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Violence and Understanding in Gaza: The British Broadsheets' Coverage of the War

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Chapter 9

Conclusion: Beyond Good and Evil

Overview and summary

Examining the British broadsheets' engagement with the armed conflict of Gaza, this book narrated a story of the war.

By and large, it started with consensus. As the coverage of 'building blocks' with which the narrative of the war was constructed was examined, whatever differences we found were coloured by grey and not categorical black and white. Regardless of political affiliation, newspapers agreed on which conceptual areas and which topics within conceptual areas to prioritize. Any divergence occurred only in the shadow of these broad similarities and may therefore be judged relative rather than categorical.

As for these relative differences or shades of greys, they occasionally appeared in unexpected patterns. Regarding the general importance attributed to fatalities, no left-right axis was discernible as it was the conservative *Telegraph* and the left-liberal *Independent* that referred to fatalities most frequently. And if this preference was not for the same reason, no ideological divide could be detected regarding specific categories of fatalities either: whilst the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* displayed an interest in the nationality of the victims (focusing on Israelis or Palestinians respectively), *The Times* and the *Independent* focus more on humanitarian status (focusing on combatants or civilians respectively). What is more, even though conservative newspapers attributed more importance to topics representing action and events in war than their left-liberal counterparts, all general differences disappeared when specific categories of action were consulted. Indeed, it was the magnitude of the *Telegraph's* coverage of the Zeytoun incident and that of *The Times* regarding

the Israeli deployment of the chemical substance white phosphorous that stood out amongst individual topics.

Whilst still coloured by the shades of grey, important divergences started to emerge in Chapter 4 where historical context and the critical perspective it implied was examined. The chapter reported that *each* of the liberal newspapers attributed more importance to historical context than *either* of the two conservative ones, and that conservatives devoted far more attention than liberals to the issue of Hamas rockets fired into Israel when compared to the Israeli economic blockade of Gaza. Yet beyond this, the picture proved once again to be rather blurry. For the conservatives' overall share of coverage of the rockets was still smaller than what would have been expected; in the case of the *Independent*, no meaningful pattern emerged regarding the target of their criticism; and whilst the *Financial Times* appeared to direct a consistent critical perspective to both participants of the conflict, they neglected most of the newspapers the seminal issue of Hamas rockets. It was only the *Guardian* where the magnitude of coverage appeared to have been translated into a meaningful qualitative difference. The left-liberal newspaper was the only one consistently deploying a critical perspective as it wrote a considerable amount not just about the Israeli economic blockade and occupation, but also Hamas rockets fired into Israeli civilian territory.

Thus, as the perspective of the book has been broadening and as analysis turned from facts towards the context of criticism, a recognizable and systematic gap has indeed been opened between the conservative and left-liberal coverage of the war.

This tendency continued in Chapter 5 as the subject of analysis became how the *act* of criticism was constructed in the broadsheets' comment pieces. First, as the first half of the chapter demonstrated, when the ratio of positions indicating a broadly 'pro-Israeli' or 'anti-Hamas/Palestinian' stance *versus* positions suggesting a broadly 'anti-Israeli' or 'pro-Hamas/Palestinian' stance was calculated, a contrastive picture appeared between conservative and (left)-liberal newspapers – one ever more pronounced in the case of *The Times* and the *Independent*. Second, there was virtually no occasion where an *overlap* of these positions would have been

showcased across the spectrum of the broadsheets. What is more, qualitative analysis was capable of looking into those articles where the possibility of precisely such overlap or *fusion of perspectives* was seemingly on offer. And, astonishingly, not even those articles that attempted, or at any rate explicitly claimed, to showcase such genuine overlap between positions actually managed to achieve that. To find a common ground, to genuinely acknowledge rights and wrongs of both sides somehow seemed to be practically impossible in the context of the armed conflict.

In Chapter 6, analyzing explicit engagements with antisemitism, more of the same was to follow. Mapping the structure of this report, there was a consensus regarding the fact of the increase in antisemitic incidents in Britain and Europe during the war. Yet as soon as of concern was not a fact but a judgment of antisemitism – that is, when newspapers engaged with the judgments that pronounced something as antisemitic – not one instance was found in the newspapers where this judgment would have been genuine. Factually wrong, perhaps, but still genuine. Instead, those judgments were acts of fanaticism or political cynicism. The realm of facts (i.e. antisemitic incidents) and that of humans (i.e. where people judge something to be antisemitic) were radically separated. Antisemitism was either simply, plainly, factually there; or simply, plainly, factually not there. In either case, this construction meant that a claim to the contrary inevitably implied fanaticism, idiocy or malice: certainly not positions that can be engaged with from any reasonable political-moral perspective.

The relative consensus of the early chapter(s) therefore started radically to dissipate. In particular, whenever issues of judgment (as opposed to facts) were occasioned, a separate and rigid dichotomy between right and wrong emerged. And as ‘right’ became so absolutely straightforward and unambiguous an entity, ‘wrong’ in turn appeared not simply an error of political-moral judgment but the emanation of suspicious or rather horrendous practices and motives.

The pinnacle of this dynamic was reached in the last two chapters, where the general narrative/argumentative perspectives of the broadsheets’ editorials were examined.

As we witnessed, newspapers like the conservative *Daily Telegraph* and the left-liberal *Guardian* became virtual mirror-images of each other, especially as far as the State of Israel and the Israeli Defence Forces were concerned. In the *Telegraph*, both in terms of law to war and law in war, Israel was not so much right in the choices it made but beyond the possibility of criticism. In the *Guardian*, it did not simply carry out action which raised the possibility or indeed the necessity of serious political-moral or legal criticism, but was immediately condemned wholesale. An entity of purity faced that of inherent aggression and violence in the respective accounts of the two newspapers.¹

The force of the dichotomy between polar and incommensurable opposites and the political-moral-legal consequences of a zero-sum game could also be witnessed in the way these newspapers engaged with what could potentially have subverted, challenged, or at least nuanced their constructions. Even when explicitly raising the grave issue of the Palestinian death toll and by implication Israel's conduct of war, the *Telegraph* maintained the State's status as being, ultimately, beyond the possibility of substantial criticism. Even when considering Hamas's characteristics, the *Guardian* never seriously engaged with the possibility that its action or overall outlook could have a significant impact on the events. Challenges to the respective discourses were therefore brushed aside brusquely and without any real reflection.

Yet these challenges arising from the *Telegraph's* and the *Guardian's own* accounts were nothing in comparison to those emerging from *The Times*. The conservative newspaper reported and then in its editorials duly reflected on the investigative finding that Israel appeared to have used weapons containing certain chemical substances in what the newspaper itself dubbed 'illegal' ways. Given that, in early editorials, *The Times* expressed only guarded support of Israel's choice to launch a war and as such retained space for criticism, one would have expected such revelations to lead to a genuine exercise of critical judgment of Israel's conduct in the war.

As we saw, *the exact opposite happened*. It was precisely as the possibility of Israel's 'illegal' conduct of war was raised that its choice of war retroactively became not so much an unreservedly

good choice, but a natural necessity. It was as Israel's conduct was explicitly stated to show 'scant regard' for the life of Palestinian civilians that Hamas started to acquire the essentially evil characteristics that the *Telegraph* exhibited from the outset. Most staggeringly, it was as the gravest questions about its action and responsibility emerged that Israel was positioned as being beyond the possibility of substantial criticism.

It is no exaggeration to assert that such a state of affairs beggared belief. What it showcased, however, was not simply a tortuous rhetoric or some logical inconsistency. Rather, it indicated the power of the un-subvertible and rigid dichotomy and, shall we say, that of the investment in the straightforward allocation of *blame* in the relevant political, moral or legal dilemmas. There *had to be* someone who was not just right but Innocent. And there *had to be* someone who was not just wrong but almost the Devil himself.

In the editorials, there was only one serious intellectual attempt to systematically counter this tendency.² The radical novelty in the *Financial Times's* account as far as Hamas was concerned was not that the organization somehow appeared to be 'better' than in the conservative press. It was that, in contradistinction to *all the newspapers*, it was constructed to be not simply something that *is*, in and of itself, but something that comes to be what it is and to do what it does through encounters with the other relevant agent, i.e. the State of Israel. This construction, therefore, moved beyond the simple allocation of rights and wrongs, of essential innocence and blame and opened up a way for engagement and understanding. As such, it opened a vista for *politics* to solve issues of utmost gravity.

Likewise, initially analyzing the newspaper's account of Israel appeared to suggest that the *Financial Times* remained consistent with its offer of approaching agents not as, to all intents and purposes, immutable essences but emanating off encounters and engagements. Of course, it did not depict Israel as innocent. But neither did it depict it as having some violent substance (*Guardian*) or 'deluded' mentality (*Observer*) at its core. Rather, it was an Israeli 'doctrine' that the newspaper utilized in understanding Israel's conduct. Doctrines, of course, can be problematic and this particular

doctrine was certainly implied to be highly counter-productive. Also, doctrines may be ill at ease with arguments aiming to challenge them. Yet inasmuch as they are, essentially, intellectual positions derived from encounters in the past, they can, in theory, be engaged with and transformed.

The perspective of the *Financial Times*, unique amongst the newspapers, was therefore that of the promise of understanding the inter-related and mutually constitutive nature of human political-moral relations. Instead of black and white dichotomies where words hold no power any more and what matters is the allocation of blame and innocence, it promised a vision which makes politics possible at all.

Yet this promise in the end remained unfulfilled. As far as Israel was concerned, the newspaper ultimately reverted to the position where the 'doctrine of overwhelming force' motivating Israel's conduct became nothing but a lunacy (if not the manifestation of some violent essence). It ultimately became unserious in intellectual and dismissed in emotional content. What is more, whilst Israel's destructive actions were constructed as constituting Hamas and its choices, Hamas's conduct also started to be depicted as merely an excuse for Israel and petrol for its rhetoric, and not something with a constitutive effect on Israel's conduct and identity.

Thus, in the end all British newspapers that engaged with war in their editorials with some intellectual seriousness utilized a perspective where political, moral and legal questions of Israel/Palestine and the ongoing war were addressed only from the point of view of who, essentially, is innocent and whom is to blame. It was not questions of responsibility and the exercise of critical judgment that was called for but to decide who, ultimately, constitutes the problem and who does not. And as such, the ultimate framework through which the newspapers approached war was not that of politics or morality or legality, but that of pure (i.e. meaning-less) violence; and equally pure and unaccountable innocence.

As noted in Chapter 8, the issue with such a perspective is not simply the proportion in which it allocates blame and innocence in the right proportions. The real dilemma is not whether Israel/Hamas was *as good or bad as* they were depicted to be. Rather, it was that such constructions

of rigid and mutually exclusive dichotomies excluded even the theoretical possibility of dialogue and engagement. Thus, they excluded the possibility of pursuing the political solution that *all* newspapers advocate: a two-state solution based on negotiation and compromises.

This book has adamantly, perhaps to the point of irritation, refrained from adjudicating over truth and falsehood. It refused to jump at conclusions about which newspaper(s) reported the conflict in the right way and which were wrong. Yet, by way of conclusion some profound wrong must be accounted for. Namely, *it cannot be right* that newspapers addressing human affairs uniformly recourse to and are motivated by non-human concepts of Good and Evil. It leads not to critical judgment, but to (conservative) fear and (liberal) anger. Nothing good can come out of this, certainly not in a conflict (whether that of the actual war or of the peace process in general) that cries out for political or legal solution. It cannot be right that whilst the broadsheets all advocate a negotiated solution, the framework they construct makes it all but impossible.

Therefore, the upshot of the empirical analysis of this book is that the discourse with which the conflict of Israel/Palestine is accounted for needs to be changed. But to do so, one first have to understand why such a framework emerged in the first place and what motivates its perseverance. These will be the tasks of our last sections.

The world is a very narrow bridge...

Violence tears people apart. In the place of shades of grey, it carries black and white. In the place of responsibility, it brings blame. In the place of understanding, it offers fear and anger. Violence, in itself, leads to nothing but more violence. It was this logic of violence that ultimately motivated the accounts of conservative and liberal newspapers' coverage of the armed conflict and, correspondingly, it did not lead to critical judgment and reflections on responsibility. To *understand* violence is the ultimate way of countering it. But to do so is an enormous task because violence tears

precisely those human relations apart which would make its understanding possible (Böhm & Kaplan, 2011; Harding, 2006; Lawrence, 2012).³

The conceptual framework the international community came up with to contain and counter political violence is that of human rights and humanitarian law (cf. Mettraux, 2008; Robertson, 2006; Smith, 1977). The horrors of the second world war led to a consensus that certain events of inter- and intra-state violence must be confronted and accounted for not only within the established system of laws within any given state's sovereignty, but in front of *humanity as such*. Both in legal and moral discourse, the language of humanitarian law, with its basic distinction between combatants and civilians, has become the *lingua franca* of assessing war and state oppression.⁴ Unsurprisingly, in accounting for the tragedy that is war, it was this vocabulary that the newspapers drew upon in critically assessing the events and the agents.

However, this language – developed in the place of and in opposition to past utopias that had some ultimate goal in mind other than that of the life of particular human beings – was used in a rather peculiar way in the newspapers. To be precise, it was either conspicuously *not* used even when made relevant; or used with some religious fervour. Israel was either *not* assessed critically in terms of humanitarian law or immediately condemned without much thought. With the occasional exception in the *Financial Times*, editorials conveying the perspectives of British broadsheets habitually occasioned the language of human rights in a way that suggested a *sacred* discourse, rather than one of political/moral/legal responsibility of judgment.

What could also be empirically established was that, conceptually speaking, this sacralisation of the discourse of critical judgment derived from the broadsheets' peculiar concept of responsibility. As the newspapers attended to the issue of possible Israeli war crimes, the conception of moral or legal responsibility was reduced to the question of pure destructive intention: that is, whether those who happened to have killed civilians *willed* to kill civilians. This was paralleled by the assessment of Hamas rockets. They were *either* reduced to the pure intention they embodied *or* to the (relatively

speaking) little material consequence they caused. No other conceptualization of the rockets than this radical schism between intention and effect featured in any of the newspapers.

Yet the moment that such a reductive and subjectivist conception of responsibility is used, one is once again left with only two options. Those who kill civilians are either *evil*, or essentially *innocent* and guilty only of mistakes. Correspondingly, if the matter of moral or legal responsibility is raised, it will immediately bring the spectre *not* of moral or legal responsibility, but that of evil. In the place of moral or legal responsibility and critical judgment, what we were left with was a choice between the *sacred* and the *sacrilege*.

Why was this the case? Why was a discourse of responsibility and critical judgment occasioned which then either effectively outlawed any attempt at criticism or rendered those judged as damned? There is no conceptual reason for this. Not only is a broader conception of responsibility than that of a direct wish to kill civilians clearly possible, it is normally used widely in legal and moral disputes (cf. Margalit & Walzer, 2009; Walzer, 2009b) – and glimpses of such a conception were actually there to be seen on occasion in the broadsheets' coverage of the war as well. Yet they were never followed up as, where it was attended to, responsibility ultimately became that of the reductive dilemma of a purely *subjective will to kill*.

Why was this the case? What made the broadsheets to resort to such an unreasonable and unviable concept of responsibility?

As documented by intellectual historian Samuel Moyn, the language developed to counter and prevent excesses of past utopias that found human lives dispensable in pursuit of the ultimate goal has *itself* become humanity's (or, at any rate, the Western half of it) last utopia (Moyn, 2011; cf. Ignatieff, 2003; Walzer, 2009b, pp. 42-43).⁵ Indeed, notions such as 'war crimes' or 'crimes against humanity' were uttered (or resolutely not uttered) in the broadsheets precisely with some kind of quasi-religious fervour.⁶ Yet if we try to answer the question of *why* exactly it occurs when issues of Israel/Palestine are discussed, another scene may be mentioned. Namely, the images of absolute separation between Good versus Evil, and Innocence versus Destruction may derive from Western

civilizations last epic and essentially uncontroversial war. It may be that it is the image of an event of metaphysical proportions in the imagination that motivate the discourse over Israel/Palestine: that, of course, of the second world war. And, in the disguise of humanitarian law, it is the framework of 'Us versus the Nazis' that is enacted in the place of common and consensual political, moral or legal standards across the broadsheets (cf. Judt, 2010).

Be that as it may, the most important finding of this book is that the 22-day event the British broadsheets covered, commented on and analyzed was not one involving human agents. Rather, it was a scene of essentially *metaphysical* nature, with Good pitched against Evil. As such, the terms of evaluations became those of pure and impure, allowing no distinction in degrees, only ever in kind.

Whilst this book sees no option but to conclude that the coverage and critical assessment of any conflict between humans must be done according to a discourse and framework developed accounting for human affairs and not according to a mythical one for gods, we must also acknowledge how far from an easy task it is to disentangle these affairs from violence, from racism, from a humanitarian discourse that is increasingly sacralised, and from the image of the last epic battle where, on a fundamental level, right and wrong could clearly, definitely and unapologetically be established. As argued above, all these factors easily ensue in a radical and absolute separation between the active and the passive, agents of destruction and those innocent or acting on behalf of innocents. The possibility of understanding, critical judgment as well as engagement is far from evident and needs enormous work.

Having said all this, there *is* at least one historical example when someone encountered violence, ultimate manifestations of racism, crimes against humanity, genocide and all this in the context of the second world war – and nonetheless managed to tackle one of the oldest questions:

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance?

(W.B. Yeats: Among School Children)

It is Hannah Arendt's encounter with the Evil in Jerusalem that the last section of this book will engage with.⁷

...but we must not fear

In 1960, the Israeli government decided to abduct former SS lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann who, despite his relatively lowly rank, had been responsible for the logistics of the Final Solution (cf. Cesarani, 2004). Concluding a trial held in Jerusalem that lasted for eight months, Eichmann was found guilty by the Jerusalem District Court on all 15 counts of the indictment, amongst them crimes against humanity and war crimes. Following appeal, the Supreme Court upheld the verdict and the President of Israel rejected a plea for clemency. Adolf Eichmann was hung and cremated on 31 May, 1962 with his ashes being subsequently dispersed in the Mediterranean sea. To this day, he remains the only criminal executed in the State of Israel (Yablonka, 2004).

It has never been questioned that a main part of the reason for Israel's undertaking the dangerous operation of abducting a person from the terrain of another sovereign (subsequently incurring the wrath of Argentina and risking sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council) was that this elusive figure appeared to symbolize the entire collective that perpetrated the Final Solution (Cesarani, 2004; Segev, 2010). In fact, he appeared to symbolize the entire collective that perpetrated atrocities against the Jewish people throughout the ages (cf. Bilsky, 2004; Cesarani, 2004; Douglas, 2001; Landsman, 2006; Zertal, 2005).

Accordingly, at the Jerusalem trial of 'the State of Israel v Adolf Eichmann', the Attorney General presented a defendant who was a criminal 'more extreme than the evil man Hitler himself' (quoted in Cesarani, 2004, p. 304). In the opening oration of the trial, those attending witnessed the whole of the story of antisemitism canvassed, leading naturally to the Holocaust with Eichmann being the 'central pillar of the whole wicked system' (quoted in Cesarani, 2004, p. 300). Not surprisingly, the Council for the Defense was of an altogether different opinion. For him, Eichmann was a mere 'cog' in the machine, executing simply the orders of his then superiors, and now a scapegoat for virtually all the crimes perpetrated against the Jewish people throughout the ages.

German-Jewish-American political theorist Hannah Arendt was present at some parts of the proceedings, read the transcript of the trial as well as publications dealing both with the Eichmann case and with international law in general (Arendt, 1994). Her account certainly differed from those of the Attorney and the Council for the Defence in terms of historical detail and historical perspective (cf. Mommsen, 1991). However, what is of crucial importance is that she decided that whom she saw and read (about) was a completely different person from the one presented by either party at the proceedings. More precisely, she decided that whom she saw in the glass booth was, indeed, a *person* (cf. Arendt, 1978, pp. 3-5, 2003a, 2003c).

From the point of view of the present book, historical inaccuracies, misunderstandings, even gross personal failings on Arendt's part are of no real interest (cf. Laqueur, 1983, 2001). What is of interest is her extraordinarily simple (and yet still, for many, practically impossible) act of intuiting that if an agent is understood as being either a monster, the devil himself or a cog, then something crucial has gone missing. Obviously, the simple fact that Arendt saw and understood Eichmann as human did not mean that she would have liked him: being human does not automatically entail being *humane*. And it most certainly did not mean that Arendt would not have fully endorsed the District Court judges' finding Eichmann guilty on all counts. It was just that she approached the man and his conduct not in terms of non- or in-human qualities, but of the relationships this man had with other (wo)men at the time. The question of responsibility became dependent on ways of relating to

other humans and not the equivalent of non-human essences. By definition, and different from the question of what Eichmann actually did, neither the evil nor cogs have conscience and, as such, political, moral or legal responsibility (Arendt, 1994, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).⁸ Monsters, the Evil and cogs have no choice but to do what they are predisposed or designed to do. They may be fought, killed, replaced or thrown away. But, lacking conscience and choice, they cannot be understood and held accountable as they are not human beings relating in one way or other to other human beings.

Thus, to investigate his responsibility, Arendt made a virtually unprecedented attempt to understand the point of view of Eichmann, and the sets of human relationships within which he lived whilst turning into a *genocidaire*. As such, Arendt exercised what she later termed 'enlarged mentality' (Arendt, 1978a, p. 94; cf. Arendt, 2003b)⁹ in revisiting the scenes Eichmann went through during his career, the situations he found himself in and the people he had contact with. In her reconstruction, Eichmann had ample reasons and opportunities to mute his conscience and feel 'like Pontius Pilate' (cf. Arendt, 1994, p. 135). Encountering the social-political context of the Third Reich as he had, killing Jews – or at any rate, arranging and organizing the killing of Jews – was all but *natural* and, after a very short period of doubting, these things did indeed come *naturally* for the lieutenant colonel.¹⁰ *Naturally*, that is, inasmuch as the person in question is incapable of or does not arrogate *judging independently* from this evaluative context what is in fact going on; and if the person in question exhibits an 'almost total inability to look at anything from the other's point of view.' (Arendt, 1994, pp. 47-48) "At that moment", Arendt starts by quoting Eichmann on the Wannsee conference, "I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt." *Who was he to judge? Who was he "to have [his] own thoughts in this matter"?* Well, he was neither the first nor the last to be ruined by modesty.' (Arendt, 1994, p. 117 – emphasis in the original)

As is well known, Arendt's critical judgment flew in the face not only of the political-moral-legal framework of the Attorney (and the Council for the Defence) but of virtually every other observer (distal or proximal) of the events (cf. Cohen, 1993; Rabinbach, 2004). The publication of her account of the trial prompted more than a thousand published polemical responses only in English

and a situation amongst intellectual circles that was later metaphorized as a 'civil war' (Howe, 1983, p. 270; cf. Braham, 1969). No surprise. For as Eichmann turned out to be a human being emerging out of social relationships, and as the central characteristic of the person at the centre of the logistics of the Holocaust became not merely domination but negotiation, the hitherto straight and absolute lines between the forces of Evil and Good took on a more problematic face than previously assumed. To make an agent human means to point to other humans of agency – hence, of responsibility. As such, Arendt's report inevitably brought up the issue of Jewish responsibility and started to ponder what role Jewish functionaries played in the destruction of the Jewish people.

And here came the most terrible aspect of the scene Arendt set. Questions of responsibility and intention regarding Good and Evil are unproblematic. As they are essences, they *embody* intention: both are beyond the possibility of critical judgment as they *embody* the acts they do or do not do. Acts of humans, however, may be unintended in any strict sense yet fall within their responsibility. And if so, both Eichmann and the Jewish functionaries found themselves to be in the grey zone (Arendt, 1994, p. 120; cf. Levi, 1989) – if, obviously, of radically different shades of grey.

Indeed, the moral guilt of the Jewish functionaries in Arendt's account derived from the same source as that of the criminal guilt of Adolf Eichmann. Responsibility in both cases concerned what Arendt in relation to Eichmann dubbed '*he never realized what he was doing.*' (Arendt, 1994, p. 287, cf. pp. 21–35, 49, 252 – emphasis in the original) Without necessarily *intending* straightforwardly the acts (of terrible consequence), they carried them out nonetheless. They did of course know what they did, but did not grasp its meaning and significance; and even though they did not actively want to contribute to the mass murder, they made no real attempt to extricate themselves either. They did things, but did not *think* about doing those things. They were not dancers, but they did do the dance.

Not only did Jewish functionaries become responsible and accountable in this framework; as they were part of the social context within which Eichmann acted and his conscience operated, the functionaries acquired a role, and thus responsibility concerning the very crimes the lieutenant

colonel perpetrated. 'As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple factor that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution. [...] Of course, he did not expect the Jews to share the general enthusiasm over their destruction, but he did expect more than compliance, he expected – and received, to a truly extraordinary degree – their cooperation.' (Arendt, 1994, pp. 116-117)¹¹ And if so, then the cooperation of Jewish functionaries (that is to say, the representatives of the victims) was the last element of a context where Eichmann, too humble to exercise independent judgment, felt convinced that what he was doing was, indeed, normal, natural and right:

His conscience was indeed set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which 'good society' everywhere reacted as it did. He did not need to 'close his ears to the voice of conscience', as the judgment has it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with a 'respectable voice', with the voice of respectable society around him.¹² (Arendt, 1994, p. 126)

Seeing human agents in contradistinction to Evil and Innocence, Hannah Arendt was not the disinterested observer she liked to claim herself to be, however (cf. Arendt, 1993, p. 227; 2003c, p. 159). Her book is one written in outrage at a scandal. As far as Eichmann was concerned, surprisingly perhaps, this outrage did not overly affect the accuracy of her historical and character judgment, as can be ascertained from recent scholarship on the lieutenant colonel.¹³ It 'only' affected her tone, which throughout the book remained acerbic in the extreme.¹⁴ This, of course, may in itself be taken as a failure to exercise the 'enlarged mentality' she did when trying to understand Eichmann, as the subsequent wrath of intellectuals may have stemmed from the inability to understand biting irony where no one ever has dared to use such kind of rhetoric. But, in retrospect, irony in Arendt's book may simply be taken as a tool to contain outrage as well as to rob someone committing the gravest possible crimes off his *greatness*.¹⁵

However, justifiable and inevitable outrage did seriously distort Arendt's account when it came to assessing the responsibility of the Jewish Councils (cf. Arendt, 1994, pp. 115-126). As her subsequent clarification of the issue in an exchange with Gershom Scholem indicates, Arendt tended in fact to judge the *entire institution of the Jewish Councils morally guilty* (Arendt, 1978b; cf. Kaposi, 2008, pp. 102-112). The assumptions underpinning such assessment, as subsequent scholarship has shown, are indefensible on sociological and historical grounds (Bauer, 2002, Chapters 4 and 7; Trunk, 1972).¹⁶ But, equally beyond doubt, an unequivocal (and faulty) collective judgment of a Jewish institution concerning the Holocaust must also to this present day be assessed as most insensitive and hurtful.

Yet, to point out problematic (and, we may say, almost *necessarily* problematic) aspects in Arendt's critical judgment should not blind us to the enormous achievements of her contribution that are deeply relevant to the present report. In accounting for the Eichmann case, Hannah Arendt's overriding characteristic was the courage to dispose of taboos, received 'metaphysical' juxtapositions and to face the vast emotional investment with which these were imbued. Staring *evil* in the face yet concluding that both those perpetrating the acts constituting evil and those suffering from those acts were *humans* requires an extraordinary measure of independence and commitment. What is more, it offers the reward that is the establishment of the conditions for understanding and, ultimately, peace and reconciliation.

This, then, is the task that awaits those concerned with the discourse on Israel/Palestine and violence. In place of the black and white of violent acts, the human shades of grey shall be put. In place of blame and innocence, that of responsibility. In place of isolated identities, that of relationships. And, ultimately, in place of (physical or rhetorical) fighting, that of dialogical understanding.

Understanding, of course, is not all that there is. It does not *at all* mean the utopian scenario of complete absence of violence and some divinely inspired capacity to forgive anything and everything at once. It is merely the precondition of any alternative to aggression. The possibility of

negotiations will not mean that their potential will always be realized or that we must not fight wars.

It will only mean that people with thorough and enormous disagreements will have a *chance* to settle their differences in ways other than (rhetorically or physically) eliminating each other.

Understanding is not a magic torch of divine proportions. Only a flicker of light in a dark room. Not necessarily able to bring the room to light at once, but the only means by which the room does not look very, very dark indeed.

Notes

Chapter 9

¹ To some extent, depictions of Hamas reflected this turnaround. In the *Telegraph*, it was the embodiment of Evil. In the *Guardian*, it was found rather unproblematic – *relatively speaking*, of course. It never reached the moral heights afforded to Israel in the *Telegraph* and *The Times*. But whilst the organization was the essential, unavoidable and un-engagable problem in the *Telegraph*, it was not depicted as a major obstacle in the *Guardian*. As such, given the circumstances, it is perhaps permissible to speak of a near-complete turnaround between the two newspapers with respect to Hamas as well.

² As analyzed, the *Independent (on Sunday)* incorporated elements of both the conservative discourse and that of the *Guardian*. Yet merely juxtaposing otherwise contradictory elements would not do for integration. As such, the *Independent*, from the perspective newspapers' editorials were analyzed in Chapters 7 and 8, offered an incoherent line of argumentation.

³ Such a state of affairs is even more complicated when the spectre of racism (and violent acts deriving from it) is raised. The dominant understanding of racism (not only in the newspapers but, arguably, in academia as well) still implies irrationality as racism's dominant character. Understandably, perhaps, given the historical catastrophes committed in the name of racism, one tends to think of the victim of racism as innocent, and the advocate of racism as the irrational agent of evil. Just as there are no shades in violence, there are no shades of racism either. It is very rarely conceptualized in terms of (hurtful and terrible) patterns of human relationships and, as such, rarely understood in terms of responsibility rather than blame/innocence. Even to raise the question of how racism may be accounted for with regard to relationships carries the (understandable) risk of

'blaming the victim' and 'exonerating the racist'. (As far as the history of antisemitism goes, seminal exceptions to this may be found in Arendt (1966) and Beller (2007a)).

⁴ The convergence of the development and popularization of human rights discourse (cf. Moyn, 2011; Weizman, 2012) and that of just war theory (Walzer, 2000, 2006) must also be pointed out here.

⁵ Moyn's account is very much contested by the recent work of Eyal Weizman who claims that it is precisely the fragmentation of the humanitarian discourse into technical details that characterizes our age (Weizman, 2012). Though Weizman's argument is certainly a cogent one, his concerns are not reflected in the way British broadsheets reported and assessed the armed conflict.

⁶ A practical aspect of international humanitarian law that may lead to such sacralisation should also be mentioned. Namely, the application of international law very much depends on practical political factors and as a result, it is very often the case that 'quasi-monsters' (e.g. Slobodan Milosevic, Charles Taylor, Saddam Hussein) of rogue states fallen out of the favour of the entire human community are seen in the dock.

⁷ As a consequence of debates and emotions over issues of Palestine/Israel, the caveat needs to be made here that the reason for what follows as longish treatise on Arendt and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1994) is *not* because the historical events surrounding it would have borne any substantial similarity to those of Gaza (i.e. the Gaza war or Operation Cast Lead was no instance of genocide). It is simply because hers was an exemplary exercise of real understanding in the face of violence.

⁸ Cf. what Arendt disparagingly calls the 'cog-theory' (Arendt, 2003a, p. 29; cf. 1994, pp. 57, 289).

⁹ The term originally comes from Immanuel Kant.

¹⁰ 'Eichmann, much less intelligent and without any education to speak of, at least dimly realized that it was not an order but a law which had turned them all into criminals. The distinction between an order and the Führer's word was that the latter's validity was not limited in time and space, which is the outstanding characteristic of the former.' (Arendt, 1994, p. 149) cf. '[...] Eichmann acted fully within the framework of the kind of judgment required of him: he acted in accordance with the rule, examined the order issued to him for its 'manifest' legality, namely regularity; he did not have to fall

back upon his 'conscience' for he was not one of those who were unfamiliar with the laws of his country.' (Arendt, 1994, p. 293)

¹¹ The context of the utterance in the book makes it absolutely clear that what Arendt means by 'the Jews' here is not the people as such but their administrative arm. Indeed, Arendt was always careful to point out the difference between functionaries and the rest of the people she elsewhere revealingly called the 'simple Jews' (Arendt, 1978b, p. p. 248; cf. Kaposi, 2008, p. 35).

¹² It is important to add here that Arendt did not see the cooperation of Jewish functionaries as coming from some sort of essence, i.e. ghetto mentality. As she put it:

I have dwelt on this chapter of the story, which the Jerusalem trial failed to put before the eyes of the world in its true dimensions, because it offers the most striking insight into *the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society* – not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only amongst the persecutors but also amongst the victims. (Arendt, 1994, pp. 125-126 – emphasis added)

¹³ Even though in his authoritative biography on Eichmann David Cesarani often distances himself from Arendt's narrative (Cesarani, 2004), the overall image he gives of Eichmann is actually one that is very much congenial to the image of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Laqueur, 2004).

¹⁴ To give just one example, this is how Arendt renders Eichmann's farewell before he is hung:

Adolf Eichmann went to the gallows with great dignity. He had asked for a bottle of red wine and had drunk half of it. He refused the help of the Protestant minister [...] who offered to read the Bible with him: he had only two more hours to live and therefore no 'time to waste'. He walked the fifty yards from his cell to the execution chamber calm and erect, with his hands bound behind him. [...] 'I don't need that', he said when the hood was offered him. He was in complete command of himself, nay, he was

more: he was completely himself. Nothing could have demonstrated this more than the grotesque silliness of his last words. He began with stating emphatically that he was a *Gottgläubiger*, to express in common Nazi fashion that he was no Christian and did not believe in life after death. He then proceeded: 'After a short while, gentlemen, *we shall all meet again*. Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. *I shall never forget them.*' In the face of them, he had found the cliché used in funeral oratory. Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick; he was 'elated' and he forgot that it was his own funeral.

It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson this long course of human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*. (Arendt, 1994a: 252 – emphases in the original)

¹⁵ Other than the tool of irony, another overriding rhetorical characteristic of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that clearly confuses its readers is Arendt's profuse use of indirect quotation. If one realised the absurd content of some of Eichmann's contentions in Arendt's rendering or her vitriolic take on them, this rhetorical tool in which those contentions were *formally* attributed to the narrator (i.e. Arendt) further strengthened the absurd character of the book. If not, however, one could for instance believe that the narrator in fact presents Eichmann as a Zionist (cf. Abel, 1963; Scholem in Arendt 1978b, p. 244-245; Robinson, 1965, p. 48; Wolin, 1996, 2001).

Of importance for us is not so much the somewhat unbelievable characteristic that the discourse on Arendt's book had taken and to some extent still takes. Rather, it is to see that by its nature *indirect quotation* demolishes the categorical boundaries between agents.

¹⁶ There are two assumptions underpinning Arendt's collective judgment. First, that by cooperating the Jewish Councils did essentially nothing else but furthering the killings. Second, that they had full freedom of choice at their disposal, not to resist (which Arendt thought next to impossible) but to *do nothing*:

And in order to do nothing, one did not need to be a saint, one needed only to say: 'I am just a simple Jew, and I have no desire to play any other role.' ... Since we are dealing in politics with men, and not with heroes or saints, it is the possibility of *'nonparticipation'* (Kirchheimer) that is decisive if we begin to judge, not the system, but the individual, his choices and his arguments. (Arendt, 1978a, pp. 248-249; cf. Kaposi, 2008, pp. 102-112)