

The legacy of Hannah Arendt on the analysis of the contemporary condition of the refugee*

O legado de Hannah Arendt na análise da condição contemporânea do refugiado

El legado de Hannah Arendt en el análisis de la condición contemporánea del refugiado

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a perspective on the status 'refugee', based on the work and considerations of Hannah Arendt. For this purpose, three texts written by Arendt will be examined during the course of this study: the first part deals with Arendt's experience as a refugee, which became a defining aspect of her perspective, the second analyses the categorisation of the refugee camps in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the third examines the three core activities of the human condition. After which, it looks to contemporary political thinkers, in order to find out the ways in which Arendt's thoughts can be used to provide an analysis of the contemporary condition of the refugee.

Keywords: Refugee law. Hannah Arendt. Refugee status.

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar uma perspectiva sobre o status de refugiado com base no trabalho e considerações de Hannah Arendt. Para isso, examina três textos escritos por Arendt: a primeira parte explora a experiência de Arendt como um refugiado como um aspecto decisivo de sua perspectiva, o segundo analisa a categorização dos campos de refugiados em seu livro *As origens do totalitarismo*, a terceira examina as três principais atividades da condição humana. Finalmente, esse artigo analisa pensadores políticos contemporâneos e suas interpretações do pensamento Arendtiano no estudo da atual condição refugiado.

Palavras-chave: Direito dos Refugiados. Hannah Arendt. Status de refugiado.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es examinar una perspectiva sobre el estatus de refugiado basándose en el trabajo de Hannah Arendt. Para esto, examina tres textos escritos por Arendt: la primera parte explora la experiencia de Arendt como refugiada como un aspecto decisivo de su perspectiva, la segunda examina la categorización de los campos de refugiados en su libro *Los Orígenes del Totalitarismo* y la tercera examina las tres actividades principales de la condición humana. Finalmente, este artículo analiza pensadores políticos contemporáneos y sus interpretaciones del pensamiento de Arendtiano en el estudio de la actual condición de refugiado.

Palabras clave: Derecho de los refugiados. Hannah Arendt. Estatus de refugiado.

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1 Introduction

Hannah Arendt is usually categorised as a theorist who is concerned with the public sphere and political action. Nonetheless, there is an aspect of her work, which is concerned with the question of refugees. Actually, it is due to her personal experience as a refugee that Arendt's initial ideas as a political theorist emerged, addressing the Jewish Question in the beginning of World War II.

The thoughts of Hannah Arendt form a fundamental theoretical basis, which is used to reflect upon the issue of refugees today. The following article aims to present a perspective on refugees, based on the work and considerations of Hannah Arendt, and to show the manner in which they have been used, to analyse their current condition.

This study is structured into four parts, and each one represents a specific aspect, which is needed for a better understanding of the topic in question. The first one deals with Hannah Arendt's experience as a refugee, which became a defining aspect of her perspective. The second analyses the categorisation of refugee camps in her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The third examines the three core activities of the human condition, which are 'Labour', 'Work', and 'Action'. The fourth proposes to look at the legacy of Hannah Arendt, based on the analysis of the contemporary condition of refugees, incorporating the thoughts of Giorgio Agamben and Zigmunt Bauman. Finally, the conclusion highlights the main points of this essay.

2 The condition of refugee as a defining aspect in Arendt's perspective

Based on her own experience as a Jewish refugee, Arendt interpreted the concept of a refugee as the vector of a new historical conscience. Her work demonstrated the need for the reinterpretation of human rights, and to consider those who have been deprived of everything, in particular, of movement and action. For Arendt,

of all the specific liberties which may come into our minds when we hear the word "freedom", freedom of movement is historically the oldest and also the most elementary. Being able to depart for where we will is the prototypal gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom of movement has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement. [...] both action and thought occur in the form of movement and that, therefore, freedom underlies both: freedom of movement. (ARENDR, 1968, p. 9)(Emphasis added)

In Arendt's reflexions and proposals, people who are forced to abandon their homes, communities, and their countries, cannot be denied the "right to have rights". In other words, the inalienable rights of the human condition: from the right to biologically survive, to the right for integration, political action, to be amongst men, the right to be seen in the public sphere, and to act politically, were all to be considered. The exiled, the refugees, and the people who were forcibly displaced from their home countries, therefore, belonged to a new paradigm for the Western societies, because they questioned the fundamental concepts of the Modern State, such as Human Rights and citizenship.

Hannah Arendt's texts show an unarguable quality, and, when talking about her own condition, she highlights that it was not a choice she made for herself, and, just as any person at his/her birth receives something in a contingent character, this was not chosen by her. Therefore, she considers the condition of being a Jew to be a political condition in a determined setting of the world, because life starts in a certain moment in time, in a concrete place, in the context of a determined community, and with a set of physical and psychological features.

This state at birth is not voluntary. One does not wish to be born in a time, or in a body where its features can be negatively evaluated. Being born is to be a part of a world of relations, of discourses and norms, where one does not choose, but in a certain way, they constitute of the human being. Therefore, for Arendt, assuming that she thought and acted like a Jew did not imply a deterministic notion, but that she thought of herself as part of a determined reality (BIRULÉS, 2007).

The fact that she was the protagonist of a story of a refugee, looking for protection when the European countries closed the borders for the Jewish refugees, gave Hannah Arendt a solid basis to reflect and narrate the inability of international institutions to solve the problem. For her, it opened the world's eyes to the fact that Human Rights were connected to a State, and that the notion of "right to have rights" came first to the rights that were being discussed in the texts of existing international declarations. Jewish people, when expatriated, lost all rights, and most of them were related to the condition of being a citizen of a State.

Arendt tried to explain the reality, in part, as a result of her Philosophy studies initiated in Germany, under the supervision of philosopher Karl Jasper, with

whom she maintained regular contact throughout her life. In her own words, she affirmed to have felt, at first, a “philosophical shock”. This amazement was more than mere curiosity, as it led her into an intense state of self-reflection, a form of thinking, in which she considered the expression of genuine philosophizing. On the other hand, the outside world presented her with what she called, a “reality shock”: it gave her the option to reflect upon the political action and the condition of human beings (KOHN, 2005). The choice for the political condition is well outlined in her work, “The Human Condition”. In this book, Arendt explains her choice, to reflect on the ‘*vita activa*’, as it will be further elaborated in the course of this text.

The Jewish Writings is a collection of several essays about the Jewish condition between 1942 and 1966 (ARENDR, 2007). Among the texts in the book, *We Refugees*, originally published in The Memorial Journal, in 1943, is one of the most relevant texts for the analysis of the situation of asylum and refugees. In this essay, the author defines the term ‘refugee’, based on her own experience as a refugee in the United States.

For Hannah Arendt, refugees are

those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by refugee committees. [...] We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives (ARENDR, 2007, p. 264).

We Refugees is a seminal text, in which the condition of refugees is proposed under the paradigm of a new historical conscience. This assumption is explicit in the sentence: “refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their people – if they keep their identity” (ARENDR, 2007, p. 274). For the first time, she understood that Jewish history was connected to the history of other nations, because the condition of being a Jew was precedent to the condition of being a citizen of a certain country, and even after being denaturalized, they continued to be Jews.

Throughout her work, Arendt insisted that thinking from living experience was an essential aspect. Thinking comes from happenings, to which, one must remain attached, as if they were the thoughts’ only indicators

and guides. Living reality is considered to be the starting point of thoughts and actions (ARENDR, 1996).

From her works, two books are indispensable for the study of refugees and understanding their condition contemporary: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958). The first book provides the theoretical and factual support for the second.

The Arendtian reflection in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* presents citizenship not only as a means, but also as a substantive principle, that is to say, as a possibility to be treated equally by others in a shared world.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt reflects upon the concept of citizenship, by using reports of participation in the public space of the Greek polis. In her allusions to Human Rights, Arendt affirms that it is not enough to guarantee people to end their condition of being social pariah. They have been defined as inalienable, because it is supposed that they are independent of all governments. However, the moment human beings cease to have their own government, and needs to reach out for their minimum rights, there is no authority or institution remaining, which would be able to protect them.

In this work, the starting point of reflection is the isolation of human beings, which destroys their political ability, and consequently, their *action*. Although, to achieve isolation of the public sphere, and in order to attempt the total domination of man, it is also necessary to annihilate their private lives, social ramifications, and roots. For Arendt, having no roots means having no place in the world. The posthumous publication of other works also enhanced Arendt’s legacy, and increased her influence in the public and intellectual spheres. One example is her text, *The Jew as a Pariah*. Published internationally, and translated into multiple languages, these books are important in understanding the subjectivity of the author, the particularity of her condition, her experience as a German-born Jew, her confrontation of Nazism, and her intellectual contributions throughout the years (ARENDR, 2005).

Hannah Arendt comprehended, and clearly explained, that the human condition can only be fulfilled in the public world, which allows these individuals to be free from the living world, and the experienced *action*. All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but action cannot be imagined outside the community. For Arendt, only action is a prerogative, exclusive of men, because it is entirely dependent on the constant presence of others (ARENDR, 1970).

In her last published work, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt approaches the concept of 'vita contemplativa', of thought, philosophy, and in a certain way, she complements the subject discussed in *The Human Condition*. The latter reflects on the 'vita activa', underlined by the political inquiries that were raised by her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Also, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt explains her option for the contemplation of 'vita activa', and for the integration in the public space, as a consequence of her own position in the world.

3 Origin of totalitarianism: refugee camp categorisation

In 1951, Hannah Arendt published the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which, she described the appearance of a new modern subject, the non-subject – the refugee and the expatriate – resulting from the international consolidation of a new world order, and divided into nation-states. Moreover, the author underlined the decay of the State, where nationality, and not residency, became the principle that defined the right of citizenship (ARENDR, 1985).

In the work, Arendt affirms that totalitarian domination aims to abolish freedom, and not just restrict it. The abolition of freedom would happen in three stages: the first one aims to eliminate the juridical person from the individual. The second intends to abolish the individual's moral persona, by denying his or her condition to be a victim, and by corrupting human solidarity. The remaining stage is the loss of individuality of each human being (ARENDR, 1985).

As Arendt describes:

the first essential step on the road to total domination is to kill the juridical person in man. This was done, on the one hand, by putting certain categories of people outside the protection of the law and forcing at the same time, through the instrument of denationalization, the non-totalitarian world into recognition of lawlessness, it was done, on the other, by placing the concentration camp outside the normal judicial procedure in which definite crime entails a predictable penalty (ARENDR, 1985, p. 145).

Hannah Arendt affirmed "the aim of an arbitrary system is to destroy the civil rights of the whole population, who ultimately become just as outlawed in their own country, as stateless and homeless" (ARENDR, 1985, p. 149). The destruction of civil rights, and the death of

its juridical person, were considered to be the initial conditions for an individual or population to be dominated entirely. With regards to the second phase, and the elimination of the human moral character, she affirms that

the next decisive step in the preparation of living corpses is the murder of the moral person in man. This is done in the main by making martyrdom, for the first time in history, impossible [...] They have corrupted all human solidarity. Here the night has fallen on the future. When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony (ARENDR, 1985, p. 149).

What is more, in order to be significant, a gesture must have a social meaning. Concentration camps, by means of anonymous death, and from the situation of its prisoners, unknown to the public sphere,

robbed death of its meaning as the end of a fulfilled life. In a sense they took away the individual's own death providing that henceforth nothing belonged to him and he belonged to no one. His death merely set a seal on the fact that he had never really existed (ARENDR, 1985, p. 150).

Nonetheless, according to Arendt, the third moment happens, "once the moral person has been killed, the one thing that still prevents men from being made into living corpses is the differentiation of the individual, his unique identity" (ARENDR, 1985, p. 151). The aforementioned individuality could be preserved by a persistent stoicism, that is, in the isolation of people, with no rights and no conscience. Arendt understood that this part of the human person would be much harder to destroy, precisely because it depended essentially on its nature, and the forces that cannot be controlled by the will of others. At the same time, when destroyed, this part would be the easiest to restore, because it depended on the individual solely. However, after the annihilation of the juridical person, and the killing of the moral, the destruction of individuality always follows (ARENDR, 1985).

According to Arendt, "the experience of the concentration camps does show that human beings can be transformed into specimens of the human animal" (ARENDR, 1985, p. 153). The ideal of totalitarian domination is only attained when men became superfluous – and that could be achieved in the concentration camps.

Arendt defines the concentration camp as being

the world of the dying, in which men are taught they are superfluous through a way of life in which punishment is meted out without connection with crime, in which exploitation is practiced without profit, and where work is performed without product, is a place where senselessness is daily produced anew (ARENDR, 1951, p. 431).

Seeing the human being as an unnecessary means is a total lack of respect for the human dignity, as “respect for human dignity implies the recognition of my fellow-men and our fellow-nations as subjects, as builders of the worlds or co-builders of a common world” (ARENDT, 1951, p. 432).

Concentration camps were the places where human beings would transform into animals. However, the camps were not an invention of totalitarian movements. Their systematic use was introduced in the Boer War² in South Africa in the early 20th century, and later, applied in India to contain the “undesirable elements” (ANGLO-BOER WAR MUSEUM, 2013). The term “protective custody” was also used during this time, and was later adopted by the Third Reich. Those camps correspond, in a common sense, to the concentration camps that were used in the early period of totalitarian regimes. They were used for “suspects”, whose felonies were not possible to be proved, and what could not be condemned via common legal process (ARENDT, 1985, p. 138).

“Protective custody”, can therefore be understood as the isolation of individuals from social life, and it was a part of the very mechanism of the totalitarian regime. In order to explain the prisoner’s situation, the Nazi regime’s propaganda adopted the idea of “protective custody” as an equivalent to a preventive police measure, thus, taking the people out of the society, where it was not possible for them to take political action (ARENDT, 1985).

It is vital to highlight Arendt’s classification of concentration camps, and the fact that, surprisingly, she considered refugee camps to be a form of concentration camps. According to her,

concentration camps can very aptly be divided into three types corresponding to three basic Western concept of a life after death: Hades, Purgatory, and Hell. To Hades correspond those relatively mild forms, once popular even in non-totalitarian countries, for getting undesirable elements of all sorts – refugees, stateless

persons, the asocial and the unemployed – out of the way; as DP camps, which are nothing other than camps for persons who have become superfluous and bothersome, they have survived the war. Purgatory is represented by the Soviet Union’s labor camps, where neglect is combined with chaotic forced labor. Hell in the most literal sense was embodied by those types of camps perfected by the Nazis, in which the whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment (ARENDT, 1985, p. 143).

The three types of concentrations camps, which were named by Arendt to be Hades, Purgatory and Hell, have a common characteristic: human beings were held there, and treated as if they no longer existed, “as if what happened to them were no longer of any interest to anybody, as if they were already dead and some evil spirit gone mad were amusing himself by stopping them for a while between life and death before admitting them to eternal places” (ARENDT, 1985, p. 143).

When pondering the philosophical implications, and, in particular, the politics/policies of refugee camps, Arendt highlighted that “apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and internment camps by their friends” (ARENDT, 2007, p. 265).

The author considered both the incentive and the silent consent to those unseen conditions, which would result from events that, in a period of political fragmentation, transformed thousands of human beings into stateless, expatriated, dispossessed, banned, unwanted people, while unemployment rendered millions of citizens to become economically superfluous and socially expensive. With regards to this alarming situation, Arendt defended that “[t]his in turn could only happen because the Rights of Man, which had never been philosophically established but merely formulated, which had been politically secured but merely proclaimed, have, in their traditional form, lost all validity” (ARENDT, 1985, p. 145).

Arendt argued that the phenomena, termed Isolation, in the political sphere, could not be compared to the loneliness in the social contact sphere. Isolation and loneliness are not the same. For her, isolation is a situation, in which individuals see each other, once the political sphere in their lives is restored. Even though it cuts men off from power and ability to take action, this type of seclusion leaves all productive activities intact.

² The first modern and systematic use of concentration camps was by the United Kingdom during the Boer War (1880-1902), when the British commander Horatio Kitchener used these camps as part of his strategy to fight the guerrillas. Kitchener ordered the destruction of the farms that fed the Boer militia, and deported the farmers and their employees to the concentration camps. Entire families were confined and imprisoned, and they would die slowly of malnutrition or disease. The use of camps was fundamental to the British victory. About 26,000 Boers were killed, excluding the local farmers.

In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable. [...] Isolated man who lost his place in the political realm of action is deserted by the world of things as well, if the no longer recognized as homo faber, but treated as an animal laborans whose necessary 'metabolism with nature' is of concern to no one. Isolation than becomes loneliness. [...] While isolation concerns only the political realm of life, loneliness concerns human life as a whole (ARENDR, 1985, p. 173).

Loneliness, on the other hand, is related to the experience of not belonging to a world. It "is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (ARENDR, 1985, p. 173). Loneliness also refers to the idea of the superfluous and meaningless being. Having no roots means lacking a known and secure place in the world, whereas, being superfluous means being utterly deprived of a place in the world. According to Arendt,

uprootedness can be a superfluousness, just as isolation can (but must not) be the preliminary condition for loneliness. Taken in itself, without consideration of its recent historical causes and its new role in politics, loneliness is at the same time contrary to the basic requirements of the human condition and one of the fundamental experiences of every human life (ARENDR, 1985, p. 173).

The very existence of the world, felt by men through material and sensorial means, depends on our contact with other men, on the creation of a common sense among all that prevents each and every one of us from being closed in, in our own particularities. "Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth, can we trust our immediate sensual experience" (ARENDR, 1985, p. 174).

With these considerations, Arendt opened the way to further considerations that would be made in the book, *The Human Condition*, in which, she classified the three stages of 'vita activa'.

4 Vita activa and the three fundamental activities of the human condition: labour, work, action

In order to understand the human condition, and more specifically, the origins of isolation necessary for the establishment of the totalitarian state (identified in *The*

Origins of Totalitarianism), Hannah Arendt chose to reflect upon 'vita activa', the living experience of men and an expression of her political position.

The expression, 'vita activa', belongs to the tradition of political thinking. According to Arendt, though far from approaching and characterizing all political experiences of the Western world, this tradition "grew out of a specific historical constellation: the trial of Socrates and the polis" (ARENDR, 1970, p. 12). Traditionally though, 'vita activa' derives from the term 'vita contemplativa', and owes its dignity to the fact that it serves the needs and wishes for contemplation (ARENDR, 1970).

For Arendt, 'vita activa' means

human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and of man-made things which it never leaves or altogether transcends.[...] All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside of the society of men. The activity of labour does not need the presence of others, though a being labouring in complete solitude would not be human but an *animal laborans* in the word's most literal significance (ARENDR, 1970, p. 22).

Throughout the 6 chapters of *The Human Condition*³, Arendt examines the specificities and generalisations of the human condition, by means of comprehension, and by revealing the three fundamental activities that integrate 'vita activa', which are labour, work and action.

Labour is the activity associated with the biological process. It is shared with the animal condition, and thus, considered by Arendt to belong to the animal laborans.

Work is not necessarily a part of the species' life cycle. By working, *homo faber* builds objects and other things, with elements extracted from nature, and transforms the world into a space of objects that are shared by men. The human habitat is made of objects that are placed between nature and men, which can either unite or separate them.

Action is an essential political condition, to the extent that it gives the individuals the ability to rule their own destiny. It is a path for freedom, and the only form of expression of individual uniqueness. Action is the ability to start something new, and it is this activity that allows individuals to express their identity.

³ The six chapters are: The Human Condition, The Public and the Private Realm, Labor, Work, Action, The Vita Activa and the Modern Age.

In Arendt's words,

with the term *vita activa*, I propose to designate three fundamental human activities: labor, work and action. They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man. Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body. [...] Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence. [...] Action the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world (ARENDT, 1970, p. 7).

According to Arendt, the experience of the Jewish refugees can be compared to an animalistic and biological life, in which, only survival matters – a situation restricted to the activity of labour. Her objective, however, is to show that behind the biological life, a political life (action) must exist, which the refugees and expatriates are denied of, because, when not being integrated, they are not allowed to have political action in the public space, and the only thing that is left is a union which is based on humanitarianism. At the beginning of the book, she states that

what I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion of complacent repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than think what we are doing (ARENDT, 1970, p. 5).

The book *The Human Condition* approaches the most elementary manifestations of the human condition, that is to say, the activities that are traditionally within the grasp of everybody. In conclusion, the book is limited to a systematic discussion of labour, work and action, as “general human capacities, which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed” (ARENDT, 1970, p. 6). In conclusion, the historical objective was to investigate the origins of alienation in the modern world.

Plurality is specified in the human condition action by the fact that we humans are equal, and at the same time, are different, unique, and independent beings. The

three activities and their respective conditions are associated to the most natural conditions of the human existence: birth and death.

In this regard, labour assures not only the existence of the individual, but the life of the species. Work, and its product, give certain permanence and durability to the ephemerality of human time. Action, to the extent that it founds and preserves political bodies, creates the conditions for memory, and hence, history (ARENDT, 1970, p. 6).

Nonetheless, for Arendt, among the three activities, action would be connected to the human capability of beginning and re-beginning, because

action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning something anew, that is of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought (ARENDT, 1970, p. 9).

The relationship between action and common life seems to justify the old translation of Aristotle's *zoon politikon* as animal *socialis*, even though the Latin use of the word *societas* also carries a clear political meaning, since its origins are indicative of an alliance of the people for a specific end (ARENDT, 1970, p. 23). The term ‘social’ begins to acquire the general meaning of a fundamental human condition, after the consequent concept of *societas generis humani*, that is to say, a ‘society of man-kind’ (ARENDT, 1970, p. 12).

Public sphere, i.e., the world in common, brings humans together in the company of one another, and, at the same time, it avoids collision.

The common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time (ARENDT, 1970, p. 55).

In her work, Hannah Arendt attributes the importance of the term “private”, to the existence of a public sphere. For the individual,

to live an entire life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived on 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist (ARENDT, 1970, p. 58).

The understanding of the importance of the public sphere reveals that, without participating in the "world in common", the actions of individuals are meaningless. Facts remain insignificant or inconsequential to others, and vice versa, because what matters for the actor does not have importance for the others.

In *The Human Condition*, when discussing the sphere of the public, Arendt recognizes its reference to two correlated phenomena: all that comes to public and can be seen and heard by all; and the world common to all, which is, in fact, a human construct, created by man-made things inserted between nature and man, bringing them together and apart, within a human habitat.

The distinction between labour and work, proposed by Arendt, is based on the fact that ancient European languages used two etymologically different words to designate them (ARENDT, 1970, p. 80).

The distinction between manual and intellectual work is also highlighted in the book. Both have different causes, but, they come from the contextual features of the Middle Ages, "under modern conditions every occupation had to prove its 'usefulness' for society at large, and since the usefulness of the intellectual occupations had become more than doubtful because of the modern glorification of labour, intellectuals started to claim their inclusion in the working population, and entitle their occupation as intellectual work" (ARENDT, 1970).

The process of labour moves in the same circular movement direction, as the biological process of the living being. As opposed to the process of work, which ends when the object is finished, the products of labour, resulting from the 'metabolism' of man with nature, do not last long enough in the world to become a part of it. The very activity of labour focuses exclusively on life and life maintenance. Labour is done by animal *laborans*, who, compelled by the needs of the body, does not make use of the same

with the same amount of freedom that the *homo faber* does, when using his hands as primary instruments (ARENDT, 1970).

In Arendt's perspective, "the ideals of *homo faber*, the fabricator of the world, which are permanence, stability, and durability, have been sacrificed to abundance, the ideal of the animal *laborans*". This explains the fact that man lives in a consumer society, as "labour and consumption are but two stages of the same process, imposed upon man by the necessity of life, this is only a way to saying that we live in a society of laborers" (ARENDT, 1970, p. 126).

The human condition is constituted by nature and the earth, and as a consequence "the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth" (ARENDT, 1970, p. 134). Nevertheless, there is a difference of perception between *homo laborans* and *homo faber*, since

the same nature seen through the eyes of *homo faber*, the builder of the world, 'furnishes only the almost worthless materials as in themselves,' whose whole value lies in the work performed upon them. Without taking things out of nature's hands and consuming them, and without defending himself against the natural process of growth and decay, the animal *laborans* could never survive. But without being at home in the midst of things whose durability makes them fit for use and for erecting a world whose very permanence stands in direct contrast to life, this life would never be human (ARENDT, 1970, p. 135).

Despite that context, Arendt concludes her work with considerations on the activity of thinking. Even though she admits to have omitted this subject from the reflections on '*vita activa*', it is a possible discussion, and might happen wherever men live in the condition of political freedom. The constitution, she says, has two dimensions that elucidate the relationship between rights and politics in the most concrete form: the building of the public space by the *homo faber*, and the agreement for joint action which is obtained by the means of a promise. Therefore, the constitution is a conventional creation, and not an independent concept, because political communities are not the product of thinking, but rather the result of action. They are the actors and are dependent on a succession of actions to exist.

The challenge posed by Arendt, which continues to be controversial even today, is subject to the possibility of the new, facilitated by the joint action of human beings in the public space.

5 Arendt's thoughts and the analysis of the contemporary condition of the refugee

The assumptions of the Italian political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, as well as those of Polish sociologist Zigmunt Bauman, defend the pertinence of Arendt's work nowadays. They point out, in particular, the predictions and the reflections made by her.

In the Chapter 'Beyond Human Rights,' from the book *Means Without End*, Agamben recapitulates the article *We Refugees*, published in 1943, where she expresses that the refugees represent a "new historical consciousness", and have no interest in gaining a new national identity, but rather seek to "contemplate lucidly their condition" (AGAMBEN, 2000, p. 15). He writes that this new form of consciousness is particularly important today, as, older concepts, representing the political actor, such as "man" or "citizen", are falling by the wayside as the nation-state gradually declines.

The author elaborates upon Arendt's approach on the Nation-State, in particular, on the difference between political life and biological life, the latter resulting from the deprivation of citizenship. At the same time, Agamben gives credence to Arendt's proposal, in the sense that political theory uses refugees as a paradigm, in order to rethink politics. To the author, the refugee is a key player, to the extent that it exposes the trilogy of Territory – State – Nation, by putting in check the relationship between the State and Nation, and bringing to light the hidden violence in the nation-building processes, by showing that sovereignty can both be inclusive and exclusive. According to Agamben

given the by now unstoppable decline of the nation-state and the general corrosion of traditional political-judicial categories, the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time and the only category in which one may see today - at least until the process of dissolution of the nation-state and of its sovereignty has achieved full completion- the forms and limits of a coming political community (AGAMBEN, 2000, p. 16).

In humanitarian terms, thinking about refugees nowadays means granting biological survival, but not providing the guarantee of political survival. In the moment of crisis of the Nation-State, it can no longer be defined, based on the homogeneous national territory (AGAMBEN, 2000).

Similarly, Baumann also makes a "bio-political" reading of refugees. He considers them as 'wasted life,' the

human residue of globalisation, and of what he calls "liquid modernity". Refugees become wandering beings, living on a trans-frontier space, doomed to live a provisory life in the shadows, because they do not belong to any State. In this perspective, biological humanism converts into an excluding practice, without the perspective of integration, where political action in the global space takes into consideration only the survival of the individuals (BAUMAN, 2004).

According to Baumann, the last 200 years of modern history considered voluntary and involuntary refugees to be the responsibility of the receiving country. Once admitted, new and established foreigners were under the exclusive jurisdiction of the country. The available choices, to solve the problem of foreigners, should be ideally between anthropophagic and anthropoemic alternatives. The first would literally absolve the foreigners, as in tribal cannibalism, or in a metaphorical sense, in an assisted simulation by power, and practiced in a universal manner by the nation-states. Foreigners would be assimilated by the national body, and they would stop existing as such. The second solution was to 'vomit foreigners', put them together, and expel them from the State power, and the world of the living (BAUMAN, 2008)

Bauman says that the refugees today are 'unsayable'. Those who are proud of their ability to self-reflect, are not only untouchable, but also "unthinkable". In a world of imagined communities, they are the unimaginable. By denying them the right to be imagined, other communities – authentic or believing to be so - reach for some credibility for their own imagination.

Only a community that actually appears often in the political discourse, but cannot be seen anywhere else in real life and time, that is, the global community, an inclusive community but so far non-exclusive, a community that related to the Kantian vision of a *Vereinigung in der Menschengattung* (a perfect civil union of the human race), could take the refugees today out of the 'non-place' where they have been projected (BAUMAN, 2002).

According to Baumann, refugee camps can be considered to be an artifice, by the means of which, blocking the exits became permanent. Those who live in those camps cannot go back to the place where they came from: the countries they leave behind do not want them back, their lives are destroyed, their homes burned down, or ransacked. There is not even a path before them: no government receives with joy a flow of millions of homeless people.

(They) are separated from the rest of the country that welcomes them by an invisible but thick and impenetrable veil of suspicion and resentment. They are suspended in an emptiness in which time has stopped. They are neither settled nor unplaced, and are not sedentary nor nomads. In the terms that used to tell the history of Humanity, they are unutterable (BAUMAN, 2002).

Bauman considers the global community to not be an exception to the fact that all communities are imagined. However, he affirms that imagination is a concrete and powerful integrating force, when sustained by socially created and supported institutions, such as, in the case of modern nations and modern sovereign States. In terms of the global imagined community, it lacks an institutional network, equally global, composed of global democratic agencies, a mandatory global legal system, and global ethical principles. To Bauman, the lack of global institutional network, "is the main reason of the euphemistically called "refugee problem" and the main obstacle for its resolution" (BAUMAN, 2002).

A common feature in Arendt, Agamben and Bauman's work is the condemnation of the exclusion of refugees, through differentiation between the mere survival (biological life) and the political life. Another aspect that is common to the three authors is to point out the limits of humanitarianism beyond survival. Nonetheless, Arendt adds a step further, affirming that the matter of refugees and expatriates is unsolvable under the existing state organizations. They clearly reveal the crisis of the nation-state. According to her, it is not possible to face this crisis, due to the amount of injustice, or be satisfied with restoring an order, that does not correspond to the modern juridical conscience, nor to the people's current conditions for coexistence.

6 Conclusions

Summing up, according to Arendt, refugee protection would need to go beyond 'protective custody', or, the seclusion of individuals from social living, as seen as a part of a totalitarian regime. In keeping with this, the simple sheltering of asylum-seekers in a refugee camp, and the fulfilment of the individual's basic needs becomes a palliative measure, that takes away from the people the ability for political action once they are separated, and hence, no integration in the society is required.

In her view, the suffering of Jewish refugees, in which, only the survival of the individual mattered, could be put in a parallel context with a situation, in which the people live an animalistic, and biological life. Her objective, nevertheless, was to show that behind the biological life, there must exist a political life (action), of which the refugees and the stateless were deprived of action, specifically in the public space. The only thing that was left was a union based on humanitarianism.

In *We Refugees*, the discussion presented is based on her experience as a refugee, and on the self's identity, esteem, and engagement in the community life. The refugee is torn from his/her ordinary life, which discloses a different perspective on the relationship between the private and the public political realm, and provides significant implications for the refugees' positive right to the asylum.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* her argument is based on the reduction of the public political realm. Recognising why Arendt's focus is through understanding what she believes was lost, with regards to personhood in the concentration camps that were run by the totalitarian regimes. Prisoners in these camps were deprived of what Arendt considers to be the core of human freedom: the aptitude to take an initiative, with concern to one's destiny. In Arendt's classification, she considers the refugee camps to be a form of concentration camp.

Hannah Arendt's ideas are pertinent for the analysis of the contemporary condition of the refugee, especially when examining new initiatives, seeking out for durable solutions, and going beyond biological support. By reflecting upon the human condition, and more specifically, on the refugee condition, Arendt makes use of a political rationale, and defines *action* as a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

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