

Hannah Arendt: Origins of a Controversy

Episode 28 of *Exile*

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JOSHUA MALINA: May 1961. At the front of a grand courtroom in Jerusalem, three judges in black robes sit on the highest tier of a raised platform. The long table in front of them is strewn with books and piles of documents. Directly in front of *them*, two court stenographers document every detail of one of the most controversial trials of the century. The room is packed with hundreds of people, all captivated by the arguments that are unfolding. The trial is also being broadcast live on the radio, and a cameraman hovers at the back of the room, recording the proceedings for posterity. All of this because of a thin, balding man in a black suit, currently encased in bulletproof glass on the left side of the courtroom. Adolf Eichmann. The so-called “architect of the Final Solution.” Journalists from all over the world have been invited to cover the trial of the man who sent millions to their deaths. Among the reporters is a middle-aged woman with short, salt-and-pepper hair and horn-rimmed glasses, here on behalf of *The New Yorker*. This is Hannah Arendt. And she is preparing to throw this whole trial into question.

THEME MUSIC UP

JOSHUA MALINA: Welcome to *Exile*, a podcast from LBI, the Leo Baeck Institute New York. I'm Joshua Malina. When everything is taken away, then what? From LBI's archives, untold stories of Jewish lives in the shadow of fascism. Today...the life of a political theorist whose controversial reporting changed the way we talk about the Holocaust.

THEME RESOLVE

JOSHUA MALINA: From the beginning, Hannah Arendt's life was marked by instability. When she was born in Hanover in 1906, her father was already seriously ill with syphilis. By the time she was three years old, her family had moved to Königsberg, in

East Prussia, to get him better treatment. Despite all of this, Hannah was always remarkably self-assured.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: She's described as shy, fiercely independent, curious and with a very active imagination.

JOSHUA MALINA: This is Miriam Chorley-Schulz. She's an assistant professor of Holocaust studies at the University of Oregon, where she focuses on modern Jewish intellectual history. Hannah's father was an engineer with a passion for Greek and Roman classics. When Hannah was seven, he died, and she found comfort in the library he had left behind.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: Apparently she got very introverted. She became increasingly self-taught and was very committed to doing things her own way. And so she fell in love with Greek philosophy and made very clear that learning was not going to be a school activity. It was really something that she would do on her own.

JOSHUA MALINA: Instead of reading what her teachers told her to, Hannah preferred to follow her own curriculum from home.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: In these early years, Hannah spent in her father's library and she would memorize poetry, you know, Schiller, Goethe, Höderlin. And diving into philosophy. And as a teenager, she was already reading Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant, of course, was also from Königsberg, so there was probably also some patriotism. She also read Kierkegaard and Karl Jaspers. Just really casual stuff at the age of 12.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah spoke about her childhood relationship to learning in a 1964 episode of the German TV interview show *Zur Person*.

HANNAH ARENDT: I read Kant. You can ask, Why did you read Kant? For me the question was somehow: I can either study philosophy or I can drown myself, so to speak.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah was highly intelligent, and when she *chose* to attend school, she was an excellent student. She didn't necessarily have a problem with the content of the lessons—she just didn't like having to listen to her teachers.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: She was really brilliant when things went her way, but deeply rebellious when it didn't. So she really, she had no patience for authority that she didn't respect. So this is true for her mother's second husband, but also for all of her teachers, it seems.

JOSHUA MALINA: All of this came to a head in 1921 when Hannah was 15 years old. At the time, she was enrolled at the Luise-Schule, a prestigious German girls' school in Königsberg. On this particular day, Hannah was actually in class. But the teacher said something that offended her, and rebellious Hannah reacted the best way she knew how: she organized a walkout. She convinced the other students to leave in the middle of the day. And although Hannah's mother tried to reason with the principal, there was no turning back. Hannah was expelled. Hannah's mother arranged for her to spend the next two years as a guest student at the University of Berlin. In the early 1920s, Berlin was in a cultural golden age. Political instability bubbled under the surface, but the city was rife with new movements in the arts, science, and philosophy.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: I think being in Weimar Berlin at the time, as a teenager, and as someone that clearly wasn't afraid to do whatever they wanted to do, is exactly the right city to be in. I imagine that it was a really good time. And had probably also an intellectual community that was finally something that she could appreciate and didn't really have in the same way in Königsberg.

JOSHUA MALINA: Berlin was not the only city in Germany where new ideas were taking hold. In early 1924, Hannah received a letter from a friend who was studying at the University of Marburg. He urged Hannah to join him there, to learn from a young professor whose work was setting the intellectual world on fire. The professor's name was Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was asking questions that had not been asked before. What does it mean to exist? How do human beings experience existence? What does it mean to exist in relation to others? Hannah knew she had to meet him. So she

followed her friend's advice and applied to study at Marburg. She attended her first lecture with Heidegger in the fall of 1924.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: Heidegger's teaching had a reputation for being basically witchcraft. This is literally how people would describe his teaching. Students described his lectures as hypnotic. And Hannah, despite being shy, was immediately also drawn in. And she also really stood out in his lecture on Aristotle and in a small seminar on Plato's Sophist.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah wasn't the only one who was enthralled. Heidegger was intrigued by this quiet, but clearly intelligent young woman who appeared in his classroom. So, on a rainy day in early 1925, when Hannah decided to stop by Heidegger's office after class, he took the chance to get to know her. Perhaps she intended to ask him about the coursework, or his own research, but instead, they just...talked. He asked her questions about herself and her interests. She answered quietly, but with that trademark self-assurance that made her so striking in class. A few days later, Heidegger wrote Hannah a letter.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER: Dear Miss Arendt! I must come see you this evening and speak to your heart. Everything should be simple and clear and pure between us. Only then will we be worthy of having been allowed to meet. You are my pupil and I your teacher, but that is only the occasion for what has happened to us. I will never be able to call you mine, but from now on you will belong in my life, and it shall grow with you.

JOSHUA MALINA: Heidegger was 18 years older than Hannah, and he was married with two children. But over the next few weeks, they continued to write to each other with growing intimacy. Before long, they began an affair.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: Above all, it was an intellectual affair. They were both obsessed with rethinking thinking itself. So basically starting from scratch. And that intensity pulled them together. It seems clear that he was very much in awe of the way her brain worked. In addition to probably being very attracted to her, but I think the attraction very much came from that intellectual encounter.

JOSHUA MALINA: They met secretly in his office. He came over to her tiny attic apartment. They went for long walks in the woods. He often slipped love notes under her door. But in the end, the romance couldn't continue. Heidegger was married, and famous, and he was always putting his dedication to philosophy ahead of his romance with her. Their relationship ended for good in 1929, when Hannah reconnected with a former classmate named Günther Anders Stern.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: They met each other at a New Year's masquerade ball in Berlin held at the Museum of Ethnology. And this ball was organized by a Marxist group Anders belonged to. They were raising money to start a magazine, apparently. So it was dancing and revolutionary politics at once.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah described Günther as gentle and kind. They often read each other's writing. And they had a lot in common—both had grown up in German-Jewish middle class households, and they had taken similar courses in university.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: Everything went really quickly between the two of them. So after a month of dating, they moved in together. By September, they were married in a quiet civil ceremony, right? So nine months and they were already married. But I think really, first of all, importantly, this relationship was very different from the Heidegger relationship. I think she clearly wanted someone that was available and devoted to her, which I think is the case with Anders.

JOSHUA MALINA: On paper, they were a perfect match. But in reality, the relationship never quite worked.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: This is as much, perhaps, due to their incompatibility as it is that history just intervened, right? So they met in 1929. And of course, in November 1929, the famous Wall Street crash, right, Nazism and antisemitism surged in Germany. And Hannah became increasingly politically active in a way that Anders didn't really appreciate.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah smoked cigars. She read the works of Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky. She stayed out late with her male friends, discussing the pros and cons of Zionism. Günther thought these habits were too “masculine” for his new wife. The relationship disintegrated, while Hannah’s political life blossomed. And as the world shifted around her, the ideas she was exploring seemed more urgent every day. In the winter of 1932, Hannah heard a rumor that deeply disturbed her. Martin Heidegger, the man she had once loved so deeply, had started to express sympathies with the Nazi campaign. She immediately wrote him a letter asking him to explain. His response came quickly.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER: Dear Hannah! The rumors that are troubling you are slander, much like other experiences I've had in recent years. To explain my relationship with Jews, I'll simply list the following facts. There's someone who urgently needs to complete his doctorate and therefore asked me for help. I agreed: He is a Jew. Then someone else comes to me every month to tell me about a substantial piece of work he's currently working on. He is also a Jew. A few weeks ago, someone else sent me another piece of work. He, too, is a Jew. Whoever wants to call this "militant antisemitism", do so. Moreover, in university matters I am as antisemitic now as I was ten years ago in Marburg. This has nothing to do with my personal relationships with Jews. And much less can it affect my relationship with you.

JOSHUA MALINA: The letter was devastating. And it was all lies. Within a few months, Heidegger became Rector of the University of Freiburg and quickly signed an order to dismiss all Jewish faculty. Shortly after that, he officially joined the Nazi Party. Hannah didn't speak to him again for 17 years. On February 27, 1933, a month after Adolf Hitler was sworn in as the new German Chancellor, Germany's parliament building, the Reichstag, was set on fire. The fallout was immediate. Nazi leaders immediately blamed their political opponents, claiming the fire was evidence of an impending communist uprising. Within hours, Hitler convinced President Hindenburg to sign an emergency security measure called the Reichstag Fire Decree. Freedoms of speech, press,

assembly, and privacy were suspended. Hannah spoke about this pivotal moment in her 1964 interview for *Zur Person*.

HANNAH ARENDT: From that moment on, I felt responsible. That is, I was no longer of the opinion that one can simply be a bystander.

JOSHUA MALINA: Suddenly, it seemed clear that she could no longer spend all of her time on intellectual pursuits.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: She just saw a certain kind of dangerous dimension when it comes to intellectual work, that you can intellectualize things so much so that you actually get implicated into the project without even noticing it. She was particularly bitter, of course, about certain friends completely accepting and embracing the Nazi party and the Nazi takeover, and she doesn't say so explicitly, but of course she's probably also talking about Heidegger at this point, and that it was really that phenomenon of close friends changing and choosing sides very early on that really broke her heart and I don't think she ever really recovered from that.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah stopped her academic research and devoted herself to her political cause. She turned her Berlin apartment into a stop on the underground network to help communists flee Germany. And she began conducting research on antisemitic rhetoric in the German press. Hannah spent much of the summer of 1933 at the library, combing through newspapers and other public communications in search of anything that could be used to build a case against the Nazis. She was acting on behalf of the German Zionist Organization. They hoped to send the collection to foreign press offices and world leaders to show how widespread antisemitism had become in Germany. Unfortunately, her work attracted some unwelcome attention as well. One day, she was busy at the library, with her usual stack of periodicals on the table in front of her. She had plans to meet her mother for lunch, so around noon, she stood up, gathered her things, and headed for the exit. But she didn't make it to lunch. There were Gestapo officers waiting for her at the door. They charged her with creating "atrocious propaganda"—material that deliberately uses terrifying claims to influence an audience.

The librarian had noticed Hannah pouring over newspapers and reported her. The Gestapo took her into what they called “protective custody.” They interrogated her, asking about her personal connections and the contents of her notes. But, according to that 1964 interview, Hannah had some tricks up her sleeve...

HANNAH ARENDT: I was very lucky. I got out after eight days because I made friends with the official who arrested me. He was a charming fellow! He'd been promoted from the criminal police to a political division. He had no idea what to do. What was he supposed to do? Unfortunately, I had to lie to him. I couldn't let the organization be exposed. I told him tall tales, and he kept saying, "I got you in here. I shall get you out again. Don't get a lawyer! Jews don't have any money now. Save your money!" Meanwhile the organization had gotten me a lawyer. Through members, of course. And I sent this lawyer away. Because this man who arrested me had such an open, decent face. I relied on him and thought that here was a much better chance than with some lawyer who himself was afraid.

JOSHUA MALINA: When she was finally released, Hannah had a huge party for all of her friends. The next day, she left the country. Eventually, Hannah ended up in Paris, where she threw herself into her Jewish activist pursuits. She did work for Youth Aliyah, helping Jewish young people prepare to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine. She participated in the World Zionist Conference. She even learned Yiddish.

ADAM J. SACKS: Zionism was kind of like the strongest rebellious flex you could do as a young German-Jewish person in the 1920s.

JOSHUA MALINA: This is Adam J. Sacks. He's a writer and educator focused on modern European history, and has written about the impact and legacy of Hannah Arendt's work. Prior to 1933, Zionism was a pretty unpopular idea among Jewish people in Germany. Many older, liberal Jews—like Hannah's mother—believed in assimilating further into German society, not moving away from it.

ADAM J. SACKS: Interestingly enough, of course, Hannah Arendt rebels. She rebels against both. What's important to emphasize with her Zionism and her turn to Zionism, is that it's a rejection, in a way, both of this heritage of liberal

Judaism, but also social democracy. So it's a turn against the legacy of her grandparents and her parents.

JOSHUA MALINA: At this time, Zionism was a very diverse movement. It included organizations focused on settlement in Palestine and working toward a Jewish state. But there were also those that prioritized work that protected and developed the cultural legacy of Judaism.

ADAM J. SACKS: There was a major tendency within Zionism that emphasized instead a kind of cultural repository or a world intellectual center, like in initiatives like the Hebrew University, that it was actually much more about reviving and stabilizing a cultural heritage and a home in the intellectual and cultural sense, not in the statist sense.

JOSHUA MALINA: For Hannah, the key appeal of Zionism in this moment was the way it enabled action. She was in exile, but still it was thrilling to be surrounded by a community of like-minded individuals working towards similar goals. In the 1930s, Paris was filled with brilliant people fleeing fascism. Here's Miriam Chorley-Schulz again.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: It was really a hub for all of these intellectuals fleeing Germany, but also other, you know, fascist states, like Hungary at the time, etc. So Paris became this hub of anti-fascists who would meet in cafes and continue their intellectual work now in France. So she got acquainted with Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Camus, but really got to know Walter Benjamin, of course, Bertholt Brecht, Arnold Zweig.

JOSHUA MALINA: It was through this intellectual community that Hannah met the poet and Marxist philosopher Heinrich Blücher in 1936. He wasn't Jewish, but had fled Germany in the early '30s because of his anti-fascist and socialist political associations. Earlier that year, Hannah's husband Günther had moved to America with his family, leaving her behind. They were still legally married, but their lives had diverged. The connection that Hannah found with Heinrich was something entirely new.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: He gave her a certain sense of stability that she never really had and at the same time really challenged her. In all of the correspondences at least that I read, he disagreed with her and really forced her to rethink certain things. Something I think that she wasn't really used to for the longest time.

JOSHUA MALINA: In January 1940, Hannah and Günther divorced so that she could marry Heinrich. But within a few months, their shared life of activism and intellectual engagement in Paris would grind to a halt. After World War II broke out, the French government became suspicious of the many German exiles living in France. Fearing an impending German invasion, they ordered the internment of what they called “enemy aliens.” On May 15, 1940, all German women between age 17 and 55 were required to report to the Velodrome d’Hiver in Paris.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: She went there, reported herself, and apparently, you know, rain started to pour down and these women were kept in the Velodrome, I think, for a couple of days. They were meant to go there and bring food for two days, as well as some clothes. No knives and forks, and tragically for Arendt, of course, no cigarettes either.

JOSHUA MALINA: After a few days in the Velodrome, the women were loaded onto buses heading south. They travelled for hours. Finally, they arrived at an internment camp called Gurs. The conditions in the camp were abysmal. They slept on bags of straw, which were always wet from the rain. There were infestations of bugs and rats. Food supplies were limited. Discipline from the guards was swift and brutal. The women kept themselves busy doing chores, holding discussions on philosophy, and studying English in the hope of getting visas to America. But still, it was miserable. And no one knew how long it would last. Finally, after six weeks of waiting, news reached the camp that German troops were marching in Paris. The French guards were preoccupied, and suddenly, Hannah and her fellow prisoners were not being monitored as closely. There was a woman in the camp who was skilled in forgery. She was put in charge of creating false documents. For days, she copied the commanding guard’s signature on certificates that appeared to give the prisoners permission to leave. With the guards

distracted, the certificates were distributed to 62 women around the camp. Including Hannah Arendt. Early one morning, they met by the gate, and agreed to walk out slowly in ones and twos, only presenting their false certificates to the guard if he asked to see them. Hannah insisted on going alone. After leaving the camp, Hannah walked and hitchhiked to Montauban, over 200 kilometres away. The town had become a haven for former detainees, and she was able to reunite with her beloved Heinrich. And finally, after months of trying, they managed to get exit papers.

MIRIAM CHORLEY-SHULZ: Heinrich and her, they traveled through Lisbon and arrived in New York City in early 1941. And so she was 35 years old when she arrived in New York City. And this is really where the Hannah Arendt most people know, the political thinker and this public intellectual, where this life really begins.

JOSHUA MALINA: In America, Hannah moved away from her activism and reignited her life as an academic—but in her own particular way. Here's Adam J. Sacks again.

ADAM J. SACKS: She begins a university teaching career, notably not in pursuit of the tenure track, which I think speaks to her authenticity and her originality that she believed that, if anything, it might undermine her creativity and her productivity. And she wanted to retain this kind of unique individual agency. So she taught at many different institutions, right? Brandeis, the New School, as well as University of Chicago at this time.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah also began writing essays for magazines and newspapers across the country, including the German-Jewish publication *Aufbau*. She established herself as an expert on antisemitism, the refugee experience, and the conflict in Palestine.

ADAM J. SACKS: She was stateless for a long time, and so she meditated a lot on the experience of statelessness and the existence of being a refugee. And the sense of being an “undesirable alien” as refugees were actually labeled in government documents at that time. And I think that greatly shaped her later intellectual work. And arguably all of her later work was a working out of ideas

that she had first articulated in the *Aufbau* and she would spend the next couple of decades unfolding them in a very powerful intellectual architecture.

JOSHUA MALINA: In 1951, Hannah published the book that would officially put her on the map: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

ADAM J. SACKS: It definitely counts on most people's list as like in the top 10 most important books, certainly nonfiction books of the 20th century.

JOSHUA MALINA: In just under 500 pages, Hannah constructed an argument about the powerful social and political forces that made it possible for totalitarian regimes to gain traction in Europe.

ADAM J. SACKS: In this text, there are a number of theses that seem almost perfectly obvious today, and she was really the first to articulate them.

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah created the distinction between totalitarian regimes and other dictatorships. She explained the role that loneliness can play in making people susceptible to authoritarian politics. She even pointed out the unique political power of misinformation.

HANNAH ARENDT: Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion, fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it.

ADAM J. SACKS: I think from a professional perspective, it's very much a sign of her staking her claim and her ground as a political theorist. Because it really is a master text of political theory. It's not a work of philosophy.

JOSHUA MALINA: With *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah established herself as an authority in her field. Not everyone agreed with her argument, but the sheer ambition of such a project was enough to create conversation and controversy. This was not the only time that Hannah's work would spark intellectual debate. In fact, Hannah's next major work would nearly tear apart the refugee community she claimed to represent. In 1960, intelligence operatives from the nascent State of Israel discovered that a Nazi

official named Adolf Eichmann was living under a pseudonym in Argentina. They tracked him down, captured him, and brought him to Jerusalem. When Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced that Eichmann was in custody and would stand trial, people around the world were shocked. Ben-Gurion framed the trial as a historic moment of justice for all Jewish people. Hundreds would attend in person, and the trial would be broadcast live on the radio. They would make an example of this man, who had done such horrible things. Hannah wanted to be there. She reached out to the editor of the *New Yorker* and suggested she cover the trial.

ADAM J. SACKS: I do think that part of it was her own working through a trauma. We have to remember that as probably almost all refugees, who I think can be grouped as survivors, that this well-known classic psychological phenomenon of survivor's guilt. And she also articulated the fact that she had never actually encountered Nazis, these Nazi perpetrators, Nazi criminals, face-to-face.

JOSHUA MALINA: Eichmann was a high-ranking officer in the SS who was primarily responsible for organizing the deportation system that sent millions of prisoners to concentration camps. For Hannah, this may have been her chance to be in the same room with someone who had perpetrated the deaths of her fellow Jews—including many of the women she was interned with at Gurs. Nine months after Eichmann was hanged for his crimes, the first of Hannah's five-part series covering the trial appeared in the *New Yorker* on February 8, 1963. The reaction was immediate—and scathing. One month later, the Council of Jews from Germany published a strong statement on the matter in *Aufbau*.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT: The greater majority of the publications dealing with the Nazi period published during the last few years serves historical truth and helps it to prevail. Recently, opinions have been voiced which must not remain uncontradicted: a historical picture influenced by such opinions would be a falsified one. This is especially true of the articles published by Hannah Arendt in the *New Yorker*.

JOSHUA MALINA: The issue was that, in her reporting, Hannah hadn't just covered the events of the trial. She had offered her own analysis of Eichmann's crimes—and of Eichmann himself.

HANNAH ARENDT: Justice insists on the importance of Adolf Eichmann, the man in the glass booth built for his protection: medium-sized, slender, middle-aged, with receding hair, ill-fitting teeth, and nearsighted eyes, who throughout the trial keeps craning his scraggy neck toward the bench (not once does he face the audience), and who desperately and for the most part successfully maintains his self-control.

ADAM J. SACKS: Eichmann was, of course, one of the very few high-ranking Holocaust perpetrators who was ever captured, who was ever brought to justice. And yet it must be said that he himself was only like what you could call senior middle management. So he had an extremely critical position in terms of the Holocaust and its perpetration, but he was not one of the, let's say, major ringleaders of the conspiracy behind the Holocaust. So she sees in Eichmann's role a confrontation with this very particular crime of administrative mass murder. And she identifies that as something novel.

JOSHUA MALINA: “Administrative mass murder.” In Hannah's eyes, Eichmann's crimes were unique in that he never killed anyone with his own hands—he caused their deaths by creating the *bureaucracy* that brought them to the place where they were killed.

ADAM J. SACKS: So she's trying to make sense of what kind of evil this is because it seems so incongruous that people immediately assume that perpetrators of mass murder and genocide are kind of raving lunatics and are so obviously demonic. And she does see the demonic in Eichmann, but it's contingent on what she calls his “thoughtlessness.”

JOSHUA MALINA: When the trial coverage was eventually published as a book in May 1963, it was titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In Hannah's

eyes, Eichmann was superficial and careless. She wrote that his form of evil wasn't maniacal, it was *banal*.

ADAM J. SACKS: And it's interesting because this is still debated a lot, you know, that Eichmann is putting on a show. It's theatrics. It's Hollywood. The real question is, does Hannah Arendt fall for it or not? I mean, many detractors say that she falls for it. That Eichmann really is, he's a psychopath just like Hitler. He's a raging, fanatical, bloodthirsty antisemite. And he manages to put on the show that he's just this kind of pencil pushing middle management bureaucrat, and she falls for that. This is the major critique.

JOSHUA MALINA: But, in the eyes of her critics, this wasn't even the worst of Hannah's sins. For the German-Jewish refugee community, the worst thing that Hannah Arendt did was to implicate the Jews of Germany in their own demise. During the Nazi era, local Jewish administrative councils were established to serve as middlemen between the Nazis and the Jews. In theory, they existed to advocate for their communities. But they were also coerced into helping the Nazis in their mission. They enforced Nazi regulations, provided lists of local Jewish families and, in the end, they even helped organize deportations. These councils included many prominent Jewish leaders, including the famed Rabbi Leo Baeck. He argued that, if the deportations were going to happen anyway, it was better for other Jewish people to be the ones to do it—they would be kinder. Hannah did *not* agree with this justification.

ADAM J. SACKS: She basically implies that had it not been for this role of Jewish leaders, that the overall murder tally would have been a lot, lot lower than it ended up being. And I think that was something that still today can be rendered as a kind of an exaggeration and something we of course can never know with any kind of certainty.

JOSHUA MALINA: In the original publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah referred to Leo Baeck as the "Jewish Führer." After extreme backlash, the comment was removed from future editions. But it was too late. The damage was already done. Back in 1955, Hannah had been part of the group of German-Jewish intellectuals who wanted

to preserve the culture of German-speaking Jews after the devastation of the Holocaust. They established the Leo Baeck Institute to further this mission. Their first publication was a version of Hannah's thesis from when she was studying in Germany. But after the Eichmann controversy, Hannah was essentially ousted from the group. Her colleagues couldn't understand why she would take a stance that implied the events of the Holocaust were anything but black-and-white.

ADAM J. SACKS: This was something that simply went beyond what could be tolerated. And it was something that I think no one could bear. And part of it is because just at the point where kind of Holocaust memory is beginning she's puncturing any kind of sacred aura around the event and she's instead bringing you know analysis, political theory to this event.

JOSHUA MALINA: In April 1963, a piece in the weekly journal *Jewish Spectator* read, "Miss Arendt is a highly gifted and intelligent thinker. In fairness to herself, she should disqualify herself from writing on Jewish themes to which she brings the pathology and confusion of the Jew who does not want to be a Jew and suffers because "the others" will not let him forget that he is a Jew." The next month, in an issue of *The American Zionist*, a journal published by the Zionist Organization of America, the president of the group wrote: "Our Prophets warned us once that some of the greatest enemies we will encounter will come from the inside. I am afraid Professor Arendt has done a great disservice to the Jewish people and, most of all, to the cause of truth." Later that year, the German philosopher Gershom Scholem wrote to Hannah directly about his disappointment. They had been good friends for decades, since her political activism years back in Berlin—but no longer. He wrote, "It is the heartless, the downright malicious tone you employ in dealing with the topic that so profoundly concerns the center of our life. There is something in the Jewish language that is completely undefinable, yet fully concrete—what the Jews call *ahavath Israel*, or love for the Jewish people. With you, my dear Hannah, as with so many intellectuals coming from the German left, there is no trace of it." For Hannah, all of this criticism was devastating. She wrote about it in a letter to her longtime mentor and friend, the philosopher Karl Jaspers.

HANNAH ARENDT: People are resorting to any means to destroy my reputation. They have spent weeks trying to find something in my past that they can hang on me.

ADAM J. SACKS: I think that it had a tremendous personal cost for her, not only in terms of deep friendships and relationships that she had had in her life, some of which were totally severed or severely damaged. And I think that affected her greatly. I think it increased her isolation just at a point where, you know, she's moving towards her later sixties.

JOSHUA MALINA: The controversy surrounding *Eichmann in Jerusalem* went on for years. To some extent, it continues today. But Hannah kept moving forward. She continued to write, teach, and publish books. She meditated on topics like political responsibility and moral judgement. She and her husband, Heinrich, lived a quiet life together, until his death in 1970. And, on December 4, 1975, controversial political theorist Hannah Arendt, who escaped the Holocaust, who charmed the Gestapo, and who once organized a walkout in her high school class because a teacher made her mad, passed away at home while entertaining friends. She was 69 years old. Half a century later, her writing is still discussed, debated, and studied.

ADAM J. SACKS: I think it's notable that there's a huge revival of interest in Hannah Arendt, almost to the point of her functioning as a kind of secular saint. And I think that, on the one hand, so many of her ideas were so far ahead of their time. Radical loneliness, atomization, post-truth. She got there decades before other people, so it's a process of like rediscovery of someone whose ideas are finally arriving.

JOSHUA MALINA: But it's hard to say whether Hannah herself would have approved of the way she is remembered.

ADAM J. SACKS: She always emphasized, and this is part of her critique of the leadership elite, that we should always turn to what she called, like, the *Kleine Hans*, like the...Average Joe, right? We should never forget the everyday Jewish victim, who had a family, who had hopes, who had dreams, who never

threatened anybody, and was so cruelly brought to torturous death. And she called repeatedly for a return of our thoughts to that. And so by focusing on her, we forget the everyday person.

JOSHUA MALINA: As a political theorist, Hannah Arendt was an innovator. She created new ways of thinking about power and political agency. She used her experiences and her knowledge to shed light on realities that other people were unwilling to see.

HANNAH ARENDT: As citizens, we must prevent wrongdoing because the world in which we all live—wrong-doer, wrong sufferer and spectator—is at stake.

THEME MUSIC UP

JOSHUA MALINA: Hannah Arendt was deeply involved in the early activities of LBI New York after it was founded in 1955. Her papers are at the Library of Congress and her personal library is at Bard College. One significant collection in the LBI Archives that bears her name is the “Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Collection”, which holds clippings documenting the furious response to her book in papers ranging from Aufbau to the Congregation Habonim Bulletin to the New Republic. Another collection of correspondence documents the efforts of the leaders of the LBI and other German-Jewish refugee organizations to organize a response to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* before the book’s publication in German. Learn more at lbi.org/exile. Exile is a production of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Antica Productions. I’m your narrator, Joshua Malina. This episode was written by Emily Morantz. Our executive producers are Laura Regehr and Stuart Coxe. Our producer is Emily Morantz. Research and translation by Isabella Kempf. Voice acting by Gordon Hecht and Athena Karkanis. Sound design and audio mix by Philip Wilson. Theme music by Oliver Wickham. This episode of Exile is made possible in part by a grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which is supported by the German Federal Ministry of Finance and the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future.

THEME MUSIC OUT