

- Chapter 3 -

DEHUMANIZATION AND TERROR

Terror is the continuation of postpolitics with other means.¹

In the previous chapter I exposed how violence is taken for granted in mainstream IR as it is seen as a natural law of life. I explored the inherent violence in the fabrication of politics and the production of superfluousness and animalised lives. I also made an analysis of Arendt's insights on violence in order to criticise how violence is seen as a self-evident question in the international sphere and how these views affect some aspects of our life to the extent of isolating men. In order to continue raising the profile of Arendtian thought and its fruitfulness for IR theory, it is my hope to apply the connections between superfluousness and violence to the phenomenon of 9/11 and the 'war on terror' we are currently immersed in. This exercise will attempt to verify the sub-hypothesis that an alternative understanding of both the concept and the dynamics of violence and superfluousness is crucial to understand and solve some of the major contemporary problems that derive from the relation of both elements.

The opening quote paints an appalling picture of our contemporary political realm. These days offer us the impression that the only radical 'political' act that our society can perform is terrorism.² Our current 'political' interactions sadly seem to confirm that we have lost somewhere the meaning of the experience of politics, the value and importance of a proper human life. Events such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon buildings on September 11, 2001 have provoked a great deal of rage and

¹ Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, "7-11, 9/11 and Postpolitics," *Alternatives* 29 no. 1 (2004): 110. Citing Zygmunt Bauman, *Society under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 94., and Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), 34.

² Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 137. Cited by Diken and Laustsen, "7-11, 9/11 and Postpolitics," 110.

paranoia, but little reflection on the ways in which ‘politics’ have been lived in the West. Immersed in a depoliticized realm in which ‘everything is possible but we have no choices,’ we are preoccupied with satisfying the necessities of superfluous lives in accordance with the preservation of the ‘health’ of the nation. We are not allowed to dedicate ourselves to any cause, any genuine belief in a political cause is a source of danger for the state, since it could pose the danger of not sharing its particular idea of a ‘garden of politics.’ September 11 and its aftermaths reflect such defect; “[w]eakened by our materialism and consumerism, we, the Westerners cannot imagine a political cause to fight and die for.”³

Although the problem of terrorism has been present in much academic and political debates for many years, the attacks of September 11 have marked the beginning of a ‘new’ kind of terrorism. This question brings to the fore peculiar and highly complex problems that indeed have an impact on issues regarding violence, terror, politics and dehumanization. 9/11 is an effect that demands a great deal of analysis since, so far, it has itself caused great violence and provoked few thoughtful attempts to examine what went wrong, why this happened and where our actions against terrorism are taking us.

To begin thinking about the event, one needs first to recognise that we do not yet have the concepts to do so... The event, in other words, is not controlled by the world picture of Al-Qaeda or any such statist ideologies. It is only the banality of a subject-centred reason that can provide the comfort of such easy, perspectivistic translations, by which disaster in the ‘democratic north’ automatically becomes a triumph in the realm of the ‘despotic south’. If thinking about the event calls for a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, it has to be seen as a form of politics that is yet to arrive. It is this political impulse of thought that the state, statist violence, and commonsensical clichés of all kinds seek to prevent.⁴

³ Žizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 40. Cited by Diken and Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11 and Postpolitics,” 98.

⁴ Anustup Basu, “State of Security and Warfare of Demons,” *Critical Quarterly* 45, no. 1-2 (July 2003): 13.

Anustup Basu's words here provide a clear picture of how mainstream IR has reacted to 9/11. Given IR is an empiricist discipline deeply engaged with providing one-sided *explanations* of events rather than focusing at least in the first instance on *understanding*⁵ them, issues such as 9/11 have been mostly treated from narrow perspectives. Such views, as usual, privilege excessively Western standpoints and make use of reified, partial views on elements of analysis such as the state, sovereignty, power, etc. As a consequence, phenomena such as the 'war on terror,' its actions and its discourses cannot be analysed and criticised from a broad, deep perspective if we continue to think with reference to the same 'usual suspects' and conceptual tools. Basu's claims are grave and address the pressing task for IR theory to stop relying on outdated concepts and start taking into account 'marginal' insights to obtain at least a clearer picture of our international realm.

In this vein, it is my hope to criticize the ways in which the West -especially the United States- has undertaken a 'war'(which rather seems to be a crusade) against terror and how these measures have only brought more violence and terror. It is noteworthy to bear in mind that George W. Bush did not declare a war against 'terrorism' as a political problem, but against 'terror' which entails a cultural dimension and attempts to a "civilizational discipline against all "terror."⁶ The fictional but common opposition between 'Jihad vs. McWorld,'⁷ the free world against despotic religious fundamentalism upon which post-9/11 politics have been seen, leaves severe Western weaknesses unnoticed. In this sense, Arendt's meditations on terror, politics and action provide

⁵ Steve Smith, "Singing our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 2004): 507.

⁶ Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, "Power, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 2004): 520.

⁷ Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

powerful elements that can help us to analyze in depth post-9/11 politics and contribute toward rethinking and recovering the humanity we have been stripped of.

1. *Palliating Terrorism with Terror: Hannah Arendt and the Police-State*

The previous chapter emphasised how traditional IR approaches are unable to detect and understand the inherent violence in the superfluous status our political structures confer to persons. How the violence of superfluosity can deprive us of an identity and a place in the world of men. These conditions, distinctive of totalitarian regimes such as Nazism and Stalinism, are still present in our current political systems which are consequently not completely free from totalitarian temptations. The core of our contemporary democracies is still permeated by totalitarian elements since they regard unqualified life as their most important value. All these perspectives are valuable for analysing the question of terror. As with the case of violence, such insights can plausibly provide more pertinent views of the question of terror in a manner that intends to pose alternative, fruitful understandings of the matter than those commonly entertained in mainstream IR.

The preceding chapter suggested briefly that for Arendt, “terror is the essence of totalitarian domination.”⁸ For totalitarianism “is a system that has no concern for individual human beings at all, but *uses* them merely as material for the working of supposedly suprahuman ‘laws’ of nature or history.”⁹ From these standpoints it is possible to apply Arendtian insights on violence, politics and identity in the analysis of the phenomenon of new terrorism and to argue the fruitfulness of her meditations for bringing attention to the dangerous elements of the current measures designed to attack and prevent it. These

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1958), 464.

⁹ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87-88.

indeed, according to her thought, carry veiled elements of terror which evoke deep similarities to totalitarianism.

First it is important to distinguish terrorism from terror, for the latter should be regarded as a *form* of violence in qualitative terms instead of a degree of violence in quantitative terms. In other words, terror should not be regarded as a result of the escalation of violence, as if it was its natural outcome. Even though some elements of violence are present and augmented in terror, the presence of the latter should not be seen as an obvious consequence of the outgrowth of violence. For example, when Arendt argued that totalitarianism is historically and contextually specific¹⁰ and that terror is its essence, she did not mean that the rise of violence in totalitarian rule provoked the emergence of terror. She rather put emphasis on how specific circumstances and aspects of a particular political life made possible the emergence of totalitarianisms and how they are constituted by terror. Thus my aim is to emphasize through the analysis of new terrorism and some post-9/11 political effects how the contemporary violence of human superfluousness and lack of political action (*praxis*) prepares the terrain for the emergence of terror. In other words, how our current political reality contains elements of terror, unnoticed by classic IR time-honoured dogmas.

Arendt explicitly declared that the common ground for terror is found in loneliness, which is basically the experience of not belonging to the world at all, of being deprived of an identity and a place in the world of men. For Arendt, “[w]hat prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age,

¹⁰ For a similar Arendtian-inspired point see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century.”¹¹ This means that certain practices that lead to dehumanization and loneliness such as racism, xenophobia and political indifference (which are so common in our political structures) are elements present in the totalitarianism that still permeates our daily interactions. In this respect, 9/11 without a doubt has provoked rage in numerous sectors of our societies which in turn has led to racism and xenophobia. However, we should not think that the shock produced by 9/11 justifies the continuation and intensification of such dehumanising practices. In this sense, mainstream IR has done little to provide alternative understandings of new terrorism, and if we continue to take its formal explanations for granted, terror will increasingly become an everyday experience as Arendt argued. Given the latter, I contend that the ‘war on terror’ is a highly problematic issue that intends to tackle the new manifestations of terrorism using terror, moreover, exploiting the already existing, problematic, quasi-totalitarian elements of our political structures to palliate terrorism. Such an exercise will show how mainstream IR’s reified, single-minded perspectives fail to deal with this problem in a form that detects and addresses the dehumanising effects of the war on terror and its use for fighting such ‘war.’

If the question of classic terrorism has always been an extremely difficult problem, the new manifestations of terror brought about by 9/11 have faced us with exceptionally complex questions and slippery issues to analyze. For example

[w]hereas classical terror targeted political adversaries and aimed at a realization of a political program, the new terror is blind and diffuse. It operates stochastically and seldom demands something explicit from an identifiable adversary... Being indifferent to the choice of targets, it seeks to maximize destruction and fear.¹²

¹¹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 478.

¹² Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 91.

Hence, we do not face uniformly constituted organizations that have specific political demands and particular, symbolic, visible targets. We will never know, for example, the exact political goals that motivated the attacks to the WTC and Pentagon. Such events or the bombs in Madrid and London subways “did not come from the usual suspects of a modern, disciplinary order, from the other(ed) occupying the margins without “touching” the rest of the society.”¹³ Unlike classical terrorism, the enemy is not only ‘unrecognizable’ but in addition, *unidentifiable* and *unlocatable*. In contrast with a traditional ‘terrorist’ (a Tamil Tiger or an IRA member) who has to remain camouflaged within a territory under enemy control, a ‘new’ terrorist does not need to try too much to remain unnoticed because he is a ‘normal’ person; he could be your neighbour.¹⁴ Moreover, contemporary terrorism does not operate within a fixed territorial extension. It is stateless and can be anywhere; it is “as global an enterprise as Coke or Pepsi or Nike. At the first sign of trouble, terrorists can pull up stakes and move their “factories” from country to country in search of a better deal. Just like the multi-nationals.”¹⁵ This means that we cannot identify terrorist networks in terms of systems, categories, structures or territories; they are mutable, and as Slavoj Zizek claims, viral.¹⁶ That is, as a sort of “immaterial” war in which “at the level of visible material reality nothing happens, no big explosions, and yet the known universe starts to collapse, life disintegrates.” Immersed in an “era of paranoiac warfare,” the biggest challenge is “to identify the enemy and his weapons,”¹⁷ the task is to identify a faceless,

¹³ Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 90.

¹⁴ Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 90.

¹⁵ Arundathi Roy, “The Algebra of Infinite Justice,” *Guardian*, September 29, 2001. Available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4266289,00.html>

¹⁶ Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 36-7. Cited by Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 91.

¹⁷ Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 25. Cited by Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 96

‘unidentifiable,’ mutable adversary, since an “evil that cannot be represented cannot be governed.”¹⁸ Thus the colossal degree of fear, uncertainty and unsafety this kind of terror causes is exemplified in the “spectral” treatment of Al Qaeda as an entity that is “both everywhere and nowhere, and because it can function as an empty signifier it can condense every threat.”¹⁹

The invisibility of ‘new’ terror is linked to its ‘unlocatability.’ This means that it is extremely difficult to place it within a context of inside/outside. I claimed in chapter 1 that the distinction between inside/outside is multidimensional, not fixed, and that its dividing line is rather blurry. Some assert however that “there is no more outside” as we are immersed in a context of deterritorialized and decentralized global capitalist networks, in which power is exercised through diffuse operations and ends up being both everywhere and nowhere, a *ou-topia*.²⁰ From this context, in the case of terror, since the enemy can be everywhere the distinction between the safe and enlightened ‘inside’ and the murky, threatening ‘outside’ is erased. New terror is potentially ubiquitous, therefore, security measures have to be applied everywhere; questions of ‘national security’ move beyond reinforcing traditional national boundaries and state’s sovereign jurisdiction over its citizens is strengthened.

Under these conditions permeated with uncertainty, fear, and the possibility of imagining terrorist threats at will, it is not very hard to figure out how we are immersed in the state of ‘paranoiac warfare’ Zizek adroitly mentioned. However, this is a tendency that can be at least minimized if we put some attention to our reactions against terrorism and try

¹⁸ Basu, “The State of Security and Warfare of Demons,” 12.

¹⁹ Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 111. Cited by Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 95.

²⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 187, 190.

to understand this phenomenon from alternative standpoints. For example, one of the failures to do so resides in taking for granted that we are at ‘war’ against terror. From an Arendtian perspective the term is highly problematic, first because claiming that we are at ‘war’ is to evoke –again- the most prominent manifestation of violence in IR discourse, which as seen in the previous chapter is treated as a ‘natural’ political manifestation. The second problem is that such state of war serves as a form of justifying –even falsely legitimating- the use of violence to the eyes of orthodox IR theories. Again, the fact that we regard politics as a matter of administering and promoting the mere survival of bare lives, that we persist in prioritising the protection of the life of the Western, national animalised lives makes possible to think in such utilitarian terms. They permit us to justify almost any kind of violence –both ordinary and extraordinary- for the sake of the security and the preservation of the sacrosanct ‘life’ of the nation-state.

This justification of violence permits the emergence of the terror inherent in a state of loneliness. Increasingly violent acts are justified against those who apparently support terrorism, current *homo sacers* such as Guantánamo detainees are deprived from an identity and a place in this world, beings who can be killed but whose death would not imply any crime. Such persons are taken to the extent of being dead to the world of men. However, they paradoxically continue to live stubbornly in this condition of deadness, in a spectral state. As a consequence, “[v]iolence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object.” And so the paranoia of the war against terrorism becomes infinite: it will justify itself endlessly in relation to the spectral state of its enemy, who will neither be completely dead, nor alive.²¹

²¹ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 33-34.

Declaring a state of war against terror in such a fashion has carried severe consequences for politics. One of the most salient effects of this kind of posture is the growing emergence of security as the top activity and priority of the state, which will endure as the ‘infinite’ war on terror lasts. Similarly to Arendt, Agamben argues that security is opposed to law as an instrument of governance. “While the law wants to prevent and prescribe, security wants to intervene in ongoing processes to direct them. In short, where discipline wants to produce order, security wants to guide disorder.”²² As Arendt warned, security provokes disorder because it permits the use of arbitrary measures parallel to the law. As a consequence, from the attempt of securitising emerges a *state of emergency*, where policing, as an activity oriented toward providing security, becomes the fundamental activity of the state. Such a situation is extremely serious since it dangerously leads toward erasing the difference between security and terror as they run the risk of justifying and falsely ‘legitimizing’ each other’s actions.²³ Indeed, an overemphasis on securitising and policing entails the danger of counterattacking terror with terror, of becoming a police state whose arbitrary rule might extend to all its citizens.

An excessive stress on security makes possible the establishment of a *state of exception* which as the term suggests, it is about the sovereign imposition of the exceptions over the rules. “[A] state of exception is declared when a person, a government or the military is elevated to the status of a sovereign with the purpose of securing the survival of the state or the political community.”²⁴ Let us remember that, regarding stateless peoples, Arendt pointed out that the clearer the state’s inability to treat stateless persons from a legal

²² Giorgio Agamben. “Security and Terror,” *Theory and Event* 5, no. 4 (2002). Available from <http://www.yorku.ca/dmutimer/4260/9-11/5.4agamben.html#authbio>

²³ Agamben, “Security and Terror.”

²⁴ Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 99.

perspective, the greater is the extension of arbitrary rule.²⁵ This case deals with how outlaws, by virtue of not being able to be subject to the law, receive a treatment from outside the law. They are unprotected and their situation and the abuses they might be exposed to are out of the reach and concern of the government. Such is the situation of alleged ‘terrorists’ under the current ‘war’ on terror which will be discussed later in this chapter. When the state undertakes policing as its main task, it is important to bear in mind the dangers of illegal and lawless arbitrary rule Arendt warned against.

The case of security and the state of exception permit us to discern how the justification of violence and terror works in tandem with the politicisation of the natural. Totalitarianisms use ‘natural law’ to ‘promise’ justice by claiming to make mankind the embodiment of that law. Hence, ‘natural law’ becomes the governing principle of everything, and under its name, anything can be done out of any moral judgement or legal punishment, thus opening a gap between legality and justice.²⁶ This means that what is deemed to be ‘just’ and the procurement of justice might not always be pursued according to the law. Such is the case of a state of exception, in its attempt to provide security and justice, it can act appealing to natural, supposedly universal laws intended to protect the ‘civilized’ world of those who stand against ‘terrorism.’ Such a claim is strongly connected with one of the dimensions of terror according to Arendt; the latter considered a form of realising the law of nature or history. It is “a law of movement whose ultimate goal is not the welfare of men or the interest of one man but the fabrication of mankind, eliminates individuals for the sake of the species, sacrifices the “parts” for the sake of the “whole.”²⁷

²⁵ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 290.

²⁶ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 462.

²⁷ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 465.

As claimed elsewhere, the state will be interested in preserving the lives of its citizens as long as they help to preserve its own life, in this sense resides the fact that from such a standpoint we are all equally superfluous, we can all become *homo sacers*. Therefore, we cannot only observe the alarming and increasing numbers of Afghan and Iraqi refugees and deaths produced by the international crusade against terrorism. We can also witness that the number of American soldiers that have died in Iraq has surpassed the number of deaths caused by the attacks of September 11.²⁸

Currently, one of the most infamous examples of the practices of a state of security that acts according to the law of nature is the treatment of detained supposed ‘terrorists.’ They could plausibly be considered a typical example of contemporary *homo sacers*, persons whose murder would not be a crime, who under the lawless order of indefinite detentions have been denied of their most basic rights and treated as quasi-human barbarians. In addition, the state-police can arbitrarily suspend the civil and constitutional rights of whoever is deemed suspicious of collaborating with terror, thus, even citizens (people ‘protected’ by the law) are also affected by this quasi-totalitarian measure.²⁹

2. Infinite Dehumanization

*We have yet to become human, it seems, and now that prospect seems even more radically imperiled, if not, for the time being, indefinitely foreclosed.*³⁰

²⁸ Michael Kinsley, “War and Embryos: Bush’s Faulty Logic About Stem-Cell Research,” September 29, 2006. Available from <http://www.slate.com/id/2150545>

²⁹ A clear example is the case of US citizen Jose Padilla, who is accused of *planning* to build and detonate a radioactive ‘dirty bomb’ in the US, but by virtue of apparently having the intention to do it cannot be charged with any crime under American laws. For this reason, he is now treated as an ‘enemy combatant’ subject to indefinite detention. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Padilla “may never face trial” since their interest “is not in trying him and punishing him,” but “finding out what he knows.” “Lawyer: Dirty Bomb suspect’s rights violated,” June 11, 2002. Available from <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/06/11/dirty.bomb.suspect/> See also Dhalia Lithwick, “How to Hide the Dirty Bomber from the U.S. Constitution: The Bush Administration Establishes a Department of Precrime,” June 11, 2002. Available from <http://www.slate.com/id/2066866/>

³⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 100.

Without a doubt, the question, indeed, problematization of security is one of the most prominent issues arising from the problem of new terrorism. So far we have seen how Arendtian perspectives make it possible to analyse in a deep manner the consequences of a state of security and exception such as the suspension of law and the continuous justification of violence and terror for the sake of the life process of the state. As I claimed earlier in this thesis, a severe flaw of mainstream IR is its disregard of persons as agents and units of analysis in international relations. This in turn has obscured the analysis of the dehumanising effects of actions such as the war on terror. For this reason, this section will be focused on calling attention to how some actions produced by the logics of the war on terror disseminate terror through dehumanization. In order to pursue this task it is important to first ask ourselves 'who' is a terrorist.

Both under classical and contemporary definitions of terrorism, a terrorist is produced from the distinction between what kinds of dissident groups or persons are 'legitimate' and 'recognizable', thus, the violence committed by 'unrecognizable' people is illegitimate.³¹ Mainstream IR has overlooked the assumption that labelling someone as 'terrorist' is in fact a stigmatisation. For example, a US Department of State document called *Partners of Global Terrorism* defines terrorism as "politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by *subnational* groups or *clandestine* agents, usually intended to influence an audience."³² The state may sponsor paramilitary groups or secret polices that, without a doubt, make use of terror; but dissident groups that fall from the grace of a regime, landless or stateless people are illegitimate perpetrators of violence,

³¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 87.

³² Charles L. Ruby, "The Definition of Terrorism," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2 (2002): 9-14. Cited by Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233. [my emphasis].

thus terrorists. In short, a ‘terrorist’ is an illegitimate perpetrator of terror, usually considered a sort of evil, subhuman, blood-thirsty criminal who does not deserve anything but strong reprisal or automatic destruction. These kinds of assumptions are shared both by infamous South American dictators such as Jorge Rafael Videla and First World democracies heads of state such as Tony Blair or George W. Bush. The three of them consider terrorism as the opposite to civilization as such.³³ Thus, in the aim of annihilating terrorist ‘threats’ there is not much difference between brutal dictators, First World secretaries and even ‘academic experts.’ Whereas Videla explicitly claimed that “as many people will die in Argentina as it is necessary to restore order”,³⁴ for Rumsfeld the objective of invading Afghanistan is “to kill as many Taliban soldiers and Al-Qaeda members as possible.”³⁵ ‘Academic experts’ assert confidently that a terrorist is a barbarian who does not deserve “legal niceties” and must be “dealt with energetically, in keeping with his dangerous cunning and indeed malevolence.”³⁶ Under these statements the problem of terrorism is treated from a paranoid, short-sighted perspective. Country leaders and some alleged international ‘specialists’ “don the mantle of witch-finders (or exorcists), reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition of a bygone era.” As claimed before, “the discourse of ‘terrorism’ becomes itself a disseminator of terror.”³⁷

³³ Ronaldo Munck, “Deconstructing Terror: Insurgency, Repression and Peace,” in *Postmodern Insurgencies: Political Violence, Identity Formation and Peacemaking in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Ronaldo Munck and Purnaka L. de Silva (London: Macmillan, 2000), 6. Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11 and Postpolitics,” 98.

³⁴ Munck, “Deconstructing Terror,” 6.

³⁵ Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 91. Cited by Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 102.

³⁶ See the statements of J.M. Fanjul or Paul Wilkinson in the 1980 Council of Europe’s *Conference on the Defence of Democracy Against Terrorism in Europe: Tasks and Problems*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Cited by Munck, “Deconstructing Terror,” 2-3. See also Walter Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no.5 (September/October 1996).

³⁷ Munck, “Deconstructing Terror,” 3.

Under a state of emergency where exceptions are allowed, such assumptions about terrorists sum up those on terrorism. The state of warfare against terror permits us to apply arbitrary measures such as ‘preemptive action’ or ‘indefinite detention’ in order to provide security in a state of exception. Although the enemy is faceless, stateless and cannot be represented, the American government believes it can control it or prevent it by measures such as ‘preemptive action’, notwithstanding that surprise and the unexpected are crucial elements of terrorism. One of the most salient measures the United States government has taken to ‘palliate’ terrorism is the Doctrine of Preemption announced by President Bush. It claims that “it is politically, legally and morally defensible for the United States to use force against a perceived foreign foe in order to prevent future harm against itself, even though that perceived foreign foe has not yet attacked the United States.”³⁸ As Bush made explicit

[d]eterrence -- the promise of massive retaliation against nations -- means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies... If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long... the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and *confront the worst threats before they emerge*... And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for *preemptive action* when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.³⁹

The Doctrine of Preemption is indeed among the kinds of measures Arendt warned us against when policing becomes one of the main tasks of the state. The U.S. government pretends to foresee and control ‘imminent’ disasters in order to minimize threats and

³⁸ Cynthia Weber, “Securitising the Unconscious: The Bush Doctrine of Preemption and *Minority Report*,” *Geopolitics* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 482.

³⁹ George W. Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point,” available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html> [my emphasis].

increase security,⁴⁰ hence preemption is seen as a form of ‘justice’ that can be legally defended in the eyes of Bush’s administration. If ‘fabricated’ politics traditionally constrains the possibility of spontaneous action, and construes policies based on means-ends logics, preemption is a sort of extreme *poietic* policy as it is designed to palliate threats before they materialize in its pursuit of security. The American government has used violent means to pursue security. However, they do not know exactly what the threat is, as it is a future event that was probably never planned. The need of evidence, it seems, is not very necessary. It is as easy as judging any person (usually based on ethnic, racial and religious distinctions) or ‘rogue’ state as a potential terrorist to invade a country or to suspend civil rights and authorize indefinite detentions. In this case, the difference between law and fact (not to say an event to happen ‘soon’) is destroyed, and the will of the state and not the uncertainty of its word is deemed valid.⁴¹ That is the case of American invasion to Iraq, whose initial purpose was to prevent possible attacks with mass destruction weapons, whose existence so far has not been convincingly proved.⁴² Under a state of infinite warfare, where threats must be annihilated before they materialize, preemption is an action that, under a state of emergency, justifies the application of measures such as indefinite detentions, secret tribunals and systematic violation of civil and constitutional rights. They constitute a state of exception imposed almost by decree which is

⁴⁰ An example of such intention of predicting the unimaginable is the cooperation between U.S. military and some Hollywood’s top directors and screenwriters in order to try to ‘imagine’ future targets and scenarios for terrorist attacks. Thomas Homer-Dixon, “The Rise of complex Terrorism,” January/February 2002. Available from http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=170&page=4

⁴¹ Basu, “State of Security and Warfare of Demons,” 20.

⁴² Mark Phythian, “The Perfect Intelligence Failure: U.S. Pre-War Intelligence on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Politics and Policy* 34, no. 2 (2006).

paradoxically becoming the rule more and more as the war against terror is infinite, where “the very distinction between legality and illegality has ceased to exist.”⁴³

Under these conditions, the logics of indefinite detention constitute a severe consequence of the war on terror. In a similar way to Arendt and Agamben, Judith Butler sees such procedure as

a part of a broader tactic to neutralize the rule of law in the name of security... the means by which the exceptional becomes established as a naturalized norm. It becomes the occasion and the means by which the extra-legal exercise of state power justifies itself indefinitely.⁴⁴

As Butler claims, the detention of suspects of terrorism is carried in an indefinite way because, as discussed in the previous section, the war against terror and its claims to infinite justice are seen as a task without end due to the unidentifiable character of the enemy. One of the most salient aspects that should be noted is that indefinite detention has permitted to reanimate the outdated concept of state sovereignty because the use of arbitrary power has permitted a reconfiguration of the power of the state. Such power is reflected in state’s management of populations, which in its aim of fabricating a specific mankind –a form of terror for Arendt- “becomes that instrument of power by which law is either used tactically or suspended, populations are monitored, detained, regulated, inspected, interrogated, rendered uniform in their actions, fully ritualized and exposed to control and regulation in their daily lives.” The extreme mode of such managerial tactics is embodied in the war prison.⁴⁵

⁴³ Anustup Basu, “The State of Security and Warfare of Demons,” 15.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 67.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 97. The US is not the only country that has established prisons for alleged terrorists. For example, the Belmarsh Prison in London also contains foreign suspects of terrorism.

The anachronism of sovereignty is revived through the suspension of law in its name, in order to preserve and defend the territoriality of the state.⁴⁶ Unlike traditional state sovereignty, this outdated sovereign power is in the hands of the executive power, extralegal administrative powers and the apparatus of the state invested with extraordinary powers over indefinite detentions, life and death.⁴⁷ The function of a state that administers bare lives works in tandem with a state-police. The task of securitising makes possible to detain indefinitely any person suspected as being ‘dangerous’ and invests such an act with a ‘legitimate’ justification for the detention (such is one of the uses of preemptive action). Since the sacred life of the state is ‘threatened,’ almost any person whether citizen or foreigner, is eligible for becoming a *homo sacer*, being stripped of their most basic protections and disposed at the will of bureaucrats who work according to fabricated, lawless, policy guidelines. Under these conditions, the outdated sovereignty brought by the war on terror and an indefinite state of security is concisely defined as a “lawless and prerogative power, a “rogue” power *par excellence*.”⁴⁸

Currently, the most salient case related to post-9/11 war prisons and indefinite detentions is the situation of the prisoners of Guantánamo Bay. The American military tribunals designed for such detainees has deprived them of their rights to legal counsel, trial, means of appeal and repatriation, which have been stated by the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war. Although this accord is one of the most powerful means to demand compliance with prisoners’ human rights, it contains in itself a serious defect as it provides protection only for war combatants who belong to ‘recognizable’ nation-states (the signatories of the accord). Therefore, stateless prisoners or those belonging to

⁴⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 55.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 56-59.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 56.

'unrecognizable' 'rogue' states are deprived of such apparent 'universal' rights. Notwithstanding such flaws, making use of its sovereign power, the U.S. government has denied to Guantánamo detainees the mere status of prisoners of war. This denial of rights has been justified by the U.S. on the basis that the Geneva Accord was not designed for the war on terror,⁴⁹ or in other words, to be applied in a state of exception. This accord cannot be applied because some persons such as Padilla were detained as a result of preemptive action and cannot be plausibly charged with any crime. But mainly because indefinite detention is not about judicial processes and rights to fair trials in legitimate national and international courts.

Despite such lack of protection, the American government has claimed repeatedly that it treats its prisoners 'humanely,' that is, according to their own standards of what it means to provide 'humane' treatment to persons they consider to be uncivilised, bestial killers. As a result, we see photographs of the inmates' shackled bodies and hear about the tortures they are submitted to, but we are also informed that the detainees are well fed and have been gaining weight lately⁵⁰ and we are supposed to believe that this is a 'humane' gesture. Guantánamo inmates have been dehumanised, stripped from their dignities, identities and places in this world indefinitely, but at least we can be relieved because they do not suffer from hunger; nothing comes closer to a bestialised life.

In this state of affairs, to be detained indefinitely is indeed an indefinite state of terror. A way of managing a population is by setting policies of public health or drug prohibition and promoting a set of guidelines to discipline bodies who only require survival

⁴⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 81.

⁵⁰ William Saletan, "Hemorrhoid Face: For those who Can Tell one End from the Other," October 6, 2006. Available from <http://www.slate.com/id/2150870/> According to Saletan, "on average, each has gained 20 pounds; most have become overweight or obese... "Meals totaling a whopping 4,200 calories per day are brought to their cells, well above the 2,000 to 3,000 calories recommended for weight maintenance," and "some inmates are eating everything on the menu."

according to the state. However, another way of administering lives is to impose a fixed, one-sided idea of who is authorized to inflict terror, and stigmatise or degrade those who cannot be recognized as legitimate terror perpetrators. More importantly, managing a population is also to take away from a person their most basic rights, the allegedly 'universal' conditions which entitle us as human at the moment one does not comply with a specific, narrow way to be in the world. Therefore some are eligible for humanity and others, usually the most vulnerable segments of the population, are not. Consequently, fabricating a specific 'mankind' not only consists in producing a set of subjects, it also involves the processes of their de-subjectivation.⁵¹ The management of populations is thus a process that leads to loneliness. A state brought by a sudden expulsion from the realm of men, by being detained by arbitrary governmental agents who do not act entirely responding to political goals but also according to racist and messianic invocations of Good vs. Evil. Indefinite detention is so far an infinite state of terror because such loneliness seems to be endless. There is no possibility even for re-entering the realm of fabricated politics as no legitimate law applies to Guantánamo inmates. They are indefinitely condemned to live in a spectral state of 'living dead.'

3. Rethinking Humanity

So far, this chapter has provided a view to the problematic points that can be detected when applying an Arendtian approach to the question of terror and post-9/11 politics of security in a state of exception. I have claimed that it is crucial to seek a deep understanding our post-9/11 reality to be able to tackle its negative effects. However, it is my contention that Arendt can contribute strongly to IR theory by providing novel notions, precise conceptions

⁵¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 98.

and alternative perspectives that can help us to at least minimize the disastrous effects of increasing dehumanization brought by the war on terror.

From an Arendtian perspective, one of the most pressing tasks to be done in the international realm is to resist totalitarianism through a strong appeal toward the defence and preservation of our humanity. A recurrent argument in these two chapters has called attention to the disastrous implications of life management and the fabrication of mankind. One of the most prominent aspects of mainstream IR criticised by ‘reflective’ approaches is the depersonalization caused by excessive reliance on states and structures and the political detachment into which persons are thrown due to these tendencies. Therefore, if we want to be able to minimize the use of violence and terror in our political interactions it is crucial to bring to the fore the vital importance of ordinary persons as the architects of our international scenario. The consequences of not paying attention to this fundamental aspect have led to, and continue to justify, the inherent degradation in ‘managing’ lives and to witness how easy it is to take such managerial self-entitlements to horrifying extents as in the case of Guantánamo detainees.

It seems somehow evident that any attempt to ‘get our humanity back’ calls for the respect of the basic rights of *every* person, not their invocation as a necessary exception to protect the most vulnerable segments of mankind who have no other resource upon which to call for protection.⁵² However, the debate upon international human rights is extremely complex, biased with state-centric views and weak facing state’s allegiance to its national sovereignty. Such is the case of the Geneva Convention which can only claim and not always enforce the protection of a minimum set of rights for ‘recognizable’ war prisoners. The arbitrariness and degradation to which Guantánamo detainees are subject is a case that

⁵² Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 293.

provides clear evidence of how our categories of being human are not yet universal. They are subject to unilateral ethnicized and racialized impositions of which kinds of lives are eligible for granting them such recognition.

Given the latter, if IR is to contribute toward minimizing the inherent terror of managing *homo sacers* and the imposition of loneliness, the discipline must pose itself an extremely deep, vital challenge: rethinking the human. Such an undertaking must destroy the hegemonic and state-centric biases that make it possible to render enormous masses of people as superfluous. Every individual must be entitled to his humanity, the fact of being humans and not citizens makes us equal to the rest and makes the excess of world exploitation by a hegemony illegitimate and unfair, regardless of our place and ascribed entitlements within a society.

Arendt's contributions to this task point toward bringing the political back in, toward restoring our unique capacity of interacting with each other to continuously create novel political possibilities for being and acting (*praxis*) in the world of men, and, I might add, women. A proper political, human life must not be overrun with concerns of surviving and fabricating a commodious life. 'Real' politics cannot accept a realm marked by the isolation brought by violence. Instead they rely on the power that emerges from a plurality of free, equal men who can present each other as equals and are capable of developing actions that delineate their own fate. In the first chapter I exposed Arendt's complex insights on identity, politics and plurality. On the basis of such assumptions, I will sketch here some concrete options that my reading of Arendt offers us to escape the realm of violence and terror by the humanising effects of a political life engaged with action and meaningful bonds with our others.

Immersed in a realm of protracted terror, in which our lack of deep understanding of situations such as 9/11 has made likely the indefinite and increasing use of violence and terror under biased criteria, one of the first steps toward rethinking humanity should point toward pursuing mutual respect. For the latter purpose, Arendt proposed a deep, peculiar understanding of *forgiving* and *promising*. It might seem that extremely grave events such as the September 11 attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan make forgiveness and promising to appear as naïve or unreal solutions. However, I believe Arendt's thoughtful and catchy analysis of both notions can provoke reflections toward building the bases for creating alternative solutions opposed to sovereigntist justifications of indefinite detentions and continuous terrorist threats. Since action is essentially irreversible, Arendt sees in forgiving a possible redemption from it because, for her, it is a way to undo what one has done, given that the outcomes of a certain action are always unpredictable. Forgiveness is a way out of the consequences of boundless actions, otherwise we would remain 'victims' of them forever. Thus revenge is the opposite of forgiveness because it is a reaction against an original transgression that triggers off a sort of endless chain reaction⁵³ as it is the case of the current war on terror. Arendt, unlike Christian thought, does not think that only love is capable of forgiving. Instead she considers that a political formulation of mutual *respect* is required, she describes it as

a kind of "friendship" without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem... the conviction that respect is due only where we admire or esteem, constitutes a clear symptom of the increasing depersonalization of public and social life. Respect, at any rate, because it concerns only the person, is quite sufficient to prompt forgiving of what a person did, for the sake of the person.⁵⁴

⁵³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 236-241.

⁵⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 243.

When respect flourishes, then it is possible for a plurality of men to come to agreements and to realise the power of stabilization caused by promising. This is achievable because action is essentially *unpredictable*, and, what she calls “the darkness of human heart” provokes that men can never

guarantee today who they will be tomorrow... Man’s inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price humans pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do... is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.⁵⁵

For Arendt, promising is the only alternative to the mastery based on domination of one’s self and rule over others. For her, “it corresponds to the existence of a freedom which was given under the condition of non-sovereignty.”⁵⁶ Although human life is unpredictable, “agreement made out in the world that lies *between* men can dispel this ‘darkness of the human heart’ and build something much more lasting and reliable.”⁵⁷ Unlike ruling and fabricating, promising makes it possible to construe “islands of predictability” without trying to conceal the inherent unpredictability of human affairs and unreliability of men.⁵⁸ In other words, the promises that flourish from a plurality of men and women who act in concert neither pretend to escape the uncertainty of the future (as preemptive action) nor try to fabricate teleologies focused on what is supposed to come next. Forgiving and promising stress what is important for the human realm of politics: “hope for man in his singularity lay in the fact that not man but men inhabit the earth and form a world between them. It is human worldliness that will save men from the pitfalls of human nature.”⁵⁹ Through

⁵⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

⁵⁶ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

⁵⁷ Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*, 192.

⁵⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

⁵⁹ Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*, 192-193.

forgiving and promising, it will be possible to build a solid basis for mutual respect and guarantee our entitlement to humanity and our ‘right to have rights.’

The development of a respectful way of dealing with our others in a political realm that permits such conditions is only one of the fruitful contributions Arendt can make to the IR sphere. Another interesting notion that can be usefully applied to the IR domain is the *space in-between*. As discussed in chapter 1, this notion involves the space that lies between people that simultaneously separates them in their uniqueness and binds them together in the public realm creating a “web” of human relationships.⁶⁰ The space in-between makes possible the continuous creation of ephemeral political spaces of interaction, cemented in a community-rooted identity, which is made possible by a plurality of unique individuals and their actions. For Arendt, the space in-between takes place within the territorial boundaries of the state, thus, a specific state in its sovereign exercise can determine the possibility of ‘real’ politics.⁶¹ Arendt’s claims in favour of the state as the only locus for politics is problematic because such a possibility will always depend on the sovereign decision of a specific state. Moreover, as we have seen, our political structures are rather moving toward depoliticization through the administration of lives and increasing policing as the result of the war on terror, which so far is indefinite. These inconveniences however should not downplay the usefulness of the notion of the space in-between as it is a mechanism that helps to assure our place in this world. Based on such notions it would be extremely interesting to start thinking about alternative political spaces that do not depend on the state; some efforts have been made so far, such as the appeal to a global citizenship

⁶⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182-3.

⁶¹ John Williams, “Hannah Arendt and the International Space In-Between?,” in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations: Readings Across the Lines*, ed. Anthony F. Lang Jr. and John Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209.

and so on. In this respect, a few Arendtian scholars have explored the plausibility of an “international in-between,” which basically consists in taking Arendt’s main idea of a space of active political engagement of rooted individuals to international and global spaces.⁶²

Our abilities of engaging in public dialogue should not be limited only to the sovereign, territorial limits imposed by the state. An international in-between opens the possibility of building alternative ephemeral intersubjective spaces less constrained by state-centred sovereigntist appeals and managerial tasks. We saw in the first chapter that the borders of our identity are blurry and our senses of allegiance cannot be defined only by the sovereign imposition of the state. Thus, one step toward countering global forms of violence and terror requires a great effort in creating, reconfiguring and strengthening our territorial and extra-territorial bonds, to dare to ‘cross’ and negotiate boundaries. If we do this, we could avoid the vice of arbitrary ‘othering,’ of unilaterally defining what lies outside the imaginary ‘inside’ of the fixed, reified ideal of the ‘West.’ Such kinds of exercises will permit us to root individuals in communities and plural senses of belonging, to dialogue in a truly political realm and thus assert their diversity, freedom and humanity. A growing humanisation and politicisation would, in short, make less likely the production of superfluosity and *homo sacers* in the name of crusades fed by infinite paranoia and moralistic, metaphysical, unilateral misconceptions of the other.

Conclusions

Terrorism and terror are issues that have permeated our political experiences for a long time. However, they have generally been regarded as a question that only permeates the non-Western world.

⁶² Williams, “Hannah Arendt and the International Space In-Between?,” 199-220.

As Zygmunt Bauman has suggested, “what the Christian bourgeois... could not really forgive Hitler was not the crime of genocide, but the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions as were borne up till now by the Arabs, the coolies of India and the Negroes.” In other words what Hitler rendered universal in Europe was the *homo sacer* who can be killed but is unworthy of sacrifice, Bin Laden brought *homo sacer* to the United States.⁶³

Such meditation can easily constitute a criticism of mainstream IR thought in its excessive, West-centric reliance on models of self-explanatory international political interactions based on violence and power as domination. This tendency has put obstacles for the discipline to think about the possibility of a universal reach of terror that now cannot only be inflicted upon the marginalised segments of a population, but also endangers the sacred, untouchable lives of the First World. 9/11 showed us that the disastrous consequences of a depoliticized realm can reach the whole of humanity.

This chapter has illustrated how Arendt can provide us with contemporary new ways of looking at terror, how the loneliness caused by the management of lives is a latent totalitarian element capable of reaching the surface of the democracies we are so proud of. Moreover, I have argued how classic IR approaches are blind to the consequences of the naturalization of violence so as not to stand against an indefinite state of exception caused by the war on terror. Phenomena such as 9/11 have marked the U.S.’s “loss of First Worldism, the loss of the prerogative, only and always to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one’s boundaries transgressed.”⁶⁴

9/11 has been a painful setback for the West. If we want to avoid the escalation of violence, a general sense of unsafety and the growth of fear of an unidentified enemy, we must first understand the phenomenon; what went wrong with the West? We have seen that

⁶³ Diken, Laustsen, “7-11, 9/11, and Postpolitics,” 95. Citing Bauman, *Society under Siege*, 13.

⁶⁴ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, 39.

such a lack of self-reflection has only brought more terror to our lives, has permitted the exception to become the rule, has made it easier to ignore the law, discipline bodies, manage lives, to sacrifice the whole for the part and to let loneliness permeate our lives. The logics of preemptive action, indefinite detention and the treatment of Guantánamo detainees are indeed clear examples of how a lack of self-reflection has permitted us to continue rendering what lies outside the West as not human. The treatment of such supposed terrorists has only opened the path toward indefinite dehumanization and policing with no plausible success in the eradication of terrorism. On the contrary, it is believed that the solution resides in producing more and more *homo sacers*, in degrading Guantánamo detainees, stigmatising any person that might look like an Arab, and increasing the numbers of refugees and “collateral damage” in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What is worse is that the declaration of war against terror in such terms is believed to be a “legitimate” answer to an event that has not been properly analysed yet. For Arendt, and for me now, it is more than clear that the first step toward an alternative solution to these problems should seek the de-animalisation and re-humanisation of individuals. For IR theory the task should therefore include to continue rejecting outdated, explanatory, excessively Western models of politics and to participate in the crucial task of giving mankind their humanity back. If terrorism must be fought, the first instance has to consist in the eradication of terror.