

CONCLUSION

So far, violence seems to be the determining factor of our contemporary interactions, it is believed to be a product of the natural law of life, an unwanted but at some point inevitable, and sometimes the only resource to put an end to disputes. We have witnessed how the civil protests of ordinary people are mitigated with the power of the gun. How the only ‘plausible’ response to terrorist attacks is found in declaring a crusade against unidentifiable enemies, regardless of the lives that might be lost in the process. We have even come to the ridiculous extent of fabricating terms such as ‘nuclear peace,’ because the danger of total destruction is the only threat that can partially interfere with the cause-effect logics of our ‘naturally’ violent nature.

In this regard, a proper and severe criticism from the sphere of international relations theory is a crucial contribution toward standing against taking for granted that mutual destruction is the only path toward achieving an enduring ‘peace.’ However, the dominant traditional discourses of the discipline, the ones we see in the news and hear in our most prominent political discourses seem to confirm the opposite: IR can do little to oppose to these long-established tendencies, and on the contrary, it contributes toward the dissemination of more violence. Of course, a conscious study of contemporary IR theories can refute that the entire discipline takes for granted the use of violence and the destruction of the planet and human lives for the sake of ‘high politics’ ideals. Rob Walker, Robert Cox, Andrews Linklater, David Campbell and many other academics have made compelling moves toward standing against such postures, but their contributions still remain marginal to the discipline. Much still needs to be done in order to provide a view of IR as a fruitful discipline engaged with opposing wars against terrorism, nuclear peace, ‘humanitarian’ interventions and so on.

For this reason, it is crucial to contribute toward finding and including compelling perspectives capable of providing new and different insights to the international realm. The inclusion of the views of Hannah Arendt, a political theorist that never traditionally belonged to the IR sphere, can shake –if not defy- many reified assumptions of mainstream IR and provide novel concepts that attempt to renovate and change the traditional image of IR as a discipline involved in the study of the logics of realpolitik, the state structures and domination.

This attempt to promote the relevance of Arendtian thought for IR theories has not been an easy task. The importance of Arendt's reflections has been traditionally disregarded due to the particular complexity of some of her most important concepts. From the sphere of political theory she has usually been criticised because her notions are extremely difficult to materialize in the practice. However, applying her notions of politics, violence, action and plurality on the criticism of violence, dehumanization and the role of ordinary persons in the international realm are an extremely original and fruitful contribution toward the rejection of some time-honoured but now anachronistic dogmas of mainstream IR theories. Even though her thought's usefulness is also difficult to apply to the international practice, her reflections on the criticism of the IR tradition can make an outstanding contribution toward realizing how mainstream IR has downplayed the importance of politics and a proper human life. In an effort to avoid giving the impression that Arendtian thought is perfect, but still holds its own somewhere at the top of the ivory tower of theories, I analyzed the consequences of taking politics, violence and bare lives for granted in the particular case of terrorism and the ‘war against terror.’

1. Summary of the Chapters

This theoretical work consisted in three main parts, the first two chapters provided theoretical insights of Arendt's thought and their relevance for IR theories and the third applied several ideas to an analysis of the empirical case of the 'war on terror.' The introduction intended to provide an outline of the general scope of the main defects of dominant IR theories as a core cause that has led to tendencies that obscure the relevance of analysing particular questions of politics, violence and superfluousness.

Chapter 1 analysed Arendt's concept of the political and how it can contribute to IR theory. I made a brief exposition of her thought and its relevance for IR theories and I criticised the problematic notion of state sovereignty. Both tasks began to defend my central hypothesis concerning Arendt's valuable contribution to IR theory. It also verified a part of my first sub-hypothesis, that traditional formulations and practices of fixed concepts of state sovereignty, violence and the downplay of persons as agents obscure the dynamics of violence and superfluousness. Even though the case of violence and superfluousness was treated in the two subsequent parts of this work, it was crucial to state how fixed concepts of sovereignty and mainstream IR disregard of persons as agents in the international realm are problematic in contrast with Arendtian thought. By doing so, I provided a more detailed perspective of how the anachronism of state sovereignty provides an idealised picture of our international realm. The chapter began with a brief exposition of Arendt's thought and her main concepts on politics, action, plurality and freedom were developed as opposed to modernity-inspired, mainstream international conceptions of politics. I raised the importance of a model of politics based on human relationships capable of creating authentic power by acting in concert in a public space of plurality. In order to raise the profile of ordinary persons as agents in the international sphere, I also made an analysis of Arendt's perspectives on identity construction in order to highlight the importance of a

plural, public space of appearance which is the condition for the emanation of politics. Finally, I analyzed the case of traditional state sovereignty, claiming that it is a fictional order of political space and time with the power of imposing boundaries of identity. I provided an analysis of state sovereignty as a social construction in order to open the possibilities for a reformulation of the concept with relation to identity issues.

The importance of Arendt's thought and her opposition to models of politics engaged with 'ruling' and imposing a prefabricated sense of order was crucial to understand her notion of violence and superfluousness in Chapter 2. Here I attempted to confirm the rest of my first sub-hypothesis that traditional formulations of state sovereignty, violence and the downplay of the role of persons as agents make possible the management of lives, which is deeply related to violence. In this chapter I also defended my second sub-hypothesis that current mainstream IR assumptions are insufficient to understand in depth the relation between violence and the superfluousness caused by the management of lives. I continued to validate the central hypothesis in this chapter by demonstrating how Arendt's thought can show that our current political structures were close to totalitarianism since they enact mechanisms for producing superfluous, apolitical lives which are only supposed to survive but not to act in a space of plurality. Such deprivation of plurality and truly political entitlements deny a human quality to persons, which depends on artificial legal and political institutions to protect it. From these considerations, I argued that fixed concepts on the state and its sovereignty have made it possible to administer superfluous human lives and to mould them in order to pursue the state's particular ideal of politics, which is opposed to a free human life. Traditional and mostly uncontested IR's understanding of violence as politics by other means, I argued has contributed to the condition of superfluousness because its instrumental nature has

facilitated the management of lives as a means to serve a specific end. The conception of power as domination has helped to overlook that if power is conceived from the Arendtian perspective of politics as acting in concert, the use of violence and the superfluousness of human lives could be minimized. I also analyzed the deep relation between violence and superfluousness, and argued that the consequences of not taking a deep look at our forms of regarding violence and human life are a state of isolation and even a state of terror, caused by the loneliness of being deprived by a place on this world and a unique identity. These bestialised conditions cannot be self-inflicted but imposed by the violence of the fabrication and management of lives.

Based and launched from the conclusions of Chapter 2, Chapter 3 confirmed my third sub-hypothesis that an alternative understanding 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 case of new terrorism, post-9/11 politics and the ‘war on terror’ are a suitable, up-to-date framework that I hope permitted me to show how Arendt’s meditations can contribute to IR’s sphere in more practical cases. I criticised that the claims to a ‘war’ against terror are indeed an appeal to the most common form of violence in the international sphere and why taking for granted this war has led to the justification of inflicting violence and terror on superfluous persons. Arendt’s reflections on the inherent terror of depriving persons of a place in this world and the management of lives were reflected in the extreme case of the war prison, particularly the case of Guantánamo detainees and their state of indefinite dehumanization. Even though the first two parts of the chapter were focused on providing evidence of how Arendt’s reflections could be verified in practice, I also argued that she can plausibly contribute toward finding solutions against the terror caused by dehumanization. An

Arendtian inspired solution thus consisted in getting back to politics, that is, in stopping taking for granted the superfluousness of human lives. Based on her notions of politics, action and plurality I briefly exposed her original notions on promising and forgiving as bases for creating alternative solutions to oppose to justifications for launching wars on terror and producing more Guantánamos. I also highlighted her notion of the space in-between as an option for creating webs of human relationships that move in spheres not subject to the control of the state and its attempts to manage lives.

2. General Conclusions

I hope to have shown how Arendtian thought can make a potentially vital contribution to IR theory. The scope of this thesis was focused mainly on raising the profile of her concepts in the particular case of violence and the production of superfluous human lives. However, this interesting exercise has left me with the impression that her thought can and should be taken further to the analysis of other aspects of the discipline, such as questions of human rights or cosmopolitanism and matters concerned with alternative creation of public spaces.

Perhaps most importantly, this thesis has provided evidence and arguments contending how important it is to pay attention to apparently insignificant conceptual distinctions and the consequences of not doing it. Works like this, concerned with exploring concepts and theoretical backgrounds of notions of common use can provide fruitful findings that invite us to think why taking concepts for granted or not can have a powerful impact on the practice. Since mainstream IR is typically empiricist and excessively Western, it is even more important to undertake these kinds of tasks since they contribute to destroy the alleged fortress in which international relations is perceived to reside.

Concerning this thesis, one of the most salient conclusions to which I arrived is that IR theory has the pressing task of rethinking and attempting to ‘rescue’ politics. The case of post-9/11 politics and its consequences of increasing violence and terror urges IR to make an enormous effort to develop a real understanding of our violent and fragmented international scenarios. It needs to engage with a realm in which plural human beings and not states or structures must be its central unit of analysis. In this sense, the perspectives drawn by Arendt have proved to be a powerful contribution to IR theories as her central concern in her main notions such as politics, violence or action is always human beings. From this, another salient conclusion from this work is that if we attempt to understand our international realm and develop approaches that can hopefully minimize disastrous conditions of violence and dehumanization, the solution not only lies in trying to recover our humanity in the ways we currently conceive it. It would not be hard to imagine that, for Arendt, we still need to think about and reinvent our humanity, what entitles us to be human and how to guarantee its defining characteristics. Politics was, for her, the path for assuring humanity to every person in order to prevent abuses and arbitrariness. Perhaps more importantly, politics is the very element that makes the difference between a meaningful existence as a human and an empty life that can barely be something more than an animal life. Thus, for IR theories the task is to reinvent the human, pull it from the margins and make it appear in its realm.

Donna Haraway’s words quoted at the beginning of this work emphasize that we exist in a sea of powerful histories which mark our personal and collective lives. In this case, we have seen how our most dominant histories and stories bear the hallmark of violence and a tendency to degrade the value of a meaningful human life. Arendt’s work in a general sense demonstrates how significant is to defy and attempt to change hegemonic stories and how

this kind of ‘modest intervention’ has a powerful impact on opening myriad possibilities for construing our histories and ways to ‘be’ in the world. As seen, the attempt to change the stories of the international realm seems to be urgent, but perhaps more importantly, it is an exercise worth making.