'One must defend oneself as a Jew': Hannah Arendt's German as a Language of Refuge

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‘ONE MUST DEFEND ONESELF AS A JEW’: HANNAH ARENDT’S GERMAN AS A LANGUAGE OF REFUGE

On 28 October 1964, the political thinker Hannah Arendt participated in a West German television interview with Günter Gaus. Forced to leave Germany during the 1930s, Arendt had, by the time of the interview, lived in the United States for twenty-three years. The wide-ranging interview includes Arendt’s most detailed discussion of her own early life and how she conceived her Jewish identity, as well as reflections on the definition of philosophy, the rise of NSDAP power, and the controversy surrounding her recently published *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). However, the section of the interview that has attracted most critical attention follows Gaus asking Arendt ‘ob Ihnen das Europa der Vorhitlerzeit [. . .] fehlt’, and what remains of that time — and what has been lost. Arendt replies:

> Das Europa der Vorhitlerzeit? Ich habe keine Sehnsucht, das kann ich nicht sagen. Was ist geblieben? Geblieben ist die Sprache.
>
> GAUS: Und das bedeutet viel für Sie?
>
> ARENDT: Sehr viel. Ich habe immer bewußt abgelehnt, die Muttersprache zu verlieren. [. . .] Die deutsche Sprache jedenfalls ist das Wesentliche, was geblieben ist, und was ich auch bewußt immer gehalten habe.
>
> GAUS: Auch in der bittersten Zeit?
>
> ARENDT: Immer. Ich habe mir gedacht, was soll man denn machen? Es ist ja nicht die deutsche Sprache gewesen, die verrückt geworden ist. Und zweitens: es gibt keinen Ersatz für die Muttersprache.[1]

Two decades after the cataclysmic events of the 1940s, Arendt’s remarks nevertheless intervened in the debate as to what it would mean for Jewish writers to continue to write in German following Nazism and the Shoah. Other notable voices in this discussion include Theodor Adorno, who justified his ‘return’ to the language with reference to his relationship with German as his native tongue, and to the fact that ‘die deutsche Sprache [hat] offenbar eine besondere Wahlverwandtschaft zur Philosophie’.[2] Paul Celan’s summary formulation suggested that German ‘ging hindurch und gab keine Worte her für das, was geschah; aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen’; his own stretching, twisting, and remoulding of the language was a testament to this ‘going

[1] Hannah Arendt and Günter Gaus, ‘Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache’, *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg Fernsehen ‘Zur Person’ Interview-Archiv* <https://www.rbb-online.de/zurperson/interview_archiv/arendt_hannah.html> [accessed 26 February 2024], hereafter WB. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text. Throughout this article, quotations from Arendt’s works are given in the language of the respective work’s first publication.

[2] Theodor Adorno, ‘Auf die Frage: Was ist Deutsch?’, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. x.2, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 691–701 (pp. 699–700).

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through'.[3] Yet the question of what it might mean for a Jewish writer to use German did not suddenly appear following National Socialism's transformation of the language.[4] As Marc Volovici writes, 'the intensity and multivalence of the responses to German's Nazification had to do with German's multiple roles in modern Jewish history'.[5] The *continued* use of German by Jewish writers may not have been such a vexed question if it had not already had a history of being vexed. Volovici's wittily titled *German as a Jewish Problem* details the multiple roles, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, that German played in 'internal' (Jewish) debates around Jewish nationalism well beyond the borders of Germany or Austria-Hungary, showing that 'Jewish German' exceeds the context of 'German Jewish' experience. By contrast, Robert Michael notes that Nazi slogans and propaganda could draw on a long German-language literary tradition of antisemitism, most prominently in the work of Martin Luther — a key figure in shaping both German literature and early modern antisemitism.[6] German has thus long been both a language shaped by and giving form to Judaeophobia, and a language of specifically Jewish intellectual life.

Arendt's response to Gaus must also be read in terms of her own writing and thought. Owing to her conceptualization of 'identity', Arendt considered her Jewishness to be one of 'the indisputable facts of my life' — not because of pride or a metaphysical significance of 'Jewishness', but because it was for her an example of 'what has been *given* and not *made* [. . .] *physei* and not *nomō* [by nature and not by convention]'.[7] Unlike citizenship — culturally 'made' and thus innately political, in the sense of being formed by the business of political actions and decisions — Arendt's Jewishness was for her simply a given. She never considered her identity as a 'German' as anything other than an aleatory participation within the nation state in which she happened to have been born: 'Ich, zum Beispiel, glaube nicht, daß ich mich je als Deutsche — im Sinne der Volkszugehörigkeit, nicht der Staatsangehörigkeit, wenn ich mal den Unterschied machen darf — betrachtet habe.'[8] The fact that her first language was German was equally undeniable yet devoid of innate significance. For example, in her speech on receiving Denmark's Sonning Prize in 1975, Arendt matter-of-factly introduced herself by stating: 'I am, as you

[3] Paul Celan, 'Ansprache anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der Freien Hansestadt Bremen', in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. III (Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 185–86 (p. 186).

[4] Victor Klemperer, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1947; repr. Reclam, 2020); Robert Michael and Karin Doerr, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich* (Bloomsbury, 2002).

[5] Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020), p. 227.

[6] Robert Michael, 'The Tradition of Anti-Jewish Language', in *Nazi-Deutsch*, pp. 1–25 (p. 16).

[7] Hannah Arendt, 'The Eichmann Controversy: A Letter to Gershom Scholem', in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman (Schocken, 2007), pp. 465–71 (p. 466).

[8] 'Was bleibt?'.

know, a Jew, *feminini generis* as you can see, born and educated in Germany as, no doubt, you can hear' — suggesting that her Jewishness, her gender, and her first language were all simply 'indisputable facts', requiring acknowledgement but devoid of innate political meaning.[9]

Arendt was well placed to understand one's everyday language as merely a matter of circumstance, since she was compelled to move between languages several times. As National Socialist power consolidated in the 1930s, Arendt left Germany for France, before being compelled to leave again, arriving in New York in 1941. She settled in the USA for the rest of her life, gaining US citizenship in 1950. While her language(s) of daily life may have been imposed upon her, Arendt wrote and published in German, French, and English.[10] Although all of her major works from the 1950s onwards were written in English, Arendt's self-translations of these works for their German editions arguably constitute redrafts, given their differences.[11]Arendt also read Latin and ancient Greek, and her *Denktagebuch* provides evidence that she wrote for and to herself in all five of these languages, for example quoting Plato or Kant in English if the Greek or German editions were not to hand.[12] Arendt's multilingualism was not that of the central European invested in specifically Jewish culture, but that of the European intellectual who would expect to read Plato, Augustine, or Pascal 'in the original' — and later, the obligatory multilingualism of the forced migrant.[13]

With these multiple contexts in mind — Arendt's understanding of her

[9] Hannah Arendt, 'Prologue', in *Responsibility and Judgement* (Schocken, 2003), pp. 3–14 (p. 4). On Arendt's understanding of (her own) gender, see e.g. Joanne Cutting-Grey, 'Hannah Arendt, Feminism and the Politics of Alterity: "What will we lose if we win?"', *Hypatia*, 8.1 (1993), pp. 35–54; Jennifer Ring, *The Political Consequences of Thinking: Gender and Judaism in the Work of Hannah Arendt* (State University of New York Press, 1998); Kimberly Maslin, 'The Gender-Neutral Feminism of Hannah Arendt', *Hypatia*, 28.3 (2013), pp. 585–601.

[10] Arendt's work in French is less extensive than that in German or English, but includes, for example, the articles collected in *The Jewish Writings*, pp. 29–37.

[11] A useful sample of comparisons between key passages is included in Marie Luise Knott, *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt*, trans. by David Dollenmayer (Other Press, 2013), pp. 97–110.

[12] Barbara Cassin, *La Nostalgie: quand donc est-on chez soi? Ulysse, Énée, Arendt* (Éditions Autrement, 2013), pp. 115 and 146. On Arendt's multilingualism, see Knott, pp. 35–53.

[13] Although Arendt began to learn Hebrew, her enthusiasm clearly waned; in a letter to Heinrich Blücher of 8 August 1936 she wrote of Hebrew: 'letzteres nach all meinen sehr trüben Erfahrungen bezüglich Erlernung keine Sprache, sondern ein nationales Unglück ist!' (Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher, *Briefe 1936–1968* (Piper, 2013), p. 39) In another letter dated sixteen days later, Arendt claims: 'Ich bin die einzige Jüdin weit und breit, die Jiddisch gelernt hat', although her actual familiarity with the language is not completely clear (Arendt and Blücher, *Briefe*, p. 58). For example, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin, 2022), p. 39, she writes that Yiddish is 'basically an old German dialect written in Hebrew letters, [which] can be understood by any German-speaking person who has mastered a few dozen Hebrew words', which seems a somewhat dismissive description of a language with its own distinct literary tradition. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (*Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 2nd edn (Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 118–19) mentions Arendt studying Hebrew under tutor Chanan Klenbort, but, regarding Yiddish, writes only that Arendt 'did not look down upon' the language.

Jewishness as a simple 'fact' rather than the basis of collective belonging; her multilingualism, both pragmatic and scholarly; and the debate as to the status of German for post-Shoah Jewish writers — it may appear somewhat surprising that, in the interview with Gaus, Arendt seems to claim a loyalty to German that goes beyond it simply being the language with which she was most comfortable or familiar. It is not immediately clear why German, of all languages, should be the one that 'bedeutet viel' for her. In practical terms, at the time of the interview Arendt had lived outside Germany for over thirty years, longer than she ever lived in the country. Moreover, Arendt's comments in this interview — tellingly published under the title 'Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache' — may appear to contradict her own wider thinking. It appears strange that Arendt, a writer so concerned with the connection between thought and the precise words used, would apparently disregard the entire question of what it might mean to speak German after the Shoah. In footage of the interview, after asking 'was soll man denn machen? Es ist ja nicht die deutsche Sprache gewesen, die verrückt geworden ist', Arendt shrugs and laughs, as if the very question is absurd.[14]

Beyond Arendt's apparently uncomplicated loyalty to German seeming to contradict her own wider thought, she even appears to contradict herself within the interview. Suggesting that the difference between her mother tongue and another language is exemplified by the fact that she has committed many German poems to memory, Arendt says: 'die bewegen sich da immer irgendwie im Hinterkopf — *in the back of my mind* —; das ist natürlich nie wieder zu erreichen' (*sic*; WB). Footage shows Arendt not fully pronouncing 'im Hinterkopf' and chuckling as she says 'in the back of my mind', as if she is grasping for the right words.[15] Arendt uses a phrase from English, a language from which she claims 'ich habe die Distanz nie verloren', to explain something deeply intimate about her relationship with German — seemingly undermining her own point as she makes it.

I want to suggest that Arendt's connection to German is, in fact, completely in keeping with her wider philosophical and political thought. Her adherence to German has little to do with nostalgia, as several critics have claimed, but is an assertion of her status as a Jewish refugee. She does intervene in the debate represented by Adorno and Celan, but from a very different perspective — one that, as her phrase 'in the back of my mind' shows, takes account of her multilingualism even as it appears to disavow other languages. Reading between 'Was bleibt' and the 1943 essay 'We Refugees', one of Arendt's first publications in English, reveals that it is the intersection between Jewishness and refugeedom that makes linguistic specificity so important. To continue to

[14] 'Hannah Arendt', *Zur Person: Günter Gaus im Gespräch* (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg Fernsehen) (1964) <https://youtu.be/dVSRJC4KAiE> [accessed 20 February 2024].

[15] Ibid., 38:00–38:04.

speak German is for Arendt not only to make the claim that the language may belong to those forced to leave Germany as much as to the Nazi government. It is, I argue, specifically to underscore and defend Arendt *as* a Jew and *as* a refugee — not as 'a German'. Speaking 'as a Jew' was central to Arendt's own political action, and her understanding of what 'political action' might entail. Such speaking and acting was made possible, I suggest, through Arendt's relationship with the German language.

In *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, the same text in which his critique of 'Was bleibt' appears, Jacques Derrida describes how the Algerian Jewish community in which he was raised spoke only French, the language of the colonizer, and thus had no 'langue de retraite qui aurait assuré [. . .] un élément d'intimité, la protection d'un "chez-soi"'.[16] I suggest that Arendt's attachment to German is one form of what a 'language of refuge' may look like. This would not be an anti-Derridean language truly of 'one's own'. Rather, a 'language of refuge' would be a relationship with language as forging 'home' — 'home' being a place from which to go forth into the world. A language of refuge, then, is not a linguistic home as shelter and retreat from the world, but home as the basis of mobility and action. In Arendt's terms, such going into the world through speech — language — is what makes politics possible. Before turning to the practical political situation described in 'We Refugees', let us first establish the relationship between 'home' and language in Arendt's wider thought.

'Wie ein Heimatgefühl'

Elizabeth Young-Bruehl quotes the Gaus interview on the first page of her biography of Arendt, claiming that 'German was Hannah Arendt's *Heimat* until the end of her life'.[17] Although *Heimat* is an infamously polysemous word, it seems inappropriate to characterize Arendt's relationship with German as a sense of hom*eland* or home-as-dwelling. Arendt would understand a version of home far less linked to place — in both her more strictly philosophical work, emphasizing relationships between subjects over a subject's relationship with 'ground', and in the practicalities of her own lived experience of forced migration. These two modes of thought may be mapped to her more 'academic' and 'essayistic' work. This is not to draw any hard-and-fast distinction between the two, but to examine the 'Spannung' that exists 'zwischen dem Menschen, insofern er ein philosophierendes, und dem Menschen, insofern er ein handelndes Wesen ist' (WB). Although Arendt rejects the label of philosopher in 'Was bleibt' — despite Gaus's attempts to convince her

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la Prothèse d'origine* (Galilée, 1996), pp. 90–91.

[17] Young-Bruehl, p. 3.

otherwise — this appears to be largely because, for Arendt, the philosopher 'steht nicht neutral der Politik gegenüber' (WB). As we shall see, it is precisely Arendt's politics, her lack of neutrality, that forms the tension between her philosophy and lived experience, between thinking and action, *in which* her understanding of language and home is situated.

Turning first to Arendt's 'philosophical' conception of home necessitates the observation that Arendt's erstwhile mentor was the philosopher most associated with a notion of *Heimat*. Marc Crépon writes that 'it is in Heidegger's work above all that [the] ontologicization of *Heimat* is most fully developed'.[18] Philosophy and politics become inextricable for Heidegger owing to his 'politics of the earth [. . .] ontological in the sense that earth becomes the site for the unfolding of basic human possibilities, the matrix or *da* within and against which *Dasein* instantiates itself as a particular, determinate, political being'.[19] Heidegger's work can be seen as the most philosophically important merging of *Grund* — philosophical 'ground', the basis of thought — and *Boden* — physical ground, soil. Regardless of whether his later work is 'much closer to [. . .] contemporary philosophies of place than Nazi blood-and-soil ideology',[20] Heidegger's thought is situated within the widespread cultural anxiety around a potential loss of connection between *Grund*, *Boden*, and *Vaterland* (or *patrie*) that was such a concern throughout German and French intellectual culture between the 1920s and 1950s.[21] Although the discourse of 'groundlessness' saw contributions from writers as diverse as André Gide, Nazi ideologue Richard Walter Darré, and Simone Weil, as Sarah Hammerschlag has shown, such discourse was intimately linked to the idea of Jews as nationless, 'rootless' people — both culturally and ontologically *heimatlos*.[22]

The discourse of 'groundedness' was so linked with anti-Jewish tropes that it is unsurprising that Arendt rejected it. Indeed, it seems almost crude to note that Heidegger, a member of the NSDAP, could afford to understand 'home' as *Heimat* fixed in the soil of Germany, while Arendt had no such

[18] Marc Crépon, 'Heimat', in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by Barbara Cassin and others (Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 430–32 (p. 430).

[19] Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism and the Greeks* (Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 14.

[20] Thomas Rohkrämer, 'Martin Heidegger, National Socialism and Environmentalism', in *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich*, ed. by Franz-Joseph Brüggemeier and others (Ohio State University Press, 2005), pp. 171–203 (p. 197).

[21] Christy Wampole, *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), esp. pp. 111–54. This is not to say that concern around 'groundlessness' was the only discourse of *Heimat* during this period; see e.g. Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat — A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

[22] Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

luxury. Yet Arendt makes no mention of her lived experience in her dismissal of *Bodenständigkeit*, possibly her most emphatic rejection of Heidegger:

> Heidegger hat dann später in Vorlesungen versucht, seinen isolierten Selbsten in mythologisierenden Unbegriffen wie Volk und Erde wieder eine gemeinsame Grundlage nachträglich unterzuschieben. Es ist evident, daß derartige Konzeptionen nur aus Philosophie heraus- und in irgend einen naturalistischen Aberglauben hineinführen können. Wenn es nicht zum Begriff des Menschen gehört, daß er mit anderen, die seinesgleichen sind, die Erde zusammen bewohnt, bleibt nur eine mechanische Versöhnung, in der den atomisierten Selbsten eine ihrem Begriff wesentlich heterogene Grundlage gegeben wird.[23]

Rejecting both the focus on the individual and a sense of 'groundedness', Arendt has no interest in emplacement. In her centralization of plurality — existence as being a human among and alongside other humans being (*sic*) — *Mitsein* for Arendt takes priority over *Bodenständigkeit*. As Seyla Benhabib writes: 'Arendt restored "being-in-the-world-with", or the condition of human plurality, to the centre of our experience of worldliness.'[24] In Arendt's thought, 'home', ontologically or metaphysically, cannot be about place.

It is therefore perhaps surprising that several critiques of 'Was bleibt', addressing the question of Arendt's continued attachment to German, read Arendt as conceptualizing the language in terms of a home*land*. For example, Derrida writes:

> en heideggerienne qu'elle reste à cet égard [. . .] Arendt ré-affirme la langue maternelle, c'est-à-dire une langue à laquelle on prête une vertu d'originarité. 'Refoulée' ou non, cette langue reste l'essence ultime du sol, la fondation du sens, l'inaliénable propriété qu'on transporte avec soi.[25]

Donatella Di Cesare concurs that 'in thinking and feeling the mother tongue as the unique and sacred place of the origin, Arendt proves to be deeply Heideggerian', suggesting that Arendt 'thinks of language in the Heideggerian sense as dwelling, where, despite everything, one sojourns and inhabits'.[26] Both Derrida and Di Cesare prove themselves rather more Heideggerian than Arendt herself, in apparently being unable to countenance a conception of 'home' that does not rely on autochthony. Barbara Cassin takes a similar position in writing that 'c'est la langue maternelle, et non pas la terre de ses pères, qui constitue la patrie'.[27] Cassin positions Arendt as a stereotypical refugee, one who has been forced from her home and longs for a return,

[23] Hannah Arendt, 'Was ist Existenz-Philosophie?', in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. III, ed. by Barbara Hahn (Wallstein, 2019), pp. 41–63 (p. 58).

[24] Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Sage, 1996), p. 50.

[25] Derrida, *Monolinguisme*, pp. 110–11.

[26] Donatella Ester Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz*, trans. by Niall Keane (State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 108–09.

[27] Cassin, p. 86.

with her language a fetishized subject of displaced homesickness: 'Arendt, en tant que réfugiée penseur du politique, est nostalgique de l'allemand et exilée d'une langue, entre autres.'[28] Leaving aside the fact that Arendt is by no means 'exiled' from German — the interview with Gaus was conducted in that language — *nostos,* linguistic or otherwise, is impossible in Arendt's thought, as 'home' would not be some*where* to which she could return.

Inasmuch as Arendt develops a concept of 'home', it is to do with thinking. In her most detailed account of what it is to think, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt cites the Platonic dialogue *Hippias Major*. At 'the end of the dialogue, the moment of going home', Socrates says that Hippias is 'blissfully fortunate' in comparison with himself, 'who at home is awaited by a very obnoxious fellow who always cross-examines him' — that is, Socrates himself. Thus, writes Arendt, 'when Socrates goes home, he is not alone, he is *by* himself'.[29] The potential Anglo-German pun here is revealing. Socrates is both 'by' himself, as in, 'next to' himself and able to dispute with himself as if with another, and '*bei*' himself — that is, at his own home. To 'go home' is to be able to continue to think. Yet Arendt also details how

> generalization is inherent in every thought, even though that thought is insisting on the universal primacy of the particular. In other words, the 'essential' is what is applicable everywhere, and this 'everywhere' that bestows on thought its specific weight is spatially speaking a 'nowhere'. The thinking ego, moving among universals, among invisible essences, is, strictly speaking, nowhere; it is homeless in an emphatic sense.[30]

Thinking itself cannot be thought of as 'home', as it is by necessity home*less*, unmoored from any specific *Grund*. While it may unduly romanticize Arendt's real experience of refugeedom to call her thinking 'exiled', it is at the least restless, migratory. Thinking is, however, essential to 'being at home', which for Arendt meant *understanding* in the specific sense of discernment and the ability to judge. Understanding, a particular mode of thinking, is 'an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world'.[31] In 'Was bleibt', Arendt suggests that it is mutual understanding within the plural human world that allows for home: 'Ich will verstehen. Und wenn andere Menschen verstehen, im selben Sinne, wie ich verstanden habe — dann gibt mir das eine Befriedigung, wie ein Heimatgefühl' (WB). If 'going home' is thinking, as Socrates illustrates, 'feeling at home' is being understood. Attempting

[28] Ibid., p. 105.
[29] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt Brace, 1978), p. 188.
[30] Ibid., p. 199.
[31] Hannah Arendt, 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)', in *Essays in Understanding*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (Schocken, 1994), pp. 307–27 (p. 308).

understanding is essential as 'every single person needs to be reconciled to a world in which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger', without *Grund* or *Boden*.[32] To *be understood*, as Arendt expresses it, is to converse with others and thus to be with others: *Mit-sein*.[33]

The movement from thinking to politics, from 'home' to the world, comes through language as speech. In this world of plural human individuals, action and speech are inextricable for Arendt as that which makes politics happen: 'if action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals'.[34] Language allows 'going home', thinking, to become 'feeling at home', being understood, through participation with others in the expression of ideas through speech in the *polis*. Language, the condition of home's possibility, actualizes plurality and thus allows for politics.

Language is thus intimately connected with Arendt's 'philosophical' understanding of home. Yet we are left with the question of why Arendt insists on her connection to the *German* language specifically in 'Was bleibt', when she had spent much of her life speaking, studying, and writing in other languages. Suggesting that Arendt maintained German simply because it was her first language disregards her insistence, after the Shoah, that 'es ist ja nicht die deutsche Sprache gewesen, die verrückt geworden ist. Und zweitens: Es gibt keinen Ersatz für die Muttersprache' (WB). Derrida's critique of 'Was bleibt' centres on this moment, suggesting that to be unable to perceive a language, figured specifically as a 'mother' tongue, as 'going mad' is to attempt to preserve a unique moment of pure origin. Thus, for Derrida, Arendt's clinging to German is a mistaken desire for an incorruptible 'home'. Such an indivisible instance of 'meaning' is literally unthinkable in terms of Derrida's work, even before considering the historical circumstances in which Arendt made this claim.[35]

However, Arendt's insistence on maintaining German is not, as Derrida claims, simply nostalgic. He cites without comment the lines following the

[32] Ibid.

[33] As the example of Socrates in *Hippias Major* shows, for Arendt such 'others' include oneself, as part of thinking: 'Better to be at odds with the whole world than be at odds with the only one you are forced to live together with when you have left company behind' (*Life of the Mind*, p. 188). Thus, even solitary thinking concerns dialogue and being with others.

[34] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 178.

[35] For Derrida, 'writing', including speech, relies on the logic of 'iterability', the potential for a symbol to be repeated and recontextualized. That which is unrepeatable or unaffected by any context outside itself thus cannot exist as writing. See e.g. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.,* ed. by Gerald Graff (Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 47–50.

above quotation from Arendt: '[. . .] es gibt keinen Ersatz für die Muttersprache. Man kann die Muttersprache vergessen. Das ist wahr. Ich habe es gesehen' (WB). Footage of the interview shows Arendt emphasizing the word 'kann' and pausing after this sentence, as if to underline the claim.[36] Thus, Arendt apparently suggests uniqueness for the mother tongue, and then in the very next sentence states that the mother tongue can be replaced. It is odd that Derrida does not call further attention to this juxtaposition, as it suggests that Arendt would agree with him on the impossibility of a self-identical, unique status for the mother tongue.[37] In insisting on her attachment to German, Arendt is not claiming that German alone is an indivisible ground of meaning. Rather, what is unique is her relationship with German in its specificity — which, equally, exists as one of many (potential) linguistic relationships.[38] Indeed, Arendt's use of the English phrase 'in the back of my mind' to explain her intimacy with a different language shows a lack of exclusivity.

As we shall see, it is precisely German's status as one language among many, and the potential for Arendt to have lost German, which render the language so politically vital for her. Arendt does not simply claim that German, as her 'original' language, has never left her; she rather insists: 'Ich habe immer bewußt abgelehnt, die Muttersprache zu verlieren' (WB). She stresses that 'die deutsche Sprache jedenfalls ist das Wesentliche, was geblieben ist, und was ich auch bewußt immer gehalten habe'; footage of the interview shows Arendt clearly emphasizing the word 'bewußt', pausing before intensifying by adding 'immer'. Gaus asks 'auch in der bittersten Zeit?' and Arendt's reply of 'immer' comes immediately.[39] To maintain German is a deliberate effort for Arendt, an active preservation. As we shall see, this is not because of nostalgia, but a point of political principle — part of Arendt's defence of her status as a refugee Jewish woman. German becomes a 'language of refuge' for Arendt not in being a home as a fixed, grounded abode, but in allowing for 'home' as Arendt would understand the term: the possibility of thinking, understanding, and thus intervening in the world of political action. Alongside the 'philosophical' importance of home and language for Arendt, historical and material factors made German, of all languages, central to Arendt's politics as a refugee Jewish woman.

[36] 'Hannah Arendt', *Zur Person*, 38:49–38:56.

[37] Derrida, *Monolinguisme*, pp. 105–08.

[38] Intriguingly, Geoffrey Bennington, in 'Double Tonguing: Derrida's Monolingualism', *Tympanum*, 4 (2000) <https://khora.site/bennington.html> [accessed 31 January 2024], finds in Derrida's *Monolinguisme* an understanding of uniqueness and plurality that is very similar to Arendt's suggestion that 'plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live' (Arendt, *Human Condition,* p. 8). However, neither Bennington nor Derrida draws an explicit link to Arendt.

[39] 'Hannah Arendt', *Zur Person*, 38:28–38:35.

'Wenn man als Jude angegriffen ist, muß man sich als Jude verteidigen'

In order to situate Arendt's relationship with German, it is essential to consider her notion of plurality. For Arendt, to attempt to attack plurality would not mean attempting to reduce 'diversity' in the contemporary sense of group identities. It would mean to reduce the diversity of human experience as such, to attempt to change the fact of 'being' as multiple singular human beings existing together. For Arendt, the enormity of the Nazi murder of Europe's Jews resided in the fact that it was quite literally a crime against humanity, since it was an attack on human plurality as such, affecting the very possibility of humans sharing existence with other humans.[40] Although Jennifer Gaffney writes that Arendt's 'conception of the mother tongue [. . .] call[s] on us to take responsibility for preserving a historical and political singularity', this 'singularity' is nothing to do with a position as a unique subject, but rather the maintenance of each instance of human plurality — including not allowing one's own singularity to be denied or diminished.[41]

The necessity of maintaining plurality means that any attempt to efface a central element of one's being demands insistence on that facet of one's identity that is under attack. To take the example of Jewishness, as Arendt understood it, defending oneself *as* a Jew would be necessary not only in the face of antisemitic violence, but also in response to, for example, a universalist understanding of the 'Rights of Man' as 'the rights of abstract human beings', with 'no place for recognition of the rights of Jews *as* Jews'.[42] Arendt would be concerned to defend herself 'as a Jew' not because of the 'love of the Jewish people', as she denied in her infamous letter to Gershom Scholem, but because political organization around the category 'Jew' is the only way to defend oneself against attacks on Jews.[43] Simply being Jewish does not in itself imply the existence of 'the Jewish community', a collective identity that is innately significant on the basis of a shared characteristic. Arendt's interest is in opposing attacks on plurality as such.

Arendt's opposition to identitarian positions means that Jewishness, for example, is 'a *pre-political* fact' in Annabel Herzog's phrase — an undeniable and irrevocable facet of one's existence, but one that 'in itself, provides no justification for political acts or for the consequences of political acts, such as

[40] Arendt, *Eichmann*, pp. 266–78.

[41] Jennifer Gaffney, 'Can a Language Go Mad? Arendt, Derrida, and the Political Significance of the Mother Tongue', *Philosophy Today*, 59.3 (2015), pp. 523–39 (p. 536).

[42] Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Polity, 1996), p. 17. Bernstein suggests that Arendt's insistence on Jews' living and being understood *as* Jews is perhaps the major constant throughout her writing, from her biography of Rahel Varnhagen through to the 1943 essay 'The Jew as Pariah' and, indeed, the interview with Gaus; see Bernstein, pp. 14–45.

[43] Arendt, 'The Eichmann Controversy', p. 466.

political rights'.[44] Yet historical circumstances may mean that collective organization around such a characteristic becomes necessary. *Claiming* a position 'as a Jew' *becomes* political in instances where people are persecuted because of their Jewishness. What should, for Arendt, be understood as a natural condition has then been made political, and so it becomes necessary to engage on that basis. Arendt's thinking is not 'strategic essentialism'[45] before the fact, as Arendt would not want to deconstruct identity categories while 'strategically' using their terminology; as we have seen, Arendt would see describing herself as 'a Jew' as unproblematic, indeed necessary. For Arendt, to call oneself 'Jewish' would be far from merely a label of convenience. However, she would also be wary of an identity-based politics that posited innate political group solidarity on the basis of a shared subject position; identity is not in itself political.[46] As Herzog notes, for Arendt it is less a question of what one *is*, and more a question of *action* — 'no one [. . .] can make the a priori claim that being a Jew is a political definition. However, in particular circumstances it is possible to *do* Jewish politics'.[47]

An example of such political defence of plurality, I argue, is Arendt's steadfast attachment to German. Arendt's 1943 essay 'We Refugees' shows that she does not defend German because of its innate unique status as her 'mother tongue', but because the circumstances of her existence in the world necessitate combating the effacement of her German language and her Jewishness. As we shall see, Arendt even combated the effacement of her speaking German *as* her Jewishness. This is not because Arendt would see the German language as innately linked to Jewish 'national' politics, as in the examples discussed by Volovici. It is speaking German that allows Arendt to go forth from 'home' into politics, as a Jewish refugee. In more pragmatic or empirical terms, as Arendt shows, in the 1940s refugeedom and Jewishness become coterminous through the German language. Language's link to 'home' becomes a question of a practical as well as philosophical defence of oneself.

In 'We Refugees', Arendt describes her own experiences alongside the desperation of fellow Jewish refugees. Many refugees, she writes, attempt to become model patriots to underscore their entitlement to remain in the countries in which they find themselves: 'after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans'.[48] Arendt relates the

[44] Annabel Herzog, 'When Arendt Said "We": Jewish Identity in Hannah Arendt's Thought', *Telos*, 192 (2020), pp. 67–79 (p. 79).

[45] The term derives from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'In a Word: *Interview*' [with Ellen Rooney], in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Routledge, 1993), pp. 1–24.

[46] For a fuller discussion, see David Kim, *Arendt's Solidarity: Anti-Semitism and Racism in the Atlantic World* (Stanford University Press, 2024).

[47] Herzog, p. 79

[48] Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *The Jewish Writings*, pp. 264–74 (p. 265), hereafter WR. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text.

story of the fictitious, but representative, Mr Cohn, 'who had always been 150 per cent German, a German superpatriot'. In 1933 he moves to Prague and becomes 'as true and loyal a Czech patriot as he had been a German one'; fleeing to Paris, he quickly identifies himself with '"our" ancestor Vercingetorix'. Arendt concludes that 'as long as Mr Cohn can't make up his mind what he actually is, a Jew, nobody can foretell all the mad changes he will still have to go through' (WR, p. 273). Mr Cohn's Jewishness is unshakeable — a simple fact of his existence — and he is fighting a losing battle by attempting to deny or downplay his existence as a Jew. For Arendt, to attempt assimilation is not to betray or renounce one's Jewishness — it is a fiction, as one cannot give up the 'pre-political' facts of one's existence. An obligation to assimilate is thus a double bind, as one must attempt to give up one's Jewishness while continuing to be undeniably Jewish and thus never actually assimilating. Arendt writes that 'the history of 150 years of assimilated Jewry' illustrates an 'unprecedented feat: through proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same' (WR, p. 273). Thus, since a Jew cannot but be a Jew, if attacked *as* a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew, rather than attempt an impossible capitulation to assimilation.

However, as Arendt writes, her fellow refugees were not only understood as 'Jews'. 'We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews,' writes Arendt, 'but having hardly crossed the French borderline, we were changed into *Boches*.' Such a designation is grimly ironic given that the majority of refugees would have long been stripped of their German citizenship (WR, p. 270). The absurdity of the situation is reflected in Arendt's tone of jet-black humour throughout the essay, which includes comparing exiled 'doctors of philosophy' to 'a forlorn émigré dachshund, in his grief, begin[ning] to speak: "Once, when I was a St Bernard…"'. And then there is Arendt's caustic description of refugee 'optimism', which sometimes manifests as 'go[ing] home and turn[ing] on the gas, or mak[ing] use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way' (WR, pp. 269, 266). Arendt's ferocious irony, even sarcasm, is a stylistic manifestation of her fellow refugees' impossible situation. Arendt's tone here is not straightforwardly aggressive or despairing or humorous, because it is unable to say anything directly. There is no agreed position from which to speak to others as a refugee/German/Jew, and so Arendt employs the doublespeak of irony. The seeming impossibility of doing anything to ameliorate these refugees' situation is thanks to their overlapping, then conflated, identities of 'German' and 'Jew'. The double bind is that they are just as prone to being attacked or imprisoned for their Germanness as for their Jewishness:

> After the Germans invaded [France] [. . .] having been jailed because we were Germans, we were not freed because we were Jews. It is the same story all over the world, repeated again and again. In Europe the Nazis confiscated our property, but in Brazil

we have to pay 30 percent of our wealth, like the most loyal member of the *Bund der Auslandsdeutschen*. In Paris we could not leave our homes after eight o'clock because we were Jews; but in Los Angeles we are restricted because we are 'enemy aliens.' Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are. (WR, p. 270)

The categories of 'German' and 'Jew' become coterminous because of the third label applied to these victims, 'refugees'. It is this category that allows other Jewish groups to look down upon those fleeing Nazi persecution. Arendt writes that 'French Jewry was absolutely convinced that all Jews coming from beyond the Rhine were what they called *Polaks* — what German Jewry called *Ostjuden*', a derogatory term for supposedly 'backward' Jewish communities from Eastern Europe. Yet at the same time, 'Jews who really came from Eastern Europe [. . .] called us *Jaeckes*', a word used to dismiss German Jews perceived as overly formal and 'buttoned up' (WR, p. 270). The original readership of 'We Refugees' was a further Jewish group who may well have looked down upon German Jews. The essay was first published in the USA liberal Jewish journal *Menorah*, whose primary audience was assimilated American Jews who would have distinguished between themselves and their Yiddish-speaking immigrant grandparents, and certainly the recently arrived German-speaking refugees.[49] In this context, the 'we' of 'We Refugees' is extremely pointed. As Lyndsey Stonebridge notes, the 'we' who are refugees contrasts with the implied 'you' readership of 'intellectual and freethinking Jews' who were 'settled immigrants within a nation-state'.[50] The essay's characteristic irony is present from the very first sentence: following the title 'We Refugees', Arendt begins: 'In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees." We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants"' (WR, p. 264). The contrast between the title and these first lines, or between 'we' and 'you', makes it clear that 'we' are not claiming any group identity, but have been assigned as a group — 'those people'. Arendt is not claiming to speak on behalf of 'we refugees', but mimics the language that enforces her membership of a group labelled 'refugees'. This appellation, and the divide between 'we' and 'you', makes it clear that there is no intra-group solidarity among the global Jewish community, as no such grouping exists. Refugeedom assigned German Jews such as Arendt to an imaginary hinterland, where they could be considered the 'wrong' sort of Jews by any other group.

Arendt and her fellow migrants are derided as Jews, as Germans, and as refugees. However, in the context Arendt describes, the primary marker of difference is not 'nationality', Jewishness, or refugeedom, but the German

[49] Matthew Kaufman, 'The *Menorah Journal* and Shaping American Jewish Identity: Culture and Evolutionary Sociology', *Shofar*, 30.4 (2012), pp. 61–79.

[50] Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Judicial Imagination: Writing after Nuremburg* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 107–08.

language itself. The language is what marks Arendt and her compatriots as Germans to xenophobes, Jews to antisemites, and refugees to other Jewish groups. 'We don't want to be refugees', Arendt writes, 'since we don't want to be Jews; we pretend to be English-speaking people, since German-speaking people of recent years are marked as Jews' (WR, p. 272). The language, as it were, remains — as a marker of irrevocable difference. Yet unlike one's Jewishness, a language can be voluntarily discarded. 'We were told to forget', Arendt writes, and 'with the language [. . .] we find no difficulties: [. . .] after two years they solemnly swear they speak English better than any other language — their German is a language they hardly remember' (WR, p. 265). To lose one's language is to shed one's status as a refugee, as a German, and as a Jew. As the three designations intersect, to attempt to lose one would be to attempt to lose all three markers of difference — through renouncing the German language.

To renounce the language would be to give up the possibility of speaking *as* a Jew, as a German, or as a refugee. As Delphine Grass writes, in Arendt's view, 'in exchange for their assimilation, Jewish refugees in America [would] lose the possibility of speaking on behalf of the political condition' that designates them as 'Jewish refugees in America'.[51] As 'We Refugees' shows, this would mean surrendering the ability to speak 'as a Jew', but also losing the specific language that itself defines their 'political condition'. However, this is not a question of *choosing* to give up the ability to speak in exchange for assimilation. Arendt is emphatic that Mr Cohn's denial of his Jewishness is delusional: his Jewishness can neither be hidden nor revoked. To attempt to lose one's language would be for Arendt as nonsensical as trying to shed one's Jewishness. This is not only because one's language is as much a part of one's individual being as Jewishness, but also because, in the circumstances of 1943, it is the German language that designates one as a refugee, a German, and a Jew. To give up the German language would not be *like* trying to give up one's Jewishness, it *would be* to try to give up one's Jewishness.

To cling to the German language is thus, for Arendt, 'to defend oneself as a Jew'. If it is the German language that marks her as Jewish, to surrender German would be, at the least, to minimize one's Jewishness. The irony that the German language becomes central not to 'German' identity, but to Jewishness, is fitting given that for Arendt and her compatriots to be attacked *as* Germans is still to be attacked 'as a Jew'. When imprisoned as '*Boches*' in France, Arendt writes that 'we were even told we had to accept this designation if we really were against Hitler's racial theories' (WR, p. 270). Such an order effaces Arendt's Jewishness, and thus exists within the same order as

[51] Delphine Grass, 'The Democratic Languages of Exile: Reading Eugene Jolas and Yvan Goll's American Poetry with Jacques Derrida and Hannah Arendt', *Nottingham French Studies*, 56.2 (2017), pp. 227–44 (pp. 229–30).

Nazi violence — a proscription against Jews existing as Jews. To be stripped of German citizenship, or to be told that she must accept that she *is* German, are in some sense the same crime for Arendt: an attack on her Jewishness. The way through this attack from both sides is to insist on a marker of her own specifically Jewish identity — the German language. This is not to make the claim that German is a 'Jewish language' or central to Jewish identity as such, but that in the particular political instance in which Arendt finds herself, to insist on a German linguistic position is to insist on one's Jewishness in the face of attack. Speaking German is no more innately political than the fact of being Jewish, but when it is necessary to 'do Jewish politics', in Herzog's phrase, speaking German for Arendt is as much a part of defending oneself as insisting on one's Jewishness would be.

Since Arendt could have chosen not to speak German, her adherence to the language is not an unthinking monolingualism, but a conscious part of her multilingualism. It is precisely the fact that German is one language among others that affords the language political import. Arendt's choice of language — defending German, even as she also uses English — is as important as what she chooses to do *with* language. Stonebridge has written that Arendt's style in 'We Refugees', the bleak irony and careful use of the pronoun 'we', is 'to double-voice the speech of the refugee [. . .] to put a diacritical marker on her political and historical assignation' — rather than speaking 'univocally as a refugee' and implicitly accepting that she may indeed not have 'the right to have rights'.[52] Stylistically, Arendt's irony means that she consciously speaks 'as' a refugee, or German, or Jew, as each of these is a category assigned to her by different others. Irony allows her to play a role, voicing-but-not-voicing the 'optimism' that is required of refugees, for example (WR, p. 266). Yet in speaking German rather than another language, Arendt sheds all irony and is utterly sincere in defending herself — *as* a refugee-German-Jew. Whether those characteristics or identities have been unfairly assigned to her by others or by circumstance, or whether they are her inherent characteristics, becomes irrelevant. What is essential is to act politically to defend what is under attack: 'wenn man als Jude angegriffen ist, muß man sich als Jude verteidigen' (WB).

This desire to defend herself, to speak her *self*, motivates Arendt's insistence on German in the 1964 interview. After living in the USA for over twenty years, she is not motivated by nostalgia, but a continued determination to defend herself *as* a refugee-German-Jew, defending all three identities at once. In speaking German, Arendt undertakes what she describes in *The Human Condition*: through speech, 'men show who they really are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in

[52] Stonebridge, *Judicial Imagination*, p. 107.

the human world'.[53] Such action is a 'disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is'.[54] The German language may be made identical with Jewishness in the eyes of xenophobes or antisemites — a condition of 'what' Arendt is — and yet to continue to speak German is for Arendt to defend herself under the identity that is under attack, and so shows 'who' she is. The material circumstances may have changed — by 1964, Arendt was a US citizen, no longer stateless or a refugee — but *who* Arendt was had not and could never change, and so it continued to be necessary to defend this 'who'. To reassert her connection to her 'mother tongue' is not to claim an identity position for the sake of cultural politics, any more than her insistence on her Jewishness would be. It was simply a conviction that one must have one's own position, one's 'who', recognized as such within human plurality.

Reading Arendt's comments in 'Was bleibt' in the light of 'We Refugees' answers the charges of nostalgia or Arendt's apparent dismissal of the political implications of Jewish writers continuing to use German. It is not that Arendt, forced to live as a refugee, makes of the language a fetishized 'home' to provide the semblance of belonging, but that, owing to historical circumstance, German is the language that makes possible Arendt's home in the Arendtian sense: a condition from which to go forth into the world, *as* a Jew. Arendt's slip into English in the interview, even while describing her intimacy with German, is also illuminated by 'We Refugees'. Arendt by no means claims that the German language is unique, but that her relationship to it is unique. Precisely the reason for German's importance to Arendt is that it exists within the world of human plurality, and to continue to speak German is to defend plurality. Arendt is perfectly within her rights to claim that 'geblieben ist die Sprache' or that 'es ist ja nicht die deutsche Sprache gewesen, die verrückt geworden ist', as she has doggedly worked to ensure that, in her case at least, both of these are indeed the case (WB). As Arendt insists, 'die deutsche Sprache jedenfalls ist das Wesentliche, was geblieben ist, und was ich auch bewußt immer gehalten habe' (WB). Arendt fights to keep German in 'Was bleibt' not because she cannot bear to lose her mother tongue, but, as 'We Refugees' shows, precisely because she *could have lost* her mother tongue — could be forced to deny her Jewishness — and so must defend herself through continuing to claim it.

Just as Arendt's Jewishness is for her not innately political, but becomes significant within the world of human plurality, so German does not in itself possess a special status among languages, but becomes political when made synonymous with Jewishness and/as refugeedom by historical circumstances. Arendt's situation in 1964 was by no means as desperate as in 1943, but she

[53] Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 179.
[54] Ibid.

was still Hannah Arendt, a German-speaking Jewish woman, and no more inclined than ever to deny what she considered 'the indisputable facts of my life'.[55]

'Ich wollte in die praktische Arbeit'

In 1975, Arendt was awarded the Sonning Prize 'in recognition of [her] contribution to European civilisation'.[56] This is how she articulated this contribution: 'If I ever did anything for European civilisation, it certainly was nothing but the deliberate attempt, from the moment I fled Germany, not to exchange my mother tongue against whatever language I was offered or forced to use.'[57] Arendt, who notes that she left Europe thirty-five years previously, delivered this speech in Denmark in English. She questions whether the award should be made to her, she questions her own 'Europeanness' — but even as she speaks another language, she insists that she has never renounced German.

Arendt's maintenance of the German language is perhaps as much a constant of her career as her defence of Jewishness. Placed in the context of her wider work, Arendt in the 1964 interview is not nostalgically, but tenaciously, actively fighting to preserve her German as a prerequisite of political action. For Arendt, the specific language that one speaks is an essential element of the development of our thinking — as what allows for one's 'home', or what I am suggesting we may call a language of refuge. Our languages are not important for the sake of diversity, but rather plurality — the possibility of humans living together, that is, politics.

Linguistic specificity is thus not a purely philosophical question, concerning Socrates and Hippias 'going home'. Discussing the rise of Nazism even among intellectuals in 1930s Germany, Gaus asks Arendt whether this is why it became pressing for her to move away from 'diesen Kreisen [und . . .] in eine praktische Arbeit zu kommen?' (WB). Arendt's reply is explicit:

> Ja [. . .] Ich gelangte zu einer Erkenntnis, die ich damals immer wieder in einem Satz ausgedrückt habe, darauf besinne ich mich: 'Wenn man als Jude angegriffen ist, muß man sich als Jude verteidigen.' Nicht als Deutscher oder als Bürger der Welt oder der Menschenrechte oder so. Sondern: Was kann ich ganz konkret als Jude machen? [. . .] jetzt war die Zugehörigkeit zum Judentum mein eigenes Problem geworden. Und mein eigenes Problem war politisch. Rein politisch! Ich wollte in die praktische Arbeit und — ich wollte ausschließlich und nur in die jüdische Arbeit. Und in diesem Sinne habe ich mich dann in Frankreich orientiert. (WB)

The work to which Arendt alludes here is her position as director of the Paris

[55] Arendt, 'The Eichmann Controversy', p. 466.
[56] Arendt, 'Prologue', p. 3.
[57] Ibid., p. 5.

branch of Youth Aliyah, aiding emigration to Mandatory Palestine.[58] It is from the desire to 'defend oneself as a Jew' that Arendt helped save people's lives. By linking the German language to this defence of oneself, Arendt does not merely dissolve the unity of nation, language, and people. She shows that our relationship with language is political — that is, it *is* what makes politics, changing how we live together, possible.

Arendt was forced to leave her own home multiple times over the course of her life. By continuing to protect her German language, with language allowing for thinking and being understood, Arendt allows us to develop a concept of a 'language of refuge', a form of home that is radically decoupled from place. It is a home that is continually made anew as we participate in plurality, thinking and seeking to understand each other. Far from abstract and nostalgic, then, Arendt's connection to German would be immanent, practical, and very much to do with what form the future world will take. Her language of refuge is not a withdrawal from the world, but a condition of truly shaping the world in which we live.

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[58] Young-Bruehl, pp. 138–44.