religious; also non-conventional. The father, an amateur classicist who worked for an electrical engineering company, died of syphilis when Arendt was seven. Her mother was a Paris-trained musician, whose strength of character was evident in the instructions she gave her child on how to respond to antisemitic remarks: if these emanated from teachers, Hannah was to leave school instantly, report the incident at home, where it would promptly be followed by her mother's letter of complaint; if the slur came from her peers, she would have to contend with it on her own and utter not a word about the incident at home: 'One must defend oneself!'⁴

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman, New York 2007; the relevance of the collection's title will be addressed below. I retain Arendt's spelling of 'antisemitism', based, as the editors observe, on the fact that 'there never was an ideology or movement called "Semitism", which makes "anti-Semitism" and its cognates logical misnomers.' See *Jewish Writings*, p. xxxiii.

² Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, edited by Ron Feldman, New York 1978.

³ Letter to Karl Jaspers, 7 September 1952.

⁴ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, New Haven 1982, pp. 10–11.

At university in Heidelberg and Marburg—studying philosophy with Heidegger, then with Jaspers, and involved in a series of love affairs—Arendt opted for a dissertation on Augustinian notions of transcendental love. As she would put it to Gershom Scholem, rebutting his sneer at the time of the Eichmann trial that she ‘came from the German Left’: ‘I was interested neither in history nor in politics when I was young. If I can be said to “have come from anywhere”, it is from the tradition of German philosophy.’⁵ Her initial approach to the Jewish Question was through the critique of assimilation to which, as she told Jaspers, ‘Kurt Blumenfeld opened my eyes’. Blumenfeld, a fellow Königsberger and leading speaker for the Zionist Organization of Germany, was one of many charismatic older men with whom she would maintain close relations; they first met in 1926 when he came to Heidelberg to address a group of Jewish students, Arendt among them. In 1929 she began a study of the German Enlightenment, which came to focus on the multi-volume correspondence of the 1790s Jewish *salonnière* Rahel Varnhagen: the brilliant and emancipated daughter of a Berlin diamond merchant, interlocutor and hostess of Goethe, the Schlegels, the Humboldts et al.; even then, the first eleven chapters of Arendt’s (highly autobiographical) biography, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, were as much about passion, existence and interiority as about the dilemmas of German-Jewish assimilation.

It was with the rise of National Socialism and the darkening political situation in Germany from 1930 that, while still working on the Varnhagen papers in the Prussian State Library in Berlin, Arendt began specifically to address the Jewish Question. Kohn and Feldman’s collection of *The Jewish Writings* opens with three pieces from this period, written for the Berlin-based *Jüdische Rundschau* and for a German Jewish history journal: two of these articles focus on the Enlightenment, the third argues for the provision of inclusive, not private, Jewish schools for the children then being driven out of the German education system. From Blumenfeld she had learnt of the different wings of the Zionist movement, epitomized in the radically different reactions of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) and Bernard Lazare (1865–1903) to the antisemitism of the Dreyfus Affair; and of Lazare’s striking distinction between two modern Jewish types, the parvenu and the (conscious) pariah. In contrast to Herzl’s policy of exodus to a Jewish homeland, and pursuit of elite

⁵ ‘The Eichmann Controversy: Letter to Gershom Scholem, July 24, 1963’, in *Jewish Writings*, p. 466.

support to win it—a goal in which, as he presciently remarked in the early 1900s, ‘the antisemites will be our staunchest friends’—for Lazare, as Arendt would later put it:

the territorial question was secondary. What he sought was not an escape from antisemitism but a mobilization of the people against its foes . . . He did not look around for more or less antisemitic protectors but for real comrades-in-arms, whom he hoped to find among all the oppressed groups of contemporary Europe.⁶

It was on this tradition that Arendt now drew. By the 1930s, the bankruptcy of any assimilation strategy for European Jewry had been thrown into stark relief: ‘In a society on the whole hostile to Jews, it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating to antisemitism also’.⁷ At the same time a Zionist model based on the ‘philanthropic domination’ of wealthy Jews—the parvenus—over their poorer outcast brethren had to be combated by Lazare’s more egalitarian ideal: a republic of ‘conscious pariahs’.

The pressing political need was to defend the Jewish people. Fleeing to Paris in 1933, having been briefly arrested for collecting material evidence of antisemitism for Blumenfeld’s group, Arendt began working for Youth Aliyah—a Zionist organization helping European Jewish teenagers move to Palestine—and, for a short stint, the Baroness Germaine de Rothschild.⁸ In Paris, in the spring of 1936, Arendt met Heinrich Blücher, with whom she would share the rest of her life. At that stage still a revolutionary Communist, Blücher was a tough and independent-minded Berliner who had participated as a 19-year-old infantryman in the 1918 Soldiers’ Councils and the Spartacist rising; a close KPD comrade of Heinrich Brandler during the 1920s, moving in avant-garde circles, he had fled Berlin with no identity papers in 1934. Their relationship would have a transformative impact on Arendt’s political thinking.⁹

⁶ ‘Herzl and Lazare’ [1942], in *Jewish Writings*, pp. 338–42.

⁷ *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, New York 1974, p. 224; cited in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 92.

⁸ Arendt’s biographer recounts: ‘Germaine de Rothschild’s favourite charity was a children’s home, and Arendt arranged for her visits—or visitations. She liked to appear in jewels and silks of the Rothschild red, with her limousine full of toys and candies, on the rather romantic theory that the children would feel they had been singled out for a miracle’. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 120.

⁹ As Arendt wrote in her essay on Luxemburg and Jogiches: ‘We shall never know how many of Rosa Luxemburg’s ideas derived from Jogiches; in marriage, it is not always easy to tell the partners’ thoughts apart.’ ‘Rosa Luxemburg’, *Men in Dark Times*, New York 1968, pp. 45–6; cited in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 135.

Its extent can be gauged from a comparison of the exchange of letters in August 1936, partly cited in Kohn's Preface, when the pair had only known each other a few months, with the pieces that Arendt went on to write thereafter. Initially, to Blücher's trenchant formulations on the Jewish question—

The Jewish people must become proud and not ask for any handouts. Its bourgeoisie corrupts it. Particularly in Palestine, where it wants to be handed a whole country. But you can't just be given a country, any more than you can be given a woman; both must be earned . . . To want a country, a whole country, as a present from a gangster who first of all has to steal it? To end up as a fence for an English plunderer? True enough, in barbarian times you could also get yourself a woman this way, but along with her you would get her total contempt and her unquenchable hatred . . . [Instead], let us join forces with the Arab workers and labourers to liberate the land from the English plunderers and the Jewish bourgeoisie that is in alliance with them. Then you will receive your share, and the revolutionaries of the whole world will guarantee it to you. That is materialistic workers' politics.

—Arendt had replied in relatively conventional Zionist mode, occluding the Arabs and couching the claim to Palestine in biblical terms (if mediated through German idealism):

Palestine. Good God, unfortunately you are right. But if we're pitching conquest against gift, then it seems to me that a military campaign against swamp, malaria, desert and stone—for that is what our Promised Land looks like—is also quite commendable. If we do want to become one people, then any old territory that the world revolution might someday want to present us with would not be of much help to us. For whichever way you look at it, that land is unavoidably bound with our past. Palestine is not at the centre of our national aspirations because 2,000 years ago some people lived there from whom in some sense or other we are supposed to be descended, but because for 2,000 years the craziest of peoples took pleasure in preserving the past in the present, because for them 'the ruins of Jerusalem are, as you could say, rooted in the heart of time' (Herder).¹⁰

Yet within the next few years, Arendt would produce not only the final chapters of her *Rahel Varnhagen*—'I wrote the end of the book very irritably in the summer of 1938, because Blücher and [Walter] Benjamin would not leave me in peace until I did,' she told Jaspers—but also the monumental though unfinished essay, 'Antisemitism', published for the

¹⁰ *Jewish Writings*, p. xviii; *Within Four Walls: The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher, 1936–1968*, pp. 16–17, 20–21.

first time in *The Jewish Writings*. It is clear that she had intended this manuscript to be a book, for it breaks off, after nearly 40,000 words, with a sentence beginning: 'In the next chapter we shall see . . .' Kohn suggests that she was writing it in Paris between 1938 and May 1940, when she was interned for several months as an enemy alien.¹¹ Although the text, written in German, shares the same title as the first section of the tripartite *Origins of Totalitarianism*, there are major differences between the two. The analysis in the later work is far more diffuse, mingling psychological insight and sociological portraiture—most famously: Disraeli, Proust, the Dreyfusards—with an account of the rise of imperialism, focused on the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

European Jewry

By contrast, the earlier 'Antisemitism' is quite different both in content and in form. The text is a rigorously historical examination of the Jewish Question in Europe—first and foremost, Germany—from the medieval era, through the rise of the early-modern absolutist state, to the modern age. Arendt rejects the assumptions on which both the assimilationist and nationalist-Zionist explanations are based, arguing that in the end they are not so very different. The Zionist account 'strips the relationship between Jews and their host nation of its historicity and reduces it to a play of forces (like those of attraction and repulsion) between two natural substances'; it sees a 100 per cent difference between the two. Assimilationist historians, on the other hand, 'opt for an equally uncritical assumption of a 100 per cent correspondence between Jews and their host nation . . . The Jews were Germans and nothing more'. Yet by the late 1930s, these 'nothing but Germans' could only enjoy the civil and legal rights that the German upper house had granted them in 1869 if they could show proof that not one of their grandparents was Jewish. Arendt comments: 'Assimilationists were never able to explain how things could ever have turned out so badly, and for the Zionists there still remains the unresolved fact that things might have gone well.'¹² Neither account manages to pull away from antisemitism's confines.

¹¹ Preface, *Jewish Writings*, p. xix. Arendt was summoned with other female 'aliens' to the Vélodrome d'Hiver on 15 May 1940, then transported to the internment camp at Gurs in southern France. In the bureaucratic chaos following the fall of France in June 1940, she and other internees seized the chance to write out release papers for themselves: Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 155.

¹² 'Antisemitism' [c. 1938–39], *Jewish Writings*, pp. 50–51.

Arendt's response was an unyielding historicization of antisemitism, anchoring its forms within concrete social contexts. She was utterly opposed to any notion of 'Jewish substance'—implicitly, also, to any antisemitic substance—and to what in current parlance is called essentialism. The contrast with her 'relatively straightforward' Zionist position of a few years before could hardly be more marked. A powerful aspect of 'Antisemitism' is her use of class as an autonomous analytical category, culminating in the 19th-century struggle between the Junker aristocracy and the German bourgeoisie for control over the absolutist state. No doubt reflecting the impact of her discussions with Blücher, a historical understanding of antisemitism had now become the key to providing not only an intellectual alternative to both assimilation and Zionism, but also, inexorably, a political one. Arendt was indefatigable in the search for a course of political action that aimed not at the disappearance of the Jews from European societies (through ceasing to be Jewish or emigrating), but rather through participating in the betterment of those societies and, perforce, of the lot of Jews within them.

Though contemporary persecutions clearly drew on ancient antecedents, Arendt distinguished sharply between the medieval 'hatred of Jews' and the emergence of modern antisemitism: the former 'was *about* Jews, and not much more than that', whereas the history of antisemitism 'conceals many other tendencies', in which Jews do not necessarily play a central role. To blur that distinction was 'to abstract the Jewish Question out of the historical process and to destroy the common ground on which the fate of both Jews and non-Jews is decided.'¹³ Before the mid-17th century, Arendt argued, European Jewry came into contact with other peoples only during 'catastrophes and expulsions'. In the ghetto, economic life was 'limited to minor craftwork and peddling', while a few rich Jews served as financial agents to the princely courts and acted as intermediaries with the outside world.¹⁴ With no protection from law or surety, they could only meet the precipitous risks of lending to others—spendthrift landowners, indigent craftsmen, farmers whose crops had failed—by charging extortionate interest rates, ensuring the hostility of their debtors. As court financiers, the richest Jewish leaders could generally maintain the royal relationships necessary to guarantee the community's protection—although, if a prince ran into debt, the Jews could always be expelled and robbed of their savings as a revenue-raising measure.

¹³ 'Antisemitism', *Jewish Writings*, pp. 70, 66.

¹⁴ Already embodying that 'personal union' of 'prominence, philanthropy and political representation' that Arendt would deplore in Herzlian Zionism.

Opportunities for European Jewry expanded during the Thirty Years' War, when cash-strapped states turned to them to develop continent-wide networks of finance ('Jew Y could pay and deliver to armies fighting far from home what Jew X had promised back in their homeland') and military supplies: cloth, grain, metal trading. Over the next century, the rise of absolutism saw an expanding relationship between Jewish leaders and royal bureaucracies: in German lands, 'the 17th-century court Jew became the 18th-century creditor of absolutist states'. The Polish court invited Jews to come and serve as tax collectors, thus buttressing the nobility from the resentment of the impoverished peasantry. If Jews still suffered expulsions during the 18th century, these now had 'a more political character': not to rob them of their wealth, but to 'shift the people's rage at being sucked dry'. Modernizing absolutist states, Arendt argued, deliberately turned to Jews to finance the expanding bureaucracies and standing armies that they required to counter both the old aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie; they were happy to pit Jewish suppliers against craft guilds to advance mercantile manufacturing. Eighteenth-century absolutism benefited not just the wealthiest Jewish financiers, who might now be granted 'exceptional' civic rights and titles on an individual basis, but a broader layer of merchants and traders. By 1803, 20 per cent of Prussian Jews were 'protected' in some way, and over 3,000—Rahel Varnhagen's family among them—had been granted dwelling rights in Berlin; they formed what Arendt terms a 'collective exception' to the unprotected and impoverished Jewish masses of West Prussia and Posen.¹⁵

Assimilation and antisemitism

It is at this juncture that Arendt locates the appearance of modern antisemitism: heralded, paradoxically, by the victory of Napoleon, emancipator of the Jews. The bourgeois intelligentsia's discovery of German patriotism, in opposition to Napoleon, bred fears that the Jews might be tempted to support him; while the surrender of the eastern provinces deprived the 'exceptional' Jews of their necessary social backdrop, the non-exceptions. Simultaneously, the rising German bourgeoisie included the Jews in its attack on Junker landowners—'the aristocracy is so closely bound to the Jews that it cannot continue without them', in the words of liberal publicist Friedrich Buchholz—while the Junkers' counter-attacks against both the growing economic power of the bourgeoisie and the

¹⁵ See 'Antisemitism', *Jewish Writings*, pp. 77, 71, 76, 86.

liberalizing moves of the state between 1806 and 1812 (permitting land sales, lifting trade regulations), highlighted the role of the ‘protected’ Jews as beneficiaries of marketization and allies of the state. The Junkers’ polemics against the bourgeoisie—promoters of industry and speculation as opposed to crafts and agriculture; of crass materialism against God’s order; of vain talent versus honourable character—rallied an alliance of farmers, guild members, shopkeepers: all ‘backward-looking or necessarily apprehensive strata’.¹⁶

In Arendt’s view, it was the Junkers’ success in portraying themselves, rather than the bourgeoisie, as the embodiment of the budding nation-state, that lay at the root of modern German antisemitism. The Junkers not only ‘otherized’ the bourgeoisie as everything the aristocracy was not but, crucially, prevailed upon it to internalize that ‘otherization’ as a truthful description—hence alienating the bourgeois citizen from himself. The final step was that the bourgeoisie, in order to rid itself of that portrayal, in turn projected it upon the Jews. ‘The malicious description of the bourgeoisie is the historical wellspring of almost all antisemitic arguments’, Arendt avers:

The only thing lacking here is . . . to apply it to the Jews. This proved relatively easy to do and was originally merely intended as the ultimate defamation: the bourgeois man is in truth no different from the Jew. For this, one needed only to declare that earning a living by profit and interest was the same as usury: the bourgeois citizen was nothing but a Jew and a usurer. The only people with a right to an income free of labour are those who already possess wealth. The ‘wild ambition’ unleashed by freedom of trade produces nothing but social parvenus—and no one rises from greater social depths than the Jew.¹⁷

She sums up:

What proved dangerous to the Jews was not the aristocracy’s historically determined hatred of the financiers of the modern state, but rather that arguments and characteristics trimmed and tailored for totally different people ended up attached to them . . . That the Prussian aristocracy succeeded in drilling these categories and value judgements into the head of the German bourgeois citizen until he was ashamed to be one—that is the real and, as it were, ‘ideological’ misfortune of German Jewry. For in the end the liberals’ truly destructive self-hatred gave rise to hatred of the Jews, that being the only means liberals had of distancing themselves from themselves, of

¹⁶ ‘Antisemitism’, *Jewish Writings*, p. 107.

¹⁷ ‘Antisemitism’, *Jewish Writings*, p. 108.

shifting slander to others who, though they did not think of themselves as the 'bourgeoisie', were forced to be its 100 per cent embodiment.¹⁸

Strategizing beyond Zionism

Though the unpublished 'Antisemitism' essay breaks off unfinished, the political impetus behind it would take more concrete form as Arendt, settled with Blücher in New York from May 1941, turned to intervene on Zionist strategies and Mandate Palestine. *The Jewish Writings* collects nearly twenty articles written between 1941 and 1948, many of them substantial unpublished essays, as well as several dozen of the short pieces she wrote for her fortnightly column in the German-language New York weekly, *Aufbau*. It was here that she registered ('Not One Kaddish Will Be Said', *Aufbau*, 19 June 1942) Goebbels's announcement that the extermination of the Jews of Europe was about to begin; attacked the Jewish Agency's collaboration on transfer arrangements with the Nazi government from 1934; and called for the creation of a Jewish Army to fight alongside the Allies.

Arendt continued to hold to the view that Zionism's merit was to see through the self-deceptions of assimilation: Jewish identities could not, and should not, just be dissolved into the surrounding citizenries of the various European nation-states. But the policies formulated on the basis of its own opposite premise—the 'utterly unhistorical' theory of an unalterable Jewish essence—had proved disastrous. In 'Antisemitism' she had roundly denounced Zionism as a 'betrayal of the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe' and a 'vassal of British imperialism', expressing the bankruptcy of a 'petite bourgeoisie pursued by pogroms and reduced to poverty in the East and of a highly imperilled bourgeoisie in the West'. In a 1941 *Aufbau* piece she savaged Chaim Weizmann's statement that the answer to antisemitism was to build up the *Yishuv* as 'dangerous lunacy'. As for its founder, a few years later she noted Herzl's satisfaction at the Armenian massacres ('This will be useful for me with the Sultan') and his 'blind hatred of all revolutionary movements as such and an equally blind faith in the goodness and stability of the society of his times.'¹⁹

¹⁸ 'Antisemitism', *Jewish Writings*, p. 109. Arendt might have taken the exercise still further by comparing the Junkers' depiction of the bourgeois citizen to Herzl's or Nordau's depiction of the Jew.

¹⁹ See 'Antisemitism', 'Ceterum Censeo . . .' [1941], 'Zionism Reconsidered' [1944]: *Jewish Writings*, pp. 55–6, 57–9, 143, 363, 381.

What was her alternative? From 1940 onwards, Arendt argued that the appropriate—non-Zionist—political solution to the Jewish Question would be a European federation, in which the Jews would be one nation among others, with representation in a common parliament: ‘our fate can only be bound up with that of other small European peoples’; a settlement in Palestine might also be feasible, but only if attached to some such European commonwealth.²⁰ On the principle of a federation she never wavered; it was based on her rejection of the idea both of the nation-state and of ‘minorities’ within it, given eloquent historical expression in—among other texts—*Origins of Totalitarianism*. Historically, her vision of the role of Jews in one could be regarded (although she was certainly unaware of this) as a virtual replication of Otto Bauer’s solution for the Austro-Hungarian empire in *The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy*; while her prediction of a European federation equipped with its own parliament has, of course, been substantially vindicated, however far the EU remains from such a federal union. It also reflects her life-long engagement with Bernard Lazare. In opposition to Herzlian Zionism, Lazare advocated ‘nations within a nation’, a structure within which the Jews could find their place as a collective without needing either to emigrate or assimilate. Though Arendt did not adhere to an anarchist world-view, Lazare’s writings continued to inform her critique of the 19th-century nation-state and of Herzl’s bourgeois-nationalist Zionism.

While continuing to uphold the ideal of a European federation, during World War Two Arendt also looked to existing federations, as she saw them, as models that could illustrate in different ways the kind of solution she had in mind. In a previously unpublished 1943 piece, ‘The Crisis of Zionism’, she discusses three of these: the British Commonwealth, the Soviet Union and the United States. The text—perhaps originally addressed to Blücher or Blumenfeld—was written in part as a riposte to the call by Judah Magnes, president of the Hebrew University, for a bi-national Palestinian state within an Arab federation, in its turn subsumed within an Anglo-American alliance. This Arendt rejected: the proximity to Anglo-American imperial interests in Magnes’s declaration was too reminiscent of the prevailing Zionist policy which, as Weizmann himself had put it, ‘always made cooperation with the British Empire a cornerstone’. In addition, the bi-national state form drew on anachronistic notions of state sovereignty, while Magnes’s use of the term ‘federation’ ‘kills its new and creative meaning in the germ; it kills the

²⁰ ‘The Minority Question’ [1940], *Jewish Writings*, pp. 130, 133.

idea that a federation is—in contrast to a nation—made up of different peoples with equal rights.’ Against this, Arendt put forward the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union:

There are many problems unsolved in Soviet Russia, and I for one do not believe that even the economic problems have been resolved there, let alone the most important question of political freedom; but one thing has to be admitted: the Russian Revolution found an entirely new and—as far as we can see today—an entirely just way to deal with nationality or minorities. The new historic fact is this: that for the first time in modern history, an identification of nation and state has not even been attempted.²¹

Her second example was the US, as ‘not only a government of united states but of united peoples as well.’²² But it was the British model that was always most actual for her—if ambiguously so, given her distrust of the role of British imperialism in the region. Thus, writing in *Aufbau*, she could envisage the whole of the Near East being included in a British Commonwealth in which Jews and Arabs would have equal rights within Palestine; though not, as noted, a bi-national state. Alternatively, Palestine could form part of a Mediterranean federation, including Italy, France and Spain and their North African extensions, and eventually other European countries and the rest of the Near East, bringing the Arabs into union with the Europeans.²³

Cassandra’s warning

In retrospect, ‘The Crisis of Zionism’ can be read as a prelude to Arendt’s outstanding 15,000-word essay, ‘Zionism Reconsidered’, first published

²¹ ‘The Crisis of Zionism’ [1943], *Jewish Writings*, pp. 336, 334–5. Her attitudes on this question shifted significantly over the decade. Writing in *Aufbau* in 1942 she had hailed the USSR as the first society in the world where Jews were ‘legally and socially “emancipated”, that is, recognized and liberated as a nationality.’ By 1950, with the onset of the Cold War, she was referring to the danger of a Pax Sovietica in the Middle East. See *Jewish Writings*, pp. 173, 427.

²² ‘Crisis of Zionism’, *Jewish Writings*, p. 335.

²³ ‘Can the Jewish–Arab Question be Solved?’ [1943], *Jewish Writings*, pp. 196–7. None of these ideas, of course, survived the end of the War. Once Palestine was effectively partitioned, Arendt—who in 1952 paid tribute to Magnes as ‘the conscience of the Jewish people’—approved his proposal for a confederal solution for Palestine, within a regional federation of the Near East, without Britain, but potentially including (here Arendt was seconding a suggestion by Abba Eban himself, in a 1948 *Commentary* article) Turkey and Iran, as well as the Arab states. See ‘Peace or Armistice in the Near East?’, *Review of Politics*, January 1950: *Jewish Writings*, p. 446.

in *Menorah Journal* in October 1944. It was prompted by the congress of the World Zionist Organization's American section in Atlantic City, which demanded a Jewish state that would 'embrace the whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished'. Arendt grasped the significance of this victory for the hard-line 'revisionist' position with striking clarity:

This is a turning point in Zionist history; for it means that the Revisionist programme, so long bitterly repudiated, has proved finally victorious. The Atlantic City Resolution goes even a step further than the Biltmore Programme (1942), in which the Jewish minority had granted minority rights to the Arab majority. This time the Arabs were simply not mentioned in the resolution, which obviously leaves them the choice between voluntary emigration or second-class citizenship.²⁴

In her view, the outcome at Atlantic City reflected 'the tremendously increased importance of American Jewry and American Zionism within the WZO.'²⁵ What the Resolution unmasked was 'the unanimous adherence of all Zionist parties' to ultimate aims 'the very discussion of which was still taboo during the 1930s', but which, so it seemed, 'only opportunist reasons had prevented the Zionist movement from stating'; the result was to forfeit any chance of Arab interlocutors, leaving 'the door wide open for an outside power to take over'. In effect, 'the Zionists have now indeed done their best to create that insoluble "tragic conflict" which can only be ended through cutting the Gordian knot'—though it would be 'very naive to believe that such a cutting would invariably be in the Jewish advantage', or 'result in a lasting solution':

Nationalism is bad enough when it trusts in nothing but the rude force of the nation. A nationalism that necessarily and admittedly depends upon the force of a foreign power is certainly worse . . . the Zionists, if they continue to ignore the Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big faraway powers, will appear only as their tools, the agents of foreign and hostile interests. Jews who know their own history should be aware that such a state of affairs will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred; the antisemitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences.²⁶

It was a politics that she scathingly denounced as a return to 'the traditional methods of *shtadlonus*'—Zionists now 'knew no better place

²⁴ 'Zionism Reconsidered', *Jewish Writings*, p. 343.

²⁵ 'Zionism Reconsidered', *Jewish Writings*, p. 368.

²⁶ 'Zionism Reconsidered', *Jewish Writings*, pp. 343–5.

politically than the lobbies of the powerful, and no sounder basis for agreements than their good services as agents of foreign interests.' Their hope was that 'if Palestine Jewry could be charged with a share in the caretaking of American interests in that part of the world, the famous dictum of Justice Brandeis would come true: you would have to be a Zionist in order to be a perfect American patriot.'²⁷

In another major paper at the time of the 1948 War, Arendt denounced the massacre of Deir Yassin and the killings in Jaffa and Haifa as deliberate measures of terror by the Revisionist wing of Zionism to drive the Arab populations out of Palestine. The building of a separate Jewish economy by the mainstream labour wing of Zionism—which had been its pride—she saw as the curse that made possible the expulsion of the Arabs ('almost 50 per cent of the country's population') without loss to the Jews.²⁸ In the Middle East, surrounded by a vastly larger Arab population, the result could only be a continual inner insecurity. 'A home that my neighbour does not recognize and respect is not a home.' The newly created state of Israel would be a land 'quite other than the dream of world Jewry, Zionist and non-Zionist'—an armed and introverted society, in which 'political thought would centre around military strategy', degenerating into 'one of those small warrior tribes about whose possibilities and importance history has amply informed us since the days of Sparta', leaving the Arabs 'homeless exiles', and the Arab problem as 'the only real moral and political issue of Israeli politics'.²⁹

A final section of Arendt's *Jewish Writings* comprises five texts focused around the *Eichmann in Jerusalem* controversy, among them her famous reply to Gershom Scholem. More unexpected is a hitherto unpublished reply to written interview questions, apparently commissioned for *Look* magazine in 1963, on the reaction to her book; it might have been written today, in the context of the pro-Israeli hordes ganging up on anyone whose views stray from the Zionist Decalogue: 'I was not surprised by the "sensitivity of some Jews," and since I am a Jew myself, I think I had every

²⁷ 'Zionism Reconsidered', *Jewish Writings*, pp. 367, 370.

²⁸ 'Peace or Armistice in the Near East?', *Jewish Writings*, pp. 444, 448. Here Arendt anticipated what scholars of settler colonialism like Gershon Shafir and Patrick Wolfe would render systematic half a century later: that in the labour formation of the pure settlement type of colony, from Virginia or New England to Australia and the *kibbutzim*, it is the indigenous people who become superfluous.

²⁹ See *Jewish Writings*, pp. 235, 396–7, 451.

reason not to be alarmed by it . . . However, the violence and, especially, the unanimity of public opinion among organized Jews (there are very few exceptions) has surprised me indeed. I conclude that I hurt not merely “sensitivity” but vested interests, and this I did not know before.’³⁰

Structurings

All in all, this fine collection provides not just an extension but a redefinition of Arendt’s political thought. It will remain for many years to come a key source of reference, not only for scholars of Arendt’s work but for anyone interested in European Jewry, Zionist history and politics, the *Shoah* and much else. It is published by Schocken, the house at which Arendt was editorial director from 1946 to 1948, and where several of her books appeared. The texts are usefully flanked by Jerome Kohn’s Preface, which identifies the different phases in Arendt’s writings on these matters; Ron Feldman’s Introduction, a slightly reworked version of the essay that introduced *The Jew as Pariah* thirty years ago, affirming Arendt’s proud self-identification as a ‘conscious pariah’; and a sensitive Afterword by Edna Brocke, Arendt’s niece. A helpful Publication History details, as appropriate, the date, original publication venue or non-published status, original-language titles, and previous collection—e.g., in Feldman’s 1978 edition—for all the texts. This is an essential service; not just because, due to the attention she has received, so many of Arendt’s texts have appeared in more than one publication, but because—perhaps for the same reason—so many have never seen the light of day at all. The only serious omission, a regrettable one, is the long 1942 essay ‘From the Dreyfus Affair to France Today’, from which *The Jewish Writings* (replicating Feldman’s decision in *The Jew as Pariah*) reproduces only the final section, ‘Herzl and Lazare’. It would be well worth extending the present collection to include the entire text in any subsequent reprinting.

In organizing the material, the editors were faced with some difficult decisions for which there was probably no ideal solution. Yet simply grouping the texts by decades (‘1930s’, ‘1940s’, etc), within which chronology is sometimes scrambled by a somewhat arbitrary choice of theme, renders it more difficult than it should be to reconstruct the

³⁰ *Jewish Writings*, p. 477. The editors have not been able to find either an interview or an article in *Look*.

development of Arendt's ideas on Zionism, which is the real core of the book; it is left to the reader to perform the laborious business of checking texts and dates back and forth. As a result, the cumulative impact of Arendt's explosive writings on Jewish politics is weakened by interspersing them with essays on other questions from the same period.

Arguably, it would have made better sense of Arendt's thinking and experience to have divided the texts into five different groupings. First, the three short pieces written in Germany before the Nazi seizure of power. Second, the six pieces written in France after her escape, culminating in the long, unpublished manuscript on 'Antisemitism'. Third, following her arrival in America, all the political texts to do with Zionism and Israel, from 1940 to 1952, in correct chronological order—that is, from 'The Minority Question' and the *Aufbau* pieces, down to 'Peace or Armistice in the Near East?', and 'Magnes, the Conscience of the Jewish People' (1952). After that, a fourth section might comprise the other 'American' essays or documents: from the full text of 'The Dreyfus Affair to France Today' (1942), 'The Crémieux Decree' (1943) and the powerful existential evocation of 'We Refugees' (1943), through to 'Creating a Cultural Atmosphere' (1947)—again, in restored chronological order. And finally, texts on the *Shoah*, from the review of Poliakov in 1952 to the demolition of Robinson in 1966.

On Jewishness

As to the collection's title: it is no more than historicist decorum to hypothesize that Arendt herself might have felt ill at ease with *The Jewish Writings*. Not that she was reluctant to proclaim herself a Jewess, nor that modernity's Jewish Question played a minor role in her life and work; but she might have been genuinely baffled by the presentation of her pronouncements on these political, historical and cultural matters under the catch-all of an adjective that she once defined as being 'if anything, racial'. In some respects, the title of Feldman's forerunner to this volume, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, is more congruous with Arendt's work and life, as well as evoking her summation of Varnhagen's *vita* and her indebtedness to Lazare. Not that 'The Jew as Pariah' would perfectly describe the contents of this book, most of which consists of tough-minded political analysis of contemporary history, rather than reflections on the social or ontological position—actual or ideal—of the Jews throughout time. Given that the editors, as their

own essays demonstrate, are amply cognizant of Arendt's thinking on these issues, the title may rather reflect the contemporary prevalence of identity politics, especially in the US; within which the organized part of American Jewry constitutes a particularly visible and vociferous group. Arendt would have presumably said that the reality this evinces is tantamount to antisemitism's triumph.

In fact, one of the most striking features of the collection is that it brings home how little Arendt was interested in problems of 'Jewishness', conceived in a stricter or more conventional sense. There is virtually nothing on Jewish religion, apart from a rather lame review of Scholem's book on Sabbatai Zevi, perhaps prompted by a sense of duty to Benjamin's greatest friend. 'Creating a Cultural Atmosphere' (1947) makes clear that she did not have a very high opinion of Jewish traditions—treating them as basically theology plus folklore, with a few (unspecified) dissident voices. She ceased to be 'bored by the Jewish Question', as she said, in the face of German fascism, but her focus on it thereafter was political, through and through. The subjects of Arendt's writings in this volume are not so much 'the Jewish' as: the historical bases of antisemitism in Europe; the illusions of bourgeois assimilation; the follies and crimes of Zionism, from the 1890s to the 1960s.

In this sense, Scholem was right that Arendt did not particularly 'love the Jewish people', in the way that he and Golda Meir did—Meir, who had told Arendt that, as a socialist, she herself did not believe in God but 'in the Jewish People'. Another way of expressing this would be to say that Arendt lacked not only the conventional cultural patriotism that Scholem evokes, but any predilection for identity. In *that* sense, the Jewish Question never ceased to bore her; she was too steeped in German high culture for it to mean very much.

Viewed historically, Arendt's writing on Zionism would seem to form a virtually self-contained episode in her career, the product of both her passionate personal involvement in the Jewish cause and of the decisive impact on her of Bernard Lazare (textually) and Heinrich Blücher (personally). What brought it to an abrupt end were two developments after the Second World War: the creation of a militarized and sectarian Zionist state in Israel, which levelled to the ground her hopes for a just solution in the region; and the petrification of the Stalinist state in Russia, which led Blücher to abandon his Marxist convictions and drift with her into a

liberal version of Cold War attitudes.³¹ After 1950, Arendt had political opinions, some of them erratic and misguided, others brave and even radical, but no truly coherent politics. Her report on the Eichmann trial might be viewed as in some sense an unconscious way of expressing her disappointment at the creation of Israel in the form it took, but since it is not concerned with the fate of the Arabs, it cannot really be regarded as much connected with her earlier writing on Zionism.

Predictably, perhaps, her increasing circulation within the Atlantic cultural–political establishment—though it was never uncritical, and could be satirical³²—made her see successive wars through American eyes. The Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956 was, to be sure, an ill-advised venture, though if it was done at all, it should have been done well: ‘I hold it for an understandable stupidity’, but ‘not to have the courage at least to carry it through technically and militarily’ made it a ‘catastrophe’.³³ Nasser was a neo-fascist, and when Israel launched the Six-Day War in 1967, Arendt was so thrilled by its prowess that a friend described her as behaving ‘like a war bride’.³⁴ ‘The Israelis did a wonderful job’, ‘I like Dayan a lot’, and ‘Nasser should be hung instantly’, she told Jaspers.³⁵ In such reactions, there was perhaps something like a displaced memory of her campaign for a Jewish Army in the 1940s.

It should be said, however, that she never repudiated a line of what she wrote about Zionism, as her American contemporaries no doubt remembered—Clement Greenberg, after all, had rejected ‘Zionism Reconsidered’ for *Commentary* as smacking of antisemitism. Her later moments of enthusiasm for the IDF were mostly outbursts of private emotion. For Arendt, unanimous opinion always remained a dangerous

³¹ Albeit in 1944 she could write of the failure of socialist Zionists ‘to level a single criticism at the Jewish bourgeoisie outside of Palestine, or to attack the role of Jewish finance in the political structure of Jewish life’, within a context in which socialists’ ‘genuine political impulses for justice and freedom had grown fainter and fainter and, on the other hand, their fanatical belief in some superhuman, eternally progressive development had grown stronger and stronger’: *Jewish Writings*, pp. 351–2.

³² See her scathing description of a Congress for Cultural Freedom junket in Ravenna: letters to Blücher, 12–17 September 1955.

³³ Letter to Blumenfeld: 26 December 1956.

³⁴ See ‘The Destruction of Six Million’ [1964], *Jewish Writings*, p. 493; and Young-Buehl, *Hannah Arendt*, p. 455.

³⁵ Letters to Jaspers, 10 June and 1 October 1967.

thing. To the end, she retained what one most values her for—that quality of intellectual independence which she so eloquently defended in her reply to Scholem:

What confuses you is that my arguments and my approach are different from what you are used to; in other words, the trouble is that I am independent. By this I mean, on the one hand, that I do not belong to any organization and always speak only for myself, and on the other hand, that I have great confidence in Lessing's *selbstdenken*, for which, I think, no ideology, no public opinion and no 'convictions' can ever be a substitute.³⁶

³⁶ *Jewish Writings*, p. 470.