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The Critic and the Cure: A Reflection on the Reasons Behind Arendt's Refusal of Psychoanalysis

Amanda Malerba
Federal University of São Paulo - BR
Andreas Hetzel
University of Hildesheim - DE

Abstract

This article aims to analyze Hannah Arendt's critique of psychoanalysis in her short essay published in 1943, We refugees*, in which, in the midst of her reflections on the changing social situations of Jewish refugees from the Second World War. Arendt describes psychoanalysis as an outmoded practice of a tedious elite who tell 'ghost stories' based on minor events from their childhoods, which, in her perception, becomes unnecessary after the frightening events witnessed during the war. This critique in itself could already serve as an object of detailed analysis, nevertheless it becomes particularly interesting when, in the following paragraphs, Arendt proceeds to examine the suicides committed by Jewish refugees, who are supposed to be safe from the dangers of war in the countries where they are welcomed, basing her investigations on possible internal factors. This approach is very similar to Sigmund Freud's so-called social theory, describing a series of symptoms which, although they only affect individuals, have a social origin, that is, they are due to historical moments or events that individuals all together experience. Arendt discusses her suspicion of the optimism with which many Jews faced the loss of their mother tongue, the sense of feeling like victims who had to be saved and the*

necessity of adapting to the new habits of their new countries' cultures – whereas all of these themes are the subject of psychoanalytic studies. Lastly, the author describes an individual who would illustrate her concerns about Jewish optimism and the constant pursuit of being part of the national culture and identity: Mr. Cohn, who would become one of the most famous characters in Arendtian thought, which, in this sense, can also be compared to a clinical case, presented in psychoanalytic writing to illustrate the development of symptoms and the analysis. Despite ironizing psychoanalytic practice, the following pages will analyse whether it is possible to relate Arendt's investigation into the suicides of Jewish refugees and the fragile state in which refugees find themselves in the countries that receive them to the psychoanalytic methods criticized by the author in the same essay.

Keywords: Arendt, Freud, Refugees, Psychoanalysis, Social Psychoanalysis

1. The Arendtian Foundations for the Aversion of Psychoanalysis

Published shortly upon arriving in New York, after a long period of tense attempts to flee the Nazi regime in different European countries[1], Hannah Arendt's essay, *We Refugees* (1943) begins with a sentence that can demonstrate the fatigue and frustration of someone who has been transiting for a long time and, finally, when arriving at a supposedly safe location, finds themselves in a new socially and politically precarious position: 'In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees". We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants"' (Arendt 1994: 110). Arendt denounces that the term

[1] *We Refugees* (1943) was first published in a Jewish magazine called Menorah, which was closed down in 1961. This essay was recovered and reprinted in Robinson, M. (ed.), Altogether Elsewhere, Writers on Exile, Faber & Faber, Boston, London, 1994.This is the edition we will use to quote from.

refugee was previously used to describe people who needed to seek refuge in other countries because of some unaccepted political act or opinion. Nevertheless, since the Second World War, the term *refugee* has also come to encompass those who do not have radical political views, but have been unfortunate enough to arrive in other countries without the means to stabilize themselves and need to be supported by the local government or different humanitarian institutions.

In the following paragraphs that introduce the essay, Arendt recognizes the resilience and optimism of refugees, more specifically Jews, who, after facing near-death situations, in which many had to be rescued and saved, are advised by those who welcome them, in the new countries where they arrive, to forget what they have endured in the past, while trying to survive. In fact, Arendt acknowledges that many refugees from the Second World War faced the challenges of integrating into the new cultures that welcomed them with the same obstinacy that they had in escaping and saving their lives, for these integration challenges can be just as daunting as those faced in the past and, for many, they can be even more unbearable. 'In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans' (111), even though he attempts to adopt and perform an optimistic posture, Arendt recalls that the refugee carries with him the mourning for his dead or abandoned relatives and acquaintances and, furthermore, this grief cannot even be experienced in their mother tongue, which deprives them of their natural reactions, gestures and spontaneous expressions of feelings.

In the midst of describing the social difficulties, the angst and the feeling of uncertainty about the future endured by the Jews in the countries where they sought refuge, Arendt interestingly criticizes psychoanalysis, mentioning this therapeutic method in an acid form of

scorn, based on recurring prejudices of this period:

> Thus we learn less about political events but more about our own dear selves, even though somehow psychoanalysis has gone out of fashion. Those happier times are past when bored ladies and gentlemen of high society conversed about the genial misdemeanors of their early childhood. They don't want ghost-stories any more; it is real experiences that make their flesh creep. There is no longer any need of bewitching the past; it is spellbound enough in reality (*Ib*.).

This passage suggests that, in Arendt's judgment, psychoanalysis would be an elitist activity detached from reality, with questionable methods and results, especially when confronted with current historical events, such as the recent developments of the war that, in her words, had created 'a new kind of human beings', who were liable to be placed inside concentration camps. Furthermore, the Arendtian thought already indicated an aversion to psychoanalysis at its very foundation, which becomes clearer and more structured in *The Human Condition* (1958), where the author categorically presents the difference between the internal, private realm of the individual's life and the realm of their public, political and, therefore, plural life.

In this work, Arendt discusses the three fundamental concepts that form the genesis of her philosophical anthropology: work, which is necessary for biological survival and takes place in the activity of the *animal laborans*, preserving not only the survival of the individual, but also that of the species; labor, the stage of *homo faber* who produces durable objects, i.e. techniques, sharing his manufacturing knowledge with other men; and action, the only characteristic of the human essence that depends exclusively on the continuous presence of other individuals. 'All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men

live together, but it is only action[2] that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men' (Arendt 1998: 22); in this sense, Arendt places labor and work in the domain of the private realm, while action is exclusively in the public and, therefore, the political realm. While the private realm is governed by necessity, the public realm is the reign of freedom, because political action is never equivalent to the work necessary for biological survival or technical production, but rather a communicational activity mediated through the language of a plurality of opinions within political confrontation.

In order to characterize the private realm, Arendt relies on the ancient Greek world, more specifically, in the realm of the home, the family and what is proper (*idion*) to men, for 'according to Greek thought, the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (*oikia*) and the family' (24). The private realm, therefore, was a reign of violence in which only the head of the family exercised despotic power over his subordinates – his wife, children and slaves –, without the possibility of any free and rational discussion. The daily routine of the home revolved around necessity: the head of the family provided food and security in the face of internal threats, such as slave revolts, and external threats, other masters who could destroy a given home and family; the woman was the property of the head of the family and her duty was to assist him procreating

[2] Further on in The Human Condition, Arendt refers to the Aristotelian concept of *praxis*: 'Of all the activities necessary and present in human communities, only two were deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called the *bios politikos*, namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*), out of which rises the realm of human affairs' (Arendt 1938: 24-5). For the Greeks, the public realm composes and defines the field of politics, while the private realm refers to the space and biological activities necessary for man's sojourn on Earth. For Aristotle, the purpose of living together is the happiness of men, and, therefore, it's essential to discuss and deliberate on the means necessary to carry out the actions in order to achieve this purpose. *Praxis*, in this sense, has a different meaning from a mere action, it signifies an action in which the agent, the action and the result of it are indissociable, as parts that exist only together.

and looking after the children; while the slaves served the head of the family with domestic activities. This illustration of a typical ancient Greek home is relevant to Arendt's thinking because 'without owning a house a man could not participate in the affairs of the world because he had no location in it which was properly his own' (30).

From an Arendtian perspective, the private realm is the purest inequality: the head of the family commanded and the other members of the family were commanded by him, under the guise of the maintenance of domestic order, which deprived individuals of the most important of capacities – the political action. For this reason, the author states that the understanding that bound all the ancient Greek philosophers together was that happiness (*eudaimonia*) lies in public life and not in private life and 'that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity – for instance, by ruling over slaves – and to become free' (31). Arendt's strict conceptual separation of *oikos* and *polis*, of private and political life, has been criticized by scholars, among them, Judith Butler, who asserts in *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly* (2015) that the most urgent political issues of our time are those related to the fair distribution of the activities associated with the *oikos*: 'Only as creatures who recognize the conditions of interdependency that ensure our persistence and flourishing can any of us struggle for the realization of any of those important political goals during times in which the very social conditions of existence have come under economic and political assault' (Butler 2015: 45)[3].

[3] In her reflection on the division between the private and public spheres, Butler also draws attention to the criticism that Arendt received from feminist theorists for designating the private sphere, and therefore detached from the public sphere, the domain classically attributed of women, slaves, children, and those too old or infirm to work. See Linda Zerilli, *The Arendtian Body*, and Joan Cocks, *On Nationalism*, in Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995).

Therefore, within the home, freedom did not exist, because the head of the family was considered free only insofar as he had the power to leave the house and enter the political realm, where all were considered equal. In this regard, Arendt states that the 'good life', as Aristotle referred to the life of the citizen, 'was 'good' to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process' (Arendt 1998: 37). Indeed, in a realm where all are equal, there is no need to command or be commanded, but rather the courage to access political life in order to affirm a discursive individuality and contradict the mere socialization imposed by the limitations of the private biological life:

> In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human. We no longer think primarily of deprivation when we use the word 'privacy,' and this is partly due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism (38).

In this sense, it is already possible to trace the origins of Arendt's aversion to psychoanalysis. In the logic of the thinking that men only exercise their freedom through political participation, discussing issues of social relevance and escaping what Arendt calls the instinctive and biological organization of the home and family, a therapy centered on the dialogue between two individuals, analyst and analysand, about

events that occurred not only in the public realm, but also in private life does not seem to be relevant, since in Arendtian thought, events that take place in the private realm don't have the same relevance as social and political issues and therefore don't deserve to be dealt with publicly.

Because it is not a place intended for freedom, but rather for the maintenance of biological necessities which are satisfied on the basis of a rigid hierarchy and dependence on the figure of the head of the family, the private sphere, illustrated by the classical Greek domestic configuration, is, for Arendt, the realm of futility, since its events have no relevance to the public sphere, 'this, to be sure, does not mean that private concerns are generally irrelevant; on the contrary, we shall see that there are very relevant matters which can survive only in the realm of the private' (51). It becomes understandable, from this perspective, the allusion that psychoanalysis is an elitist practice of wasting time 'hunting ghosts', since it is not believed to have practical implications in the lives of those being analyzed, when investigating the origin of symptoms and anguishes – as Arendt herself will interestingly conduct in the course of her essay.

2. Arendt and the Investigation of Suicide

Following the sharp critique on psychoanalysis in *We Refugees*, Hannah Arendt begins her investigation into cases of Jewish suicide, not only in large cities where the persecution caused the greatest panic, such as Berlin, Vienna, Bucharest or Paris, but also in New York, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires and Montevideo, that is, the regions where the Jews arrived after their long escapes and were, or should have been, safe. 'No, there's something wrong with our optimism. There are these odd optimists among us who, having made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way' (Arendt 1994: 112); Arendt draws attention to the

fact that there have been few reports on Jewish suicides[4] in ghettos and concentration camps, during times of greatest anxiety and suffering, and recounts that she herself only became aware of the issue of suicide once while she was in the Gurs[5] camp, but only as a suggestion of collective action, that is, the idea of a collective suicide of the people who were imprisoned in that camp to protest against the conditions they found themselves in and in order to cause vexation to the French.

And, yet, Arendt perceives that these same Jews, who displayed a remarkable violent courage of life during the time they spent trying to survive in concentration camps or seeking refuge, with no certainty about the future, 'as soon as they returned to their own individual lives, being faced with seemingly individual problems, changed once more to this incase optimism which is next door to despair' (113). The author reflects that perhaps the philosophers were right to assume that suicide is the ultimate and supreme guarantee of freedom, for these suicides can be related to the fact that these people did not expect to live these lives – refugee lives –, and, not being free to live the lives they had prepared for in a world they had hoped for, they are at least free to 'throw away' the lives they have in the world they live in.

In contrast to the suicides as acts of resistance which Gayatri

[4] In his work *Suicide, a Study in Sociology* (1897), Émile Durkheim discusses the small percentage of Jewish suicides, especially when compared to Christians and Protestants: 'Jews killed themselves less frequently than Catholics in all countries but Bavaria; only towards 1870 do they begin to lose their ancient immunity. They still very rarely greatly exceed the rate for Catholics. Besides, it must be remembered that Jews live more exclusively than other confessional groups in cities and are in intellectual occupations. On this account they are more inclined to suicide than the members of other confessions, for reasons other than their religion. If therefore the rate for Judaism is so low, in spite of this aggravating circumstance, it may be assumed that other things being equal, their religion has the fewest suicides of all' (Durkheim 2002: 155–156).

[5] Arendt fled to France in 1933 and was imprisoned in Gurs for several weeks. In 1940, she managed to escape to the USA via Lisbon. Information and a virtual exhibition of the Gurs camp can be found on the website: https://www.gurs1940.de/de/#/

Spivak mentions in her essay *Can the subaltern speak?* (1994)[6], these quiet, modest suicides committed by Jews don't seem to represent acts of rebellion or violence, but rather silent ways of disappearing. It is as if their own modesty were an apology for the violent solution they have found – alone – to deal with personal problems. In a world that continues to be strange and different from what they imagined, many of the Jewish refugees, 'having felt entitled from their earliest childhood to a certain social standard, they are failures in their own eyes if this standard cannot be kept any longer' (114), it is then that suicide may appear as a solution for those who feel they no longer have any value or use, for being unable to fulfill their rightful place in society or pursue their professions:

> Once we were somebodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends, and even known by landlords as paying our rent regularly. Once we could buy our food and ride in the subway without being told we were undesirable. We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done; we already are so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have, where our birth certificates were filled out – and that Hitler didn't like us. We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food (Arendt 1998: 115).

[6] Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?* Reflections on the History of an Idea. In: Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader. Columbia University Press, 1994, 90-105.

If, for Arendt, man is a social animal who exercises his freedom publicly, the loss of a social status, especially in a context where that status may be irrecoverable, can be very difficult for an individual to overcome. Nevertheless, in portraying the suicides of Jewish refugees, Arendt follows a path very similar to Sigmund Freud's so-called social theory in describing a series of symptoms, which, although they impact individuals alone, originate socially, that is, due to historical moments or events: i) the optimistic nature with which Jewish refugees view their situations; ii) the belief that, no longer being able to exercise their professions, they no longer have any value; iii) the loss of their mother tongue, which implies the loss of natural and spontaneous reactions; iv) the grief of having left relatives and friends in ghettos and concentration camps; v) the feeling that they had to be saved; vi) attempts to forget the past and simply fit into the new host culture, pretending to be 'Frenchmen or Americans'; vii) failing to talk to other refugees about past experiences. In an attempt to expand the limits of psychoanalysis into the social field, Freud began to write about the influence of social relations and the impact of the increasingly frenetic modern life on the functioning of the psychic apparatus, initiating his study of society and culture with his work *'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908), in which he describes a world of collision, dislocation and instability, which is the Modernity he experienced himself, and produces a series of works that expand the field of psychoanalysis until his last great work *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), which also portrays the socio-political tension and the historical moment experienced by the author, the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of the Second World War, while examining the social and political violence experienced by the Jewish people over the centuries.

3. Arendt and Social Psychoanalysis

If we analyze Sigmund Freud's social texts, which inaugurated the field

of Social Psychoanalysis, this means the investigation of the effects of the social configuration on the unconscious, it can be seen that the structure of the texts and the line of investigation are similar to Arendt's reflections in *We Refugees*, even though she criticized psychoanalysis in that same essay. In '*Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908), a short text in which Freud relates directly aspects that were occurring during the late period of Modernity, observed and experienced by himself – in the same way as Arendt –, such as the emergence of new technologies and the excitement of urban life to the increase in nervous diseases:

> The extraordinary achievements of modern times, the discoveries and inventions in every sphere, the maintenance of progress in the face of increasing competition – these things have only been gained, and can only be held, by great mental effort. The demands made on the efficiency of the individual in the struggle for existence have greatly increased and it is only by putting out all his mental powers that he can meet them. At the same time, the individual's needs and his demands for the enjoyments of life have increased in all classes; unprecedented luxury has spread to strata of the population who were formerly quite untouched by it; irreligion, discontent and covetousness have grown up in wide social spheres' (Freud 1981: 183).

For Freud, the social configuration is intrinsically related to psychoanalysis, because the rules and requirements imposed on individuals in a civilized life are not natural human tendencies, but rather seek to protect their members from external dangers, the forces of nature, while also regulating the internal tensions between its members that result from living together. Nevertheless, while

civilization is responsible for a large part of the satisfaction of its members, protecting them from the external threats of nature and ensuring that they do not have to be overly concerned about their daily survival, it has not managed to increase individuals' happiness. Despite the significant scientific and technological advances that have been made, becoming themselves the symbol of Modernity, science does not seem to have increased the happiness of individuals or diminished the feeling of malaise.

For Freud, life in civilization implies sacrifices in the sexual lives of individuals and the renunciation of aggressive inclinations, which not only cause frustration and feelings of aversion to civilization, but also lead to an increase in nervous diseases. Hence, from a Freudian perspective, it is not wrong to assume that the health of individuals is subject to damage and influences of a social order, mainly due to the impositions of a high cultural level, such as sexual restrictions imposed on men and women, which are combined with the unprecedented and versatile scenario of the late modern period. Along with the intensification of urban life, Freud points to the fact that individuals seek refuge in the pleasures offered by the urban environment, which results in an ever-increasing state of exhaustion.

Freud argues that the demands of cultural ideals, functions which provide guidance on what is expected of each member of civilization in terms of their behavior, appearance and interaction with others, also contribute to the malaise of man in civilization, being incorporated into the Superego[7] of the members of civilization, causing them to feel

[7] In Freudian theory, the Superego is the agent of the psychic apparatus responsible for imposing moral values on the Self, which continues to correct or judge the individual based on the moral or religious precepts usually taught by their parents during their childhood, perpetuating the parental influence throughout the individual's life: 'The super-ego retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading), the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on – in the form of

increasingly compelled to respect the rules and norms of that society and, in the event that they do not respect them, even in private, to feel guilty. Such cultural demands are an attempt to free civilization from tendencies towards violence, and, yet, impose unattainable standards on individuals, demanding far more than they can manage, which results in suffering:

> Occasionally a nervous patient will himself draw the doctor's attention to the part played in the causation of his complaint by the opposition between his constitution and the demands of civilization and will say: 'In our family we've all become neurotic because we wanted to be something better than what, with our origin, we are capable of being' (187).

Not only is this excerpt remarkably close to the complaints registered in Arendt's 1943 essay about the Jewish refugees, but it also demonstrates how, in Freudian theory, civilization is an order imposed on a naturally disordered humanity and, for this reason, it imposes norms and demands that regulate the possibilities of satisfaction for those who live in it, directing the violence that would be addressed to other members towards the civilized individuals themselves, in terms of perfectly complying with social norms and meeting social expectations of them. Nonetheless, 'experience teaches us that for most people there is a limit beyond which their constitution cannot comply with the demands of civilization' (191), the feeling of malaise is an indication that the impositions and renunciations demanded by civilization are never fully accepted in the unconscious of individuals, which evidences civilization as an object of study for psychoanalysis.

Freud observes that these cultural ideals can be unfair and cruel

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conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt' (Freud 1986: 34–35).

for many in expecting all members of civilization to fit into the monogamous heterosexual life project:

> It is one of the obvious social injustices that the standard of civilization should demand from everyone the same conduct of sexual life-conduct which can be followed without any difficulty by some people, thanks to their organization, but which imposes the heaviest psychical sacrifices on others (192),

emphasizing the suffering of homosexual people as well as women, from whom chastity is expected until marriage and even a distant and pure attitude towards their sexuality once they are married, at the risk of being condemned for having a sinful disposition. In this regard, relating the increase in nervous diseases in Modernity to the rapidity and exhaustion that can be caused by urban life, in addition to the sexual and aggressive restrictions imposed on individuals as part of what is expected within the cultural ideal, Freud places psychoanalysis as a therapy that ought also to address suffering caused from social causes, which distances psychoanalysis in its very foundation from the image presented by Arendt as an mere activity of 'bewitching the past', unrelated to real experiences.

4. An Arendtian Clinical Case

As Freudian theory developed, so did the psychoanalytic clinical practice, which often based its arguments and concepts on real examples of analysands. In this way, many characters illustrated Freud's texts[8], such as the first and perhaps most famous, Anna O.,

[8] Some of the other analysands who have gained interest over the years and illustrated Freudian works are Dora, pseudonym of Ida Bauer, who appears in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905 [1901]); Little Hans, pseudonym

pseudonym of Bertha Pappenheim, was the analysand of the clinical case that opens the work *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), organized by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, and who provided a face for patients with hysteria. Hannah Arendt adopts a similar resource in *We Refugees*, when she designates a character to illustrate the problematic of Jewish refugee optimism, more specifically, the sudden change of identity in an attempt to fit in better with the culture of the country they are entering:

> Some day somebody will write the true story of this Jewish emigration from Germany; and he will have to start with a description of that Mr. Cohn from Berlin who had always been a 150% German, a German super-patriot. In 1933 that Mr. Cohn found refuge in Prague and very quickly became a convinced Czech patriot—as true and loyal a Czech patriot as he had been a German one. Time went on and about 1937 the Czech Government, already under some Nazi pressure, began to expel its Jewish refugees, disregarding the fact that they felt so strongly as prospective Czech citizens. Our Mr. Cohn then went to Vienna; to adjust oneself there a definite Austrian patriotism was required (Arendt 1998: 116).

Arendt narrates Mr. Cohn's story through the nations he traveled in search of refuge, emphasizing the way he changed his personality to encompass traits of the cultures he arrived in: Czech, Austrian and, finally, French. After explaining the symptoms presented by the Jewish refugees and the reported cases of suicide, the description of the story

of Herbert Graf, discussed in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (1909); The Rat Man, pseudonym of Ernst Lanzer, presented in *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* (1909) and The Wolf Man, pseudonym of Sergei Pankejeff, which can be found in *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918).

– or case – of Mr. Cohn illustrates the farce of the Jewish refugees' optimism. For Arendt, the ease observed in personality changes, in the absorption of cultural traits and new patriotisms reveals the desire to be changed, the desire to no longer be a Jew: 'we don't succeed and we can't succeed; under the cover of our 'optimism' you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists' (117). However, this assimilation does not occur with the country in which they were born, in their mother tongue.

Arendt argues that refugees need to adjust to a whole new reality – a new culture, a new language and a new social position –, yet patriotism is not understood as a matter of practice, but as a trait of those who are native to that region. Giorgio Agamben writes a short reflection on the thinking of Arendt, which he also names *We Refugees* (1995), analyzing the way in which refugees can be disturbing figures, because 'by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty' (Agamben 1995: 117). Agamben states that the first camps built in Europe were designed to deal with this problematic figure of refugees: initially being internment camps, later becoming concentration camps and, during the Nazi regime, extermination camps. In this sense, Agamben points to the same threat that Arendt had already mentioned, the precarious state of a man who is no longer a citizen, and, in this reasoning, the refugee seems to acquire a meaning, a sacred meaning, in Agamben's words, of one who is destined to die, whether in an extermination camp or through suicide in another country.

Like Arendt, Agamben reflects on the damage and impact that the refugee causes to the nation state, but the authors don't spend much time thinking about the damage that the social configuration causes to refugees, stripping them of the protection of being a citizen and creating the perception that there is no longer a place in the world for

them. This is the reason why, for Arendt, if patriotism were not a matter of birthright, but of practice and routine, the Jewish people would be the most patriotic in the world:

> Let us go back to our Mr. Cohn; he certainly has beaten all records. He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains (Arendt 1998: 118).

However, Arendt observes that despite the attempts to integrate the new cultures, the native population continues to resist accepting that these transformations are sincere[9], for only a loyalty to the refugees' old countries is understandable, which places, which makes the lives of refugees very similar to a dead end.

5. Conclusion

Towards the end of her essay, Arendt refers to the refugees as Ulysses-wanderers, who on their journeys find themselves not knowing who they are, like Mr. Cohn, simply because they refuse to embrace their identity as Jews. The author considers that many Jews find themselves continuously excited about the prospect of a new destination, a new nationality that can offer them a new life, without realizing that their *status* will remain the same. However, Arendt recognizes that this attitude is understandable, since it has become clear to these refugees

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[9] In the process of forming the national identity of a given people, Freud says that while subjects build their personalities by identifying with aspects that are part of a collective, they will also identify aspects that are not part of the collective to which they belong to, which they then classify as 'other'. Freud specifically refers to the treatment that Jews have received in various societies, having their most striking features manipulated into becoming 'others', and then a source of hatred that should be eliminated: 'Other grounds for hating the Jews are stronger – thus, the circumstances that they live for the most part as minorities among other peoples, for the communal feeling of groups requires, in order to complete it, hostility towards some extraneous minority' (Freud 1939: 34–35).

how dangerous it is to assume that they are Jewish:

> If we should start telling the truth that we are nothing but Jews, it would mean that we expose ourselves to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while, since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed (Arendt 1998: 118).

Having lost their jobs, their homelands, not being able to express themselves in their mother tongue and having to adapt their personalities to, sometimes more than one, nationality, it becomes evident, in the post-modern gaze, the need for these people to receive psychotherapeutic support[10]. Arendt does recognize the fragile state refugees find themselves in and the risks of coping alone with the social issues imposed on them, such as the prejudice of the native population and the impossibility of living up to the social expectations they had of their own lives: 'It is true that most of us depend entirely upon social standards, we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us; we are – and always were – ready to pay any price in order to be accepted by society' (119).

Despite ironizing psychoanalysis as a practice separated from reality, it is possible to observe the way in which Arendt approached

[10] 'For refugees who need it, proper mental health care empowers them to cope with the challenges of displacement, take care of their families, earn a living and contribute to their communities. UNHCR advocates for refugee access to national mental health care systems, builds the capacity of local health staff and communities and supports mental health programmes in facilities'. More information can be found on the website: https://www.unhcr.org/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support.

psychoanalytical models in the composition of her essay. Not only was the approach similar, with the initial description of the symptoms, the reflection on the possible causes of Jewish suicides and the presentation of a character who illustrated one of her concepts, Mr. Cohn as the farce of Jewish optimism, but also the subject of the essay revolved around a reflection on the refugees and, therefore, about identity, fragility and suicide – all of these objects of psychoanalytic studies.

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