

# HANNAH ARENDT ON “WORLDLESSNESS” AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

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## Abstrak

*Tulisan ini bertujuan menganalisis ide Hannah Arendt, seorang filsuf politik keturunan Yahudi, bahwa kejahatan kemanusiaan tidak terpisahkan dari situasi dunia atau politik yang tidak manusiawi. Arendt menyebut situasi ini dengan istilah worldlessness, kondisi di mana warga negara dirampas hak-hak asasi mereka untuk memperoleh tempat tinggal yang layak, untuk dilindungi oleh negara serta untuk bertindak dan berbicara secara bebas. Menurut Arendt, situasi worldlessness ini berefek ganda karena dalam situasi seperti ini warga negara digiring, di satu pihak, untuk menjadi pelaku kejahatan; dan di lain pihak, menjadi sasaran kejahatan. Contoh konkretnya adalah peristiwa pembantaian massal di Auschwitz, di mana Nazi sebagai pelaku dan orang-orang Yahudi sebagai korban. Mereka semua adalah korban dari kebijakan politik tidak manusiawi yang diterapkan oleh Adolf Hitler. Ide Arendt sesungguhnya menantang pemerintah untuk merancang strategi yang menyeluruh dalam mencegah dan mengatasi kejahatan kemanusiaan.*

**Kata-kata Kunci:** “Worldlessness”, crimes against humanity, anti-Semitism, imperialism, “rightlessness”.

## Introduction

After the tragedy of the Holocaust Arendt predicted that “the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe.”<sup>1</sup> How do we properly explain evil or human crime? Arendt is dissatisfied with a metaphysical understanding of evil because the

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1 Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, Jerome Kohn (ed.), New York: Schocken Books, 1994, p.134.

Holocaust/*Shoah* has pushed philosophical and religious accounts of evil to their own limits.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, she offers a new way that is neither philosophical nor religious, but rather political. It is political because Arendt conceives of evil as something real as to be capable of being repeated many different ways. Evildoers, such as the Nazis, were ordinary people; so what they did can be done by others who also have the capacity to act and think. She writes: “The reality is that ‘the Nazis are people like ourselves. The nightmare is that they have shown, have proven beyond doubt, what people are capable of.’”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the reality of evil shows that evil is inseparable from the condition of “worldlessness”. In the condition of “worldlessness” people either turn to violence as seen in Adolf Eichman and the Nazis in Germany, or are exposed to crimes as experienced by Jewish people during the Holocaust/*Shoah*.

This paper aims at exploring Arendt’s idea that modern “worldlessness” is closely related to crimes against humanity. Arendt describes “worldlessness” as the condition where people do not belong to the world that defines them as individuals, where people are deprived of “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.”<sup>4</sup> The world, a significant space for human appearance in action and speech, loses its power and thus human beings who live in it are deprived of their rights to belong to a political community or are alienated from the public realm. In other words, “worldlessness” is the condition where people have nothing in common with others, no institution to rely upon, or any system of meaning in which to act and speak up. In this condition, people are treated not as a *who* that can act and speak, but as a *what*, as thing-like.<sup>5</sup>

2 There are two metaphysical accounts of evil that are common in the history of philosophy and religion. The first account attempts to justify evil by comparing it with goodness. Since the good is related to being, then evil is the lack of being or non-being as seen in St. Augustine’s notion of evil as *privatio boni* and in Heidegger’s lack of being. In this context, evil is considered as an integral part of God’s or reason’s or history’s plan. The second account tries to locate evil in human motives. In this sense, evil is explained on the basis of the demonic intention of the subject. See Patrick Hayden, “The Relevance of Hannah Arendt’s Reflection on Evil: Globalization and Rightlessness,” in *Human Rights Review*, 2010, p. 253.

3 Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, p.134.

4 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: A Harvest Book and Hartcourt Inc., 1951, p.293.

5 Michael Gottsegen, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p.5.

Regarding crimes against humanity, Arendt refers to a specific kind of crime, namely genocide. If, crimes against humanity are generally related to systematic attacks such as murder, kidnapping, and disappearance against the civilian population, the crime of genocide - one kind of crime against humanity - is characterized by the intention of the agent to destroy, wholly or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. In Arendt's view, totalitarian genocide is a new and unprecedented type of genocide because it is intentionally organized to attack plurality and diversity.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Phenomena of Modern "Worldlessness"**

Arendt observes that there are two phenomena or conditions in modernity that have generated "worldlessness" in which the world loses its power, namely escape from the world and the rise of the social.

#### **Escape from the World**

Along with her contemporaries Horkheimer and Adorno, Arendt criticizes modern scientific disenchantment of the world. All of them are concerned with the destructive and repressive effect of the enlightenment's project of modernity. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that there is a paradox in enlightenment's project because, despite all its greatness, enlightenment has turned into its opposite, barbarism. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that in the enlightenment project, 'humanity, instead of entering humanity into a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.'<sup>7</sup> The barbaric aspect of modernity is central in Arendt's discussion of modern "worldlessness". However, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, who are concerned with the mastery of nature that generates the domination of the human subject,<sup>8</sup> Arendt laments the loss of the power of the world, brought about by modern instrumental rationality. If Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the reduction of humanity because

6 Cláudia Perrone-Moisés, "Forgiveness and Crimes against Humanity: A Dialogue between Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida," in <http://hannaharendt.net/research/perroneIII.html>. 2006, p. 4.

7 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, California: Stanford University Press, 2002, p. Xiv.

8 Horkheimer and Adorno are concerned more with the reduction of individuality into the automatic process of consumption and production through the expansion of instrumental reason. They write: "The individual is entirely nullified in the face of the economic powers. This powers are taking society's domination over nature to unimagined heights." *Ibid.* p. xvii

of the expansion of instrumental reason, Arendt focuses more on the alienation of human world.

From Arendt's perspective, the world's alienation refers to the loss of trust or faith in the power of the world in which we live. The consequence of this loss of trust is that people strive to escape from the world, either to the universe or to the self. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt concludes her prologue by saying that the modern world's alienation can be traced in "its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self."<sup>9</sup> She refers the former to modern scientific progress that enables us to travel in space, and the latter to modern philosophy that turns us away from the common world into what Simon Swift calls 'inner exile'.<sup>10</sup> In both, Arendt observes that people today desire to escape from their condition as being-in-the-world.

With regard to the first, 'flight from the world to the universe', Arendt claims that in the modern age we live in "a world thoroughly determined by a science and technology ... in which knowledge acquired by selecting a point of reference outside the earth is applied to earthly nature and the human artifice."<sup>11</sup> For Arendt, the modern age began in the seventeenth century with Galileo's discovery of the telescope in order to search for the secrets of the universe and bring them down into human cognition. That means, the telescope puts "within the grasp of earth-bound creatures and their body-bound sense what had seemed forever beyond their reach."<sup>12</sup> The invention of the telescope was accompanied by the discovery of the Archimedian point, "a point outside the earth from which to unhinge the world."<sup>13</sup> These discoveries were driven by the fear that our sense-organs deceive us in the reception of reality, doubting the certainty of human perception.

Grounded in the distrust of sensual perception, modern science has "turned toward experiment, which by directly interfering with nature

9 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p.6.

10 Simon Swift, *Hannah Arendt*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008, pp.21-22.

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.268.

12 *Ibid.*, p.260.

13 *Ibid.*, p.262.

assured the development whose progress has ever since appeared to be limitless."<sup>14</sup> Arendt acknowledges that these discoveries have generated progress in modern science, but the problem is that modern science not only has the potential to destroy all earthly organic life and even the earth itself, but also considers nature from a point of view outside the earth. It is the handling of nature from the perspective beyond human reach, outside the earth.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile regarding the second flight 'from the world to the self', Arendt points to modern philosophy, initiated by Descartes, that placed radical doubt in a central position. Philosophy after Descartes, Arendt claims, consists "in the articulations and ramifications of doubting."<sup>16</sup> Descartes argues that what certainly exists is the the capacity to think, and that others, including the world or even our own body, may or may not exist. The point is that there is doubt with regard to the reality of the world and of human life. Since everything else seems to be doubtful, the only way out is introspection, which is, for Descartes, the source of certainty. In this way, the existence of the world depends on processes in the human mind.<sup>17</sup> It is introspection because objective reality is dissolved into a subjective mental process. This introspection is predominant in modern philosophy and results in the modern attitude that what is construed in the human mind is the only thing that is certain and thus can be comprehended. Here, the human mind replaces the Archimedian point because human reason has become the point, where we can look upon the reality of the world.

For Arendt, the handling of nature from outside the earth's perspective - whether in modern science or modern philosophy - points to the fact

14 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York: The Viking Press Inc., 1961, p.55.

15 Arendt beautifully writes: "For whatever we do today in physics—whether we release energy processes that ordinarily go on only in the sun, or attempt to initiate in a test tube the processes of cosmic evolution, or penetrate with the help of telescopes the cosmic space to a limit of two and even six billion light years, or build machines for the production and control of energies unknown in the household of earthly nature, or attain speeds in atomic accelerators which approach the speed of light, or produce elements not to be found in nature, or disperse radioactive particles, created by us through the use of cosmic radiation, on the earth—we always handle nature from a point in the universe outside the earth." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.262

16 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 274

17 Richard J. Gill, "Arendt on 'Universal Science': the Holocaust and the Question of Technology," in <http://www.angelfire.com/folk/richardjgill/five.html>.

that the cosmic process is imported into nature, which is called 'acting into nature' that presupposes "the godlike powers that humankind takes on in its delving into the fundamental nuclear processes and the ultimate unpredictability of such powers and interventions."<sup>18</sup> What concerns Arendt is the new emphasis placed upon cosmic or mental processes and not on things-in-themselves. This emphasis deprives things-in-themselves or the objective world. In this context, the world lost not only its power but also its meaningfulness.

### The Rise of the Social

Arendt also finds the loss of the power of the world in the modern phenomenon of mass society. Here "worldlessness" refers to the condition where the world between people has lost its power to gather people together, to relate or separate them.<sup>19</sup> There is nothing 'in-between' or common that unites people and even things. The products of human work do not bring people together, but conversely disperse them. This condition brings about the growth of a third realm called society characterized by the elevation of labour above all other human activities.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the limits of a private household are liberated and channelled into the public realm. What is supposed to be kept private in the household, becomes public in modern society. In this way society has replaced altogether the private and public realm. Arendt writes: "Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival - previously confined to the private sphere - are permitted to appear in public."<sup>21</sup>

The rise of the social, in Arendt's view, is the loss of a plurality of distinct human beings, because society requires its members to act as one

18 Michael Janover, "Politics and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," in *Action and Appearance*, Anna Yeatman, cs., (eds.), London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p.27

19 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp.52-53.

20 Richard J. Gill, "Modern Worldlessness and New Beginnings: Arendt's Critique of the Rise of 'Society'" in <http://www.angelfire.com/folk/richardjgill/three.html>.

21 *Ibid.*, p.46.

huge family and to have only one opinion and interest.<sup>22</sup> The consequence of this attempt is the destruction of the plurality of perspectives that marks the end of the common world since the social requires that the world "is permitted to present itself in only one perspective."<sup>23</sup> In the mass society, conformity becomes the mode of life, in the sense that instead of acting together and telling their life story to one another, people are required to conform themselves into 'a certain type of behaviour'.<sup>24</sup>

Conformity eliminates the freedom of people to act. Since people are deprived of the opportunity to talk about their life story and the value of products of their works, then their destiny is decided not by their own free action but by an elite's group who happen to possess either economic or political power. In this context, as Richard Gill claims, "worldlessness" means the "loss of the sense of reality as individuals are thrown back upon their own subjective experiences and natural drives, tending less to initiate spontaneous actions than to conform to predictable patterns of behaviour."<sup>25</sup>

Arendt finds a concrete example of the "worldlessness" of society in the blurring of the distinction between property and wealth. Property, Arendt argues, is privately located and has its own significance for the maintenance of the life process. It allows people to enter into the public realm. In having property of their own, a person becomes free, no longer governed by the necessities of life, and is thus able to participate in public life.<sup>26</sup> For Arendt, property becomes the condition of worldliness, because it is only by owning property that one is able to be part of the world, shared with others. In this sense, property has a worldly dimension because it represents "the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary condition for a person's worldliness."<sup>27</sup>

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22 *Ibid.*, p.39.

23 Margaret Betz Hull, *The Hidden Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002, p.68.

24 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.40.

25 Richard Gill Richard Gill, "Modern Worldlessness and New Beginnings: Arendt's Critique of the Rise of 'Society'" in <http://www.angelfire.com/folk/richardgill/three.html>

26 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.65

27 *Ibid.*, p.253.

The problem actually emerges when property is transformed into wealth derived from the exploitation of peasants or labourers. In this way, labourers lose their stable place in the world and are not protected - either by their own property or family. For Arendt, wealth is “worldless” because it replaces the immobile, durable and worldly property and has the tendency to create a fluid or unstable commercial society. This consumer society, Arendt argues, “cannot possibly know how to take care of a world and the things which belongs exclusively to the space of worldly appearances, because its central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches.”<sup>28</sup>

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that capitalism and imperialism are related. In Arendt’s view, the driving force of imperialism is the expansion, or as she puts it: “Expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism.”<sup>29</sup> Imperial expansion was driven by social and economic interests. Economics became a leitmotif of the states to expand their political power. In so doing, states were concerned more with accumulating wealth than with the well-being of citizens. This phenomenon is known as the colonialization of the political, in which the state turns away from its responsibility for public matters and submits itself to the forces or imperatives of the social. In this context, politics becomes a part of social life. This is clear in bourgeois society as the consequence of imperialism. Arendt writes:

Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant economic growth, it had to impose this law upon its home government and to proclaim expansion to an ultimate political goal of foreign policy.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, when the regimes of the capitalist states concentrate on maximizing profit and accumulating capital, they disregard the role of people. Worse, the state purposely forces citizens to lose their common

28 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p.211

29 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.125.

30 *Ibid.*, p.126.

interest, have no goal to achieve in life, and become indifferent to societal matters. They are treated as "the masses", which Arendt describes as the people who "either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations or trade unions."<sup>31</sup>

In totalitarian states, Arendt observes, there is a state-organized effort to deprive citizens from their active participation in social and economic life. In striving for capital accumulation, the state is turned into 'a highly atomized society' because it is structured on the basis of competitiveness.<sup>32</sup> The impact of this process is that those citizens who fulfil these criteria are allowed to participate in the state, while those who do not are automatically eliminated. In practice only a few citizens can attain it and the majority of people cannot. As a result, the majority of citizens "either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass."<sup>33</sup> What concerns Arendt with the masses is not the brutality it may create or the unprogressiveness of people, but the isolation of people as a group and the destruction of human relationships. There is nothing in common for people to talk about and there is no space to act together. In other words, the objective world, or things-in-between that provide the space for people to appear before one another and to act and tell their life stories, has been destroyed by the emergence of mass society in modern capitalist society. Arendt beautifully illustrates the situation of loneliness as follows:

The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.<sup>34</sup>

Here we find the connection between the destructive effect of mass society generated by the rise of the social in capitalist society as discussed

31 *Ibid.*, p.311.

32 *Ibid.*, p.310.

33 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, pp.89-90.

34 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.53.

at length in *the Human Condition* and the phenomenon of superfluosness brought about by totalitarian regimes as discussed in detail in *the Origins of Totalitarianism*. In this regard, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl argues, in favour of a single party totalitarian regimes abolished all other parties in order to establish absolute power and in doing so all social and class formations were broken down in order to create a mass society. In order to attain this purpose, totalitarian regimes employ total terror, including secret police and establish concentration camps. In this way, totalitarianism became a new form of government that destroys politics because it methodically eliminates speaking and acting human beings and attacks the very humanity of people. It makes people superfluous as human beings.<sup>35</sup>

### **Modern “Worldlessness” and Crimes against Humanity**

Modern “worldlessness” as described above is the condition out of which totalitarianism emerges. It has driven European states to become authoritarian during the first half of the twentieth century. Totalitarian ideology has generated ‘organized loneliness’, which is the common ground for terror and the essence of totalitarian regimes.<sup>36</sup> Totalitarian ideology serves as a theoretical framework for totalitarian regimes in their total domination to destroy the world and everything in it, including other human beings. This domination is mainly intended to make individuals superfluous. Arendt writes: “Totalitarianism strives not towards despotic rule over people, but toward a system in which people are superfluous.”<sup>37</sup> By making people superfluous, totalitarian regimes believe that people easily turn to violence or be exposed to violence. This is exactly what Arendt means by the inseparability between “worldlessness” and crimes against humanity.

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35 Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Why Arendt Matters*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006, pp.38-39.

36 There are only two ideologies that claim themselves to be comprehensive and predictive explanations of human conduct and become state policy, namely, Communism of Stalin in Russia and National Socialism in Germany, while others ideologies or better doctrines are partial. Crick calls those two ideologies as economic determinism and racial determinism. See Bernard Crick, “Hannah Arendt and the Burden of Our Times,” in *The Political Quarterly*, 1997, p. 80

37 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 457.

### "Worldlessness" and Violent Action

According to Arendt, the condition of "worldlessness" has generated the violent attitude of moderns, or has made them radically evil. This is clearly seen in Adolf Eichmann and other Nazis in Germany. She explores this point in her report on the trial of Eichmann, a series of articles in the *New Yorker*, afterwards published in book form under the title *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In this book, Arendt attempts to relate the individual moral character - good or bad - to community in totalitarianism, through her description of evil as banal because evil comes to exist in the condition where people are being abandoned or are superfluous.

In order to understand the banality of Eichmann's evil, we need to look at the condition that has made him such a monstrous person. Eichmann, in Arendt's view, is a 'victim' of the totalitarian ideology, called Nazism because he is treated as agent of totalitarianism, an instrument of the evil political system. Hitler's ideology changes not only how people act or behave to one another, but also human nature itself. Arendt claims the aim of totalitarian ideology is to transform human nature by inducing humans to become ideological creatures.<sup>38</sup> What Arendt stresses here is the fact that it is only when people have been possessed by ideas, or more accurately by a system of ideas (ideology), that they turn to be vicious people.<sup>39</sup>

This transformation of human nature was carried out through the establishment of concentration camps. She describes concentration camps as the fabrication of hell on earth. Arendt divides three types of death camps that correspond to the concept of life after death; *hades*, purgatory, and hell. Among the three types, Arendt argues: "Hell in its most literal sense was embodied by those types of camp perfected by the Nazis, in which the whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment."<sup>40</sup> The image of

38 *Ibid.*, p. 432.

39 George Kateb, "Ideology and Storytelling," in *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2, 2002, p.321.

40 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.445.

hell in the form of concentration camps is meant to construct the fantasy that human beings can be omnipotent. Arendt writes: "The totalitarian hell proves only that human power is greater than they ever dare to think, and that we can realize hellish fantasies without making the sky fall or the earth open."<sup>41</sup> The desire for omnipotence is called 'madness for the superlative,' "a madness that brings God down to earth in the figure of a particular omnipotent individual."<sup>42</sup> Through this desire, the Nazi regime wanted totally to dominate the world, which would be achieved through eliminating plurality in favour of 'being one' or the only one. Hitler, as *Führer*, desired absolute power, a godlike power on earth.

In the concentration camps, the desire for absolute power was transferred into the mind of ordinary Germans and the Nazis. In favour of being omnipotent, they were driven to carry out the order of transporting, organizing, and then murdering camp inmates. Because of the fantasy of omnipotence, the Nazis were reluctant to give in to their vices and resisted the temptation to do good. Arendt claims: "Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality which most people recognize in it - the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis ... must have been tempted not to murder ... but God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation."<sup>43</sup> This resistance occurs through the Nazi's imperative of obedience and self-sacrifice.

The perfect example for this is Adolf Eichmann. The imperative of the Nazi's regime stimulated Eichmann's own consciousness and thus Eichmann's conscience was carried away and caught up in the voice of others. Eichmann's voice became the voice of Himmler. In this way, Hitler's desire and fantasy, voiced by Himmler, became Eichmann's own desire and fantasies.<sup>44</sup> Arendt argues that the sacrifice of Eichmann's desire through the elated voice of conscience is accomplished by turning the basic instinct

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41 *Ibid.*, p.446.

42 Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt & the Human Rights: the Predicament of Common Responsibility*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006, p.108.

43 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p.150.

44 Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt & the Human Rights: the Predicament of Common Responsibility*, p.109.

of pity back to oneself. "The trick used by Himmler consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self."<sup>45</sup> That means, the sacrifice of desire for duty displays Eichmann's fantasy of being omnipotent as well. In other words, the fantasy of Hitler as *Führer* was transferred into the mind of Eichmann.

This fantasy drove Eichmann to be an agent of the state's criminal policies. Consequently, his crime represents a new form of evil, which Arendt calls 'the banality of evil', that is "the condition of a humanity that has been forsaken, banished."<sup>46</sup> Evil is banal because the person acts out of ideals which he or she had taken over from others without understanding them. In other words, the person does not think what he or she is doing and thus fails to recognize the negative impacts of her or his action on others. Or as Berel Lang puts it: "The evildoer was a 'hollow being, emptied of whatever it is that distinguishes human beings as human - then the result of this would be the banality, the sheer mechanical thoughtlessness, of the evil-doer."<sup>47</sup> In the case of Eichmann, he was superfluous as a human being, deprived of his individuality as a free and thinking person. Although he appeared as a normal person, whether during the Holocaust/*Shoah* or the trial in Jerusalem, but in fact he lacked of the capacity for freedom and thinking or understanding.<sup>48</sup> Eichmann was an ordinary person, but his lack of thinking, generated by Hitler's ideology (Nazism) has made him a monstrous person. He is the perfect example of how "worldlessness" in the form of superfluousness is the driving force of violent action. In this context, Eichmann represents the terrorists and fundamentalists in our time that have been driven to violent action because of ideals induced by certain ideologies or religions. They are the victims of the politic of brainwashing where people are deprived of their own ideals or desires and replace them with other ideals coming from the outside.

45 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p.106.

46 Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt & the Human Rights: the Predicament of Common Responsibility*, p.112.

47 Berel Lang, "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil," in *Judaism*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 1988, 269

48 *Ibid.*, p.272.

### “Worldlessness” and the Loss of the Right to Have Rights

Besides driving people to be violent actors, “worldlessness” also renders people vulnerable, in the sense they are easily exposed to crimes as experienced by Jewish people during the Holocaust/*Shoah*. For Arendt, the *Shoah* is not a unique event simply due to the historically large number of victims and the degree of suffering, but is a unique horror that negated modernity’s universalism, absolutism, and ideology.<sup>49</sup> It marks the failure of modernity because instead of bringing about a healthy human condition, where human beings can freely and meaningful act and speak as equals, modernity created a “worldless” or inhuman condition. Arendt considers “worldlessness” as the precondition for crimes against humanity. In the condition of “worldlessness”, people loose their right to have rights. They become a rightless people.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt relates that the loss of the right to have rights, and the failure of the nation-state that began in the late nineteenth century in anti-Semitism and imperialism, reached its climax in the twentieth century in the form of totalitarianism. The idea of the nation-state emerged as a response to the growth of ethnic groups within the state that demanded recognition of their rights. William Batkay claims that the nation-state is based on the premise that the state should be the political embodiment of a racial or ethnic nation, replacing the state based on individual or citizen’s right.<sup>50</sup> The nation-state is reflected in the Westphalian system, “the nation-state survived as an organized political community in which citizens were granted rights and a meaningful space among equals.”<sup>51</sup>

However, the problem with the nation-state is that it is contradictory because from the beginning, the nation-state is formed on the principle of ‘nationality’. In other words, the principle of nationality is the founding

49 Bernard Crick, “Hannah Arendt and the Burden of our Times,” p.78.

50 William Batkay, “Judaism Challenge to the Idea of the Nation State: A Reappraisal of Hannah Arendt,” in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 20, 1995, p.746.

51 Lars Rensman, “Grounding Cosmopolitics: Rethinking Crimes against Humanity and Global Political Theory with Arendt and Adorno,” in *Arendt & Adorno: Political and Philosophical Investigations*, California: Stanford University Press, 2012, p.132.

element of the nation-state. But history shows that this principle is also the driving force for the expulsion of citizens and minorities in some of European nation-states, at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is on the principle of nationality that nation-states expel their own citizens, particularly minorities and render them superfluous. Consequently, minorities are not protected in their own nation-state and at the same time cannot find any protection from international authority or even from other countries.<sup>52</sup>

This is what Arendt calls as the decline or crisis of the nation-state because it was unable to cope with the emergence of large ethnic minorities within the existing states and obsession with national or ethnic rights that have generated both the domination of one ethnic group over the others (discrimination against minorities) and war between ethnic's nations.<sup>53</sup> This is exactly what Arendt sees in anti-Semitic and imperial politics. For Arendt, nationalism easily turned to racialism and anti-Semitism that provided impetus for hate against a minority. The first victim of the change from individual or citizen-based state to ethnic-based state was the Jews. Arendt writes: "The fact is that modern anti-Semitism grew in proportion as traditional nationalism declined, and reached its climax at the exact moment when the European system of nation-states and its precarious balance of power crashed."<sup>54</sup>

What concerns Arendt in anti-Semitism is the politicization of this social discrimination, in the sense that the hate or discriminating attitude is formalized by political leaders in order to maintain their power and carry out their hidden agenda. In Arendt's view, the driving force of hate towards the Jewish people was political.<sup>55</sup> One good example of the politicization of such social phenomenon was Hitler's nationalism. When he came into power in 1933, Hitler declared: 'Germany for the ethnic Germans', and 'Germany is not an immigrant state'. Of course

52 *Ibid.*, pp.132-133.

53 William Batkay, "Judaism Challenge to the Idea of the Nation State: A Reappraisal of Hannah Arendt," p.746.

54 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.4.

55 *Ibid.*, p.87.

this pronouncement brought about prejudices and hate against minorities groups, particularly the Jews, firstly in Germany and then more wildly in other European states.<sup>56</sup>

The decline of the nation-state can also be seen in imperialism, which is driven by what Steve Buckler calls a 'depoliticizing mentality'.<sup>57</sup> Imperialism marginalized people because they lost their right to belong to a political community, and even worse deprived of active participation in political life.<sup>58</sup> This is found in bureaucracy, where the state is ruled by the few or the elite who have either political or economic power. In this way, large numbers of ordinary citizens are disempowered and the states become "the precious cement for binding together a centralized state and an atomized society."<sup>59</sup> Arendt observes that national sovereignty has deprived the majority of people from their right to have rights. In fact, she discovers that in modern "worldlessness" human rights are at stake. Or as Rensman claims:

The loss of your polity includes the more fundamental loss of human dignity, 'the essential quality as [hu]man' which is dependent of a place in the world—a worldly context in which human life can have meaning and in which human recognize one another as free and equals."<sup>60</sup>

The decline of nation-states as described above has brought about the loss of right to have rights. There are three indications of this phenomenon: first, it is "the loss of their homes."<sup>61</sup> Home is a special entity and significant space because at home we find security and even meaning in our life. When homes are destroyed then the human world that defines human existence and meaning is also destroyed. However, Arendt is not only concerned with the loss of the home, but the difficulty

56 Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2011, p. 62.

57 *Ibid.*, p.64.

58 Jeffrey Isaak, "A New Guarantee on Earth: Hannah Arendt on Human Dignity and the Politics of Human Rights," in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1, 1996, p. 62.

59 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.231.

60 Lars Rensman, "Grounding Cosmopolitics: Rethinking Crimes against Humanity and Global Political Theory with Arendt and Adorno," p.133.

61 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p.290.

of finding a new home or new place for human shelter. Describing the condition of migrants, Arendt writes:

What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one. Suddenly, there is no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they could found a new community of their own.<sup>62</sup>

Second, it is "the loss of government protection."<sup>63</sup> Here, Arendt points to people who are looking for political asylum. These people, she argues, are not politically and legally protected in their own country and are uncertain to be protected in other countries. What is unprecedented in this context is that people do not belong to any community. Since no country in the world claims them, they remain superfluous. This is exactly what the Nazis' regime did to the Jewish people. "The Nazis started their extermination of Jews by first depriving them of all legal status (the status of second-class citizens) and cutting them off from the world of living by herding them into ghettos and concentration camps."<sup>64</sup> Arendt shows that this phenomenon does not end in concentration camps, but still going on in those who were treated as refugees. Therefore, in her article 'We Refugees', she claims that the loss of refugees is absolute. "We lost our home ... We lost our occupation ... We lost our language .... We left our relatives ... and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps."<sup>65</sup>

Third, it is the loss of humanity where human capacity of action and speech are destroyed: "They are deprived not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion."<sup>66</sup> The complete destruction of humanity is seen in Nazi's concentration camps where people were not only deprived of their right to action and opinion, but also were treated as thing-like that can be predicted and calculated. Their spontaneity and condition were

62 *Ibid.*, p.291.

63 *Ibid.*, p.291.

64 *Ibid.*, p.293.

65 Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp.264-265.

66 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 294.

being denied. In concentration camps, Arendt claims, Jewish people were treated: first, not as judicial beings because they were arbitrarily arrested and put into camps; second, not as moral beings because they were completely cut off from the world; and third, not as distinct individual beings because they were permanently and institutionally tortured.<sup>67</sup>

It becomes clear that for Arendt, the loss of ‘the right to have rights’ particularly the right to be a member of political community is the precondition for the annihilation of the Jewish people in concentration camps. Before being killed they were made superfluous, uprooted, and stateless. They were stripped of their citizenship. For Arendt, the loss of citizenship is similar to the loss of worldliness or the condition of human existence. In fact, Arendt’s thinking on crimes against humanity is informed by her awareness of dehumanization brought about by racism, imperialism, colonialism, militarism, and bureaucratic domination in modern society and politics. That means, as Hayden argues, crimes against humanity are closely related to modern structure and condition of superfluosness, created and maintained by “political, economic, and social structures, attitudes and beliefs that normalize and legitimize extreme deprivation and exclusion.”<sup>68</sup>

Arendt’s description of the inseparability of “worldlessness” and crimes against humanity does not mean that she defends the criminals. Arendt does not treat Eichmann as an innocent person. Arendt’s main point is to consider a crime in a broader context in order to get a whole picture of why cruelty could happened. In this way, I think, Arendt challenges such judicial systems throughout the world that focus only on the criminals on trial and thus let the actor’s intellectuals behind the crimes—those who have either political or economic power—go away unpunished. Furthermore, Arendt’s idea helps governments to fight against and eradicate crimes. That means, in understanding the inseparability between crimes and the condition of “worldlessness”, the governments

67 Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” in *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 12., No. 1, 1950, Indiana: Indiana University Press, p.372.

68 Patrick Hayden, *The Relevance of Hannah Arendt’s Reflection on Evil: Globalization and Rightlessness*, p. 458.

are able to design a fundamental and comprehensive strategy to prevent such crimes occurring again in the future.

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