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Tulips to *Tanzimât*: Tensions of Reform in the Ottoman Empire

By Jonathan Bramell

The 1700s proved to be a time of great difficulty for the Ottoman Empire, at least in the eyes of those desiring a powerful and centralized state. The 18th century saw the rise of imperial powers, with the Russian and Habsburg monarchies being the closest and most aggressive rivals to the Ottomans. The Ottoman military, which was at one point known for its exemplary military performance, gradually lost territory in the Caucasus as well as the Balkans.¹ The Ottoman economy for the most part was agrarian, unlike the maritime European powers of the time, and the basis of the state's monetary power was tied to the lands that they were losing. External threats to the empire further exacerbated the internal issues. The central government faced gradual decentralization as *ayans*² served as a growing mediating class between the Sultan's government and its subjects, establishing themselves as local authorities. The gradual diffusion of power and presence of external threats were noted by Sultans during the time and served as incentive to call for reforms geared to a centralized empire.

However, initial attempts at reform were gradual, and eventually widespread reform gained momentum under the rule of Selim III (r. 1789-1807), who was fuelled by a "revised perception of the Ottoman place in the world".³ The reforms targeted different practices and institutions, and in many cases went against the interest of the ruling class in Ottoman society.⁴ Tensions grew throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries between those calling for reform and those against it, sometimes culminating into violence. Looking at the institutions of the Ottoman military, *ayan*-held land, and the *ulema*⁵, one can observe the ideologies behind the reformist and anti-reformist movements.

During the eighteenth century, a series of territorial losses to the Russian empire served as a source of embarrassment to the Ottoman state.⁶ Military reform was a recurring topic for Sultans starting in the early 1700s, but began to manifest under Sultan Mustafa III (r. 1757 -1773). The resistance to reform centered around the infantry, which consisted notably of the janissary class. By this period, janissaries were not the well-trained *devshirme*⁷ recruits that helped the Sultan centralize against *sipahis*.⁸ The soldiers that were once the fear of Western European soldiers, had become in the eyes of the central government a relic of the past. The term Janissary had changed in meaning, to the point where it became a "swollen" hereditary class that reaped benefits such as tax exemption. During peacetime, the janissaries were not widely popular with non-Muslim commoners as the police force (and fire departments) consisted of members from the corps. Reformists in favour of centralizing power viewed the janissaries as an outdated institution when compared to European armies, as well as a budgetary liability due to the "paper janissaries".⁹ Reformists pushed the emulation of Western militaries as a means to compete with encroaching powers. Military advisors, such as Baron de Tott and Count Bonneval, were sent to the Empire to

¹ It should be noted that between the years of 1700 through 1830, the Ottoman Empire fought multiple wars with both the Safavid and Afsharid dynasty. Though these conflicts were a budgetary strain like there other wars, they paled in comparison to the territorial losses incurred by the Russians and Austrians.

² The term *ayan* in this context refers to an individual or dynasts who had administrative control over a religion. Many *ayans* had bought rights from the central government to farm taxes on an auctioned piece of land.

³ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of The Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 394.

⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 24. Hanioğlu makes the claim that the ruling class is comprised of three components, the ulema, the bureaucracy, and the army (consisting of Janissaries and Timars).

⁵ The term *ulema* refers to scholars concerned with the study of Islamic law.

⁶ A watershed to keep in mind is the Russo-Ottoman War (1768–1774), where the Ottoman Empire lost the town of Azov and the region of Kabardia. Notably, the Ottomans lost their first Islamic holding in the form of the Crimean Khanate, as they were forced to be recognized as independent (and later captured by the Russians).

⁷ The *devshirme* refers to the practice of collecting Christian boys and pushing them into civil service. These children formed the backbone of the Janissary corps until the seventeenth century.

⁸ *Sipahis* refer to fief-holding (*timars*) cavalry troops. By this time they are greatly overshadowed by the *ayans*.

⁹ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 391.

oversee military developments, establish military schools, and shape the military doctrine in a fashion akin to the armies of Frederick the Great.¹⁰ Many *ayans*, such as Muhammad Ali of Egypt, recognized the importance of modernizing their local forces, and did so years before the Sultan could manage. *Ayans* raised local militias modelled after European armies, and these militias performed better in combat than their janissary peers during the Napoleonic conflicts (1798-1801). For reformers, the janissary class was seen as impossible to reform, and this was fuelled by its history of disloyalty. Abdul Hamid I (r. 1773 – 1789) set forward the idea of creating an alternative fighting force after considering that janissaries, in their peacetime role of being firefighters, were deliberately setting fires.¹¹ The idea was realized when on the 1st of March in 1793, Sultan Selim III decreed a pursuit of the *Nizam-i Jédid* reforms, also known as the “New Order.” These New Order reforms established another infantry fighting force, much to the ire of the janissaries.¹² The New Order was short lived, but the central government held onto the view of those resistant to military reform as regressive, since those in favour of reform viewed it as essential to the survival of the Empire. This idea towards reforming the military persisted, and culminated into the “Auspicious Incident” on June 15, 1826, which formally (and bloodily) ended the janissary corps. Sultan Mahmud II’s (r.1808-1839) *Mansure* Army followed the New Order model and was established on June 16th, 1826.

Opposition to military reform stemmed from many places, namely the perceived budgetary mismanagement from the central government and protecting the janissary identity. Issues of social security were a major concern throughout the 18th and 19th centuries for the janissary class, considering the economic stresses encounter throughout the 1700s. During the early 1720s, the “Tulip Age”¹³ began under Sultan Ahmed III (r.1703-1730) and ushered in a wave of decadent spending. Though initially met with excitement, the Empire was in a precarious situation financially. The growing number displaced individuals from wars prior to 1720 served as an economic shock, and the lavish spending punctuated a disconnect from the Sultan and his people. As Caroline Finkel, author of *Osman’s Dream*, notes, “with a growing underclass of displaced and disposed, and simmering resentment among established trades people, social differences became ever more marked...the gulf between the ostentatiously rich and the rest was becoming dangerously wide.”¹⁴ The janissaries were a broad social group, and many of the poorer members who were generally shopkeepers and merchants felt the economic shocks more so than the richer members of the elite. The phenomenon of the “paper janissaries” flourished due to what anti-reformers believed was economic insecurity. This is punctuated by the fact that the Ottoman economy faced further economic downturn in the 1760s as hostilities resumed with Russia. In a period between 1782-1785, Grand Vizier Halil Hamid attempted to forbid the sale of warrants declaring one’s janissary class and was met with violent opposition.¹⁵ The anti-reformists also saw the establishment of the New Order, and the progressive encroachments against them by Selim III as a threat to their identity, and an aggressive erasure of the corps. The members of the janissaries were likely open to reforms such as learning how to use newer European weaponry, as well implementing tactics pertaining to artillery and sapping, but not at the expense of their own identity by adopting a European one. In 1806, tensions came to a head in Edirne, where a recruiter from the New Order army was lynched by janissaries, and in 1807 janissary auxiliaries revolted after refusing to don European style uniforms.¹⁶ and on May 29th, 1807, Selim III was forcibly deposed by the janissaries backed by Mustafa IV (r.1807-1808).

Over the course of the 18th century, the topic of economic reform was highlighted due to the increasing financial issues (such as inflation and inability to compete with European goods). However, underlying the issue of finance was a question of who should have the wealth, and responsibilities of said wealth. Reformers in favour of a centralized state had attempted to wrest lands and revenues from *ayans* and the *malikâne* lands held by them (as well

¹⁰ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 391-393.

¹¹ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 392.

¹² Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 53. Hanioglu notes that the policy of “duality” meant that having a European style army fighting along a Janissary one resistant to change would not only foster bitter rivalry, but also serve as an immense financial burden.

¹³ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 348. The Tulip Era got its name from the consumerist culture surrounding the Tulip flower. The construction projects, though popular, were immensely expensive and persisted throughout the 1720s, eventually leading to Anti-Tulip rebellions.

¹⁴ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 350.

¹⁵ Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 392.

¹⁶ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 53.

as *sipahis* with their *timar* lands). For reformers, there was a fear of how autonomous *ayans* were becoming. When the system was adopted, life long land contracts were sold to local notables to farm taxes on the land. Some of these land contracts were held by the same *ayan* families and were invested in for successive generations. As a result, the local authority the *ayans* held was concerning to the central government, as it siphoned away the influence of the Sultan. Their militaries were also considerably effective in the wars of the 18th century.¹⁷ Reformers also feared the fiscal clout the *ayans* held. In the early 1700s, the *malikâne* system saw a drastic increase in tax profits, however “the overall benefit of the system was cancelled out, for the most part, by the decline of central power and concomitant reduction in the states capacity to raise taxes.”¹⁸ This inability to raise taxes became incredibly problematic by the 1760s, as war began to break out and cheaper European goods began to flood the market. The Ottoman government resorted to internal borrowing of money in 1775, and an imperial decree was issued in 1783 banning the wearing of non-domestically produced clothing.¹⁹ The overall disposition was that centralizers needed the land *ayans* were on but were chafed by their need of *ayan* military support. Desiring a stronger economic base to finance the New Order Troops, and fearing the strength of the *ayans*, the pro-reform faction established the New Revenues Treasury in 1793. The New Revenues Treasury was “charged with retaining (and not reselling) tax farms and state bonds left by deceased holders, thereby simultaneously liquidating both the *malikâne* system and the internal debt.”²⁰ This meant that the Ottoman central government would have direct control of what was formerly private lands, and if a successor to a landholding wanted inherit their predecessors land, it had to be cost of increased central authority. The emphasis on land control can also be seen in the gradual shift of paying salaries to officials instead of granting taxation rights.

Anti-reform factions believed that the autocratic measures taken were regressive. The establishment of the New Revenues Treasury and Arsenal Treasury had been viewed as administratively inept, as the central government who debased the currency throughout the 1700s, was desperate to find any means of tax income to liquidate loans it had taken. However, for some *ayans*, an opportunity to push back against the reform was found after the reactionary janissaries deposed Selim III in 1807. Alemdar Mustafa Pasha (d. November 1808) was an *ayan* that attempted to rescue and reinstate Selim III, however when his army assaulted the Sublime Porte, Selim III had been killed leaving Mahmud II to be the new Sultan. In 1808, Alemdar Pasha convinced (and possibly coerced) Mahmud II into signing the “Deed of Agreement”, which was an attempt to “reconcile” the position of *ayans* and the Sultan. Two key aspects that would have countered the previously established New Revenues Treasury was the making of *ayan* lands inheritable, and the role *ayans* would take in overseeing administrative practices.²¹ The document however was short lived, as Mahmud II continued to pursue centralization at the expense of the *ayans*. The local dynasties that were established were gradually be uprooted as the state resettled them to different regions.²² A few figures like Muhammed Ali of Egypt refused to fall under the Ottoman central authority and believed, much like the Anatolian *ayans*, that the central government was inadequate at providing for its people.²³ Muhammed Ali and periphery *ayans* (in areas such as Libya) would continue to dissent, and nobles closer to Istanbul would be far more adherent to the strong central government.

With the confrontation of foreign powers in the 18th and 19th centuries, came an arousal of fears pertaining to westernization. The *ulema* over the course of the 18th century had lost a considerable amount of power as *wakf* territory was targeted in economic reform, and Sultan Selim III once exclaimed, “May God help us and relieve us of

¹⁷ A notable example is Jazzar Pasha, who had considerable military successes against the French army at the siege of Acre in 1799.

¹⁸ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 22.

¹⁹ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 22.

²⁰ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 46.

²¹ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 57. Hanioglu mentions that the language insinuates the central government’s dependence on *ayan* military support in order to combat rebellion from the janissaries. The demands being made served as an official assertion of boundaries between the central government and *ayans*, prompting a comparison to the *Magna Carta*, despite being revoked shortly after.

²² Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 61.

²³ Muhammed Ali was involved in the suppression of Wahhabi rebels in Arabia and dedicated (and lost) a large part of his military forces to try and pacify the Greek Rebellion. The lack of compensation for his service to t

our dependence on them.”²⁴ The quote paints a picture of contempt for an institution that once served as the intellectual core of the empire. The fears of westernization had its seeds sown initially in military reform. Educational institutions, which once were controlled by the Ulema, had face a growing body of secular institutions of education. Places such as military professional schools began to instil European tactics and dress, and there was a popular perception from the *ulema* that the anti-reform parties that Islamic identity was being encroached upon.²⁵ Some members of the *ulema* found themselves sympathizing and supporting the janissary revolt in 1807 due to a shared struggle in combating “infidel imitation.”²⁶ This was further punctuated with the Napoleonic conflicts at the turn of the 19th century, where western concepts such as social justice (and Jacobin tradition of revolt) and popular sovereignty entered collective memory. This anti-reform fear of westernization was also deeply rooted in the diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and European powers. Hanioglu makes the claim that “As the Ottomans quickly learned, the role of public opinion meant that strategic partnership with European powers came with a string attached: the demand for administrative reform, often with the aim of improving the status of the empire’s Christian subject.”²⁷ Ottoman-European relations likely influenced the lifting of clothing restrictions on non-Muslim men. In 1829, Sultan Mahmud II also issued the ban on turbans, barring government employees, except certain members of the *ulema*, from wearing them. The Turban Ban of 1829 served as a moment for anti-reformers as a tangible symbol of what they would call an “atheization” of the state.

Those in favour of reform that didn’t want to depend on the *ulema*, didn’t see themselves as atheizing agents. Pro-reform factions were astutely aware of their reputation given to them by the opposition of “emulating infidels.” Mahmud II went as far as calling the newly established military, “The Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad,” as a way of staving off religious critics. In schools like the “Military School of Engineering”, instructors avoided teaching French in order to “limit the dangerous influence of French culture.”²⁸ This shows an effort from those calling for reform to simply appropriate what is beneficial from Europe (centralizing governance, sciences, and other knowledge), but without transplanting the culture.²⁹ The establishment of the government newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* in 1831 became a way in which policy was seen as transparent, and combatted the rhetoric of the *ulema*.³⁰ Even in the Edict of Gulhane, which was announced by Sultan Abdulmejid I (r.1839-1861) in 1839, the rhetoric of the document contained pro-Islamic undertones reminiscent of the *ulema*, despite the deliberate efforts within the edict to secularize the law.³¹

In Hanioglu’s book, there are two portraits of Sultan Mahmud II next to one another. The portraits are essentially identical, with the Sultan assuming a stoic pose mounted on top of a horse, and an Ottoman soldier behind him.³² However, one was commissioned before the destruction of the janissaries in 1826, where Mahmud II is donning traditional garb, on horse barding typical to that of a *sipahi*, with a *sipahi* cavalryman behind him. The other portrait was commissioned after the events of 1826, where the Sultan is donning European style military garb, with European barding, and a dragoon behind him. Both portraits were commissioned in his lifetime, and painted a picture of how fast reforms moved in the early 19th century. The overarching fight to centralize or decentralize persisted into the late 19th and earlier 20th century, however in the form of conservative-monarchism and liberal-constitutionalism. The fight over reform in the 1700s and early 1800s marked a societal shift in perception from “Golden Ageism” to a more forward-looking view of emulation and innovation. The portraits display how material culture, collective memory, and definitions of concepts changed over these times of reform.

²⁴ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 19.

²⁵ Once major blow to the *medreses* and member to the Ulema was the central government’s fixation on training future officials in the Translation Chamber which were established in 1832.

²⁶ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 58.

²⁷ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 49.

²⁸ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 63.

²⁹ This Proved to be somewhat ineffective, as constitutionalism became a movement in the later part of the 19th century.

³⁰ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 62.

³¹ As Islam would be recognized as the official state religion.

³² Hanioglu, *A Brief History of The Late Ottoman Empire*, 64-65.

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Gender, Motherhood, and Resistance: Women in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s

By Paige Hawksworth

State terror has always existed. The tactics and way in which a government goes about instilling terror, however, has varied. Specifically, military dictatorships that emerged following the start of the Cold War employed fear tactics to eliminate their leftist enemies in ways that people had never seen before. The spread of extreme right-wing groups intentioned in changing the political order created an international environment in which regimes were able to usurp former governments and foster a sense of violence and brutality that at unprecedented levels. Not only in Chile and Argentina, but in other South American countries including Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay, a trend of authoritarian coups radically changed the respective countries' political and social climate. Leftists and "enemies of the state" were sought out and persecuted in ways that had not existed on such a scale before. The term *desaparecidos*, or disappeared, became common in many countries. This word denotes the actions that the government took against people they wanted eliminated. Targeted men and women were unlawfully kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured, and killed on a wide scale to essentially have them *disappear*. Their disappearance meant there was no knowledge of where they went, no certainty if their relative was alive or not, nobody to mourn over, and no way to stop it from happening.

Throughout the historical research into these countries and their changing political and social situations, two groups emerged through the studies. The first one involved focusing on social and political lenses to understand what events exactly occurred and why they might have unfolded the way that they did. The first group of scholars also included recounting the events of the era and attempting to establish a history, as definitive as possible.³³ Around 2000, there was a shift from these analyses to a more particular focus on the experiences of individuals throughout the period of authoritarian regimes in South America in the later 20th century.³⁴ Gender, ethnicity, and cultural lenses began to emerge as a prominent trend throughout scholarship on Chile and Argentina. Examinations of previous research also emerged following this shift and demonstrated a new wave of critical analysis by scholars. Considering the question of how motherhood and the concept of family affected how women mobilized against authoritarian regimes in their country, this paper identifies with the second group of scholarship regarding the experiences of women in Chile and Argentina. It is important to explore the roles of marginalized people in authoritarian regimes, especially women, as they had unique experiences and can shed light on individuals during this time period.

In both Chile and Argentina, women resisted the oppression of authoritarian regimes in different ways by rallying around different values, whether that be motherhood or the concept of family. Women in Chile under Pinochet could not publicly protest due to the ruthlessness of the regime, so they moved to organizing in small groups to protest human rights violations. Their movements strayed from the gendered lense, as they focused on defending human rights before they mobilized together as women. In Argentina under General Videla and the Junta, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo appealed to their changing notion of motherhood and family whilst protesting the inhumane treatment of leftists and the disappearances of their children born in captivity.

Chile

In Chile prior to the authoritarian regimes, the typical role that women held in society was that of housewives. In the early twentieth century, the Popular Front was forming in Chilean society. As leaders of the Popular Front forged solidarity and attempted to gain support from both the right and the left, they found that

³³ An example of some of this work is *God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s* by Patricia Marchak and *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* by Pamela Constable and Sam Hall Kaplan.

³⁴ An example of some of this work is *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War* by David Sheinin, *Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet* by Michael J. Lazzara, and *Argentina's Missing Bones: Revisiting the History of the Dirty War* by James P. Brennan.

advocating for a nuclear family, “...constituting male-headed nuclear families in which husbands acted as stable breadwinners and women as housewives and mothers” gained the most support.³⁵ Reforms that aimed to normalize these roles aided the creation and deep societal ties to the norms for women that would persist in the country for decades. Since industry and mining were viewed as vital sectors to the country’s economic well-being, the association of male roles and these domestic roles kept women marginalized. These norms developed and grew due to the physical labor men performed within industries and were emphasized for doing important work in the country.³⁶

Chilean women were not entirely quelled into submission in the early twentieth century. Organizations established by women in Chile after 1915 were primarily founded by well-educated women who were interested “feminine education, equality before the law, and self-expression.”³⁷ Although women were seen as subordinate to men, women still had the desire to band together and form bonds in order to better themselves and have spaces for like-minded women to interact. These organizations were not overtly political, nor did they consider themselves feminists at this point. For example, The Club de Señoras was a response to male-oriented clubs where women were able to gather and attend lectures by political figures or go to classes about cooking or sewing.³⁸ As the 1920s approached, organizations that were created earlier in the century began to take on political motivations. The Círculo de Señores, which started as a book club for women, split into two branches that began to broach the idea of feminism and women’s suffrage.³⁹ Women in these organizations struggled with the backlash from society, which challenged their causes. Disorganization and division from within left them in a state by 1940 where men remained dominant in the political and social arena.⁴⁰

Although women in Chile were beginning to mobilize in favor of equal rights, many of those gains were halted by the authoritarian regime of Pinochet. After Allende ran successfully for president in 1970 and served his term, he was thrown out of power by Pinochet via military coup in 1973. The coup was bloody and violent, as many of the *poblaciones*⁴¹ associated with being populated by leftists were surrounded and attacked.⁴² After a period of violence in the weeks following the coup, Chile’s main soccer stadium, Estadio Nacional de Chile, was transformed into a makeshift detention center for those who had been incarcerated. With Pinochet at the forefront a state of siege ensure within the country. Public gatherings, trade unions, and political parties were outlawed, as well as new, harsh economic policies put into place.

Through this lense of terror and murder, women in Chile were able to work through the uncertainty of life in their country in order to mobilize for the protection of human rights. In fact, just three weeks after the coup took place, the Association of Democratic Women formed “...to work with political prisoners and their families” and they also “provided spiritual assistance to prisoners, tracked human-rights abuses, protested against the regime, and

³⁵ Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures & The State in Chile, 1920-1950* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 45.

³⁶ Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises*, 50.

³⁷ Asuncion Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 256.

³⁸ Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 286-287.

³⁹ Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 296.

⁴⁰ Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 320.

⁴¹ A *poblacion* is a small town or village.

⁴² Judy Maloof, “Chilean Women and Human Rights.” In *Voices of Resistance*, edited by Judy Maloof (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999, 122.

petitioned international organizations for help.”⁴³ This immediate reaction demonstrates the desire that some women held to attempt to rectify the atrocities that were being committed and assist in the ways that they could in establishing justice for those who had been imprisoned by the government. The *arpilleras* movement also began in resistance to the regime around 1976. This movement involved women creating tapestries that illustrated “...the political struggles of human-rights activists, protests, and stories of the disappeared...”⁴⁴ An example of an *arpillera* is shown at the left. This one specifically shows an image of what a common shantytown or *poblacion* would look like. There’s two women holding signs that say “trabajo” and “pan”, or work and bread. People are also gathered around a common soup pot outside. This piece of artwork is just one of many examples of *arpilleras* that were created during this time period. Women mobilized in this way because as they were primarily encouraged to be homemakers within Chilean society, they used their skills in sewing to create works of art that opposed the regime. In this way, they were taking a gendered skill that was forced onto them due to societal norms, and changed it to use it as something powerful and impervious to the fear that Pinochet’s regime was spreading throughout the country.

On the other hand, compared to the mobilization of women in countries such as Argentina, the movement of women against Pinochet in Chile was not centered around the notion of motherhood and family. “[F]emale activists in human-rights organizations did not identify themselves in gendered terms and they did not frame human rights as a women’s issue. Members of the AFDD, for example, did not emphasize their identity as mothers, as the Argentine Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo...few of them espoused a feminist orientation.”⁴⁵ The notion that many



women primarily expressed their grievances in a gendered way is an extremely interesting to consider, due similar circumstances that women found themselves in as the women in Argentina. When considering the situation of women in Chile, it may seem logical that they would have wanted to frame their movement in terms of their motherhood and womanhood, but just because the norms in the country typically put them into the mother role, does not mean that this role followed them into their political activism. These women were entirely focused on the human rights issue at hand, and in turn ended up setting aside their identity as women and the issues that women were facing in the country for this cause. It is not to say that the leaders of these organizations were not feminists or believed in women’s desire for equal rights and suffrage, but a serious discussion and movement around those issues did not occur until the latter part of the 1970s.

The area where women mobilized considerably were in shantytowns, or *poblaciones*, around the city of Santiago.⁴⁶ Amid the economic crisis under Pinochet that was developing in Chile, many men lost their jobs and became unable to sufficiently provide for their families. The creation of soup kitchens, or *ollas comunes*, became a vital part of the support for struggling families during the regime. Women were the primary organizers of these soup kitchens and “[o]rganizers of the kitchens tended to view them as political spaces from which to mobilize against the regime.”⁴⁷ Since families often gathered at these places with women as the leaders in charge of cooking and organizing the small expenses, political ideas were circulated and discussed among neighborhood members. From

⁴³ Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women’s Movements in Chile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129.

⁴⁴ Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 130.

⁴⁵ Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 133-134.

⁴⁶ Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 136.

⁴⁷ Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 137.

these *pobladoras* came a new form of feminism in which women viewed the problems of the poor, such as unemployment, high housing and food prices, and drug addiction from a feminist perspective.⁴⁸ The Movement of Shantytown Women (MOMUPO) was created as a result of this wave of new thinking, and aimed to mobilize the women in the shantytowns around Santiago in the mid-1970s. The women's ultimate goal was to aid their fellow citizens who had been affected by the regime's terror and murder. This goal led them to create and participate in organizations that recognized the human rights violations and brutality of the regime to resist the terror and pain fervent throughout the country.

The involvement of women in the quest for justice under Pinochet were brave acts. There were countless women either directly or indirectly affected by Pinochet's regime, and each of their efforts were unique. Elena Mauriera, a woman from the rural community of Isla del Maipo, experienced her husband and four of her sons unlawfully detained and essentially disappear until their corpses were found five years later. She recounted the story of what happened when her husband and sons were detained and the efforts her daughter and daughters-in-law took to find their missing relatives. She remembered how, "[a] police officer with a guilty conscience had confessed to a priest in Santiago, and that's how the mass grave site was found" and "[w]hen I went there and saw the hair, the rocks, the remains, I was in a state of shock! I almost fainted; I thought I would die from the horror!"⁴⁹ The chilling testimony of Elena Mauriera is just one of thousands of women who experienced the same situation in which their relative were unlawfully kidnapped and killed. Elena continues to describe how she began working with the Vicaria de Solidaridad, the human rights organization supported by the Chilean Catholic Church, to offer support to families in similar situations. Elena embodies a group of woman who experienced the crimes of Pinochet first hand, and then began to be involved in efforts to support others and seek justice .

Argentina

Though the country experienced similar widespread state terror and crimes against humanity as Chile, Argentina's different cultural background led women to mobilize around ideals framed more around motherhood and femininity. At the turn of the century, Argentina was considered to be the "meeting ground" in South America for contemporary thinking of the evolving role of women due to the culture and ideas being circulated at the time.⁵⁰ Due to the disorganization of political parties in the early part of the twentieth century, the movement for women's suffrage was widely contested. Women's status in society and their inability to qualify for military service meant suffrage for women could not be possible without changes to the country's laws.

In the decades leading up to the coup in 1976, there were various leaders implementing changes that shaped Argentine society. From June 1946 to September 1955, Juan Peron, and his wife Eva, enacted social reforms that benefited the poor, increased their popularity, and raised hope that poorer people would not be overlooked as they had been. Peron also granted women's suffrage during his leadership, which was notable as women had been struggling to gain suffrage for decades.⁵¹ After a military coup ended Peron's presidency in 1955, the country's social, economic, and political problems remained unsolved through the successions of military and civilian governments. In June 1966, General Juan Carlos Ongania took power and attempted to adopt some Peronist ideas to gain the favor of general workers, but it soon became obvious, through no substantial or beneficial reforms being passed, that his only intention was to manipulate them into submission.⁵² Following this strained time in the Argentine political community, a large popular protest erupted in 1969, called *El Cordobazo*, led by students and workers to protest the Ongania regime. Chaos ensued with several groups taking malicious actions, including the

⁴⁸ Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 138.

⁴⁹ Elena Mauriera, "Speaker on Behalf of the Disappeared." Interview by Judy Maloof. *Voices of Resistance*, December 21, 1993, 139.

⁵⁰ Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 257.

⁵¹ Rita Arditti, *Searching For Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (California: University of California Press), 9.

⁵² Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 9.

ERP. The Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, or People's Revolutionary Army was a military force used by the communist government under Onganía. The group went as far as murdering former president Aramburu and the kidnapping of many of the student protesters.⁵³ After Onganía's downfall, several other failed government power struggles ensued. These struggles included Juan Perón returning from his exile in Spain to resume his presidency until his death, leading to Isabel Perón taking power and targeting guerilla activities.⁵⁴ With the feeling of a growing left-wing threat mounting, the first junta, led by General Videla, executed a coup and took control of the entire government. Little did the people of Argentina know that the junta's own brand of state terrorism would soon be unleashed upon leftists and those deemed to have malicious intents against the state. Although the immediate political history leading up to a violent regime in Argentina is complicated, it is important to note the developing tensions in the political and social atmospheres in the country. Through all of these political turnovers and struggles for power, women were in the middle of it all, as they would eventually play an important role in denouncing the unjust and unlawful actions of the government.

Furthermore, in order to enforce the doctrine of National Security, the government began taking actions that they believed were necessary to ensure their vision of the nation. In the case of the Junta, enforcing this doctrine involved getting rid of all the threatening leftists within the country.⁵⁵ In order to create and maintain their ideal version of the country, the junta started a new trend of "the kidnapping, torture, and murder of tens of thousands of people."⁵⁶ Anonymous government forces would often raid suspected places of political gatherings and imprison suspects with no justification or explanation. These atrocities committed against their own people drove fear deep into the hearts of the citizens, as there were countless victims to these human rights violations. The junta committed these crimes with the intention of terrorizing their population into obedience, but by kidnapping and murdering so many of their own citizens, many people in the country could not ignore the desire to resist the terror and pursue justice for those wronged. Within these atrocities, a large portion of those who were targeted were men. Comparatively, the regime inherently felt more threatened by men within the country. This feeling of threat is due to revolutionary activity being perceived as more masculine rather than feminine. In particular, revolutionary masculinity was perceived as more of a threat to authoritarian regimes. By focusing their main actions in quelling resistance against men, this allowed room for women to take their own actions against unjust regimes. Although the regime also unlawfully arrested and murdered a large number of women, the fact that men were the primary target of the junta demonstrates the gender dynamics and biases within the country. Even though women could have been involved in supposedly subversive activity, the relation of their femininity and assumed weakness made them less threatening to the government compared to men. These assumptions alone set a gender dynamic into play within Argentina.

Following the streak of state terror in Argentina, the hostile political climate, and the noticeable crimes being committed against those who were deemed enemies of the state, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo slowly began to form and take action against the injustices they saw going on. Many of the early members of the organization recall feeling utterly hopeless whilst desperately trying to find their sons and daughters.⁵⁷ From these feelings of hopelessness, many of the members found that they shared a common identity and had gone through similar situations with the disappearance of their family members. The women who came together to form this organization were women who were previously content in their role as homemakers and socialized into society that upheld traditional male and female norms.⁵⁸ It was not unheard of for women's social organizations to be created

⁵³ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 10.

⁵⁴ Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 20.

⁵⁵ David Pion-Berlin, "The National Security Doctrine, Military Threat Perception, and the 'Dirty War' in Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies* 21, no. 3 (October 1988): 385.

⁵⁶ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 13-14.

⁵⁷ Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*.

⁵⁸ Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 65.

within the country, but with the beginning of the reign of the junta, the terror led to the repression of these organizations or eliminated the potential for them. The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo were inspired by the similar feelings that they all had and the desire that they held to seek justice for those lost. This commonality is extremely important, as it bound them all together in protest and rebellion.

The disappearance of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo's children and grandchildren, however, ignited a flame within them that galvanized the women to break the norms and come together for a common cause. At first, many of the grandmothers felt hopeless and scared and alone in the situation they were facing. One woman in particular, Maria Isabel Chorobik de Mariani, also known as "Chicha," had similar experiences to other future members of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, though she didn't know it yet. It wasn't until talking with Dr. Lidia Pegenaute, a public official who actually showed some concern for the grieving family members flocking to the police stations after disappearances, that Chicha Mariani discovered the possibility of finding other women who had had family members *desaparecido*. She said that, "[Pegenaute] had been trying to tell me that I was too alone and that maybe it would be better if I got together with the other women...She jumped up and gave me the address of Alicia de La Cuadra."⁵⁹ Together these women attended meetings of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and connected with women in ways that they had never been able to before. These connections and conversations became the foundation for the movement which would propel them into the public eye and earn them the reputation of strong women.

The Grandmothers faced many challenges in their quest to reunite with their disappeared children or grandchildren, but they were able to revolutionize the meaning of motherhood and womanhood to what they needed it to be during this time of protest. In this instance, womanhood transformed from being the more traditional notion of staying at home and managing the household, to womanhood being a notion of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Instead of maintaining the traditional image of a mother during this time period, the brave women of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo consciously went against the norms of society and defied what it meant to be a woman. Instead of staying at home and mourning the loss of their loved ones, they took the pain that they felt and transformed it into the strength and courage to seek justice for those who had been wronged. These feelings can be seen translated into actions by the protest marches that the Grandmothers participated in, pictured above. Every week, the Grandmothers organized and joined together in front of the Casa Rosada in the Plaza de Mayo. They protested with their signs and posters with emotional phrases on them about their missing children and grandchildren. Along with protests, many posters and signs were created by the women to appeal to people's emotions and make a point about their mission for justice. An example of one of these posters is illustrated to the left. This poster in particular was created by Jorge Proz and was widely recognized as one of the most poignant illustrations relating to the movement of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The singular petal floating away represents the disappeared children that families had not been able to find. It depicts a powerful image and evokes a sense of loss and sadness. These demonstrations and use of images like the one depicted were a manifestation of their strength and unwavering quest in justice for their children and grandchildren. Although the junta was not favorable towards these demonstrations, they did not "disappear" any of these protesters due to the publicity, both within Argentina and around the world, that they were receiving.



One of the challenges the Grandmothers faced was the fear that the regime instilled in them by committing these crimes against their fellow citizens and disappearing political opposition. Rosa Roisinblit, a member of the organization, recalled:

I was very frightened. When I joined the Grandmothers and we met in coffeehouses to do our work we had to hide who we were. When they called the office and said they were going to bomb us, of course we were afraid...I don't think that I have totally overcome the fear. One gets used to it, though. The love for one's children and grandchildren, the need to do something, to work and get some results, is stronger than fear.⁶⁰

Rosa, like many of the other Grandmothers, felt that the oppressing sense of fear was not strong enough for them to submit to the regime. If anything, they fought stronger through the fear in order to hold onto the hope of searching for and reuniting their families. This resilience and strength enabled the Grandmothers and countless other women involved in resistance in Argentina, to transform the notion of motherhood from something traditional and subservient into something powerful and tenacious in their pursuit of justice for their families. With the advent of their efforts, "motherhood" was no longer connected with subdued femininity and conventional housewifery, but with the passion, hope, and fortitude of standing up to Argentina's regime.

Being mothers and having the desire to protect their families as a whole not only provided a reason they needed to revolt, but also was a basis on which the foundation of their movement was laid. The symbolism of motherhood and the connotation that it began to carry as their efforts of protests in the Plaza de Mayo, the research they did into the whereabouts their stolen grandchildren, and the safe environment they created for the victims of the crimes, altered the lives of many women and what it meant to be a mother. For some, such as Estela de Carlotto, the death of her daughter motivated her to pursue activism as someone who endured similar events. She asserted that, "After I buried my daughter, a new level of struggle started...My work was just beginning."⁶¹ These women were forever changed by the event, which enabled them to morph the notion of motherhood in their own way to create the notion that they need for the environment and experiences they are going through.

Conclusion

From the different ways that women mobilized themselves against the regimes in their respective countries, the involvement of the Catholic Church and their responses to these crimes in the relation to women also varied. In Chile, the Catholic Church mobilized quickly in response to the Pinochet coup and the spread of state terror, in which ecumenical denominations, including Judaism, came together to form the Pro-Peace Committee, in which they focused on submitting petitions for legal aid for relatives of those who were disappeared.⁶² After the government forced the committee to dissolve in 1975, a cardinal from the Catholic Church established the Vicariate of Solidarity to lead the human-rights effort within the country. Conversely, in Argentina, the Catholic Church was complicit or refused to directly acknowledge the crimes that were being committed against the country's people. Many of the women who had disappeared relatives reached out to their local churches for help. Since the transformation towards feminization in Catholicism, focusing around the worship of the Virgin Mary, the church had been able to become a space for women where they could worship the ultimate symbol of motherhood. The problem with the church was that, "...they knew what was happening but they did nothing" and "[w]hat they did not do was stand with the victims."⁶³ Many leaders within the Argentine Catholic Church turned a blind eye to the atrocities being committed by the government. When their church betrayed them when they pleaded for help,

⁶⁰ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 83-84.

⁶¹ Arditti, *Searching for Life*, 89-90.

⁶² Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 130.

⁶³ Gustavo Morello, *The Catholic Church and Argentina's Dirty War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 165, 163.

Argentine women in many organizations became harsh critics of the church and the actions that they took during the regime's rule.⁶⁴

In conclusion, the studies of Argentina and Chile represent similar, but distinct situations when it comes to how women mobilize in defense of human rights against regimes that have committed crimes against its citizens. In Chile, while women did not take an explicit gendered approach, or one that focused on the aspect of motherhood as in Argentina, they still fought against the repression of authoritarianism and sought to accomplish their goals of protecting human rights. In Argentina on the other hand, women organized around a changing notion of motherhood in order to find hope in the search of their lost grandchildren. As the Grandmothers began to discover, children born in captivity were sometimes adopted by favorable families to the regime, or ones who were close to government leadership. For the Argentine Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, their efforts continue to this day as they search for their now 30 year-old grandchildren. With the advent of DNA testing and advances in technology, many of these children adopted by families close to the regime have been able to be identified by matching their DNA to that of their parents or relatives to discover their true blood relations. These identifications have revealed a new challenge for the Grandmothers, as well as the children themselves, into how to deal with new revelations about their lives. Both for the women of Chile and Argentina, dealing with the memories of what happened during that time period will resonate with them throughout their lives. Through their resistance to authoritarian regimes, women played an imperative role in facilitating the end of these brutal regimes and return to lawful democracy.

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⁶⁴ Morello, *The Catholic Church and Argentina's Dirty War*, 137.

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Algerian Women in the *Battle of Algiers* And Beyond

By Maya Montgomery

Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*, follows National Liberation Front (FLN) soldiers as they fight against the French presence in Algeria through terror-style attacks and the assistance of a wide network of supporters. Gary Crowdus, in his 1988 review for *Cinéaste*, lauds the film as "one of the most cinematographically powerful and politically sophisticated films ever made" due to its intimate portrayal of urban guerrilla war tactics and the philosophies of violence.⁶⁵ While the film's documentary-style footage aims to maintain a fairly accurate depiction of the war, one side of the story is left largely unrepresented; women appear in the film for a total of 15 minutes in the 121-minute film.⁶⁶ Some scenes reveal brave women who risked their lives by planting bombs or concealing weapons for FLN soldiers, but they are not treated with the same level of complexity as their male counterparts.⁶⁷ In other scenes, they are not given a voice. Pontecorvo does not adequately develop the female characters to represent their inner motivations, fears, and ideological positions. Nevertheless, Algerian women in the film, though distilled to represent a few key roles within the resistance movement, highlight the conflicting roles of women in Algerian society. On one hand, they are shown to be self-mobilizing, capable actors in colonial resistance. Yet they are also portrayed, in the words of Miriam Cooke, as the "oppressed of the oppressed."⁶⁸ In this way, the film's female figures embody various social roles that women adhered to or cast off through the history of French colonization. Pontecorvo's film is, however, far from complete in its exploration of women during the independence movement and throughout the colonial period.

Violence: Tool and Oppression

One of the first depictions of a female figure within the National Liberation Front (FLN) features a fully veiled Algerian woman who hides a gun under her clothing. She waits to deliver it to Ali La Pointe, an FLN revolutionary leader, in a plot to kill a French police officer.⁶⁹ As a member of the FLN, this woman represents a demographic of women in Algerian society that was actively involved in the resistance against French colonial rule. Her scarf conceals her weapon, serving a functional, military purpose. This representation of the veil evokes the historical controversy of the garment in the colonial era. The veiled woman epitomized the depravity of Algerian society, and as Frantz Fanon states in *A Dying Colonialism*, the "dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered."⁷⁰ The veil as a head to toe covering was the most obvious visual evidence of cultural distinctiveness, specifically of a Muslim society's distinctiveness from Europe.⁷¹ For the colonizer, the veil was a tool to be twisted into confirmation of the backwardness and moral corruption intrinsic to Algerian society. French policies did not offer much of a change from the conditions women faced, instead contributing to female oppression by introducing colonial regulations to an already patriarchal system.

⁶⁵ Gary Crowdus, "The Battle of Algiers," *Cinéaste* 16, no. 4 (1988): 22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41687587>.

⁶⁶ Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne and Alistair Clarke. "Women at War." *Interventions* 9, no. 3 (November 2007): 340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010701618562>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 342-343.

⁶⁸ Miriam Cooke. "Deconstructing War Discourse: Women's Participation in the Algerian Revolution." *Women in International Development Publication Series* (June 1989): 2, <https://gencen.isp.msu.edu/files/6514/5202/8260/WP187.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*, Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966.

⁷⁰ Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," In *A Dying Colonialism*, (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 38.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 36-37

⁷² The veil took on new meaning during the war, having been, as Fanon describes, “removed and reassumed...manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage into a means of struggle.”⁷³ The veil itself embodied both a means of power and oppression, represented in its use in the film as well as its donning throughout colonial history.

Unveiling as a form of liberation or violence was perhaps just as controversial. One memorable scene from the film gives the audience intimate access to the process of three women putting on makeup. A frantic drum beat adds urgency to their seemingly routine movements. From their glimpses in the mirror to the makeup they use, it becomes clear that they have altered their typical Algerian appearance to appear more European. One of the women pauses thoughtfully before chopping off her long braid, adopting a western-style haircut.⁷⁴ These transformations have a very clear purpose: to blend in so as to pass checkpoints into the French quarter. Upon passing the checkpoints, the women will plant bombs at various predetermined locations. This scene introduces several larger patterns within Algerian society during the war for independence and throughout the colonial period. Even before some women chose to unveil during the revolution, a portion of urban Algerian women had already stopped wearing the veil, and many in the reform circle as well as daughters of prominent members of society went unveiled in the 1950s.⁷⁵ This choice created a distinct political motive for women to evade searches at checkpoints during the independence movement.⁷⁶ More women, not simply confined to the urban elite, shed the veil, stirring anxiety among more conservative members of society and leading to opposition from Islamist groups.⁷⁷ Algerian society had been changed by contact with Europe, for better or for worse, and the choice to veil expanded beyond the war, despite the film’s suggestion that it served a solely strategic purpose. In the postcolonial era, elite Islamist university women, for example, have looked to the veiled women of the revolution as exemplars for finding social liberty (via mobility) while upholding Muslim identity.⁷⁸ Unmarried female factory workers, even those who would like to abandon the Islamic dress that is decried in Islamist quarters, have acknowledged that the veil can be a tool that sanctions their economic agency.⁷⁹

Another phenomenon not shown in the film is unveiling by force, both literally and figuratively. Beginning in the 1940s, writers, artists, and ethnographers like Edouard Duchesne, Hector France, Michel Chevalier, and Eugène Daumas traveled to Algeria to capture exotic scenes of lust and allure, offering French audiences a glimpse at harem life, prostitutes, and the sexualized female form.⁸⁰ This eroticized vision of Algerian women was often staged for

⁷² Julia Clancy-Smith, “Islam, Gender, and Identities in the Making of French Algeria, 1830-1962” In *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1998), 155.

⁷³ Fanon, “*Algeria Unveiled*,” 61.

⁷⁴ Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*.

⁷⁵ Natalya Vince, “Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion and “Français musulmanes” during the Algerian War of Independence”, *French Historical Studies* 33.3 (Summer 2010): 452.

⁷⁶ Fanon, “*Algeria Unveiled*,” 61.

⁷⁷ Susan Slyomovics, “‘Hassiba Ben Bouali, If You Could See Our Algeria’: Women and Public Space in Algeria.” *Middle East Report*, no. 192 (1995): 11-12. doi:10.2307/3013348. This anxiety has continued in the post-colonial era. For example, in 1994, the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) threatened to kill seven million primary and secondary school students and more than 3,000 professors if the schools did not follow norms of Islamic education, which included the veiling of female teachers and students. Accounts of threats and the murders of female students who did not wear the veil were also reported.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁸⁰ Isra Ali, “The Harem Fantasy in Nineteenth-century Orientalist Paintings,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2015): 39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43895901>.

postcards or placed in normal contexts that conveyed the commonplace practice of such sexual displays.⁸¹ The wealth of the scenes was exaggerated, failing to show the economic conditions that may have attributed to female prostitution.⁸² Frantz Fanon described incidents in which female prostitutes and servants were taken to central squares during the revolution and stripped of their veils with cries of “*vive l’Algérie française!*”⁸³ Forcible removal, Fanon explains, often had the opposite effect. Women donned the veil once more to signal that female liberation and the wearing the veil were not mutually exclusive, and could in fact be an empowering means of mobility.⁸⁴ Pontecorvo depicts the practice of veiling and unveiling in the two contrasting scenes described earlier: the fully veiled women hiding the gun, and the women shedding the veil to plant bombs. The film shows each choice in its revolutionary context, but the complexity of these choices or the lack of choice is not sufficiently discussed.

Veiling and unveiling are largely psychological forms of structural violence, which anthropologist Paul Farmer characterizes as a violence that “withers bodies slowly.”⁸⁵ Physical violence, an equally brutal component of colonization, is just as present throughout the colonial period as during the fight for independence. The movie does not highlight violence against women, though the first bomb planted in the kasbah documents the reality of violence directed at a domestic setting largely composed of women and children. In the aftermath, the viewer witnesses the shrieks of women as they frantically search for their children among the rubble.⁸⁶ Beyond this frenzied scene and the looming threat of physical violence in home searches, the film does not depict direct violence against women. Sexual and physical violence during the war, however, was incredibly widespread. As McDougall asserts in *A History of Algeria*, an “uncountable numbers of women were raped by French soldiers” throughout the war.⁸⁷ Violence during the revolution was not limited to actions by the French. The ALN, the armed branch of the FLN, and competing factions took advantage of women as they fled or preyed on those who stayed behind in cities ravaged by the effects of war.⁸⁸ Before the war for independence, women were victims of similar brutality. During the initial French desert campaigns to take Algeria, moral outcry arose over accusations of some officers’ abuses. One account details an incident in which Thomas Robert Bugeaud, who would become Governor-General of Algeria, took three thousand women, children, and elderly hundreds of kilometers into the desert as prisoners, eventually letting them return to their ruined homes naked and miserable.⁸⁹ Another harrowing account describes a brutal interrogation in which a woman who failed to reveal the locations of silos was beaten and raped to death by dozens of French soldiers.⁹⁰ Another elderly woman was thrown from a balcony and stripped naked, dying in agony in the street below.⁹¹ The initial atrocities committed against women in the desert and the sustained violence through the colonial period indicate the great stake of women in the independence movement. Yet this motivation to oppose

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 40.

⁸² Zeynep Çelik, “The Indigenous House,” In *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule*, (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 107.

⁸³ Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 62.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 8.

⁸⁶ Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*.

⁸⁷ James McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 221.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 221.

⁸⁹ Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, 45.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 80.

the brutal regime came with great risk. Violence against women, implied but not fully developed in the film, was widespread both by the French and by Algerian men, and resisting this violence often proved deadly.

Eye of the Beholder: Examining Sources and Motives

The film portrays the women in the FLN as highly capable, brave, and intelligent. What level of agency did most women possess during the war and before the battle of Algiers? In discussing Algerian women's agency throughout the colonial period, it is important to acknowledge that the available sources are largely one-sided. Most ethnographic research from the period is written by French scholars. Thus, this will be less of a discussion of the Algerian woman as she actually existed during the colonial period. Instead, it will focus on the perception of her from the view of her oppressor. Her agency is perceived within the context of her colonizer's interests. As Julia Clancy-Smith describes in her book *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, the "Arab woman...functioned as an inverted image or negative trope for confirming European settlers' distinct cultural identity, while denying the political existence of the other."⁹² Pontecorvo does not explore the representation of Algerian women in popular French discourse, though comparisons arise in several scenes. First, there is the contrast between the women *colons* as they attend a party with their husbands, who later enter the kasbah to plant the bomb in a residential area. This image of ease and female liberation (in dress, in drinking wine, in conversation with other men) is contrasted with somber scenes within the medina. The Algerian women are serious about their mission, and they relate to men in a highly formal, structured manner as they prepare for their own planting of bombs.⁹³ This comparison in the film is reminiscent of the colonial focus on the inferiority of Algerian society due to the poor conditions of its women and their absence from public life.

In the early years of French control, men dominated the ethnographic field, though they either failed to gain access into female spaces or inserted themselves intrusively.⁹⁴ They often fixated on how the conditions of women were indicative of deeper inferiorities.⁹⁵ Émile Masqueray's ethnographic research launched the invasion into the Algerian home in the 1880s.⁹⁶ In his search for sources of societal inferiority, he concluded the root lie in "the condition of women and the condition of housing."⁹⁷ With the emergence of female ethnographers, the dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized changed. French women were trusted more than French men, which allowed them to gain access into female spaces and earn respect in the ethnographic field due to their unique position.⁹⁸ Mathéa Gaudry, a French woman who studied Algerian housing patterns, found that women were at an "evolved social stage" but needed a better environment in which to break the chains of oppression.⁹⁹ On the other hand, Military General Eugène Daumas, whose stated goal in writing about women was to tear the veil off morals and customs of the society, discussed two main theories of Algerian inferiority. He first proposed that the Algerian woman was inherently a depraved and sexual animal who could not mix with Christian values. The second postulation supposed that she was oppressed by men and therefore, with marriage to the colonizer, would be capable of assimilating into French society.¹⁰⁰

Exceptions exist to the generally agreed upon low level of agency ascribed to Algerian women by European scholars throughout the colonial period. While these may not account for the agency of most women in Algerian

⁹² Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 156.

⁹³ Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*.

⁹⁴ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 157-158.

⁹⁵ Çelik, "The Indigenous House," 89.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 89.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 89.

⁹⁸ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 167.

⁹⁹ *Ibid* Çelik, "The Indigenous House," 92.

¹⁰⁰ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 164.

society, recognizing agency is arguably key to extending the portrayal of women beyond their depiction as solely powerless. While women only worked outside the domestic economy in a few areas, James McDougall relays that some “women worked as midwives, food-stall holders, owners or employees of bathhouses, makers and sellers of candles or as prostitutes...this latter category, again, illustrates a diversity of fortunes.”¹⁰¹ McDougall offers an example of a prostitute who left behind a sizeable fortune, illustrating that women could in some cases gain economic power.¹⁰² It is notable that McDougall considers prostitutes to be in control and powerful within this system, revealing that even the definition of agency is contestable.

Algerian women often held a different view of their agency, and while this voice was not easily amplified, writers like Assia Djebar brought this perspective to the foreground.¹⁰³ For example, the harem, a secluded style of housing that keeps women cloistered and separated from the outside world, was typically viewed as a singularly repressive space.¹⁰⁴ Djebar refashioned the harem from a prison into a female space dominated by its own matriarchal structure.¹⁰⁵ Through her female protagonists, Djebar created a space in which women could construct their own identity through body and space. She also transformed the *hammam*, the bath house in which men and women remain separate, into a safe space for feminine voices to be heard and nurtured.¹⁰⁶ Women were protected from the reaches of the patriarchal mold in this space, making it “the ideal meeting-place, sheltered from the male gaze, in which women can at last speak and talk to one another without the veil.”¹⁰⁷ In this way, Algerian women like Djebar ascribed their own agency and power to places that outsiders often considered repressive. Though Djebar recognized the oppression of society, she and many other women adapted to this and created their own agency within female spaces.¹⁰⁸

In many instances, Algerian women’s agency was undermined by the process of sexualizing their bodies. Prostitution became a popular topic of discussion among ethnographers in Algeria, who regarded it as a symptom of underlying moral insufficiency.¹⁰⁹ Edouard Duchesne, despite his classification of Algerian women as lazy and morally depraved, recognized underlying causes in his writings.¹¹⁰ He maintained that the prostitution observed by the French was due to the lack of suitable work in the public sector for poor women and the decline of traditional handicrafts.¹¹¹ Initial desires to regulate prostitution due to concerns of sexually transmitted diseases were later converted into a desire to morally regulate it.¹¹² Prostitution is not depicted in the film, though the bomb-carrying women are sexualized as they accept the gaze of checkpoint officers or experience advances by men in the milk bar.

¹⁰¹ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 35.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁰³ Rita Faulkner, "Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land," *World Literature Today* 70, no. 4 (1996): 847-55. doi:10.2307/40152312.

¹⁰⁴ Faulkner, "Assia Djebar," 855.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 855.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 853.

¹⁰⁷ Huughe, Laurence, and Jennifer Curtiss Gage, “‘Ecrire Comme Un Voile’”: The Problematics of the Gaze in the Work of Assia Djebar," *World Literature Today* 70, no. 4 (1996): 872. doi:10.2307/40152315.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 869.

¹⁰⁹ Clancy-Smith, “Islam, Gender, and Identities,” 162.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 160.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 160.

¹¹² McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 91.

In the film, the women use this attention to their advantage, embracing the distraction as they plant their bombs. The film ascribes agency to the sexualized women if they can use it for their own needs.

Despite discourse criticizing the perceived inferiority of Algerian women in society, most discussions treated women as objects rather than humans with their own agency and responses to the systems oppressing them.¹¹³ In the discussion of prostitution, the question was not about the wellbeing of the women but rather the safety of the French troops.¹¹⁴ In the film, female characters are not adequately developed, leading to a similar effect. The audience is not privy to the women's backstories as they are for the male leads, so they are one dimensional. They become props that carry out the missions of the FLN and to ultimately die for the cause.

Some French women ethnographers departed from the patterns of confirming French superiority through their own research on women. Hubertine Auclert, founder of the radical wing of the French feminist movement, championed for the right of French women to vote while in France, highlighting the gender equality that still existed in the metropole.¹¹⁵ When she moved to Algeria, she found that the *colons* dehumanized the Arab population at every chance they got. Auclert accused French officials of colluding with Algerian men to preserve Islamic family law practices such as child marriage and polygamy.¹¹⁶ Her extensive research was used to the opposite effect, suggesting the inherent inferiority of Algerian subjects.¹¹⁷ Pontecorvo does not address the relationship between French women or *colons* and Algerian women in the film. They exist in separate planes and scenes, conveying a disconnectedness with each other.

The same phenomenon extended to the discussion of intermarriage between French men and Algerian women. Prior to the French conquest, the Ottomans in Algeria desired to keep their men separate from Algerian women so as to retain the purity of the Turkish officials.¹¹⁸ Alternatively, the French considered the possibility of fostering a stronger, lasting relationship through intermarriage.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, French policy dictated keeping a distinction was useful in policing the native population, and *colons* did not desire to mix with Algerians, which would threaten their status.¹²⁰ This initial desire to intermarry prompted a push to educate Algerian women. Education was extremely limited, especially for girls. By 1938, less than five percent of Algerians girls received any form of education.¹²¹ In 1954, of roughly eight million Algerians, 94 percent of men and 98 percent of women were illiterate.¹²² In the metropole during the same period, women struggled with a similar lack of access to education or professional opportunities thereafter. French women did not even obtain the right to vote until 1944.¹²³ In the film, Algerian women's education is not discussed, though some of the women portrayed possessed college degrees.¹²⁴ While the

¹¹³ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 155-156.

¹¹⁴ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 167-168.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 170.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 172.

¹¹⁸ Tal Shuval, "The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 3 (2000): 331. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259512>.

¹¹⁹ Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 178-179.

¹²⁰ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 123-126.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 260.

¹²² Clancy-Smith, "Islam, Gender, and Identities," 178-179.

¹²³ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, "Women and Politics in France," *French Politics and Society* 10, no. 1 (1992): 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42844276>.

¹²⁴ Amrane-Minne and Clarke, "Women at War," 347.

film provides a snapshot of women in urban Algiers, the actual level of agency and the perceived level of agency is a far more complex exploration.

Identity of Liberation

Women in the resistance movement throughout the struggle for independence also found that their agency was simultaneously expanded and decreased according to their participation, where they lived, and with whom they associated. As McDougall writes, women “were torn between engagement in the struggle for liberation, seeking safety for their families from the reciprocal violences of the revolution and counter-insurgency, and struggling to get by in a country ruined by war.”¹²⁵ The independence movement did in some ways achieve an organic liberation of women. According to Laurence Seferdjeli in “Rethinking the History of the Mujahidat During the Algerian War,” prior to 1954, most Algerian women were confined to the home. Female participation in external situations during the war possessed a “challenged the existing order of Algerian society and was a remarkable development during the war.”¹²⁶ Neither the French nor the FLN anticipated the effect of this involvement on women and their view of their rights following independence. Fanon points particularly to the mobility of unmarried women, whose participation was not as controversial since they would not be leaving children or a family behind.¹²⁷ At first, women’s contributions were confined to supportive roles, working as social assistants to spread information about hygiene or organizing political meetings with women in rural zones.¹²⁸ As seen in the film, however, some women acted as liaisons and messengers, carrying bombs and other weapons.¹²⁹ Pontecorvo portrays the women as key players in the resistance movement, which is not fully representative of reality. Female agents were far rarer, and women were closely monitored in these roles, which is alluded to in the movie through the various men that are involved in the bomb planting process as background support.¹³⁰ The ALN took care to keep men and women separate by policing unregulated relationships and sexual advances. Men and women in the *maquis* were allowed to marry, and of 47 married female FLN-ALN members interviewed by Djamila Amrane, 38 married other male militants.¹³¹ The marriage that occurs between FLN members in the film does not reveal whether it was sanctioned by leaders of the FLN, though it does occur within the context of an FLN meeting. The imam talks of a time when this marriage will be done in the open, alluding to the oppressive French policies.¹³² Even the fact that they signed papers implies that they followed French family law, as they must do in order to be officially married under the colonial system.

Women in the independence movement did not necessarily see their participation as revolutionary. Zohra Drif, a FLN fighter portrayed in the film, reflected that in “this Algerian war in which all, civilians included, are participating in the struggle for liberation, my participation as a young woman student is natural.”¹³³ Literature by both men and women during the war confirmed a woman’s active role in independence, but while men seemed to fear this greater role in society, women welcomed it.¹³⁴ Both men and women who fought in the FLN believed the FLN’s assurance “that the armed struggle was a revolutionary one that would ‘open for the Algerian woman radiant

¹²⁵ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 220.

¹²⁶ Laurence Seferdjeli, “Rethinking the History of the Mujahidat During the Algerian War,” *Interventions* 14, no. 2 (June 2012): 240, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2012.687902>.

¹²⁷ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 51.

¹²⁸ Seferdjeli, “Rethinking,” 240.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 240-241.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 240.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 241.

¹³² Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*.

¹³³ Zohra Drif, *La morte de mes freres*, (Paris: F. Maspero, 1960), 6.

¹³⁴ Cooke, “Deconstructing War Discourse,” 7.

horizons of fulfillment and emancipation in harmony with our epoch.”¹³⁵ The FLN, however, was a patriarchal organization that continued to enforce rigid codes of sexual and social morality.¹³⁶ Thus, Algerian independence helped introduce women to new roles within society, but it did not have the sweeping effects some wished for.¹³⁷

Joining the independence movement for female liberation was clearly not the sole reason for women’s participation. In fact, their role *as women* in the revolution may not have been their primary level of consciousness about the war. Chandra Mohanty, in her discussion of women of colonized society, describes the phenomenon by which women writing about the struggle for independence often speak “from within a collective, as participants in revolutionary struggles” rather than from the view of the specific woman’s consciousness of her own situation/gender.¹³⁸ In a revolutionary movement, the primary goal is to expel the colonizing oppressor. The primary consciousness of women may not be of their gender within the movement, but rather of their national identity as an Algerian.

The war was often extraordinarily demoralizing for women. They lost their sons and husbands to the effort or were themselves tortured and abused by the both the French and by resistance groups such as the ALN. Participation in such a public way throughout the war exposed women from the domestic sphere, but this exposure could be alienating, leaving women without a solid support system after the war.¹³⁹ As one Tlemcen commander wrote, “in independent Algeria the freedom of the Muslim woman will stop on the threshold of her house... women will never be equal to men.”¹⁴⁰ Views such as this were discouraging, and literature by women in the period following independence focused on the increased polygamy and divorce witnessed during the revolution.¹⁴¹ Some writers went so far as to call the French the only true defenders of women in Algeria.¹⁴²

Society experimented with a series of familial, domestic policies after independence. Algeria’s civil law code of 1975 was not revised to include family law until 1984.¹⁴³ More women, not simply confined to the urban elite, began dressing like their European counterparts, stirring anxiety that prompted the Fourth Islamic Thought Seminar to conclude that family law should be exclusively based on Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁴⁴ This interpretation of family law made women legal minors for life.¹⁴⁵ Some changes have since taken place, including revisions to family law that limit the role of a woman’s guardian upon marriage and give more parental rights to divorced women.¹⁴⁶ Women have made progress in some political rulings, but social patriarchal mores still dictate much of their agency to this day.

Conclusion

¹³⁵ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 221.

¹³⁶ Cooke, “Deconstructing War Discourse,” 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

¹³⁸ Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle” in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 81.

¹³⁹ Cooke, “Deconstructing War Discourse,” 15.

¹⁴⁰ James McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 221.

¹⁴¹ Cooke, “Deconstructing War Discourse,” 13.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁴³ James McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 266.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 264.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 273.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 273.

As Fanon writes, “the Algerian woman rises directly to the level of tragedy.”¹⁴⁷ Throughout the colonial period, wave after wave of tragedy found its way into every facet of society, altering families and the power structures within them. In “The Battle of Algiers,” the women rise to every occasion, from harboring FLN leaders to planting bombs in the French quarters of the city. The character of Hassiba Ben Bouali, a social worker and pioneering resistance fighter, even chooses to die alongside Ali La Pointe rather than surrender and presumably face the brutal retribution of the French.¹⁴⁸ As their cries ring through the streets in the final scenes of the film, the audience recognizes these women’s resilience in the face of unimaginable strife. With the final shot highlighting a female figure as she dances in a defiant, proud show of resistance while holding a flag that says “FLN,” one is reminded that women endured just as much- or more- than their male counterparts throughout the period.¹⁴⁹ Their fight for independence and their own liberation reflects the complicated relationship between gender and larger society. The film, while highlighting select roles of women throughout the period, does not engage with the many complexities of women within the colonial system. It does, however, serve as a helpful branching off point and means of framing a wider discussion.

¹⁴⁷ Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 50.

¹⁴⁸ Amrane-Minne and Clarke, “Women at War,” 346.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 342.

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Hannah Arendt: A Divisive Historical Witness

By Elana Morris

Introduction

From April to December of 1961, the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann reverberated throughout the world, as thousands tuned in to the spectacle, fascinated by the testimony of Holocaust survivors and the indictment of an instrumental organizer of the greatest tragedy of the 20th century. The survivors who testified were voicing their experience for the first time in public- and for some, the first time aloud. But for a televised spectacle, the mood was unusually flat. The man on trial did not fit the expectations of a mass murderer. He was slight, unassuming, and balding. He spoke at an even volume and with no particular charisma, and bore no evil glint in his eye that hinted at mass conspiracy, or visible psychopathy.

The glass booth that encased Eichmann, and the stern Israeli soldiers who flanked him presented an absurd image: two stoic dominoes, the bookends to a tired pawn.

Among the voices who covered the trial were Elie Wiesel, the author Haim Guri- and most famously, Hannah Arendt.

Arendt's opinions on the trial shocked the intellectual world. They are impossible to extricate from the spectacle's enduring narrative. Scholars have attempted to separate Arendt from Eichmann, and have made legitimate and thoughtful contributions to an expansive field of work on the subject. They rightly questioned Arendt's condemnation of the trial as mere theater, her explosive claim that Eichmann was a docile bureaucrat, rather than a cunning and pro-active killer, and her glaring lack of attendance at the trial itself. Justice Michael Musmanno, who served as a judge in the United States Nuremberg trial, as well as a prosecuting witness at Eichmann's trial, wrote, "The disparity between what Miss Arendt states, and what the ascertained facts are, occurs with such disturbing frequency in her book that it can hardly be accepted as an authoritative historical work."¹⁵⁰ Author and Zionist activist Mary Zyrkin wondered if Arendt's views were a result of "Jewish self-hatred or possibly the assimilated Jew's aversion to all manifestations of organized Jewish life."¹⁵¹

Despite these and far more criticisms, Arendt remains an imposing work on the subject. Even while modern context (the release of Eichmann's memoir from his testimony for example, or exhaustive published works examining his role in the Holocaust) have largely contradicted and to some extent even debunked Arendt's character assessment. Her writings still loom large.

In this essay, I will attempt to argue that Arendt's position as a political theorist and her personal experience observing a totalitarian regime informed her views. She was an undisputed authority on totalitarianism. But in her detailed analysis of the conditions that allowed for these regimes to take hold, she sometimes neglected the importance of individuals in forming the basis of a historical narrative.

Hannah Arendt, the Philosopher

Hannah Arendt epitomized the potential scholars have to express ideologically inconsistent ideals. She was bitingly intelligent, often brash and provocative in her writing. In her book on the Eichmann trial, Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt observed that Arendt "sometimes seemed more interested in turning a good phrase than on understanding its effect," and remarked that "she wanted to needle her readers to examine their assumptions."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Rabinbach, Anson. "Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy." *October* (2004) pp. 99.

¹⁵¹ Rabinbach, Anson. "Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy." *October* (2004) pp. 100.

¹⁵² Lipstadt, Deborah E. *The Eichmann Trial*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2011. pp. 184.

Arendt's legacy is one of erudite political theory, provocative and sometimes polarizing philosophy, and complex connection to her Jewish identity.

As an historical witness and commentator, Arendt's story was one informed by her personal experience; she grew up in Germany as an assimilated but unobservant Jew. Her father died in 1913 of syphilis, leaving her mother to raise her alone. Arendt studied philosophy at the University of Marburg, where she met the widely lauded -but politically controversial- philosopher Martin Heidegger. Arendt carried on a brief affair with Heidegger while under his tutelage. Though their romantic relationship only played out over the four years while Arendt completed her degree, they remained friends for the remainder of their lives. Heidegger joined the Nazi party in 1928. Arendt fled for Paris in 1933 after detainment due to her association with a Zionist organization. Their relationship, already controversial due to age difference, faced greater challenges in an increasingly anti-Semitic Germany. She was a young Jewish student; he, a tenured professor whose work played into and promoted Nazi ideology and whose works contain blatantly anti-Semitic statements.¹⁵³ Arendt's fondness for Heidegger attracted ire even far after they separated. American Jewish historian Barbara Tuchman famously said that Arendt "defended Eichmann to defend Heidegger." In 2018, Ella Milch-Sheriff composed an opera around their affair, based on a play written by Savyon Liebrecht. Both women are Israeli. The production was titled "Die Banalität der Liebe"- or "The Banality of Love."¹⁵⁴

Did Arendt indeed "defend Eichmann to defend Heidegger?" The point may be too speculative to explore meaningfully. But Arendt's personal decision not to condemn Heidegger was, in some ways, a confirmation of the views expressed in her later writings- the belief that people are mere products of their environment- and not fully cognizant of their own actions. Heidegger may have been a blind spot for Arendt, as Eichmann was for her. But her repeated failure to acknowledge the role of the individual in perpetuating violence would later damage her reputation as a historian.

In 1941, again fleeing political and religious persecution, Arendt immigrated to the United States with her husband, Heinrich Blücher. In New York, she found a cohort of like-minded intellectuals, and published writings on subjects such as anti-Semitism and the rising tide of totalitarianism in Europe. These essays established her as a figure of prominence in the philosophical world, as well as a powerful witness to the perils of an oppressive regime.¹⁵⁵

The Origins of Totalitarianism

One cannot fully appreciate Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial without having read her prior works, particularly *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Published in 1951 and widely considered to be her magnum opus, *Origins* attempted to find an explanation for the 20th century totalitarian state by examining the organization, methods of influence, and leadership of Hitler's and Stalin's oppressive regimes. Arendt's understanding of the methods of subjugation necessary to achieve complete control over a people contextualize her later writings and assessment of Eichmann as a cog rather than a cold-blooded killer. But the *Origins of Totalitarianism* also stood apart as its own work, an exhaustive exploration of how oppressive governments terrorize and indoctrinate their people.

Arendt analyzed both the historical context of anti-Semitism, and its implementation in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She understood the importance of political propaganda in creating a totalitarian state whose masses were willing to participate in total demagoguery. "Only the mob and the elite can be attracted by the momentum of totalitarianism itself," she wrote. "The masses have to be won by propaganda."¹⁵⁶ She also saw those who freely

¹⁵³ Rothman, Joshua, and Joshua Rothman. "Is Heidegger Contaminated by Nazism?" The New Yorker. June 18, 2017. Accessed May 08, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Hitron, Haggai. "Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger and the Banality of Love between a Jew and a Nazi." Haaretz.com. February 20, 2018. Accessed May 07, 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Center, Hannah Arendt. About Hannah Arendt. Accessed May 08, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Arendt, Hannah. "The Totalitarian Movement." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace &, 1951. pp. 333.

gave themselves over to Nazi ideology as members of a mass of Germans who were highly susceptible to influence, and who, having experienced a liquidation of true class distinctions in the aftermath of World War I and prior to Hitler's rise, were "as favorable to the rise of Nazism as the absence of social stratification in Russia's immense rural population was to the Bolshevik overthrow..."¹⁵⁷

Historian David Welch (Director of the Centre for the Study of Propaganda at the University of Kent) wrote an analysis of Nazi propaganda in 2004 which examined the aspirations of the Nazi regime. He, like Arendt, asserted that one central goal of Nazi propaganda was to re-organize the way that the German people lived and to make them abandon the previously accepted class system. According to Welch, the Nazi objective was "radically to restructure German society so that the prevailing class, religious and sectional loyalties would be replaced by a new heightened national awareness."¹⁵⁸ Though Munch's assessment of German politics did not, as Arendt's, discuss the essentiality of anti-Semitism in the reformation of German identity, he echoed her statements which argued that the German people were already primed for a radical societal restructuring. Propaganda was not the source, but rather the fuel. "Propaganda is as much about confirming rather than converting public opinion," he wrote. "Propaganda, if it is to be effective must, in a sense, preach to those who are already partially converted."¹⁵⁹

The basis of Nazi propaganda, according to Arendt, was its reliance on anti-Semitism as the linchpin in the mass's reliance on the Nazi party for their sense of belonging and self-worth. "Nazi propaganda," she wrote, "was ingenious enough to transform anti-Semitism into a principle of self-definition, and thus to eliminate it from the fluctuations of mere opinion."¹⁶⁰ Arendt argued that the Nazis' obsessive stratification of citizens based on racial and Semitic heritage created a social value system that functioned to replace the roles to which Germans had ascribed prior to the Nazi rise to power. Anti-Semitic propaganda "gave the masses of atomized, undefinable, unstable and futile individuals a means of self-definition and identification which not only restored some of the self-respect they had formerly derived from their functions in society, but also created a kind of spurious stability which made them better candidates for an organization."¹⁶¹

Arendt's examination of Nazi propaganda highlighted the willingness of a people to submit to and engage in an ideology which they not only cowed to, but accepted as their true reality. This willingness, Arendt believed, was the cornerstone of the totalitarian mindset. She wrote:

[The masses] do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. ... What the masses refuse to recognize is the fortuitousness that pervades reality. They are predisposed to all ideologies because they explain facts as mere examples of laws and eliminate coincidences by inventing an all-embracing omnipotence which is supposed to be at the root of every accident.¹⁶²

In Arendt's view, consistency, rather than accuracy, was the weapon of the Nazi party. The world conjured from sources like *Der Stürmer* and *Das Reich* was one without nuance, an onslaught of media that cast the vile Jew as its undeserved villain.

Along with examining what caused the German people to be so readily susceptible to Nazi propaganda, Arendt explicitly disassembled the structure of Nazi leadership. Adolf Eichmann presumably fit into this model- and

¹⁵⁷ Arendt, Hannah. "A Classless Society." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Et. al. pp. 306.

¹⁵⁸ Welch, David. "Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a 'National Community' (Volksgemeinschaft)." *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 1 (1993): 1-15.

¹⁵⁹ Welch, David. "Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a 'National Community' (Volksgemeinschaft)." *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 1 (1993): 1-15.

¹⁶⁰ Arendt, Hannah. "The Totalitarian Movement." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace &, 1951. pp. 346.

¹⁶¹ Arendt, Hannah. "The Totalitarian Movement." Et. al.

¹⁶² Arendt, Hannah. "The Totalitarian Movement." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace &, 1951. pp. 341-342.

Arendt's assessment of his position as a relatively oblivious bureaucrat is consistent with her analysis of the Nazi power structure.

Arendt described Nazi leadership as a radius of party members and romantically choreographed secretive societies that revolved around a mythicized leader. Arendt asserted that the totalitarian "Leader" (She capitalized the first letter of "leader," suggesting a sort of political deification) both represents the entirety of the party's directives, and "[claimed] personal responsibility for every action, deed, or misdeed, committed by any member or functionary in his official capacity." Arendt wrote that this leader would not "tolerate criticism of his subordinates, since they [acted] always in his name."¹⁶³

Particularly unique to the Nazi regime and model of party leadership was the continual shifting and rotation of its members. Arendt explained:

The inhabitant of Hitler's Third Reich lived not only under the simultaneous and often conflicting authorities of competing powers, such as the civil services, the party, the SA, and the SS; he could never be sure and was never explicitly told whose authority he was supposed to place above others... the consistent and ever-changing division between real secret authority and ostensible open representation made the actual seat of power a mystery by definition, and this to such an extent that the members of the ruling clique themselves could never be absolutely sure of their own position in the secret power society.¹⁶⁴ (383)

The perpetual rotation of power that Arendt described characterized the Nazi state as an amorphous organization, an ever-widening amoeba whose sovereign office remained unclear. This elusive leadership was not only bewildering, but essential to the continuation of the regime, according to Arendt. "The longer... a totalitarian regime stays in power," she wrote, "the greater becomes the number of offices and the possibility of jobs exclusively dependent upon the movement, since no office is abolished when its authority is liquidated."¹⁶⁵

Arendt's explication of the Nazi power structure not only explained its perpetuity, but debunked the common myth, that still persists, of a rigidly organized party, that subscribed to a top-down leadership style. It also suggested that a great number of Nazi members might have caught up in the ether of this chaotic structure. Was Eichmann one of them?

Interestingly, Arendt acknowledged Eichmann's place in the Nazi Party immediately following her study on the Party itself. Eichmann's name appeared on the page following Arendt's explanation of the power structure. Arendt used the example of the "organization of scientific antisemitism" to describe the confusion that classified Nazi leadership. According to Arendt, the duties of the sector responsible for research on the Final Solution ricocheted from an institute in Munich, to Frankfurt, and finally Berlin. Here was where Adolf Eichmann, the head of "Himmler's special Gestapo department for the liquidation... of the Jewish question," received the stolen property of European Jews and headed the operation to carry out the Final Solution.¹⁶⁶

If Arendt so readily acknowledged Eichmann's leadership role in the "liquidation" of Jews and their property, why was she so reluctant to recognize his agency in the extermination of the Jewish people during his trial? Why did she see him as a bureaucrat, when he was in fact the center of such an insidious operation? Here, again, Arendt missed the opportunity to recognize the autonomy of the man responsible for the death of millions.

The Trial

"Despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a "monster," Arendt famously wrote of Adolf Eichmann, "but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Arendt, Hannah. "The Totalitarian Movement." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace &, 1951

¹⁶⁴ Arendt, Hannah. "Totalitarianism in Power." Et. al. pp. 383.

¹⁶⁵ Arendt, Hannah. "Totalitarianism in Power." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace &, 195. pp. 384.

¹⁶⁶ Arendt, Hannah. Et. al. pp. 385.

¹⁶⁷ Arendt, Hannah. "Eichmann in Jerusalem." *The New Yorker*. February 8, 1963. Accessed May 07, 2019.

This phrase, easily the most damning in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt's five-part series that ran in *the New Yorker* in 1961, seemed to be the lasting conclusion that has emerged from her coverage of the trial. The irony of Arendt's conclusions was difficult to escape; she was a Jew who might have experienced the same fate as Eichmann's victims if she had remained in Germany. Also her writing leading up to this bombastic statement explicitly laid out the severity of Eichmann's crimes. Arendt was no supporter of the man she described. One of the most challenging aspects of Arendt's coverage was not simply that she described Eichmann only as a simple bureaucrat- but that she did so knowing the full scale of his murderous career while the Nazis were in power.

The Eichmann that Israeli agents captured in a ramshackle house in Argentina, transferred to a prison in Israel, and eventually prepared for trial, did not embody the mythos of the crimes for which he was known. In his *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, David Cesarani wrote that "His personality sowed confusion and discord among his captors... When they had to take him to the toilet and deal with his bodily functions they were struck by his helplessness and also his humanity..."¹⁶⁸

Transcripts and analyses of the trial reveal Eichmann to have been a resourceful defendant, given to long, meandering sermons rather than concrete answers. In her book *The Eichmann Trial*, Deborah Lipstadt recalled that "Eichmann's loquaciousness infuriated the judges. [Judge] Landau had to admonish him, repeatedly to keep his answers short."¹⁶⁹ Lipstadt called Eichmann's tendency to over-exposit "maddening."

During his defense, Eichmann spoke of matters of life or death with a matter-of-fact precision, yet was determined to paint himself as well-meaning man, who, despite his murderous actions, was essentially an ethical person. Recalling his desire to learn Hebrew, he admitted, "I must note that it would have been much easier for me to suggest that we simply grab a rabbi and lock him up... he then would have to teach me Hebrew from jail. But I did not have that intention."¹⁷⁰

At other times, Eichmann seemed to be entirely unaware of the demographics of his audience. When confronted with the evidence that he had forced Jews onto trains packed grotesquely beyond the vehicles' capacity, Eichmann made up excuses. Lipstadt wrote that he "claimed that the seven-hundred figure was calculated on the basis of soldiers with baggage. Since Jews' luggage was sent separately, there was room for an additional three hundred people. The gallery erupted in laughter."¹⁷¹

Arendt posited that these avoidance strategies seemed to stem from "a systematic mendacity that had constituted the general, and generally accepted, atmosphere of the Third Reich." She claimed that "Eichmann needed only to recall the past in order to feel sure that he was not lying and that he was not deceiving himself, for he and the world he lived in had once been in perfect harmony."

But others saw Eichmann's fumbling long-windedness as a façade. The real Eichmann- the one responsible for the transfer of millions of Jews to concentration camps, emerged during the trial only occasionally. This break with formality often happened when Robert Servatius misplaced documents or phrases which were necessary for Eichmann's defense. Lipstadt quoted an onlooker, who "noted, 'Eichmann's voice sharpened: the cold snarl, the bark that many witnesses remembered was there, one beneath what we heard.'"¹⁷²

But it was not a lack of composure which laid bare Eichmann's immorality. In fact, it was in his evasive style of testimony that revealed the true extent of his crimes. Avoidance strategies were not an entirely effective method in sidestepping those accusations that were so well-evidenced as to be accepted truth. In *Becoming Eichmann*, David Cesarani pinpointed an instance in which Eichmann slipped up. During Hausner's cross-examination, he asked about Eichmann's role in implementing the infamous foot-marches that forced 70,000 Jews to walk from Budapest to Vienna. The evidence against Eichmann was damning: Hausner had the Sassen

¹⁶⁸ Cesarani, David. "Flight and Capture, 1945-60." In *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "desk Murderer"*. Cambridge Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2007. pp. 233.

¹⁶⁹ Lipstadt, Deborah E. *The Eichmann Trial*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2011. pp. 115.

¹⁷⁰ Lipstadt, Deborah E. Et. al.

¹⁷¹ Lipstadt, Deborah E. Et. al. pp. 111.

¹⁷² Lipstadt, Deborah E. *The Eichmann Trial*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2011. pp. 111.

tapes. These were interviews conducted by fellow former Nazi Wilhem Sassen, in which Eichmann plainly stated his desire to enact a 4th Reich, and expressed regret that he had not been *more* pro-active in bringing about the demise of the Jews. Cesarani wrote:

In the face of a mountain of evidence he denied that he had initiated the foot marches Exposed to contradiction by his own words to Sassen he made a slip and said, 'I proposed the foot marches.' He tried to wriggle out of this admission by claiming that he just arranged the food supplies and 'rest areas', efforts which were frustrated by the Hungarians. Noise erupted in the courtroom and Landau had to call for silence.¹⁷³

Eichmann could attribute his crimes to politics and blind obedience- but when confronted with his own, uncensored opinions, he faced a losing hand. The lies that formed his defense crumbled, their foundation exposed to be utterly hollow.

Arendt famously missed the cross-examination. Her absence at this key moment in the trial may be the missing link in her appraisal of Eichmann's banality . In ignoring this revelation of Eichmann's character, Arendt once again demonstrated a tendency to disregard the influence of the individual in favor of seeing the larger picture. She would express this same mentality in her articles on the trial.

Arendt's simplistic judgment of Eichmann's character was not the only aspect of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that provoked outrage. She famously criticized the *Judenräte*, German-appointed councils of Jews who carried out orders in the ghettos, writing, "Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis."¹⁷⁴

Arendt ignored the fact that *Judenräte* held no real power, that they themselves faced grisly consequences for disobedience. Lipstadt aptly found the irrationality in this statement, responding, "[The *Judenräte* leaders] had no cards to play. They lacked the power to halt the Nazis' resolute determination to murder Jews."¹⁷⁵

Conclusions

50 years after the trial of Adolf Eichmann, I have access to what Hannah Arendt did not: Eichmann's 1,200 page memoir, released by the Israeli government in 2000; evaluations of his character given by historians who examined his every decision as a Nazi officer; numerical accounts of the number of Jews he sent to their deaths, after deceiving them into believing that he had petitioned for their emigration; responses to Arendt herself, fact-checking her coverage of the Holocaust and the trial. But perhaps the most striking excavation of Eichmann's character are the thousands of pages of works, meticulously researched and compiled by renowned historians such as Bettina Stagneth, which reveal him to be not simply murderer, but a man whose intention was to restore the ideologies that lead to the Holocaust. The Eichmann that Israeli agents captured on Garibaldi Street, transported from Argentina to Israel, and swiftly tried, televised, and executed, is not the Eichmann that emerges from these records, which include his diary entries in prison prior to the trial, personal accounts during the duration of the trial, and the tapes of him and fellow Nazis in Argentina, conspiring to bring about a return of radical anti-Semitism.¹⁷⁶

The Eichmann that emerged in these documents would seem to be precisely the cold killer which critics of Arendt believed him to be. He willingly sent millions to their deaths and he pro-actively furthered the cause of the Final Solution. He felt no remorse for his actions and was so committed to the cause as to believe it worthy of re-institution. Popular culture dubs Eichmann the "architect" of the Holocaust. Contrary to his determination to be

¹⁷³ Cesarani, David. "Interrogation, Trial, and Execution, 1960-62." In *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "desk Murderer"*. Cambridge Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2007. pp. 297.

¹⁷⁴ Sharon Muller. "The Origins of Eichmann in Jerusalem: Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of Jewish History." *Jewish Social Studies* 43, no. 3/4 (1981): 237-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467139>.

¹⁷⁵ Lipstadt, Deborah E. *The Eichmann Trial*. New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2011. pp. 184.

¹⁷⁶ Frum, David. "The Lies of Adolf Eichmann." *The Atlantic*. October 08, 2014. Accessed May 07, 2019.

seen as an upstanding citizen, someone to be lauded for his obedience, Eichmann has emerged as a central figure in the narrative of a mass genocide. Yad Vashem devotes a detailed exhibit to his murderous legacy.¹⁷⁷

There are several logistical factors that may explain Arendt's dismissal of Eichmann. First, she may not have attended enough of the trial to witness his defense crumble. Second, she did not have access to the same wealth of resources that have since revealed Eichmann to be, though not *the* central planner of the Holocaust, certainly essential to its fruition. But the most difficult aspect of Arendt's coverage to understand, and to explain, was her own personal biases. She was a Jew, but did not always associate with Jews. She carried on an intimate relationship with a member of the Nazi party- and forgave his crimes. She devoted her life to understanding why a totalitarian government was so easily able to possess its people through romanticism and hatred, but later attached more significance to the bureaucracy and influence of that government than the people who perpetuated its morbid goals. She distanced herself from the victims of the Holocaust, even while defending their right to bring one of their perpetrators to justice. Ultimately, she saw the trial- and the verdict, which indicted him for all 15 initial charges - as justified, an opportunity for survivors to serve justice to the man that had caused so much pain. She agreed with the death penalty and said that critics "seem to have felt—rightly I think—that this was not a very promising case on which to fight."¹⁷⁸ Finally, she universalized the proceedings, writing, "Insofar as the victims were Jews, it was right and proper that a Jewish court should sit in judgment; but insofar as the crime was a crime against humanity, it needed an international tribunal to do justice to it."¹⁷⁹

On October 36th, 1964, shortly after the publication of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she participated in an interview on a German program called *Zur Person*, with journalist Günter Gaus. Asked about the potential for her work to influence others, Arendt answered, "if I am to speak honestly, when I am working I don't care how it might affect people." In response to his prompting, she continued, "...the most important thing is for me is to understand. For me, writing is part of this process of understanding... As long as I manage to think something through, I'm satisfied.... If others understand in the same way I've understood, that gives me a sense of satisfaction, like being among equals."¹⁸⁰

Arendt's reputation may be forever confounded by her controversial writings on the trial of Adolf Eichmann. By modern accounts, Arendt misjudged Eichmann's character, imbued him with a certain credulousness which he did not possess. She often disregarded the significance of specific people in perpetuating genocide, and her work contained myriad imperfections. In this analysis, I have selected some of her most discordant views, and attempted to understand their origin. They do not reflect the entirety of Arendt's prolific and valuable career. Hannah Arendt fully understand the ease with which seemingly normal men are made into conspirators of evil. This is the truth that she explicates in her most important book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and in her more contemporary- and disputed- work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt's writings on Eichmann himself are long out-of-date; the same cannot be said for her testimony on totalitarianism. Her term- *the banality of evil*- encompasses an era which many would prefer to forget, and continues to spark important discussion. Even in its controversy, her writing continues to elicit that which she most valued: understanding.

¹⁷⁷ Adolf Eichmann - SS Obersturmbannführer. Yad Vashem. Accessed May 08, 2019. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/eichmann/overview.asp>.

¹⁷⁸ Arendt, Hannah. "Judgement, Appeal, and Execution." In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York, NY: Viking Press, 1963. pp. 230.

¹⁷⁹ Arendt, Hannah. "Epilogue." Et. al. pp. 247.

¹⁸⁰ "Hannah Arendt, "Zur Person." Full Interview." Columbia College.

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Jacob Birnbaum's Effective Campaigning in the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry

By Leah Silinsky

Categorized as utterly unlivable by refuseniks and former residents, life in the former Soviet Union (USSR) was demoralizing for those who inhabited it. Lines were long, persecution was common, and state-sponsored censorship was a way of life. Those at the forefront of such misery were the Jews of the Soviet Union. Under the charismatic leadership of Jacob Birnbaum, young American Jews came to the Soviet Union in large numbers to protest the treatment of Jews in the country. Birnbaum not only informed the American masses of these gross human rights violations, but also influenced future Jewish leaders, such as Meir Kahane, Avi Weiss, and Yossi Klein Halevi. His passion for Judaism and justice was infectious.

Jacob Birnbaum wanted to help the Jews of the USSR by pressuring the Soviet Government to allow them the freedom of religious practice and expression. Moreover, Birnbaum hoped to pressure the Soviet Union into allowing its Jewish citizens the right to leave and emigrate to other countries, including Israel, Canada and the United States. Many Jews, in fact, wanted to immigrate to Israel, especially following the Six Day War in 1967.¹⁸¹ In order to accomplish this goal, he founded the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ).¹⁸² Birnbaum was not only successful in educating American Jewry about the mistreatment of Soviet Jewry, but he completely altered Jewish involvement in politics. He gave American Jews the confidence to advocate for specifically Jewish-related issues, which prior to SSSJ, was limited. His success was seen in tangible policy changes, including the passing of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in 1974, and subsequent freedom of Soviet Jews to leave. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment was a political statement stating that the United States would not conduct trade with countries associated with human rights abuses, including those that restricted emigration and freedom of movement.¹⁸³ His success was also seen in the exponential growth of his movement, as well as the increasing media coverage of Soviet Jewry and how the SSSJ mobilized to help them. These successes were the result of multiple efforts, not Birnbaum's work alone, but the role of his leadership cannot be underestimated.

However, Jacob Birnbaum's success cannot be attributed to charisma alone. The SSSJ was one of the many grassroots organizations created to help Soviet Jews in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸⁴ Created during the civil rights era, there was a growing movement globally towards the acceptance of diversity and promotion of human rights. Birnbaum's movement had much in common with the Civil Rights movement for African Americans and was inspired by the that movement. Both movements used non-violent resistance in the form of sit-ins, protests and demonstrations to achieve social change. Also, both movements focused on historically persecuted minorities politically mobilized people to fight for their rights.

Birnbaum was able to make the movement uniquely Jewish by intertwining elements of politics and religion. He was effective in situating the movement as a second Holocaust, capitalizing on the feeling of collective guilt felt among American Jewry for not taking action to help European Jewry during World War II. This sentiment, however, was a controversial one. Author Hasia R. Diner challenges such notions directly in her book, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945-1962*. The title alone stated Diner's opinion: that American Jews were neither silent nor complacent. Birnbaum, however, was speaking to a generation engulfed in collective guilt, as a result of the perceived silence of the previous generation.

¹⁸¹ Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and Lillian and Albert Small Jewish Museum, *Voices of the Vigil*, (Washington, D.C: Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Lillian & Albert Small Jewish Museum, 2014), 6.

¹⁸² Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964-1986," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol.22, no. 1 (2012): 88.

¹⁸³ "Jews In Former Soviet Union: The Jackson-Vanik Amendment," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jackson-vanik-amendment-jewish-virtual-library>.

¹⁸⁴ Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and Lillian and Albert Small Jewish Museum, *Voices of the Vigil*, (Washington, D.C: Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Lillian & Albert Small Jewish Museum, 2014), 8.

Many saw Birnbaum's movement as a chance for a new generation of Jews to make up for the passivity and indifference of the previous one. Whether or not American Jews were guilty or innocent of collective silence, did not ultimately matter in the context of Birnbaum's campaigns. The Jewish-American generation of the 1960s felt that the previous generation did not do enough to ease the plight of European Jews during the Holocaust. Finally, Birnbaum was an effective and organized community leader as well as a political mobilizer. His movement was centralized, he networked efficiently, and was able to market the movement without resorting to thuggish tactics that risked driving others from the movement as was the case with the Jewish Defense League, led by Meir Kahane.¹⁸⁵ This paper will examine Jacob Birnbaum as a leader, how he was remembered by others along with his relationships with other activists. Most importantly, this paper will examine Birnbaum's tactics, the effectiveness of the SSSJ as an organization, and the reasons for its overall success.

This paper will be an overview of Jacob Birnbaum's biography, how he was remembered by former students, an overview of the life of Soviet Jewry, how Birnbaum founded the movement and his political tactics. The rest will focus on the role of Judaism and religious symbolism in the movement, the events held, and tactics used by the SSSJ, and an overview of the American Jewish establishment in the World War Two Years, and why Birnbaum disavowed them. Finally, this paper will explain how Birnbaum changed how American Jews viewed politics, the effectiveness of his political mobilization, his relationship with Meir Kahane, and the effectiveness of marketing the plight of Soviet Jewry as a mass civil rights matter, in relation to the civil rights movement for African Americans.

One could argue that Birnbaum's passion and idealism was inherited. His grandfather, Nathan Birnbaum, was a Jewish activist from Vienna, who coined the term "Zionism".¹⁸⁶ Originally a secular nationalist, Nathan Birnbaum grew more religious as he became disenchanted with his "western European acculturated identity."¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Nathan Birnbaum was interested in the plight of Eastern European Jewry similar to how his grandson took an interest in the struggles of Soviet Jewry, as both were concerned with Jewish affairs in Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁸

According to Yossi Klein Halevi, a former student of Jacob Birnbaum, Birnbaum described himself as a "klal yisrael Jew," meaning a "Jew for the whole of Jewish people". In his own self-identification, it became apparent that Birnbaum was highly idealistic. Despite being observant, he refrained from defining himself as "orthodox."¹⁸⁹ Given that Birnbaum's movement was predicated on uniting all American Jews to help their fellow Jews in the Soviet Union, the message of unity was even more important. Such views were easy to espouse, given that Jacob Birnbaum himself ascribed to these views.

A final element to Birnbaum's biography, was his origins. Birnbaum was born into a family that had survived the Holocaust. He was born in Germany, and his family moved to England during World War II, when he was young and highly impressionable. One of his students, and a later participant in the SSSJ, Avi Weiss described the impact of the war on Birnbaum's activism, claiming that Holocaust inspired Birnbaum to resettle the "remnants of Eastern European Jewry."¹⁹⁰ Birnbaum also made efforts to help Algerian Jews, though that movement was far less successful.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 207.

¹⁸⁶ Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964–1986," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2012), 89.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

¹⁸⁹ Shaul Kelner, "Let My People Go," *Contexts*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2011): 6.

¹⁹⁰ Avi Weiss, "Jacob Birnbaum Was the Unsung Father of Jewish Freedom," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, (April 13, 2014),

<https://www.jta.org/2014/04/11/news-opinion/obituaries/jacob-birnbaum-was-the-unsung-father-of-jewish-freedom>.

¹⁹¹ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

Moreover, Weiss wrote, “Having seen firsthand the horrors of the Shoah, Birnbaum resolved to do all he could to save Soviet Jewry.”¹⁹² Such background explained Birnbaum’s continuous references to the Holocaust as well as the seeming inaction by the American Jewish community. One only needs to listen to his speeches to hear such references. These references were seen in posters, flyers, and letters. A poster advertising a rally held by the SSSJ exemplified such rhetoric. The heading reads, “Mass Rally for Soviet Jewry!”¹⁹³ Underneath the title reads, “Two generations ago the world stood by silently while 6 million of our brethren went to their deaths. Today in Russia, 3 million Jews are subjected to a systematic campaign of spiritual and cultural genocide...DARE WE BE SILENT TODAY!”¹⁹⁴ The use of the word “genocide” was not coincidental.

One must refrain from viewing Birnbaum as hyperbolic and sensationalist. Not only were his efforts deliberately moderate, in comparison to that of Rabbi Meir Kahane’s, but Soviet Jewry was in fact, persecuted severely. From pogroms before the establishment of the Soviet Union, to Stalin’s “Doctor’s Plot”, to discrimination in the workforce, the Jews of the Soviet Union were among the most heavily persecuted ethnic minorities in the country.

The argument had been made that if Jews assimilated, they would not be persecuted. This does not explain why, despite having a highly secular Jewish population, the persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union did not decrease upon an increase in secularization. Moreover, such arguments do not address the fact that acceptance upon extreme assimilation, is not even surface-level acceptance. In other words, if the Jews of the Soviet Union ceased to be Jews, they would not be persecuted. Of course, there were moments of détente. At times, the Soviet Union paid for Yiddish speaking schools.¹⁹⁵ There was also some enthusiasm among Russian Jews in the early days of the Revolution, thinking such changes would bring about acceptance from the larger Russian society. Some insisted on replacing Yiddish culture with Russian, as was stated in a Yiddish newspaper from Minsk.¹⁹⁶ While there were instances of acceptance and co-existence between the Jews and state, the overall pattern was one of persecution.

As the 20th Century progressed, persecution did not wane, Jewish mathematician I. Pimenov was exiled for 5 years, simply for suspected “anti-Soviet activities.” Not in the early days of the Revolution, but in 1970.¹⁹⁷ This was simply illustrative of the larger pattern of widespread discrimination. The time period from the late 1960s to the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided an especially interesting relationship between the Soviet Union and its Jews.¹⁹⁸ In 1965, Alexei Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers gave a speech denouncing racism and anti-Semitism, explicitly stating that the Jews of the Soviet Union had the liberty to leave, if they so choose.¹⁹⁹ While far from reality, the idea of anti-Semitism was clearly a concern, and a talking point among Soviet politicians. The Six-Day War, had strong ramifications for the Jews of the Soviet Union.²⁰⁰

Birnbaum was not a radical sensationalist. His movement was deliberately non-violent, and moderate. The language, he used was not a manipulation tactic. Rather, it was language which accurately described life of Soviet Jewry.

Before examining the history of the SSSJ, it is paramount to understand how Birnbaum was viewed by his students and followers. Two of the most notable members were Yossi Klein Halevi and Rabbi Avi Weiss, now

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ “What Can We Do for Soviet Jewry? A General Action Survey (flyer),” in Yeshiva University Archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, (New York: Indiana University Press, 2001), 89.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 93.

¹⁹⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, “Soviet Scientist Exiled for 5 Years,” October 14, 1970, *The New York Times* (article), in Yeshiva University Archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

¹⁹⁸ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, (New York: Indiana University Press, 2001), 174.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 175.

²⁰⁰ Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, (New York: Indiana University Press, 2001), 177.

prominent Jewish leaders. Currently, Yossi Klein Halevi is an Israeli journalist, who focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and other Jewish matters.²⁰¹ Avi Weiss is the founder of “Open-Orthodoxy”, following his disillusionment with the Rabbinical Council of America refusing to ordain Orthodox female rabbis.²⁰² Both activists experienced controversy, and also trace their activist origins to their involvement in the SSSJ, under the leadership of Jacob Birnbaum.

Yossi Klein Halevi described Birnbaum as an, “...imposing man in his late thirties, tall, with a Vandyke (sic) beard, a British accent, and a Russian-style fur hat, [who] appeared on the campus of Yeshiva University in upper Manhattan, and began knocking on dormitory doors.”²⁰³ Birnbaum certainly made an impression. Halevi specifically focused on how Birnbaum shaped Jewish political mobilization in the United States. During the Second World War, Birnbaum, and Halevi, by extension, viewed American Jews as highly assimilated. According to Birnbaum, for this reason, they opted out of politically mobilizing for specifically Jewish-related political issues. Birnbaum and the SSSJ changed this, and increased Jewish political participation, in Jewish-related causes. Halevi writes, “...Before the mid-1960s, American Jews were reluctant to pursue Jewish causes publicly for fear of rousing anti-Semitism and jeopardizing their inroads into American society.”²⁰⁴

Halevi thought Birnbaum’s passion for Soviet Jewry, was inspired by his passion for the European Jewry, which was completely devastated by the Holocaust. His politics had a redemptive quality to them, as if to suggest that while American Jewry behaved with abysmal indifference to the first tragedy, they now had a chance to make things right, and to save the Jews of the Soviet Union. Birnbaum was highly idealistic. Such a character trait is almost a necessity for any activist. Such passion and idealism were noted by Birnbaum’s followers, especially Halevi. Halevi writes, “As I soon discovered, Birnbaum was not conventionally charismatic...he almost never spoke at rallies, preferring the role of mentor... Birnbaum’s magnetism came from his faith in the eternity of the Jewish people and its certain triumph over evil.”²⁰⁵

Rabbi Avi Weiss also held Birnbaum in high regard, referring to him as the “unsung father of Jewish freedom.”²⁰⁶ Weiss joined the movement in 1970, and later worked as the national chair for 17 years.²⁰⁷ Much of his analysis of Birnbaum rests on biblical allusions, comparing him to the biblical Jacob. He argued that Birnbaum was not appreciated enough by the Jewish establishment as an advocate for the freedom of Soviet Jewry and as a pioneer in American-Jewish politics.²⁰⁸ Overall, Weiss stressed the fact that Birnbaum’s movement was effective in informing the masses of the plight of Soviet Jewry, and was effective in reshaping the attitude that American Jews had towards politics, and their role in the American political process. By invoking religious imagery and allusions during protests, and by leading his movement during the civil rights era, Weiss argues that Birnbaum made American Jews more politically outspoken, especially during the movement but also long after.

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was founded by Jacob Birnbaum in 1964.²⁰⁹ The first official gathering was held on April 27, 1964 at Columbia University. when about 250 Jewish students gathered to protest.²¹⁰ Birnbaum was then in his thirties, fresh from England and looked for students to influence, presumably because he

²⁰¹ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Biography," *Yossi-Klein-Halevi*, (2014), <http://www.yossikleinhalevi.com/bio>.

²⁰² Johanna R. Ginsberg, "Closing a Chapter on Open Orthodoxy," *New Jersey Jewish News*, (August 15, 2017), <https://njewishnews.timesofisrael.com/closing-a-chapter-on-open-orthodoxy/>.

²⁰³ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Avi Weiss, "Jacob Birnbaum Was the Unsung Father of Jewish Freedom," (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, April 13, 2014), <https://www.jta.org/2014/04/11/news-opinion/obituaries/jacob-birnbaum-was-the-unsung-father-of-jewish-freedom>.

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Mark, "Portrait Of The Rabbi As A Young Activist," (Jewish Week, June 16, 2015), <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/portrait-of-the-rabbi-as-a-young-activist/>.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964–1986," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* vol. 22, no. 1 (2012), 90.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

felt college-age students were highly idealistic. Birnbaum began by mobilizing students in Yeshiva University and Columbia University in New York, knocking on doors and convincing students to join his organization.²¹¹ Before going door to door, Jacob Birnbaum first approached the organization Yavne- an Orthodox student-interest group, which had multiple chapters across the United States. This was a student organization in Yeshiva University, and he asked if they could create a committee, specifically focused on Soviet Jewry. They agreed, and so his organization began.²¹²

Over time, students at various schools became involved in SSSJ activity, based on the structure that Birnbaum created. When talking to student activist, Glenn Richter, a co-leader of the SSSJ would tell them, “‘If you’re fine within your student group, your Hillel, that’s fine... Create a Soviet Jewry interest group within that organization. You already have the structure set up for it and don’t have to build one from scratch.’”²¹³ SSSJ was a centralized organization, and for this reason was able to provide structure to student groups on various campuses. While it is not inherently necessary for an organization to be centralized to be effective, the fact that the SSSJ was centralized came to be one of its greatest advantages.

The SSSJ was able to get the attention of the media and American Jewry by using a wide variety of tactics including holding vigils, a tactic also used by more established American-Jewish organizations.²¹⁴ The SSSJ had mass protests and demonstrations, with constant Jewish and Soviet motifs. Many events were deliberately created to mock the Soviet Union, such as their May Day Parade-explicitly mocking the joy with which May Day was celebrated in the Soviet Union.

This work was not solely performative. In addition to protesting and holding vigils, the SSSJ also distributed information leaflets, posters, and other educational materials to schools and synagogues across the country. The group also held letter writing campaigns, writing to Congress and also took out ads in newspapers. Additionally, the SSSJ created organizations in which members visited refuseniks in the Soviet Union and ran a database, dedicated to exposing the perils of Soviet Jewish life.²¹⁵

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was an organization which purposefully used references to Judaism when disseminating its message. These Jewish references were seen everywhere-from the language Birnbaum used in leaflets, to the themes surrounding various events. For instance, rather than simply having a “redemption march,” this organization had a “Geulah March.”²¹⁶ Geulah is Hebrew for “redemption,” which exemplifies how the slogans contained religious allusions. In other words, this march was redemptive, and in the context of this time period, was a chance for the Jewish-American generation of the 1960s, to be redeemed from the perceived passivity of the previous generation. The main slogan surrounding the movement was “Let My People Go,” a reference to the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt. Moreover, the SSSJ created political music with similar motifs. Commentator and activist Dennis Prager translated the Russian song “Otpusti Narod Moy” into English, which means “Let My People Go.”²¹⁷ Such songs were sang regularly by supporters and protestors at events. Another popular slogan, featured on many posters and advertisements was “I am my Brother’s Keeper,” a reference to the story of Cain and Abel.²¹⁸ During protests, Birnbaum led chants of “Ani Ma’anim” (“I Believe”) in Hebrew.²¹⁹

²¹¹ Avi Weiss, "Jacob Birnbaum Was the Unsung Father of Jewish Freedom," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, April 13, 2014,

<https://www.jta.org/2014/04/11/news-opinion/obituaries/jacob-birnbaum-was-the-unsung-father-of-jewish-freedom>.

²¹² Ibid, 89.

²¹³ Ibid, 93.

²¹⁴ Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and Lillian and Albert Small Jewish Museum, *Voices of the Vigil* (Washington, D.C: Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Lillian & Albert Small Jewish Museum, 2014), 18.

²¹⁵ Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964–1986," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol 22, no. 1 (2012), 90.

²¹⁶ Shaul Kelner, "Let My People Go," *Contexts* vol. 10, # 3 (2011): 72.

²¹⁷ Dennis Prager, "Otpusti Narod Moy-Let My People Go!", 1969 (sheet music with transliterated lyrics), in Yeshiva University Archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²¹⁸ Letter from Jacob Birnbaum to unknown recipient, February 16, 1966, in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

Chants of “Am Yisroel Chai” (“The Jewish People Lives”), were also very common.²²⁰ Politics and religion became intertwined. This was not a coincidence. In fact, using religious symbols when protesting, was itself an act of rebellion and opposition, given that the SSSJ was protesting the Soviet suppression of religious expression.²²¹

Organizer, Glenn Ritcher had much to say on why the SSSJ used religious imagery and language. Ritcher explained, “...this was really Yaakov Birnbaum’s...thing-to put in simple, overt Jewish symbolism.”²²² When explaining why this was the case, Ritcher said, “We saw what worked in demonstrations...You see what gets on TV and what doesn’t...the symbol itself was easy to understand.”²²³ Not only did the movement use overt Jewish symbolism, but it often did so when mocking cultural Soviet events. As mentioned earlier, the May Day protest was among the organization’s most famous events. However, rather than celebrating the unification of the workers of the world, this event protested the Soviet Union in its entirety, as well as the mistreatment of its Jewish population.

The SSSJ picketed Soviet events in New York and surrounded entrances to these events with demonstrations. When the Bolshoi Ballet, a Moiseyev Dance Company, and the Moscow Philharmonic came to perform in New York City, the SSSJ was present ready to protest.²²⁴ At these performances, students would pass around fake playbills, with the names of Russian Jews, who were detained and denied exit visas from the Soviet Union.²²⁵ Such activities were designed to deliberately humiliate the Soviet Union.

The use of overt religious symbolism was a tactic used to gain press attention and to effectively spread the ideology of the SSSJ. Moreover, this tactic was also used to instill Jewish pride in those who protested. The chants emphasized pride in belonging to the “Jewish nation,” and fighting for its members around the world. While much of this religious symbolism was a deliberate, political choice, one must also remember that most of those leading the group were traditionally religious Jews. Birnbaum himself was highly observant, though refrained from calling himself “Orthodox.” Avi Weiss himself later went on to become an Orthodox rabbi, and Glenn Ritcher, though raised in a secular home, became increasingly religious with age. Moreover, most of those in SSSJ, especially in its inception, were young, modern Orthodox Jewish men from New York.²²⁶ According to Jim Schwartz’s 1973 survey of the group, about 65% of its members self-identified as “intensely-Jewish.”²²⁷

The religious nature of the SSSJ can be explained by two factors. First, most of its members were religious Jews, who were well versed in Jewish theology, and were, therefore, well-equipped with the knowledge needed to add Jewish symbolism to the movement. Second, using overt Jewish symbolism in protests and events was effective in gaining attention from the media and press, and thus was effective in spreading the SSSJ’s message to American Jews around the country. American Jews only saw such religious and cultural passion from Baptist preachers fighting for civil rights for African Americans.²²⁸ By using a similar method, but replacing it with Jewish symbolism and cultural references, Birnbaum was able to make the movement to garner the attention of the press, and to inspire Jewish pride in what Birnbaum viewed as an otherwise highly dormant, and assimilated American-Jewish society.

In addition to using overt religious symbolism, Birnbaum’s effectiveness as a leader came from invoking the Holocaust, and, in turn, the passivity of American Jews during that time. The national conscience of American

²¹⁹ Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 81.

²²⁰ Shaul Kelner, “Let My People Go,” *Contexts* vol. 10, # 3 (2011):72.

²²¹Shaul Kelner, "Ritualized Protest and Redemptive Politics: Cultural Consequences of the American Mobilization to Free Soviet Jewry," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, vol.14, # 3 (2008): 13.

²²² Ibid, 13.

²²³ Ibid., 14.

²²⁴ Maya Balakirsky Katz, "Staging Protest: The New York Jewish Museum and the Soviet Jewry Movement," *American Jewish History*, vol. 96, no. 1 (2010): 62.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Jerry Goodman, "American Response to Soviet Antisemitism," *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol 70 (1969): 115.

²²⁷ Adam S. Ferziger, ““Outside the Shul”: The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964–1986,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol 22, # 1 (2012): 92.

²²⁸ Ibid., 89.

Jews concerning the Holocaust, was one of guilt. Birnbaum's politics, in this light, almost seemed redemptive. Some argue that this inaction was not solely out of a desire to assimilate, but also out of growing isolationism among Americans during the 1930s, and of growing anti-Semitism from Catholic and Protestant groups. The country was in an economic depression, which is often accompanied by an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment.²²⁹

Moreover, Birnbaum argued that the Jewish establishment during the 1930s was passive and focused more on securing rights for Jews as American citizens, rather than on focusing on the plight of Jews in different lands. For instance, in 1935, the American Jewish Committee refused to confront President Roosevelt over his inaction regarding the Nuremberg Laws, fearing that it would lead to conspiracy theories of Jews controlling the American government, and increasing anti-Semitism in the United States.²³⁰ While they viewed their parents as passive, the students in the SSSJ thought they could be active defenders of their people. Such language was as visible, as were the religious allusions used by SSSJ.

One poster, advertising an SSSJ event for February 27, 1966 deliberately used this rhetoric. The title said, "Wanted! A Way of Hope for 2 Million Soviet Jews!"²³¹ This poster was divided into three sections. The first section was below the title and read, "For the second time in a generation the American Jew has been called upon to insure the survival of the 'Jewish Way of Life'. We failed in our responsibility the first time, let us not fail again. If we were guilty of the sin of silence let us not sin again. The Jews of the Soviet Union are still faced with persecution by a government dedicated to erasing their cultural heritage, and depriving them of their right to show their traditional belief in God..."²³²

Birnbaum unabashedly criticized the perceived passivity of the previous generation of American Jews and stated that the current generation had the chance to redeem the mistakes of the past. He did so by comparing the Nazi Holocaust, to the practices of the Soviet Union towards its Jews. During a meeting, Birnbaum notably stated, "'We, who condemn silence and inaction during the Nazi Holocaust, dare we keep silent now?'"²³³

Yossi Klein Halevi said that Birnbaum was instrumental in changing how Jewish Americans viewed their involvement in politics. Halevi writes, "Before the mid-1960s, American Jews were reluctant to pursue Jewish causes publicly for fear of rousing anti-Semitism and jeopardizing their inroads into American society."²³⁴ Rather than continuing the trend of staying dormant to avoid increasing anti-Semitism, Birnbaum encouraged American Jews to mobilize. This was not only effective in achieving his goal of educating American Jews on the mistreatment of Soviet Jews but was also effective in changing the relationship between American Jews and politics.

Not only was Birnbaum effective in how he presented the movement, and in the rhetoric, he used, he was also a highly methodical and organized political mobilizer. To have a successful movement, emotional and impressive visuals alone are not enough. The movement implementing such changes must be centralized and organizationally sound. By creating a specific mission statement and adhering to it, Birnbaum proved his organizational abilities. These abilities, and capabilities as a political leader were also seen in how he networked with individuals to increase visibility for the SSSJ.

Birnbaum was effective in attracting new members to the SSSJ. In part, this was due to his use of language, and references to the Holocaust. His effectiveness also came from his letter-writing campaign, in which he wrote to multiple people, organizations, and committees to participate in his events, and to contribute to them. When first forming the SSSJ, he did not simply assemble a group of people with like-minded views. Rather, he addressed an

²²⁹ Fred A. Lazin, "'We Are Not One': American Jews, Israel, and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs, Michigan Publishing, vol. 16 (2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.13469761.0016.001>.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ "Wanted! A Way of Hope for 3 Million Soviet Jews!" (poster), February 1966, in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

²³⁴ Ibid.

already existing organization, Yavne, knowing that an already existing and functioning organization would be of more use, when spreading the ideals of the SSSJ.²³⁵ His successes in networking did not end there. In the early days of the movement, he asked Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a rabbi known for his spiritual songs which appealed to many young Jews internationally, to compose a "Soviet Jewry theme song."²³⁶ This was an effective form of delegation. Birnbaum was able to utilize the unique talents of various individuals to spread his ideals.

Birnbaum also wrote mass letters to various establishments, with the help of Glenn Ritcher, and other leaders of the organization. Letters were written daily. In a letter written to William Kurland, Birnbaum seemed to be extending an invitation to him, while resolving a sort of conflict. Birnbaum writes, "Dear Mr. Kurland, When we agreed to sponsor the East Flatbush Soviet Jewry rally, we did so on the understanding that it should be a community rally and not confined to any one group or party. I understand that the personal invitation to you, Fay Haiekin and your colleagues had long since been extended. Nevertheless, I am herewith extending our formal invitation..."²³⁷ From this letter, one gains a sense of how Birnbaum interacted with others. It is evident that he made all efforts to attract as many people as he could to the SSSJ's movement.

While standing his ground, he could maintain a neutral, if not friendly demeanor, and include all, even those who disagreed with him to participate in SSSJ-led activities. One can assume that there was a dispute between Birnbaum and Mr. Kurland over the nature of the event. Nevertheless, Birnbaum not only defended the activity, but he also encouraged Mr. Kurland and others to participate in the event. Rather than being a staunch ideologue and excluding all who disagreed with him, Birnbaum was able to maintain the integrity of his position without alienating opponents. He was a more effective activist than Meir Kahane, by using less sensationalist tactics. While both were anti-establishment leaders, with similar views, Birnbaum sought to include even those, who disagreed with him. Kahane was more focused on keeping the purity of his ideology, no matter the cost.

Birnbaum wrote letters to invite others to various events and protests as a form of delegation. On February 16, 1966, Birnbaum wrote a letter inviting the recipient (unknown), to an event, encouraging him to bring banners and flyers.²³⁸ Again, in this letter, Birnbaum was not only mobilizing other people and organizations to come to protests, but he is also effectively delegating, and telling the recipient what he can do to help. Other SSSJ leaders, like Glenn Ritcher, also participated in this mass letter-writing campaign.

Birnbaum's SSSJ was a highly organized and centralized organization, with a definitive goal, and a clear method of achieving it. The SSSJ had a four-part plan. The first part of this plan was directly addressed to the American-Jewish establishment and American Jews themselves. Halevi describes this process as, "rous[ing] a dormant American Jewry, working at the grassroots level, while simultaneously pressuring the establishment."²³⁹ Birnbaum wanted to convince American Jewry to pressure the establishment, because the establishment had the resources necessary to create tangible change.

The second element of this plan was to expose the Soviet Union and degrade it in the eyes of the American populace.²⁴⁰ This tactic was seen in the May Day Parade, and when SSSJ participants picketed Soviet ballets and performances in New York City. Humiliating the Soviet Union was necessary for the American public to disavow this nation as one associated with human rights violations, rather than another respectable nation. Since such

²³⁵ Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964–1986," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol 22, # 1 (2012): 89.

²³⁶ Avi Weiss, "Jacob Birnbaum Was the Unsung Father of Jewish Freedom," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, (April 13, 2014),

<https://www.jta.org/2014/04/11/news-opinion/obituaries/jacob-birnbaum-was-the-unsung-father-of-jewish-freedom>.

²³⁷ Letter from Jacob Birnbaum to William Kurland, February 15, 1966, in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²³⁸ Letter from Jacob Birnbaum to unknown recipient, February 16, 1966, in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²³⁹ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

campaigning took place during the Cold War, the American public at large was more than prepared to absorb information denigrating and exposing the Soviet Union.

The third element of his four-part plan was to appeal to the American government, as the “protector” of Soviet Jewry.²⁴¹ Appealing to Washington policy makers would give the movement more legitimacy and resources, especially since that the SSSJ prided itself on being an anti-establishment group which generally meant it often lacked necessary resources. While defining itself as such, the SSSJ made a point to win over American Jewry, to pressure the establishment, and to convince the policy makers of Washington D.C, to be the “defenders” of Soviet Jewry.

The fourth and final element of this plan was to lift the spirit and morale of Soviet Jewry.²⁴² This was of real help, as it gave many refuseniks the hope and strength to persevere, knowing that their struggles were not falling on deaf ears. The SSSJ was not the only organization to do so. Various establishment Jewish-American organizations also held vigils and rallies to show support and solidarity. Many activists personally traveled to the Soviet Union to speak with refuseniks. Furthermore agencies organized to help Soviet emigres, once they were in the country.²⁴³ In this respect, the SSSJ shared much in common with various other organizations.

Not only was the mission statement of the SSSJ organized, but the information was highly methodical. An extensive database was kept, pertaining to information on Soviet Jewry. The SSSJ distributed information leaflets, describing in detail the wrongdoings of the Soviet Union towards its Jewish population.

One leaflet features a list of actions different activists can take and is organized by geographical location. The leaflet is called, “What Can we do for Soviet Jewry? A General Action Survey.”²⁴⁴ There are three main headings, which read “In the Soviet Union”, “In the United States and Canada,” and “Action Outline.” The actions, recommended for activists in the Soviet Union are centered around welcoming visiting American-Jewish activists and sending care packages to needy families, which were distributed by various rabbinic groups.²⁴⁵ The recommendations for activists in the United States and Canada were three-fold. The first was to pressure Ottawa and Washington; the second was to disseminate information and gain publicity; and the third, was to hold multiple rallies and demonstrations.²⁴⁶

There was an “action outline”, with a list of 7 things that activists and SSSJ chapters must participate in, including writing songs, training speakers, holding seminars, and organizing materials.²⁴⁷ When reading though the general action outline, the reason for Birnbaum’s success becomes evident. Rather than attempting to have this group do everything, Birnbaum successfully delegated tasks to others, and created a format for other SSSJ chapters to be self-sufficient.

In addition to distributing general action surveys, the SSSJ also distributed information leaflets, which advertised upcoming protests and demonstrations. In other words, after reading the incendiary information, his audience was given a specific time and place to showcase its frustration at this injustice, at the promoted rallies and demonstrations. A widely distributed leaflet, called “Are We Guilty of the Sin of Silence?” explains the living conditions of Soviet Jewry, benefits of protesting, and instructions for those wishing to get involved. The leaflet ends dramatically, saying, “We must speak out for those who cannot!”²⁴⁸

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and Lillian and Albert Small Jewish Museum, *Voices of the Vigil*, (Washington, D.C: Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Lillian & Albert Small Jewish Museum, 2014), 50.

²⁴⁴ “What Can We Do? A General Action Survey” (poster), in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ “Are We Guilty of the Sin of Silence” (brochure), in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

The way this information was being disseminated, was organized and appropriately compartmentalized. Moreover, the information was being presented in a highly strategic manner. First, the reader is informed of the mistreatment of Jews in the Soviet Union. He reads of the “mass synagogue closures,” “prohibition of Jewish education,” “destruction of Yiddish culture,” and “overt anti-Semitism.”²⁴⁹ Once the reader is informed of this mass injustice, he is encouraged to take direct action through protest, and is told the benefits of doing so.²⁵⁰ The final page of this leaflet, features an allusion to religion in which it reads, “I am my brother’s keeper,” referencing the story of Cain and Abel.²⁵¹ Even the manner in which information was presented was highly strategic and effective. Overall, Birnbaum was an effective mobilizer not only because of the language he used, and the passion with which he advocated for Soviet Jewry. He was an exceptional leader because he, and the SSSJ, were highly organized. He delegated properly and networked efficiently.

In addition to studying how the SSSJ disseminated its message, one must also understand his movement within the context of the Civil Rights Movement, and the growing acceptance of anti-establishment organizations. Situated in the mid-1960s, the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was not out of place, since many were following the Civil Rights Movement, in which activists were fighting for equal voting and education rights for African-Americans. Birnbaum himself had much to say on the matter. Halevi recalls a speech by Birnbaum, in which he exclaims, “ ‘Just as we, as human beings and as Jews, are conscious of the wrongs suffered by the Negro and we fight for his betterment, so must we come to feel in ourselves the silent, strangled pain of so many of our Russian brethren... We, who condemn silence and inaction during the Nazi Holocaust, dare we keep silent now?’ ”²⁵²

By associating the plight of Soviet Jewry with the mistreatment of African Americans, Birnbaum was able to appeal to those, who would otherwise have no interest in the matter. Many American Jews were active in defending the rights of African Americans during the civil rights era. By associating this movement, with one they were familiar with, the SSSJ seemed like another civil rights movement, in which many would want to participate. Moreover, given that the 1960s are most remembered for their counter-culture, anti-establishment nature only made the SSSJ even more appealing. Non-Jews, who supported African American civil rights, could find resonance in the SSSJ message and join the cause.

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was deliberately created as an anti-establishment organization. In part, this was due to Birnbaum’s disgust with the passivity of the American Jewish establishment, not having done much during the Holocaust. The creation of this group as anti-establishment was a clear statement, saying that the current establishment failed, and this organization was going to do what should have been done. Many in the SSSJ felt undercut by various establishment groups, like NCSJ (National Coalition Supporting Soviet Jewry), GNYCSJ (Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry), and NJCRAC (National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council).²⁵³ Specifically, they felt that they were not being given chance to express their views, the same way that establishment groups were able to. Moreover, the SSSJ was composed of mostly religious and traditional modern Orthodox Jews, who were more politically Zionist, than many in establishment groups. This caused much tension after the Six-Day War, in which SSSJ members almost uniformly supported building projects in Gaza and the West Bank, while many establishment activists did not.²⁵⁴

Birnbaum and the SSSJ did not only compete with establishment organizations but competed with anti-establishment ones at the same time. The case of Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League is among the most contentious. Originally a member of the SSSJ, Kahane later disavowed the group, focusing his efforts on this own organization, the Jewish Defense League (JDL).²⁵⁵ The SSSJ viewed the JDL as thuggish and extreme, while the JDL viewed the SSSJ as uncommitted to the cause of Soviet Jewry. In 1964, Birnbaum invited Kahane to speak

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

²⁵² Yossi Klein Halevi, “Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry,” *Azure*, no.17 (Spring 2004), <http://azure.org.il/include/print.php?id=221>.

²⁵³ Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 204.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 208.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 207.

at an SSSJ event, but was furious when Kahane used the event to promote the JDL.²⁵⁶ Kahane viewed the SSSJ as disingenuous, referring to it as a “false” activist group.²⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, despite their differences, Kahane was still present at various SSSJ events, even after the incident in 1964. On February 16, 1966, Birnbaum wrote a letter inviting an organization to come to a protest and assist in creating flyers and banners. Next to the address, there is a list of all those involved in the event. The first line reads, “Jacob Birnbaum, National Coordinator.”²⁵⁸ Beneath that reads, “Glenn Ritcher, New York Coordinator.”²⁵⁹ Several lines below, Meir Kahane appears on the list of notable people attending, right above Rabbi Dr. Gilbert Klaperman, and below Professor Irving Greenberg.²⁶⁰ Despite being fierce critics of each other’s movements, both Kahane and Birnbaum supported the same cause. This could explain such cooperation. Birnbaum’s appeal lay in his relative moderate nature. He was able to effectively run an anti-establishment organization, without being as polarizing as Kahane. He was passionate and ideological, without being extreme. Therein, lay the appeal.

Jacob Birnbaum founded in the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry on April 27, 1964. What started off as thirty-something-year-old man, knocking on college dormitories to recruit members, quickly became the most successful of the anti-establishment groups advocating for Soviet Jewry.²⁶¹ Birnbaum was able to lead his movements as one advocating for civil rights in the civil rights era. He networked and mobilized with countless leaders and experts to create songs, protests, branches and disseminate information. Without Jacob Birnbaum, the SSSJ would have ceased to exist, and the advocacy for Soviet Jewry among American Jews would have been completely different and less effective.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Letter from Jacob Birnbaum to unknown recipient, February 16, 1966, in Yeshiva University archives, Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Publications Collection, 1256211.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Jerry Goodman, “American Response to Soviet Antisemitism,” *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 70 (1969): 115.

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