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by Rebecca M. Samson

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Twentieth century western philosopher Johanna "Hannah" Arendt (1906-75) dissected the effects of the individual on totalitarianism and vice versa. A secular German-Jewish student and intellectual within the Third Reich, she experienced firsthand the early phases of a victim of totalitarianism; later, when she wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *On Violence*, she analyzed her former position of victim and delved into the mindset of the targeted individual. Conversely, Marguerite Harrison endured the role of a privileged victim, an outsider, even, who, unlike Arendt, existed outside of the goal of an early totalitarian state. As an outside entity, the Soviets had little to gain by eliminating her by show trial or otherwise unless they could prove that she had gathered extremely valuable information as a spy. Even then, the Soviets had more to lose than to gain on an international stage by killing a seemingly innocent foreigner. Therefore, Harrison's account of the events exposed the lives of more legitimate threats to the totalitarian state in the moment and Arendt's intellectual analysis completed the bigger picture of the social mechanisms employed by any totalitarian state and the effects of totalitarian culture on human beings; Harrison observed the casualties of early Soviet totalitarianism and her international *Strength* saved her life whereas the *Strength* of each dangerous element, formerly considered a human being, usually lead to its demise.

Arendt defined words commonly overused in sociopolitical discourse in her book/essay *On Violence*. Central to the Soviets' idea of an enemy was the *Strength* of each individual, as Arendt contended that,

> "*Strength* unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity; it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its character which may prove itself in relation to other things or persons, but is essentially independent of them. The strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many..." (*On Violence* 44).

The Soviets, who wanted to become the ideological many and turn those who they wanted to oppose them into the few, regardless of individual reality, feared becoming the few- or having their influence and ideology demoted to the status of a few. Within the mindset of ideological expansionism, every individual in the Soviet Union gained *Strength*. With *Strength* came volatility; *Strength*, in the eyes of the most zealous, powerful Soviet officials, existed mainly to be taken away in the form of millions of prison sentences, show trials, executions, and deportations to various concentration and work camps. Undoubtedly, Harrison did not fit that profile because she came from elsewhere and did not intend to permanently reside in the Soviet Union as a citizen or even a long-term guest who could have dangerously indoctrinated others with *Strength* to counterrevolutionary mindsets like an evangelist or proponent of a democratic youth group. Instead, she got lost in the fray, though she did go through the process of arrest, interrogation, detainment, and imprisonment. Her status as a foreigner put the state in an ambiguous position: as a foreigner not looking to become a citizen, the state did not have the obligation to accommodate her for the rest of her life if she was not found guilty to the degree of a life sentence or execution in the state's eyes. If word traveled across the

world that the Soviets killed a fairly innocent foreigner, then the Soviets would have spent time and resources just to damage their own reputation and begin to make more enemies instead of alliances on their clean slate.

Consequentially, Harrison got to observe the process of punishment of those the Soviets believed had done something deserving of severe punishment. Whether or not the prisoners or arrestees were legitimately guilty regardless of evidence did not matter; only what the state believed- or wanted to believe- mattered because the state had the power to inflict punishment on an individual, nullify the individual's *Strength*. In observing these individuals, she observed a certain objectivity within the prison system to insiders. Many, as Harrison noted, did not receive interviews for weeks or months or have any information on the grounds of their arrests; she admitted the others' notice of her special treatment, which put her outside the norm (Harrison 231). She was treated rather mildly by those in power, as were some of those around her. What she did not see was how the state was not objective at all, that it was quite discriminatory in its treatment of criminals. The state had all sorts of standards for reasons for arresting people and guidelines to fit the crime and the reasons grew throughout the Soviet era, more and more of them for different crimes but there were always reasons given, justified or not, even with such diversity of prisoners (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 423-26). There were so many different categories of prisoners because each category estimated the quantity of potential *Strength* within a central idea deemed dangerous to society: thieves, for example, obviously posed a danger to society where as kulaks, in their different forms, did not always, for example, if they happened to possess too much livestock beyond a standard set arbitrarily low by the state. The state made so many categories so it could eliminate the *Strength* of the many and the guards did not reflect the state's intentions in its somewhat mild treatment of well-behaved prisoners like Harrison. Otherwise, the guards functioned more realistically than the state itself by punishing prisoners who behaved erratically or posed a legitimately extreme danger- or prisoners senseless enough to provoke their keepers.

Harrison and the Soviet prison experience were examples that fit Arendt's description of *Strength*. Arendt's notion of the *Strength* of each individual exemplified the function of each totalitarian state, especially in the infancy of each totalitarian state. Harrison's mild experience as a foreigner supported the grounds for the demise of the individual within totalitarianism. Arendt's writings completed Harrison's account so well because Arendt knew without a doubt that she was guilty of being a Jew, knowledge that gave her the mind of the sentenced rather than the observant outsider with more than a chance to survive. Harrison's rosy picture of her experience furthered the harsh reality of the situation and the true mindset of the Soviet regime because it exposed the circumstances under which the Soviets had reason to treat an individual humanely: the Soviets treated individuals humanely when they knew those individuals had the power to alter outside *Strength* like Harrison could have if they needlessly killed her and the word traveled far enough to negatively impact the Soviets' reputation. Both women exemplified the ramifications of *Strength* on totalitarianism. Arendt's *Strength* was how she developed her experience and other accounts of victims into world-renowned philosophy; she demonstrated that each individual was a potential threat to totalitarianism because she herself understood her own threat as a Jewish intellectual to her former society and Harrison's account as an individual who could hope her guilt was not severe exposed the enduring weakness of the Soviets and their consciousness of the potential *Strength* wielded by each individual.

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