

Jewish intellectuals and their wider engagement with the imperatives of German, indeed modern, culture and its later great breakdown.

I must conclude with an admonitory confession. Cults – intellectual as much as political and religious ones – disturb me. The present-day adulation of Hannah Arendt is coming precariously close to such a sorry condition and the Newsletter (of which, indeed, I am a corresponding editor), it must be said, is playing a central contributory role. Why, then, have I seemingly added fuel to the fire? Why, even though I have tried to bring a critical perspective to bear, play into the phenomenon? The answer lies not only in the requirements demanded by autobiographical veracity but in the fact that – despite its many, obvious shortcomings, its blatant historical blunders and eccentric, sometimes inco-

herent, connections – *The Origins* (despite, or perhaps because of, its idiosyncratic nature) is indeed an extraordinary work. It has achieved a kind of canonic status. This has been granted as much by its detractors as by its admirers. As classics are wont to do, it seems to withstand constant renewed scavengings and, somehow, reveals previously unnoticed flashes of brilliance and new insights. So often off the mark, it nevertheless possesses the power still to yield moments of rare illumination that light up our own condition as much as it does the past.

Vlasta Jalušič

Totalitarianism: redundancy of the people and domination of the social

My personal interest in Hannah Arendt's thought was raised by a »casual acquaintance« with her work in the second half of eighties. Almost accidentally, while working on a topic »Women and Revolution«, I bought her book *On Revolution*. Reading it through, especially the part on the meaning of revolution and the chapter on the »social question«, I discovered, utterly astounded, not only from the mainstream so radically different thinking about violence, revolution, and politics, but also an author who confirmed my doubt in the concepts of »social emancipation« that have been predominant within the socialist surrounding and that especially applied to the question of emancipation of women.

I have begun reading her *Origins of Totalitarianism* the first time when Milosevic was just gaining his support by mobilizing a mass ethno-nationalist movement and when amongst many intellectuals in former Yugoslavia there was a widespread opinion that »politics« and politicians were the main culprit for the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation and, later on, for the horror and misery of war and

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ethnic cleansing. However, the events were proving that, without a mass movement and mobilization, such phenomenon as Milosevic would have been impossible. Still more, the development has shown that the approach, how Milosevic has paved his way to power through implementing ethno-nationalist propaganda, has been very close to the Arendtian observation about totalitarian propaganda, when

she maintained with Konrad Heiden, that the propaganda is not »the art of instilling an opinion in the masses« but »the art of receiving an opinion from the masses« (OT: 361).

In my opinion, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* represents one of the central, if not the central book in political thinking of the twenty century, that is taking its real effect in our time, at the turn of the 21st century. This »monumental history« (Jaspers) that takes into account the »three pillars of inferno«, is still original and significant both »methodologically« as well as in view of the analyzed phenomenon.

Its methodological significance is great especially regarding the debate that it aroused in the time when it was published and that can still be aroused especially after the transformation of communism since it opens the question about the relationship between the political theory, political thinking and action, and especially the question why the modern political thinking is inclined to the »displacement of politics« (Honig) and what consequences does this have for us. The analysis of the »elements« of totalitarianism represents the »zero point« of Arendt's questioning about the importance of political action and thus offers the point of departure for her analysis and notion of politics.

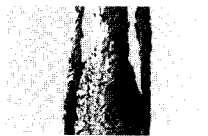
Totalitarianism is detected as the worst form of endeavor not only for the inauguration of the redundancy of political action but also for the redundancy of people (in plural). Coming from this conclusion, Arendtian approach, so different from the mainstream in the 20th century which, keeping company with Carl Schmitt, searches the notion of politics that would be »pure« and independent of the »human factor«, represents the inseparable connectedness with the human involvement, unpredictability and with the potential for the new beginnings.

The main stress I would like to put forward regarding totalitarianism in this short text is concerning the analysis of the »social« respectively behaviorism of the mass society as a potential source of totalitarianism. This is the more so important because the image and the conception of »totalitarianism« today is still mainly, especially after the fall of the communist systems, interpreted as »omnipresence of politics« as »overpoliticization« or as dominant presence of the violent state apparatus and violence. Totalitarianism still appears as a mirror image of democracy, and, above all,

as a rule of violence that comes from »above«. This was the reason why, in the case of the disintegration and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, we were faced with such an incredible misinterpretation of the events. With her analysis, Hannah Arendt redirects our attention from the notion of totalitarianism as a repression to the fact that it is created as a »non-structure«, not in the sense that such system does not have a »structure« but that, its de-politicized bureaucracy as a substitute for government produces a kind of »structural obedience«, that destroys the spaces of action, freedom, the real political authority and power.

Hannah Arendt's notion of politics as active involvement/citizenship and public judgement was primarily developed out of her exploration and the critique of the so-called »social«¹. It was out of the experience with the widespread conformist behavior within the Nazi-Germany that the questions arose which developed to the ruling principles of her »method« of thinking and judging. Namely, on the one hand the question, why were the Jews as a social group the first and the main victims of the totalitarian experiment, on the other hand the question, what was the problem with society and public judgment, and with the educated intellectual elite which was ready to forget the elementary principles of human solidarity and ready to tolerate or to support even the most dreadful human experiments within the Nazi-socialist regime? Both questions together formed the initial points of Arendtian analysis of totalitarianism and her critique of the social and accompanied her through her whole life. Through answering them she has shown that modern anti-Semitism represents a novel form of social hatred: the Jewish population was neither a »scapegoat« for Nazism nor was anti-semitism a final result of a two thousand years old hostility towards Jews who were automatically condemned to play the eternal victim role. Both the »Jewish fate« and the modern European anti-Semitism represented a mirror of the contemporary situation of the social (also of the paradoxical »social emancipation« of some groups) and of the condition of the nation-state at the beginning of the 20-th century (OT: 3-88).

As the most important elements of totalitarianism Hannah Arendt takes into consideration anti-semitism, racism, imperialism, pan-movements, mass-movements and, as a result, the system of the total domination and organized guilt. Through her



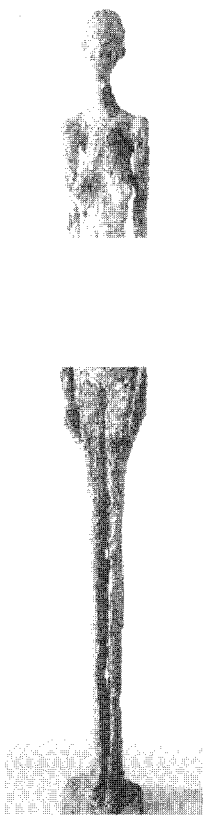
account of the »rise of the social« as a capitalist expansion and as a growing mass conformist movement she shows not only the decline of the public realm in the traditional sense but also the vanishing of the elementary human bounds, of the human worldliness and the loss of plurality. With the help of the critique of the Hobbesian concept of the state she explains how the modern nation-state becomes a kind of a »power business«, it provides only for the accumulation of power, and expands its means of power all over the globe to enable the economic exploitation. In times of crisis such a state shows its total powerlessness to guarantee the humanistic ideals, to protect its own minorities, and to render the framework for equality for all citizens. Humanistic and Christian ideals, toleration and love towards others can, in view of the stateless groups without citizenship, exposed to their »mere social existence« and assimilation, easily be transformed or can transgress into the social hatred, being able (within the modern sovereign state and under the democratic condition) to even legally conquer the nation-state institutions and use them for its own totalitarian, violent purposes.

Within this context represents the »Jewish question« an example of the one of the most problematic unsolved modern political questions in terms of inclusiveness, and, together with this, also an example of the unsolved question of the nation-state and its »democratic« structure: the Jews embodied one of the most capable, developed and adaptable social group on the one hand, and yet one of the most politically vulnerable, marginalized groups, on the other. This was the reason why they could, within the twenty century nation-state system, be transformed into the stateless people and thus, as refugees, defenseless people, become the people without the possibility of existence, exposed to holocaust. As having the »social identity« only, not being politically recognized by any state as equal identity, were the Jews (representing »naked human beings« only) in the environment of the European state system, fallen into pieces, without any possibility for the protection of their existence (OT: 123-157 and 267-302)².

We could say that the »enlarged« analysis of totalitarianism, where Hannah Arendt puts forward the question of the social emancipation, shows that one of the main problems with the modern nation-state system and its globalizing national economy was that it was permanently radically marginalizing,

excluding certain social groups from the political existence: it allowed and enabled them social emancipation only, the »emancipation« from certain constraints of the private existence and identity, inasmuch as it enlarged the certain activities of the household into the economy of capitalism. It has thrown them into the semi-public or social space: in spite of this they did not become (necessarily) political in the sense of active citizenship. The most of them were directed to »use other means«, not politics, for their influence and power. They could interfere, but only in extraordinary circumstances, as a part of the »social force«. As individuals, they ought to rely on assimilation and »social type of power«, striving for social acceptance, on private or semipublic action through sentiments, love, humanitarian work or on private search for other mechanisms of power. If we follow Hannah Arendt, this type of action and demanding social recognition favors one the most anti-political characters and is of a very fragile nature unless the rights of the group are not legally and politically guaranteed and represents actually represents something which she called »perversion of equality from a political into a social concept« (OT: 55).

I think that it is this critique of the social as a conformist pressure towards assimilation and adaptation to the mass behavior and of the »social emancipation« (Arendt spoke about the social emancipation in the cases of women, workers and also in the case of Jewish population³) which can help us (with its »method«) to think over the situation of socially and politically marginalized groups⁴: those ones that succumbed to the »logic of the social« and its emancipation and were »liberated« on this basis – namely thrown into the public as apolitical, social subjects. These groups are nowadays often socially and economically free, however, they are not free in a very political sense and are therefore in their existence often immediately endangered: the groups, which were in the so far existing history excluded from what was called politics, not being admitted or declared as non-political by definition (or, rather, through their »function« within the social and private – HC: 71 – 73). It seems to me, although I am not suggesting any direct parallels, that Hannah Arendt's approach to the problem of the »social« and »social emancipation« can be highly inspiring for the contemporary questions such as the political (in)equality of women or for the questions such as nationalism,



racism, anti-Semitism etc.⁵ It opens up not so much the question of the content or the place of the political involvement than the question of the possible modi of action. Here I am very much inclined to the suggestion of P. Boling that Arendtian differentiation of »the social« (behavior) and »the political« (action) are »not to be read as physical locations but as different modes of spirits in which people approach their problems« (Boling 1996: 80). Together with the Arendtian differentiation between the parvenu and the pariah position, it can open the path towards productive differentiation between »behavior« (passive and reactive social attitude, connected to a conformist pattern, which makes people redundant), and »action« (conscious political activity, connected to »pariahdom«) that seems to be amongst the most important concerns of our world.

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1 Especially in her major works Rahel Varnhagen, *The Origins of Totalitarianism, The Human Condition, On Revolution*.

2 This point is not only important for contemporary understanding of the question of the refugee and general migrant's and citizenship problems all over the globe but, within the European context, also for the explanation of the new wars and conflicts.

3 Especially in the works *Rahel Varnhagen, The Human Condition, The Origins of Totalitarianism, On Revolution*.

4 I think that we could also find something similar to the Arendtian »social« (the phenomenon of social conformism) within the contemporary East and Central European context – as one sort of all-embracing liberal-capitalist logic and practically working ideology together with the »imagined community« (Anderson) of nationalist thinking. The strong liberal discourse is a remarkable part of this, and is virtually compensating for a public discourse and – through the visual media above all – also radically penetrating into the realm of the private and intimate. This phenomenon is restructuring the relationship between the public and the private as well: the neo-liberal discourse which dominates in the public and in the media (the literary »creation« of »watching« and »voyeuristic« society which could be seen as »the social« in the Arendtian, negative sense) is occupying the place of the public discussion and creating anti-political conformism.



5 I am, of course, perfectly aware of the danger of direct parallelisms in such cases. The Jewish position of a social group cannot be immediately compared to that of women, ethnic or other marginalized groups as E. Y. Bruehl has once rightly pointed out. However, there might be, as some authors like M. Dietz, B. Honig, P. Boling, and S. Bickford have shown, quite important parallels among marginalized identities regarding the possible building of individual's and political group public awareness and political action.