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## **Arendt's 'Conscious Pariah' and the Ambiguous Figure of the Subaltern**

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### **Abstract**

Hannah Arendt's Jewish writings were central to her thinking about the human condition and engaged with dialectics of modernity, universalism and identity. Her concept of the 'conscious pariah' attempted both to define a role for the public intellectual and understand the relationship between Jews and modernity. Controversially she accused Jews of lack resistance to the Nazis and argued that their victimization resulted from apolitical 'worldlessness'. We argue that although Arendt's analysis was original and challenging, her characterization of Jewish history as one of 'powerlessness' is exaggerated but, more importantly, her underdeveloped concept of 'the social' is insensitive to the complex modalities of resistance and consciousness among subaltern Jewish communities. Further, her lack of interest in religious observance obscures the importance of Judaism as a resource for resistance. This is illustrated by 'hidden transcripts' of Jewish resistance from the early modern period.

**Keywords:** Arendt, conscious pariah, Judaism, powerlessness, resistance

In recent years Arendt's Jewish writings have received extensive attention and commentaries have brought out the richness of this work – from her biography of Rahel Varnhagen, through debates about Zionism in the 1930s to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the ensuing controversy in the 1960s. Indeed, for Kohn (2007: xxvii) 'her experience as a Jew is literally the foundation of her thought'. These commentaries have also revealed how her 'Jewish' works and her wider political philosophy were interconnected and interdependent such that one strand in her work cannot properly be understood apart from the others. This discussion begins with a critical account of Arendt's concept of the 'conscious pariah' which is central to her understanding of the dilemmas of Jewish emancipation, her early Zionism and her concept of political action. The concept was closely connected to other strands in her work. First, there was the nineteenth-century 'Jewish Question', that is, on what terms would Jews be granted civil and political rights, if at all? Drawing on Bernard Lazare, Arendt understood this question largely from the standpoint of secular rather than religious Jews in the context of the idea of the *Rechtstaat*. However, we suggest that her concept of Judaism wavers between a figurative 'Judaizing' that preoccupied Christian thought and reappears in secular form in post-enlightenment philosophy, and what one might call a sociological understanding of Jewish life.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, her concept is grounded in her critique of 'wordlessness', that is, a refusal to engage with political action and choosing instead living with mystical utopias. This concept drew on Max Weber's description of Jews as *ein Pariavolk* and debates in German sociology about the origins of capitalism but was also informed by her political existentialism. This discussion examines these issues and introduces evidence of everyday resistance among Jews in early modernity in which the Jew could be understood as a subaltern figure. We argue that this evidence points to ambivalent relations between Jews and the wider community that are more complex than Arendt's essentially figurative dichotomy of the pariah/parvenu suggests. The discussion concludes by arguing that the concept is limited by her underdeveloped concept of the social combined with an exaggerated stress on autonomous political action, which was not sensitive to multiple modalities of resistance in the lifeworld.

### **Pariah, Parvenu and 'the Jewish Question'**

Arendt's concepts of political action and Jewish identity were framed by the nineteenth century (particularly German) 'Jewish Question' and subsequently by the Holocaust. She

was part of the generation of Jewish intellectuals, including Adorno, Horkheimer and Bauman, traumatized by the *Zivilisationsbruch* and who, as Ron Eyerman (2013) argues, were deeply affected by the violence that breached taken-for-granted realities. Although not included in Eyerman's account, Arendt was similarly witness to the catastrophe that, he says, leaves wounds and memory scars that influence later behaviour in unpredictable ways<sup>2</sup>. Documenting the extermination of Jews in occupied Europe, Arendt concluded that the inevitable choice, including for those such as herself, who escaped, was to resist or die<sup>3</sup> and, '[if] you are no longer willing to die for anything, you will die for having done nothing' (Arendt 2007:163)<sup>4</sup>. These comments encapsulate Arendt's call to Jews (and indeed all subaltern peoples) to abandon both accommodation with gentile society and the Diaspora condition of 'worldlessness'. Jews must become instead 'conscious pariahs', willing to fight and organize politically *as Jews* – to demand rights that were not conditional upon abandoning Jewishness – an attempt that was anyway doomed to failure.

Arendt's rather Simmelian vignettes of the parvenu and pariah were developed with reference to the 'Jewish Question' in nineteenth-century Europe<sup>5</sup>. The French Revolution and Napoleonic edicts of Emancipation had offered civic rights, although this was a 'hope and curse at same time' (Sznajder 2010: 430). Clermont-Tonnere, Constituent Assembly deputy, defined the terms of emancipation when he stated in 1789 that Jews were 'welcome as individuals' but 'there will be no nation within a nation', thereby excluding Jews from the nation state *as Jews* (Dreyfuss 2012). Arendt agreed with Gershom Scholem that European nations were thus not prepared to assimilate Jews without demanding that they alter their identity beyond recognition (Biale 1982:5). 'Jews were', Arendt says therefore 'socially speaking, in the void' (Arendt 1968: 14). Their position in the social hierarchy was quite different from the inequality of the class system because it arose from their relationship to the state through which Jews were either 'over-privileged' and protected or underprivileged (1968:14).

Arendt's understanding was framed by a wider view of Jews in Christian society. Her Jewish writings are characterised by a largely unacknowledged distinction that, following Nirenberg (2013) and Judaken (2012) one might call a figurative, imaginary Judaism, as opposed to the 'sociological Jew'. Imaginary Judaism serves as a trope in western Christian and Enlightenment thought and originates in the dichotomy between Christian spirituality and

Jewish corporeality being 'of the flesh' of Abraham. Further to 'Judaize' was to make an erroneous passage from 'soul to flesh', 'spirit to matter', 'truth to appearance' in which even converted Jews were often suspected of being crypto-Jews (Nirenberg 2013:57ff). This dispute with figurative 'Judaism' has been deployed to place Jews in a category of alterity while serving as a foil to legitimate Christian and later Enlightenment views. While for Christianity figurative Judaism was an enemy of revelation, for the *philosophes* and then for Hegel and Kant it was an enemy of reason (Nirenberg 2013:343). In a further twist, the image of Judaism was transmuted after the French Revolution by counter-revolutionaries such as Burke and Romantics like Fichte into the epitome of materialistic modernity. Here the outcome of the revolution would be the triumph of 'Judaism' in the forms of money-jobbers<sup>6</sup>, usurers and parasitic huckstering. This figurative association of Judaism with capitalist modernity was replayed in the controversy between Bauer and Marx in the 1840s in which Jews were both enemies of reason and bearers of materialism. Marx appears to accept aspects of the then widespread antisemitic caricature of Jews as inveterate moneylenders and hucksters and *Judentum* is a metaphor for commerce. Throughout the essay the term is invested with double meaning – referring to Judaism both as a religion ('the Sabbath Jew') and grubby financial dealing. There are points where Marx makes it explicit that he does *not* dissent from Bauer's stereotypical characterisation of Jews as *Geldmensen* and a reactionary caste without history<sup>7</sup>. Further, he argues that since Jews can be emancipated politically without abandoning Jewishness, political emancipation is not identical with human emancipation (Marx 1977:51). While the essay can be read as supporting Jewish legal emancipation (e.g. Fine 2014) and 'political emancipation is of course a great progress' (Marx 1977:47) this is also limited to rights within the bourgeois-legal state that in due course will give way to full 'human' emancipation. What space there would then be for cultural particularity is unclear.

Arendt's position was ostensibly the reverse of this in that for her Jews must insist both on their 'right to have rights' while engaging politically *as Jews*. Hence her often-quoted maxim, 'If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man' (Arendt 2000:12). Indeed, for Arendt 'rights' are meaningless without the guarantee of collective will to defend them. In this sense Durkheim's 'solution' to the Jewish Question after Dreyfus – the institutionalization of

human rights as a new sacred object which would permit both social solidarity and the respect of difference (Durkheim 1973) – could not be Arendt’s solution. This was because for her ‘rights’ are always both inclusive and exclusive – they include those possessing right but exclude stateless, superfluous populations that grow in contemporary society. Rather as Agamben later argued, the logic of sovereignty coincided with the logic of exclusion and ban, since rights are bound up with the political entity of sovereign people (Lysaker, 2014). However, ‘to be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all’ (Arendt 1979: 475). The twentieth century had shown that there was no guarantee of rights and that the utopia of assimilation had failed<sup>8</sup>.

Although Arendt’s concept differed from Marx’s, the stereotypes of Jews noted above were not completely absent from her work either and it is not always clear whether she too is referring to figurative or actual Judaism. She links the alleged passivity of Diaspora Jews to their being materialistic, deceitful and lacking historical ties; their pursuit of individual advantage and seeking the protection of gentile authorities to which they were obsequiously grateful; and becoming ‘court Jews’ avoiding politics. Indeed, these ‘parvenus’ shared ‘inhumanity, greed, insolence, cringing servility and determination to push ahead’ (Arendt 1979:66). They embraced the status offered them by gentile society as ‘exceptions’ and thereby internalized antisemitism (1979:56). This is, to say the least, a figurative caricature<sup>9</sup> and raises questions about the pariah-parvenu couplet, as the next section argues.

Despite such apparent ‘success’ though, the position of the parvenu is impossible. This is explored furthest in Arendt’s biography of her alter-ego, Rahel Varnhagen, begun in 1933 and finally published in 1956 with two additional chapters written with hindsight as to the fate of European Jews. Rahel’s story epitomised the absence of collective political struggle for rights and how ‘Jews did not ... want to be emancipated as a whole; all they wanted was to escape from Jewishness, as individuals if possible’ and only failures and ‘*shlemihls*’ were left behind (Arendt 1974:6-7)<sup>10</sup>. The lesson of Rahel’s story is that ‘to play a part in society [i.e. bourgeois salon society]’ nineteenth-century Jews ‘had no choice but to become parvenus par excellence’ and Rahel played this part to the full (1974:209). She found in the end though that the parvenu ‘will become something’ they ‘did not want to become’ who

'has to acquiesce to everything' (1974:215). Her attempt to assimilate into Christian literary salon society ultimately failed, and, for Arendt, was always doomed to do so. Whilst clearly many nineteenth-century Jews did assimilate, Arendt's concepts of the pariah and parvenu signified a relationship to authenticity – the lesson of Rahel's life was that the parvenu attempted *inauthentically* to conceal a Jewishness of which salon society would ultimately remind them, while Rahel's decision to re-embrace or at least acknowledge her Jewishness was a defining moment of authenticity (1974:199). For Rahel 'the central desire of her life had been to escape from Jewishness, and this desire proved unfulfillable because of the antisemitism of her milieu, because of the ban, imposed from the outside, against a Jew becoming a normal human being' (Arendt: 1974: 216). Indeed, Rahel found that '[t]he world became peopled with evil demons who shouted from every corner at every opportunity the thing she wished she could conceal forever' (1974: 220) and she finally salvaged her pariah qualities. In the end Rahel reportedly declares 'The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life—having been born a Jewess—this I should on no account now wish to have missed' (1974:3). Rahel loved and wanted to be loved back and rejected the Jewish world but was in turn rejected by the Gentile world (Motzkin 2001). For Arendt this story became an exemplar of the dilemmas of Jewish assimilation and subsequently 'haunted her life' remaining in the background of her analysis in *The Human Condition* (Birnbaum 2008:223). Rahel realized at the end of her life that her 'liberation' from Jewishness had come at the cost of self-alienation. This Jewish dilemma was expressed later by Bauman (1988) in terms of 'exit visas' from 'national and corporate' existence but without 'entry tickets' into the societies in which they lived. The emerging constitutional nation-state both claimed adherence to universal principles of rights but was legitimated by claims to national identity, which for Jews created a double dilemma. There was a conflict between the 'offer' of universalist citizenship versus the particular identity of Jews as a 'nation' whose loyalty to the state would always be in question, but also between the nationalist foundation of the state versus the alleged Jewish cosmopolitanism.

The parvenu fails also because of the modern paradox that the more assimilated Jews are the harder it becomes to define their 'foreignness', yet Jewishness becomes an inextricable putative essence. Hence '[i]nstead of being defined by nationality or religion, Jews were

being transformed into a social group whose members shared certain psychological attributes and reactions, the sum total of which was supposed to constitute “Jewishness” (Arendt 1979: 66). This essence was ‘hidden’ among those who adopted gentile customs although, contrary to what Arendt suggests, this did not arise only in the post-Enlightenment period. The idea of ‘hidden Jews’ is an ancient trope that was central to attempts by the Inquisition to expose ‘crypto-Jews’ and goes further back to early Christian texts that express suspicion of Jews who have ‘accepted’ the teachings of Christ (e.g. John 8:31; see Nirenberg 2013: 78ff). Indeed, although Arendt focusses on the post-enlightenment period, the excluded and abject Jew as pariah is both an ancient and modern figure. Weber derives the concept of pariah from the Indian caste system, in which the pariah is separated by ritual barriers, exclusion, economic separation, and applies this concept to Judaism as a ‘religion of suffering’ that places them outside of history.

*The problem of ancient Jewry, although unique in the socio-historical study of religion, can best be understood in comparison with ... the Indian caste order. Sociologically speaking the Jews were a pariah people, which means ... they were a guest people who were ritually separated ... from their social surroundings. All the essential traits of Jewry's attitude toward the environment can be deduced from this pariah existence – especially its voluntary ghetto, long anteceding compulsory internment, and the dualistic nature of its in-group and out-group morality (Weber 1976:3)*

The concept is important in Weber’s sociology as a defence of his Protestant Ethic thesis against Smoller’s (as we have seen, typical) view of capitalism as ‘Jewish’. Weber claimed by contrast that Jews were pariahs on the margins of the economy while the catalyst for the spirit of capitalism had arisen from ascetic Protestant sects. ‘Pariah capitalism’, like the Hindu trader castes, Weber says ‘felt at home’ only in the very forms of booty-capitalism and trade that the Puritans abhorred (Weber 1976:336-55). However, here again we see a melding of the figurative and sociological ‘Jew’. For Weber and Arendt, the Jews were pariahs and parasites without country or nation who became marginal ‘middlemen’ and politically powerless, a condition intensified in the mid-twentieth century where they are now ‘cast up on the shores of strange lands, chased into the cracks of strange economies ... they are once again parasites’ (2007:75).

Arendt further drew on Lazare's concept of ambivalent pariahdom that had characterised Jews in exile after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) – 'Thus, on the one hand, unwillingly, the Jews were unconscious auxiliaries of Christianity while, on the other hand, they were its enemies, for which there were numerous reasons' (Lazare 2005:45). Also following Lazare, pariah status was ultimately their responsibility. While their 'isolation has been their weakness' (2005:23), legal emancipation freed pariahs from servitude but Jews themselves had to overcome their self-oppression and break the chains which they had 'forged themselves' (2005:180). In the modern state pariah status was actually intensified by their 'teachers and guides' who united to keep them in a 'state of servitude more complete than the ancient bondage of Egypt' (2005:333). By refusing Enlightenment then, Jews remained the Other of reason.

Arendt developed Lazare's concept but as a largely figurative-literary aesthetic dichotomy of the pariah and parvenu. Like Rahel, the parvenu lives in self-abjection and inauthenticity, allowed a temporary economic role in Christian society which is politically powerless (as for Weber) as war profiteers, hired tax collectors and adjuncts of developing European capitalism (Weber, 1967:336-55). The way of the pariah and parvenu are, Arendt claims, 'equally ways of extreme solitude' because the pariah regrets not having become a parvenu and the latter has a bad conscience at having 'betrayed his people and exchanged equal rights for personal privileges' (Arendt 1979: 66). The pariah is 'worldless', that is, apolitical and withdraws from engaging with the politics of the dominant society. The unpolitical, worldless, non-public character of the community was defined by the demand that it should form a 'body, whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family. The structure of communal life was modelled on the relationships between the members of a family because these were known to be non-political and even antipolitical' (Arendt 1998:53-4). By contrast the 'world' is the 'in between', the interaction between people and experiences of living together in a public sphere as a space of appearances<sup>11</sup>. They jointly exercise the capacity to think and take charge of history, although this is under threat as the 'public' increasingly becomes the 'mass' (Arendt 2002:235-6). Freedom is 'never to let oneself be bound by what one is' or by a 'mirror in the other' (Arendt 2002:93) and worldliness not feeling 'at home' in the world – being in the world but not of it (Chacón 2012).

By contrast with this secular conception, Scholem (2011) identified a 'hidden tradition' of mysticism in Kabbalah as a dialectical source of strength. Scholem had shown the importance of a 'hidden tradition' of spiritual resistance which Arendt (rather like pre-War Zionists with whom she was in uneasy alignment) rejected as apolitical worldlessness<sup>12</sup>. Both writers were critics of Jewish assimilation but for Scholem the apparent conservatism of Judaism disclosed radical cultural social forces and heretical and revolutionary impulses that arose in messianism. The 'hidden tradition' has many layers (Sznaider 2011: 26) but Arendt agreed with Scholem that in the seventeenth-century Sabbatian movement mysticism turned towards political action but after its failure 'the Jewish body politic died' and led to nihilism (Arendt 2007:310). However, while for Scholem the concealed tradition remained hidden in Kabbalah and mysticism, Arendt adopted a more secular concept of political action and was disdainful of religiously expressed identity. Suchoff (1997) notes that Arendt viewed Scholem's account of the mystical tradition as both too particularly Jewish and as a source of dangerous passivity – something both 'beautiful' but also a 'great disaster'. The self-conscious pariah by contrast is one who lives with difference and distinctness in such a way as to establish her difference publicly. The self-conscious pariah requires visibility, requires to be seen 'as other' (Benhabib 1995) and as 'different'. The pariah must become political as in the Ghetto Uprising 1944 and as illustrated by her repeated calls in *Aufbau* for a Jewish army (e.g. 2007:134-187). In turn Scholem criticised Arendt's concept of action as a betrayal of *verborgene Tradition* – the concealed tradition which was politically active in paradoxical ways (Suchoff 1997). In the Eichmann controversy that was to end their friendship, Scholem said to Arendt, 'At each decisive juncture ... your book speaks only of the *weakness* of the Jewish stance in the world' (Scholem 2012:302)<sup>13</sup>. This indeed was Arendt's judgement of the 'passivity' of Jewish history. To speak as a pariah then was to acknowledge Jewish particularly in a secular world and reject the success of assimilated parvenus.

This is a posture Schnaider (2011 *passim*) identifies with 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (combining concrete identity with cosmopolitan values) although it is also a disruptive and rebellious one. The 'conscious pariah' is 'awake to an awareness of his position ... and [has] become a rebel' (Pitkin 1998:63) but paradoxically while rejecting the spiritual ghetto they were nonetheless formed by it. The pariah acknowledges the modern condition of loss of

traditional bearings but nonetheless insists on separateness – to assert Jewish particularity and reject assimilation. Arendt discusses different types of rebellious pariah – Haine’s Lord of Dreams; the awkward, visionary *shlemihl*; the stateless refugee, in constant fear of the cop – a figure dramatized by Charlie Chaplin (whom she acknowledged was not Jewish); and the ‘man of goodwill’, ‘nobodies’, always excluded, who feature in Kafka’s work, for example in *The Castle*<sup>14</sup>. A more recent figure of the *shlemihl* might be Larry Gopnik in the Cohen Brothers’ film *A Serious Man* (2009). While the *schnorrer* is a fraud seeking self-interest, the *shlemihl* is an ironic literary figure who can see through the mask of social conventions. The highest form of self-conscious pariahdom is to live in authentic awareness that only an outsider embodies the humanity that society otherwise denies (Rabinbach 1999). As with Lazare, the conscious pariah will rouse fight against all domination and will be rejected by antisemites and conventional Jews. According to Rabinbach (1999) the self as pariah lives in the authentic awareness that only an outsider embodies the humanity that society otherwise denies.

Her vignettes are informed by an existential concept of responsibility which is central to the idea of the conscious pariah. The claim that every pariah who refused to be a rebel was partly responsible for their own position contrasts with the Sartrean view of the ‘Jew in the eyes of the other’. Arendt did not really dismiss the significance of the stigmatizing gaze, since modern antisemitism had ‘very little to do with the Jews’ (2007:75), that is, it was not caused by them – although the ‘double pariah’ (as both Jew and rebel) were responsible for their own fate. If they fail to rebel they become a *schnorrer*, a beggar who props up the social order, perhaps not unlike Marx’s dismissal of the Lumpenproletariat as ‘knaves’ (Marx 1977: 316). Thus despite her differences with Sartre (e.g. Bernstein 1996:47-8 and 195-7) there is an echo here of the authentic redeeming heroic deed like Mathieu’s moment of existential choice when, in the face of the defeat of the French army, he sacrifices his life to hold the German advance by fifteen minutes (Sartre 1970:225). For Arendt too the authenticity of the act seems more important than its effectiveness.

It follows then, for Arendt, that ‘Every pariah who refused to be a rebel was partly responsible for his own position’ (Arendt, 2007:77) which underlay her controversial claim in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that the collaboration of the *Judenräte* was symptomatic of the disastrous parvenu strategy of attempting to become ‘favoured Jews’ (Arendt 2006:12) and

failure to resist was the ‘darkest chapter in the whole dark story’ (2006:117, emphasis added). It is worth noting in passing that although this claim provoked controversy it was not new<sup>15</sup>. Arendt had already said it in the 1950s (1950; 2007: 458); Raul Hilberg (Arendt’s main source on the Holocaust) had said it<sup>16</sup>; and it had been publicised in Israel in the Kastner trial<sup>17</sup>. During the War Jewish partisans such as the Bielski Brigade and Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa called on the *Judenräte* to resist and assassinated members of the Jewish Police they believed to be collaborators (Glass 2004; Raffles 2007). More recent scholarship has found both evidence of systematic collaboration by the Ghetto Jewish Police (Anonymous Members of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police 2014) but also of considerably more Jewish resistance than Arendt was then aware (e.g. Glass 2004). The existence of resistance does not detract from Arendt’s ethics of responsibility to resist or from the claim that the Holocaust was in part the outcome of a history of Jewish ‘passivity’ and worldlessness. However, the issue of passivity and resistance in Jewish history is central to this discussion as is her ability to reconcile general and particular identities. It has been suggested (e.g. Postone 2006) that (particularly in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*) Arendt is ultimately unable to address particularity but subsumes it within the abstract general. The following section explores some dilemmas of her position and suggests that forms of resistance within the Jewish lifeworld point to the limits of advocating purely secular defiance.

### **Domination, Subordination and the Subaltern**

This section further examines the pariah concept and presents evidence of everyday resistances grounded in early modern Jewish religious identities. The separation between the social status of parvenus and the political status of the conscious pariah reflects a division central to Arendt’s political philosophy which is replicated in the distinction between secular and religious. The conscious pariah is a figure of the secular, not religious, Jew – as in Lazare’s ‘I am a Jew and I know nothing about Jews. Henceforth I am a Pariah and I know not out of what elements to rebuild myself with dignity and a personality’ (Lazare 1982:766). ‘One does not escape Jewishness’ Arendt says in the final chapter of *Rachel Varnhagen* (1974: chap 13) and demands the ‘admission of Jews *as Jews* to the ranks of humanity rather than permit them to ape gentiles or ... play the parvenu’ which is a

treacherous promise of equality (Arendt 2007:275). The conscious pariah is 'aware of her position' but what exactly is this awareness?

Two problems arise here. First, Arendt (like Lazar) calls for Jewish secularism (an end to 'worldlessness') as indeed for Rachel, Judaism had lost all spiritual significance and was reduced to a 'vague humanism' that had nothing in common with Orthodox Jews or Yiddish 'Oriental' Jews (Birnbaum 2008:232). One might wonder then in what sense a Judaism stripped of religiosity would be 'admitted' in a form that sustained 'difference'. Similarly, following Arendt, Wellmer (1996: 166) calls for 'revolutionary particularism' and Benhabib (1996) for the 'concrete particular', but it is unclear what will be the culturally defining nature of this particularity, other than being a persecuted group with certain ascribed characteristics. Sznajder (2011:18) notes that for Arendt 'being a Jew was ... a political stance' and, as she said, an 'indisputable fact of her life' but this begs the troubled question of the boundaries and markers of Jewish identity (see Diemling and Ray 2016). One source of particularity of course was religious difference and Arendt's lack of interest in Jewish religiosity is surprising in view of the complexity of her understanding of Christian secularism and thoughts on political theology (Moyn 2008). Whereas Judaism was 'worldless', for Arendt Christianity was 'political' and Christian secularism retained institutional political forms from the past that beckoned a possible return to religiosity. With regard to Judaism it is not just that Arendt ignored its religious components, as Weissberg (2007) notes, but that she discounted its potential to generate an ethic of resistance. As Jews became secular the 'more obsessive [their] Jewishness became' along with a sense of either superiority or inferiority but not of being 'ordinary people' (Arendt 1979:84). That is, Jewishness became a psychological disposition, not an institutional or organizational legacy. Yet as Glass shows, armed Jewish resistance in German-occupied Europe had a spiritual dimension and while 'spiritual resistance may not have saved lives, it may have installed a psychological refuge inside the self and within the community' (2004:105). Indeed, in view of the ambiguous relationships between Judaism as secular (cultural or ethnic) and religious identities we might problematize Arendt's religious/secular binary. This in some ways derived from Zionism's rejection of the religious, Diaspora, *Kaffeehausjuden* in favour of the new *Muskeljuden* fighters for the Jewish State.

Second, Zolkos (2014), following Bauman, interprets the ‘parvenu and the pariah [to] express the nomadic sensibilities and vulnerabilities of the modern era, and are thus precursory [sic] to the post-modern nomadic identities of a refugee, a vagabond, a tourist, etc’. But the situations of refugees, vagabonds, tourists and whoever else are hardly comparable (beyond the trite observation that they are all in some sense ‘mobile’) and these sensibilities refer to nothing in particular about the Jewish condition. Differentiation and social complexity are crucial to Arendt’s understanding of political resistance but for a writer in whose work the ‘in between’ was a central idea, there is little sense of the complexity of moral choices and political action. Arendt drew a clear line between the social as a space of passivity and discrimination (as in her ‘Reflections on Little Rock’) versus the public as one of equality and action (Hammer 1997). Yet if this distinction in Jewish history is wrong then perhaps, as Benhabib (1996:166) suggests, the ‘despised terrain of the social’ could ‘become the scene of repoliticization’. Further the ethic of resistance might admit multiple forms of everyday social practices that are embedded in alternative cultural identities, even if they do not manifest as overt heroic opposition. In this sense Scholem’s understanding of ‘hidden’ resistances might be more valid than the overly polarized division of the social and public in Jewish history.

The concept of the pariah also needs more scrutiny. Momigliano argues that ‘[m]uch of what Weber said on ancient Judaism remains valid’, for example, ‘he duly appreciated the whole Messianic dimension as a promise of future rectification of present injustice’ but there nonetheless

*remains a curious basic contradiction in [his] analysis of Judaism. More perhaps than anybody else he gave importance to its juridical structure – the pact between God and the Jewish nation.... [but] did not appreciate the consequence. Throughout the centuries this pact remained the foundation of the self-regulation of the Jewish communities and therefore saved the Jews from whatever self-abasement can be associated with the word pariah (Momigliano 1980:177).*

Further, the depiction ‘pariah’ is not consistent with the level and type of continual interaction between Jewish and majority societies. As Zolkos (2014) points out, the analogy with the Hindu caste system does not work because there the pariahs were excluded and

untouchable and the Brahmins were not looking to them for legitimation. Figurative Judaism was needed as a liminal and an ambiguous figure against which Christianity defined itself but as we will show below Judaism was also an oppositional subaltern against which Christianity defined itself as spirit versus the body of Jewishness.

Eisenstadt (2009) points out that mutual definitions of 'otherness' became central to relations between the Jews and dominant Christian and Islamic societies. These definitions and continual encounters with each other have played crucial roles in the crystallization of Jewish collective consciousness, historical experience, continuity and survival. It is true, as Arendt claims, that this involved focus on religious and legal rather than political activity, and as Eisenstadt also says, 'The major – probably the only – institutional arena that could be constituted according to the basic tenets of the Jewish cultural vision and tradition was that of learning, ritual observance and prayer, and of communal organization' (Eisenstadt 2009: 240). However, contrary to Weber, this setting aside of active political participation 'did not entail that Jewish communities gave up their civilizational visions, their claim to be a civilization of universal significance and the political components connected with this vision' (Eisenstadt 2009: 242). Indeed, the universalistic claims of Halakhic Judaism meant that the tension between particularism and universalism was not simply a feature of the modern period created only by the demands of assimilation. Rather this was always implicit in the duality of particularity and universalism in Judaism.

Arendt's view that under rabbinic tradition Judaism condemned itself to powerlessness is disputable. Although he refers to Arendt only in passing, David Biale's account of Jewish history similarly argues that the Jewish Question arose with the Enlightenment, dismantling of medieval corporations and modern nationalism in which a trade between rights and edicts of toleration for loss of identity was possible. However, it was only in the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) that a new myth of 'Jewish powerlessness' arose (Biale 1986:112). Following Arendt, he defines power as the ability to act in concert with others but argues that power and the political have always been central features of Jewish life. By contrast with Arendt's passive pariahdom, Biale tells an acutely political history of Judaism which at the same time subverts dominant narratives of power and the political. Dominant narratives disturb conventional hierarchies – so the younger son is preferred over the elder – Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau and Joseph over his brothers (Biale 1986:38).

Defeats and exile came to be seen as signs of God's power but also an opening up of human activity that rejected humiliation and subservience and allowed the advocacy of militant action, such as the revolts of 115-17 CE in the Roman Diaspora, and the Bar Kokhba rebellion (132-35 CE). Although defeated, these revolts were not futile, Biale argues, and resulted in the restoration of some autonomous self-government under rabbis and the restored Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (1986:53). Again, the Mar Zutra revolt of the Babylonian Exilarch created a Jewish kingdom that survived for seven years until defeated by the Persians in 520 CE (1986:72). Samuel Ha-Nagid led Muslim armies in Grenada in the eleventh century and 'grasped the relation between force and politics' (1986:76). Jewish communities in Europe in the Middle Ages usually enjoyed internal autonomy in exchange for recognition and settlement rights. Biale concludes that in many periods of Diaspora history Jews were neither passive subjects, nor what Pitkin calls 'hapless beneficiaries' (Pitkin 1998:255) but resisted, took up arms and engaged in politics both within the community and with Christian authorities. Indeed, Biale says, from biblical times to the present day, the Jews have 'wandered the uncertain terrain between power and powerlessness ... living with uncertainty and insecurity' (1986:210).

Arendt's public-private distinction coincides with that between authenticity and passivity. The social hides responsibility and undermines the capacity for action in a private world of thoughtlessness and habit (1998:29). The limitation of Arendt's analysis arises in part from her concept of the social in which she contrasted the social private realm with the political realm of public action and never celebrated any transgression of the public and private (Pitkin 1998). Indeed, there are, as Benhabib (1995) argued, several layers to Arendt's concept of the social, but in relation to self-conscious resistance the concept of the social is undeveloped. The experience of worldlessness was expressed in her depiction of the social as 'the Blob' – something insidious, unimaginative and threatening, which as Pitkin (1998) argues, recalls the portrayal of threats in 1950s science fiction films. The emergence of society occurs with the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices and from 'the shadowy interior of the household' enters 'the light of the public sphere', where it has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, but has also changed 'almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen' (1998:38). The rise of mass society,

on the contrary, indicates that the various social groups have suffered the same absorption into one society that the family units had suffered earlier. With the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has 'reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength'. But society then 'equalizes under all circumstances', the victory of which in the modern world is 'recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual' (1998:41). The consequence of this is generalized worldlessness where our 'capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private' (1998:49). Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else, of sheer survival, assume public significance (1998:46).

This overly polarized division of the public and the social occludes the cultural and social dimensions of resistance within textured relationships in the lifeworld, within which politics is nested. If we return to the 'hidden tradition' then subordinate groups do not necessarily contest subordination openly but rather covertly and often through furtive performances that can nonetheless subvert public consent. The private sphere, the home, has been an important place for affirmation of Jewish identity since ancient times and destruction of the Temple. The liturgy of the home with its daily and weekly prayers, the observance of dietary laws, the multitude of laws and customs that regulate observant Jewish life from the moment of awakening to the moments of falling asleep. The home is not only the place of perpetuating Jewish memory and identity (as in the *seder*, the Passover home liturgy) but also a place for a variety of strategies that affirm Jewish resistance to Christian oppression and persecution.

This can be illustrated by recent research (Deutsch, 2010; Diemling 2011 and 2015; Elyada 2012) focusing on examples from the early modern period. This period is relevant here since for Arendt it was the period of the formation of the market and state and therefore of 'society'. The rise of the social resulted in the blurring of the distinction between the private and the public – so it was not merely a prelude to the modern but its epitome (Arendt, 1998:160-61). Research on the texts of the sixteenth-century convert, Anthonius Margaritha<sup>18</sup> has highlighted how early modern Jews asserted their sense of self in linguistic or ritualistic ways to express their secret opposition to Christian power (Diemling 2011 and

2015) Seemingly trivial everyday acts, expressed as avoidance of Christian spaces or symbols or mockery, can be interpreted as acts of resistance that asserted a Jewish sense of opposition to Christian power. For example, linguistic strategies that reinterpret Christian terms in a derogatory and dismissive way, sometimes as quite witty Hebrew puns and word-plays, have been used in Jewish culture regarding enemies of the Jewish people for a long time (cf. Deutsch, 2010). They serve as a 'secret code', which the insiders who are part of the community understand. Coded language also undermines the hegemony of the powerful majority by distorting a Christian term in a way that often still sounds similar to its original meaning, but mocks it and links it to idol worship and impurity.

Margaritha claimed that Jews cursed nations under whose governments they lived, blasphemed Christianity and Jesus in their prayers and resisted the pariah status of inferiority to Christians. Margaritha's 'ethnographic' descriptions of Jewish practices include for example:

- The anti-Christian rhetoric of the Hanukkah *piyyutim* (liturgical poetry) emphasised its strongly anti-assimilationist origin – celebrating the Maccabees' victory against the Hellenizing Seleucids. In particular the *Maoz Tzur*, sung after lighting candles at home, includes the stanza calling for revenge upon those who persecute the Jews: 'bare Your holy arm/ ...Avenge the blood of your servants, take revenge upon the evil nation/ ... repel the Red one in the deepest shadows'.<sup>19</sup> The 'Red one', *Edom*, was historically a reference to ancient Rome but here to sixteenth-century Christendom.
- The *Alenu* Prayer, part of the daily liturgy, was from the twelfth century onwards a 'kind of anti-Christian credo' (Yuval: 2006, 119) because of the verse 'for they bow down in vanity and emptiness and pray to a God that cannot save' (adapted from Isaiah 30:7 and 45:20). Margaritha mentions the Christian censorship of this prayer that led to the removal of these controversial passages from Jewish prayerbooks and adds that Jews maintained an empty space in their books, reminding the community to say these controversial words when praying and spitting out after 'emptiness' - a Hebrew word play with '*rik*' (emptiness) and '*rok*' (saliva).<sup>20</sup> This example demonstrates subversive practice despite overt compliance to Christian authority. The spitting out expresses Jewish disdain of what they understood as Christian veneration of 'graven images' and a strong feeling of superiority.

While it is true that these examples come from a pre-secular universe they contradict the claimed passivity of Diaspora Jewish life and add nuance to Arendt's grammar of action. Outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is visible embedded in everyday practices of the lifeworld. Drawing on Goffman's analysis of front and back stage performances, James Scott (1990) describes how subalterns contest their oppressed status secretly 'behind the scene' where it is safe to do so. The 'hidden transcript', the expression of the real feelings of subordinated groups in safe space away from the public gaze, allows us to get a sense of the subversive strategies to express anger, frustration, hatred or hopes for revenge. Reconstructing such historical subservice strategies is notoriously difficult and has only recently been researched. These 'ethnographic' descriptions of Jews and Judaism, authored by converts from Judaism from the 16th century onwards, expose hidden Jewish practices to outsiders, particularly to Christian authorities, that shed light on the status of late medieval and early modern Jews, usually considered passive victims of Christian oppression and persecution. The concept of passive pariahdom then does not capture the ambivalences of Jewish history and identity which is neither unambiguously subject nor openly rebellious.

### **Conclusion**

Arendt's concept of the conscious pariah has a prophetic aspect – a potential reversal of the statuses of both the pariah and parvenu that has been important in understanding the politics of resistance. Further, her anti-individualism points towards forms of collective action rather than a republic of individuals although in the process the public sphere operates as a kind of utopia the potentiality of which was never realized. These concepts were rooted in anger and despair at the fate of European Jewry and the growing 'worldlessness' of the world. However, the dichotomy of the pariah/parvenu does not encompass the complexity of Jewish-Christian relations but more particularly it inadequately understands the dynamics of resistance. Further, the pariahdom from which she would emancipate Jews is a combination of sociological and figurative constructions, which are in turn related to Arendt's underdeveloped concept of the social, which is a realm of privacy as opposed to the public realm of political action. In the process Arendt overlooked or undervalued other forms of cultural and aesthetic resistance. In the context of trauma and exile there is urgency to her diagnosis that is also too polarized and castigates

the social as a realm of passivity and domesticity. Yet Arendt's 'Jewish Question' – on what terms are the Jews to be admitted citizenship? – remains unanswered. If to be a religious Jew is to retreat into 'worldlessness' and utopia then it is unclear quite what, for Arendt, it means to be 'Jewish'. If it means to enter the public sphere as a secular Jew, like Arendt herself for whom 'being a Jewess was one of the indisputable factual data of my life', then this could be viewed as another route to assimilation. In this case it is not so clear why one would want to insist on the concrete particular of Jewishness as opposed to membership of a secular republican civic space. At the same time the assertion of Jewish religious identity in the Diaspora has been a source of resistance to pariahdom and she perhaps dismissed too readily the force of this hidden messianic tradition.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The distinction between the figurative and sociological Jew does not mean the former is unreal, on the contrary it has real consequences.
- <sup>2</sup> The term 'witness' is used cautiously here – these writers were not directly witnesses to the mass extermination, however, Arendt was imprisoned in Camp Gurs in 1940 and those who did not escape were eventually deported to death camps. Arendt was then survivor of a process that she documented from the 1930s.
- <sup>3</sup> Of those who escaped she said, 'They must remember that they are constantly on the run, and that the world's reality is actually expressed by their escape... [the] personal strength of the fugitives increases as the persecution and danger increase'. (Arendt 1968)
- <sup>4</sup> In 1942 she said, 'The extermination of the Jews of Europe ... is about to begin. The murder of five thousand Jews in each of the cities of Berlin, Vienna and Prague is to mark the start of this mass slaughter (2007:162; and again pp 191-2 and pp 214-7). It is not often noted that Arendt publicised the genocide while the Allies were still dismissing evidence of them.
- <sup>5</sup> There are other similarities between Arendt and Simmel's understanding a society of strangers mediated by money (see Birnbaum 2004:123-68).
- <sup>6</sup> This was a derogatory term for people working in the stock exchange.
- <sup>7</sup> Marx also used the term 'parvenu' to describe assimilated Jews involved in finance (Marx to Engels 30/7/1862)
- <sup>8</sup> It would be interesting to explore a dialogue between Arendt and Durkheim on the possible solidaristic bases for human rights.
- <sup>9</sup> This is a charitable way of putting it. Laqueur (2001) claimed that Arendt had read 'too much antisemitic literature for her own good'.
- <sup>10</sup> *Shlemihl* (Yiddish) is an awkward, unfortunate person.
- <sup>11</sup> It might be thought that the concept of the public used here is anachronistic but it follows Arendt's usage of the term as a sphere of speech and action that pre-dates modernity where, actually it is increasingly compromised.
- <sup>12</sup> It is fashionable to regard Arendt as now an 'anti-Zionist' (e.g. Butler 2014) but her relationship with Zionism was complex. Her insistence on the impossibility of assimilation had resonance with Hertz's view of the inevitability of antisemitism. Similarly, Zionists dismissed Diaspora history as passive and impotent 'ghost people' adopting a posture of *kiddush ha-shem*, allowing oneself to be killed for the sanctification of God. She became more critical of Zionism in the 1950s, though ambivalently so, thus Parvikko's (1996:170) claim that Arendt 'was never a Zionist' does not bear scrutiny.
- <sup>13</sup> In the same passage he accused Arendt of lack of *Ahavat Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people).
- <sup>14</sup> Scholem also saw Kafka's stories as allegories of the Jewish condition, although it is unclear to what extent K in *The Castle* was a pariah or parvenu – he had contempt for the peasants in whom he has 'no interest' (2009:26) and was obsessed with entry into the castle.
- <sup>15</sup> There were of course other reasons for the controversy. Her concept of 'banality of evil' and claiming that Eichmann was no fanatical antisemite still provoke controversy while her account of the trial omits witness testimonials, which endowed the trial with historical significance. But consideration of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper.

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<sup>16</sup> Hilberg (1961: 16-17) had written of the failure to resist as an 'alleviation-compliance response' and similarly Arendt wrote of 'Diaspora mentality' that was indifferent to survival or death.

<sup>17</sup> In 1947 Malchiel Gruenwald who lost 52 relatives in Auschwitz accused Rudolf Kastner, a Hungarian lawyer, journalist and later Israeli civil servant, of collaborating with the Nazis in Hungary. Kastner sued for libel but the judge ruled in Gruenwald's favour. Kastner was assassinated in Tel Aviv in March 1957. Parts of the verdict were overturned by the Israeli Supreme Court in 1958.

<sup>18</sup> Anthonius Margaritha was a sixteenth-century Jewish Hebraist and convert to Christianity. He was a source for Martin Luther's conception of Judaism. The texts of converts (also including Victor of Carben, Johannes Pfefferkorn and Ernst Hess) were designed to convey negative images of Jews to Christian audiences but for our purposes serve to illustrate daily resistances to pariah status.

<sup>19</sup> Anthonius Margaritha, *Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, Augsburg 1530, fol. G1v-G2r.

<sup>20</sup> Margaritha, *Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, fol. DGJG, V4r-v.

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