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## Arendtian Beginning Under the Threat of Violence

**Abstract:** Action and violence are two of the most central topics in Arendt's works. The opposition between action and violence can also be interpreted as the opposition between the potentiality of human capacities and their fundamental destruction in human life. For Arendt, action and speech are the actualization of those capacities in their ever-new forms. However, those capacities can only be actualized in human plurality: a plurality of equal and distinct individuals. Therefore, in its different appearances and in its different tools, the threat of violence for the individual and for the political realm consists in its intrinsic aim to destruct human potentialities and human plurality. In our economical-global world, world violence increases significantly, since the emphasis is no longer on political categories such as equality or political action, but rather on everything that can be turned into materials and accelerate economic growth. Human beings are not exceptions; they are constantly under the threat of turning into "human materials" as Arendt rightly claims. Hence, in this paper I will first examine the relation between action, beginning and potentiality and second, indicate how plurality and power interact; in the third part I will outline how violence transforms human beings into human material, and in the final part I will indicate some problems of inequality and the economic agenda which produces millions of displaced people.

**Keywords:** Arendt, Beginning, Violence, Migrants, Refugees, Minorities, (In)equality, Instrumentality.

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## Şiddet Tehditi Altında Arendtçi Başlangıç

**Öz:** Eylem ve şiddet, Arendt'in yapıtlarında ele aldığı temel konular arasındadır. Eylem ve şiddet arasındaki karşıtlık ise, insana ait yetilerdeki potansiyellik ve bunların insan yaşamında kökten yıkımının karşıtlığı olarak da yorumlanabilir. Arendt için eylem ve söz bu insan yetilerinin her zaman yeni biçimlerde edimselleşmesidir. Arendt'e göre bu edimselleşme, ancak insan çoğulluđu; eşit ve ayırdlı olan bireylerin çoğulluđunda gerçekleşebilir. Bu nedenle farklı görünüşlerde ve farklı araçlarda ortaya çıkan bireylere ve politik alana yönelik şiddet tehdidi, özellikle insan potansiyelini ve insan çoğulluđunu hedef alır. Ekonomik-küresel dünyamızda vurgu artık eşitlik ve politik eylem üzerinde olmadığından, şiddet belirgin biçimde artmakta, vurgu, daha çok ekonomik büyümeye katkıda bulunabilecek malzemelere kaymaktadır. İnsan da bu türden malzemeler arasında bir istisna değildir ve Arendt'in haklı biçimde dile getirdiđi gibi, sürekli olarak "insan malzemesine" dönüştürölme tehdidi altındadır. Bu çerçeve düşünöldüğünde ilkin, eylem, başlangıç ve potansiyellik konularını inceleyecek ve ikinci olarak da, çoğulluk ve güç arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alacağım. Üçüncü bölümde şiddetin nasıl insan varlığını bir "insan malzemesi"ne dönüştürdüğünün bir çerçevesini sunacağım. Son bölümde ise, eşitsizlikten ve milyonlarca yerinden edilmiş insan yaratan ekonomik programlardan kaynaklanan bazı sorunlara işaret edeceğim.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Arendt, Başlangıç, Şiddet, Göçmen, Mülteci, Azınlıklar, Eşit(siz)lik, Araçsallık.

Arendt's remarkable contribution to phenomenology is her interpretation of potentiality in the political sphere. In phenomenology, potentiality is mostly examined in relation to temporal and spatial horizons of appearances. In Arendt's political theory, however, equal importance is awarded to human plurality as the realm of potentiality. In plurality, the human relations continuously create various, multiple, and interconnected segments. Hence, a single relation one has in the present can retain the past and shape the future of human plurality. According to Arendt, this intriguing human interaction and its potential to influence people and events are one of the most powerful sources of the political because, in this interaction, neither these influences nor their results can be predicted. Arendt accurately describes this reserve of future potentialities as the "unexpectedness" and "unpredictability" of human action (Arendt 1958: 178 & 194). Besides, for her, these potentialities are not only the most productive part of human beings in terms of creating new relations and new events, but also their most powerful source for resistance to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Despite their differences, the

common denominator of these regimes is to make human actions predictable and control them accordingly.

Plurality is not only the open sphere of potentialities for human relations and events, but it is also the only realm in which one can exercise freedom. In this regard, Arendt's investigations of plurality go beyond Husserl's epistemological foundations of the life-world and Heidegger's analyses of *Dasein's* existential analytic. By the inclusion of human freedom, the implications of Arendt's interpretation of plurality and the world in which they take place, add a fundamental layer to Husserl's investigations on intersubjectivity (*Intersubjektivität*) and the surrounding world (*Umwelt*), as well as to Heidegger's description of *Dasein* as *Dasein-with* (*Mit-dasein*) and with-world (*Mitwelt*). (Heidegger 1997: 155). Despite the differences in their philosophical projects, one can still find clear resemblances between Arendt and her predecessors; for example, her strong emphasis on the capacity to begin something new and Husserl's attitude towards philosophy when he describes himself as a perpetual beginner. The capacity of reflecting upon one's life, that is, the awareness of it in constantly renewed intentional directedness, is also marked by Husserl's phenomenology. Moreover, from her doctoral dissertation on *amor mundi* onwards, Arendt's explorations of Heidegger's investigations on being-in-the-world and disclosing its meaning in language and exercising it in action are constant motives of her "will to understand." In the continuity of her phenomenological-political project, indeed, it would not be an overstatement to claim that for Arendt the most crucial lack of awareness consists in the forgetfulness of our capacity to speak and act.

The clear focus on the potentiality of creating new relations and exercising freedom in plurality, leads us to follow Arendt's views on "beginning something new" (1958: 177) as a link between potentiality and actuality. In order to explain this link, first I will expose the meaning of beginning, and second discuss why

action and power are inseparable; third, I will continue with an account of violence as a general practice of the destruction of the human capacity to speak and act. The core of this part concerns the question of how *human potential* is transformed into *human material* in an economically dominated world order. In the fourth and final part, I will conclude my chapter with some observations concerning how violence creates more inequality by means of creating millions of displaced people in the global world and obstructs and destroys human potential in general.

### **1. Action as Beginning**

For Arendt, to act in its most general sense is to affirm one's appearance in the world. This appearance is a result of an act of being involved among others by one's deeds and words. Arendt describes this act of involvement by the term "insertion": people insert themselves into the existing human relations. To account for this way of appearing to oneself as well as to others, she suggests an existential link between birth and insertion, because in both cases one comes into the world by opening a new space to oneself in different degrees. In the latter case, for instance, by taking a place among others, one gains a location of one's own and becomes visible to oneself as well. Arendt calls this intentional positioning of oneself among others a second birth. Similar to the birth of someone, which changes the physical constellation of human plurality, inserting oneself into plurality is the actualizing of a potential. This potential has the capacity to give a new structure to all relational constellations that forms human plurality. Inspired by the Latin origin of *insertion*, that is, *initium*, which means to begin and to lead, Arendt says that every *initium* or initiative is a new beginning (1958: 177): a beginning not only includes the beginning of events, but also a building up of oneself by confronting oneself in this process with seeing what one can say and do. This passage from the new beginning to political initiative is the source of Arendt's description of natality as a decisive category of the political.

Hence, the “new” is intrinsic to every newcomer and it is always the actualization of an unknown potential. Nobody can know who a new-born will be, yet it is an irreversible addition to the world, its plurality and its events. Thus, both birth and insertion present a potential of coming to be as well as open up a horizon of a new constellation in human relationships. Although Arendt does not use the terms of horizon or potentiality except in a few instances, nothing describes more clearly human action and speech than these terms: action and speech are the horizon of human relations and they form the potential of interrupting the course of existing events. From an Arendtian perspective, potentiality is nothing else than human action and its capacity to *begin something new*. One can always bring a new course to given events, both individually and collectively, and those actions cannot be known and are unpredictable even to their actors.

One can observe the similarity between Arendt’s interpretation of potentiality and Aristotle’s investigations in *Metaphysics*. A specific form among the different senses of potentiality Aristotle elaborates, is particularly influential for Arendt’s understanding of action. In Book *Theta*, Aristotle gives his famous example of the act of seeing in which he claims it is the impossible to separate seeing and having seen (*Metaphysics* IX.6.7–8, 1048b18–34, 446–49). As this example shows, in some acts, potentiality is internal to actuality. These inseparable actions are particularly important for Arendt and they are the primary examples of her whole theory of action, since in these examples, potentiality exposes itself only as an inseparable internal process in actuality. Another example for action can be found in Aristotle’s account of flute playing in *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.7.3 1097a 24–35, 22–23; cf. *Magna Moralia* II.12.1–3, 1211b18–38, 670–71), and once again the act and the end or the result are inseparable; the potential and the intended act overlap in one single actualization. Similarly, for Arendt freedom can be exercised through speech and action, neither before nor after the moment of its actualization. That is why freedom can neither be freedom of thought nor freedom of choice but is always a performance which belongs to the present.

Precisely because of this clear reference to performativity and presence, beginning becomes a key notion to explain what action is. As it is in the example of flute playing, Arendt's beginning can be conceived as the bridging link between potentiality and actuality, since it discloses itself only in action and speech. According to her interpretation, the beginning corresponds to changing the existing constellation or course of events and to give an ever-new form to one's own life. Freedom is nothing else than actualizing these new forms. In this process of actualization, actors confronts who they are among others and experiences the uniqueness of their individual lives. Hence, the beginning is not limited to be the core of the political and the ethical categories, but is rather the core of human existence. That is why she emphasizes that every newcomer, namely every newborn, enters the world of others with this intrinsic existential capacity of the new. However, this capacity, as all potentialities, can be actualized or not actualized, either because of external or internal impediments. Particularly in mass societies the intrinsic forgetfulness that marks everydayness and being absorbed by masses, as Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* (1997: 163-69), retrieves a particular meaning and importance in relation to Arendt's notion of plurality: plurality is not only the togetherness that enables humans to perform political action, but also the togetherness that remembers what has happened and what can be done differently from the masses.

Despite its enormous capacity, Arendt's theory of action as beginning is overshadowed by a phenomenological complexity: action presupposes a "balanced" coexistence between earth, world, and human plurality. Arendt famously distinguishes the relations between earth and labor, world and work, and plurality and political action in *The Human Condition*. These relations are described in what they used to be and what they are in the contemporary situation; for example, labor as what preserves the human life that is conditioned by biological needs and the sustainability of them, concerns what it used to be, rather than what labor means today. Originally, labor is an activity that we share with all living

beings; however, as Arendt elaborates in the last section of the same work, this description is no longer valid in the Modern Age. Work is described as the realm of productivity and of all capacities of forming the world in which one lives in; again, productivity is no longer limited to the solid construction of the world, but is rather turned into a tool to expand the productivity of labor. Plurality is the condition for constituting the body politic, but in the Modern Age we deal with mass societies, which are characterized by economic interests rather than political concerns. Since plurality is also the realm in which one can exercise freedom as well as a humane life, the tension between “what it was” and “what it is” confronts us with the immense difficulty to bridge the gap between the past and present situation in the human condition. Therefore, at the beginning of her work, Arendt warns her reader by saying the book was not written to provide answers, but rather to remind that “it is nothing more than to think what we are doing” (1958: 5).

Thoughtlessness regarding what we are doing lies at the centre of Arendt’s criticism of the Modern Age. Such thoughtlessness brings an imbalance to the three activities and conditions of human life, which culminates in losing the capacity of action and speech. According to her analyses in *The Human Condition*, the loss of action and speech can be traced back to two directions. The first one is the gigantic capacity to produce and to consume, that is, the processes by which the economic realm expands over the political realm by the promise of commonwealth. The second one concerns how violence becomes the tool and the practice for realizing this promise, particularly by expanding the practice of turning everything that exists into a means to an end. Although Arendt describes the three human conditions mostly as distinct, it is misleading to read them as completely separate activities in one’s life. They are part of one’s life, but the demand is to balance them both individually and collectively. Thus, she mainly emphasizes the danger of the mixing up of labor, work and action and their functions in one’s life, which will result in the loss of the capacity to act. Plurality once again plays a crucial role to

prevent this danger: only plurality can balance these three realms because, by maintaining one's distinction from another, plurality can prevent one to turn into a part of the masses and to lose one's potentialities to begin.

## 2. Plurality and Equality

Plurality is not a simple logical conclusion of the necessity of the presence of others in order to act and speak together. It goes further, because when Arendt uses plurality, she refers to a community of *distinct* and *equal* individuals. In *The Human Condition* being equal and distinct is described as follows:

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not *equal*, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future. . . . If men were not *distinct*, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood (1958: 175-76).

As the quote suggests, equality is based on our capacity to *understand* each other. This capacity of understanding is not only limited to our present togetherness, but also opens up toward past and future generations; it thus includes a temporal, historical dimension. Second, the *distinction* only becomes apparent in our capacity to *say* something *different* from each other, and thus the distinction is inevitably based on performing speech. Entailing to the previous, if we all say the same we do not need to speak; therefore, *understanding* is only *needed* as long as we speak and act differently from one another. In conclusion, understanding is needed while actualizing our uniqueness; and this stands in contrast to the involvement in masses and their interest-oriented convictions and in repetitive slogans or propagandas.

The emphasis on equality and distinction affirms our equal capacity to begin something new as distinct individuals. In an Arendtian sense this affirmation is nothing else than the affirmation of an equal human capacity to speak and act. The actualization of our uniqueness is a genuine event of this world because as she



states, most of our acts and speeches are concerned with the matters of “the world of things” or “worldly interests.” (1958: 182). Arendt says that only such an interest gives the significance to the world as “inter-est” since it is something “which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together.” (1958: 182). If one calls this spatial and tangible dimension of the world an “objective” in-between, the latter is the “subjective in-between” (1958: 183) that goes directly between one person to another. The subjective in-between is the interaction between people consisting in their speeches and actions, and hence it leaves neither anything tangible, not any “end products” (1958: 183) behind. Yet, the process itself and the events that appear in this in-between are no less real than the former. Arendt calls this reality “the web of human relationships” in order to indicate its “intangible quality.” (1958: 183).

In her double reference to the in-between, which both are intrinsically referring to plurality, Arendt’s political interpretation of Heidegger’s being-in-the-world is clearly visible. Plurality does not only objectively constitute the world of appearances, but also its meaning can be caught in the interaction with others, even it leaves no product behind. For Arendt, this very structure affirms the role of the “event” in the late Heidegger, which can be interpreted as the political event of “the coincidence of thought and event.” (Arendt 1994b: 433). In this transposition into the political, speech and action are both events of the world, from which they are sourced and which they constantly form. The world is inseparable from the changing web that shelters plurality. In addition to the tangible and the intangible in-betweens that Arendt pointed out, one of the most significant interactions between the world and plurality is the producing of institutions. At this level, equality is once again crucial: “Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals.” (Arendt 1994c: 301). However, to speak of *producing* “institutions” and “laws” can become dangerously misleading because it can introduce a norm which claims that it is

possible to treat human beings as the “material” for these productions. According to Arendt, losing the crucial distinction of making institutions and laws, and treating human beings in the same manner as material, is the most destructive practice in political history. In her view, any foreseeable agenda that is based on means and ends or on “making or fabricating things” stands in sheer contrast with the unpredictable political potentialities of the web.

The unpredictability of the events in the web is the result of the features of plurality described above: the web refers to human potentiality because it is a dynamic constellation; by every insertion of a new individual the whole constellation changes. Arendt calls this immense potentiality of open possibilities the boundlessness of action (1958: 201). As every single action and speech can change the course of the events in changing constellations, collective initiatives carry the same potential, and even in a stronger sense. Arendt calls this plural form of potentiality *power*:

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal, where the words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities (1958: 200).

Being among others can offer us the potentiality to use our collective initiatives together. Power in that sense is a collective initiative of people beyond any unequal or hierarchical forms, and which has no external aim than itself. Therefore, from her point of view, neither organizations of charity nor collectives such as brotherhoods can provide one with examples of human togetherness that form power. In charity or brotherhoods, the power cannot be constituted among equal and distinct initiatives, because the act of charity already presupposes the inequality between the ones who help and those who are in need of help; in that sense charity is already in the frame of a means to an end; in an organization like a brotherhood, the organization sees the others as equal only when they come from the same religious background and hence, it has a sense of a narrow equality which

excludes genuine plurality. Beyond these two forms, if people gather together this still does not guarantee the occurrence of power: “whenever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.” (1958: 199). Therefore, to create power, the interaction between plurality and the web it forms needs to be marked by two reminders; it has to be (i) a constant reminder to humans that they are both equal and unique, and (ii) a reminder of their potentiality to begin something new, both individually and collectively.

These points have particular significances for authoritarian regimes, since, human potentiality, that is, the capacity of having an initiative and the potentiality to begin are the less wanted features of the subjects of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The plurality of countering initiatives gives an unpredictable structure and result to human affairs, while all tyrannical regimes aim to foresee and to manipulate and govern accordingly. This given frame outlines why it is important to keep equality and distinction as the main features of any society and why it can be the only remedy against violence.

### **3. Violence**

For Arendt, power and violence are opposite poles in her conception of plurality. She is one of the witnesses of the loss of human plurality under the suppressive violence of a totalitarian regime. In her analyses of violence, she investigates how the loss of plurality leaves people vulnerable to any form of violence and at the same time, how violence can be performed only when there is a loss of power. In *On Violence*, Arendt describes violence in its clear opposition to power. For her, violence is followed by the loss of human potentiality to act and speak, and it aims ultimately to destroy power irreversibly, because power can only be constituted by plurality. She describes this opposition as follows: “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s

disappearance.” (1973: 56). As the quote claims, the relation between violence and power cannot be understood as part of a dialectical thinking: the opposite of violence is not nonviolence; it is the loss of power. Violence is a destructive act that can only take place when there are no political initiatives left.

The second important claim of Arendt is that violence is never accidental, but always rational. Because violence is always a means to reach to a certain end and in order reach those ends it uses instruments. Hence, the main characteristic of violence is its being *instrumental*. The instruments of violence can be various; ranging from weapons to manipulative propaganda. However, what remains the same is its actualization in the ‘means and end’ category. Hence, one can recognize a violent act by turning things or humans into means to an *already* decided end. The emphasis on “already” is fundamental here, because it explains why it must be a rational act and it explains, for example, the difference between planned violence and self-defence. In this account, violence is clearly opposed to the unpredictable plural course of human actions in the web of relationships, by its aim to fulfil its end as a result of a calculated process. In this regard, whereas action affirms the beginnings and the potentialities in the unpredictability of human affairs, violence affirms the ends; the planned and calculated ends of processes.

Among the variations of its different forms, the most dangerous form of violence is justified violence. It stands out from its other forms because justified violence can be accepted and be supported voluntarily. In *On Violence*, Arendt provides several examples of those justified forms including revolutions and wars (1970: 52–56). The common denominator of these instances is that in them, violence is introduced as an *inevitable act for a higher end*. For example, to maintain the security of a public realm, to protect the well-being of society, to bring democracy, or to prevent production of atomic weapons can turn into one of these higher ends. These are only some of the examples from the contemporary context and many can be added.

Arendt adds that pseudo-convictions or manipulated data can create public support for violence as well. She analyzes the potential victims of justified violence in the public sphere in her essay “The Eggs Speak Up,” which reflects a bitter irony of those sorts of justifications. The egg is not only a well-known image of life in the arts, but it also inspires one of the most famous mottos in the political tradition: “in order to make an omelette eggs must be broken.” (1994c: 275). The validity of this phrase is not only limited to the period addressed in the essay, but also today we are dealing with it; it remains the clearest expression of instrumentality in politics. In this essay, once again she examines the ground of instrumentality, and how this expression is justified for humans when they are included in the categories of means and end in contemporary politics. For Arendt, the means and end category belongs to the process of fabrication where the material is transformed into an end product. There are two characteristics of this process. First, the process needs a singular person, a maker who plans and produces according to a planned end. The maker is the master of the whole process, and the process is predictable, for instance while making a table an artisan anticipates the end product, and plans and processes accordingly. Second, in the process of transforming materials there is always an intrinsic violence. For instance, in order to make a wood table one (the maker and the master) has to use a cut tree. The process of making is certainly more reliable to acquire the end product or the desired result when compared to the unpredictability of action. According to Arendt the contrast between the products of action and making indicates one of the oldest tensions in political history: If it is possible to make laws, is it not possible to “make” the state and form the society as Plato once described?

However, if the model of making is taken from the realm of fabricating and expanded to the political realm, the danger of seeing human beings as “human material” is almost inevitable. The material can be an egg or any other material that one can use in order to reach to an end. Hence, the old phrase of “to make an omelette, eggs must be broken” represents not only the instrumentality, but also

the embedded justification of human use, which marks instrumentality in the political tradition. For Arendt, what becomes transparent here is the practice and the danger of treating human beings as “human material” (1958: 188) that can also be transformed by violence. Another decisive feature of the metaphor of eggs is their muteness, sameness, and frailty. Arendt indicates the muteness of the human material, and by calling it so, she emphasizes their being deprived from speech and action. In their sameness as material, which is clearly contrasted to their distinction and unique existence, they become equally frail and open to be broken. In their muteness, sameness, and frailty, the human material can be reduced to numbers and masses, and used for aimed purposes.

Indeed, what we confront today once again is the loss of millions of human lives in the name of *higher* causes than human existence itself.<sup>1</sup> Even if one can produce justified reasons for those violent acts and losses, as Arendt rightly emphasizes, one can never find a truly legitimate ground for reducing human life to material. Although, these violent acts proceed from an intrinsic inequality between the ones who decide and who obey, they somehow lead to another equality regarding all the relevant sides involved in violence; these sides equally turn into the victims of those higher ends. This bizarre equality in front of death is no less strange than comparing fragility of human life to the breakability of different eggs in order to make an omelette. The metaphor of the eggs indicates not only the potential of using human beings as human material, but also how fragile individuals can be without the power of plurality.

#### **4. Contemporary Situation of “In/Equality” and “Human Material”**

Already in 1958, Arendt mentions the political history of her time, and modern scientific experiments in social engineering and in biochemistry are full of

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<sup>1</sup> As a recent example, it is remarkable to see that a politician during the 2017 presidential inauguration in the US described the loss of American soldiers’ lives as a dedication to a higher end as it was for earlier generations and as it is for that of today. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nieiu8tmLIM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nieiu8tmLIM), between 1.47<sub>9</sub>-1.50<sub>9</sub>.

examples of using the term of “human material,” aiming at treating and changing human material like any other matter (1958: 188). The contemporary context confronts us with a similar picture as fifty years ago. Can we claim that all people of the same world today (i) are equal in their potential to take their initiative and (ii) have equal risks of being treated as human material? These questions can be posed from the aspects of our capacity both to form a plurality and to act and speak. The contemporary situation indicates a clearly negative answer. Some parts of the world, such as the Middle East or some parts of South America or Africa are already for decades almost geographically registered war zones. Even worse, in the contemporary world, the refugees are living in a state of permanent displacement, which indicates not only a radical loss of their world in its references to the political as I mentioned above, but even worse; they have lost the potential of constituting a new one. Beyond doubt, Arendt’s phenomenological approaches aptly describe our experience of violence today in its increasing new justified forms. One may find many documents in governmental reports as well as newspapers speaking of justified acts of war in order to defend democracy, human rights, or warding off a nuclear threat. At a certain level, it is possible neither to detect the sincerity of these acts nor to prevent people from the results of being part of a continuous state of war or civil wars. The major result of war is the mass displacement of people. However, the contemporary displacement never ends up in finding a new place for the displaced ones; on contrary, it radicalizes the experience of displacement by excluding these displaced people from all political categories.

Displaced people, be they refugee, migrant, or asylum seeker, are deprived from the many rights attached to being part of the new society that they encounter and to appear among them. Moreover, and even worse, in society they are the subjects of a new form of justified violence, since they are the “potential dangers,” either based on how much they cost to this society or based on their different ethnic or religious origins. Nothing can indicate the loss of plurality in a global

sense more clearly than these displacements. Thus, one of the questions that urges for priority is how to fulfil the gap between people's unequal capacities to begin something new in the different geographical regions; or, in other words, how can the displaced people become part of the web, how can they use their initiative and actualize their potential in their given conditions? As Arendt accurately states, the task of answering these sorts of questions does not belong to one person or one view but is a matter of thinking together about what we are doing.

Once again Arendt's prompting emphasis on thinking is the only possible solution. Particularly while witnessing varied forms of violence in the daily news, responding to Arendt's request almost seems inevitable. Indeed, the necessity to think about what we are doing becomes more urgent when considering the political debates today. These debates are no longer centered on the basic political categories, but rather their concerns are constantly and globally the economic interests. The priority of economic interests and their most effective tools, such as war, to accelerate economic processes, inevitably prepares the loss of the world, both individually and collectively. In the same course, it becomes almost ordinary or inevitable to see human beings as human materials, to be spent for a "higher" cause.

In the frame of global economic growth and digital technologies, there is nothing more ludicrous than separating global from local changes. Hence, only the global political initiatives and the web they can build can bridge the gap between the individuals concerning their possibility to actualize their potentials. Otherwise, the attempts of bridging the gap by accepting refugees and immigrants are simply insufficient and of very little influence to the total number of displaced people. A brief look at the numbers reported by the UN indicates clearly why they are insufficient: the amount of the displaced people by force and violence is 65.6 million in the last six years, and this number is even more than the amount of the



people that were displaced during the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Hence, no refugee or immigration policy can find a permanent solution to the current state of violence. Besides, since the description of an instrument can vary depending on its usage, for instance, depending on the conflicting interests, an immigrant can become the subject of humanitarian aid at first, and a potential danger in the further stages. The quote from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* describes the current situation of refugees, even though it is written in another context: “They were nothing of their own making, they were like living symbols of what had happened to them, living abstractions and witnesses of the absurdity of human institutions. . . . they were the shadows of the events with which they had nothing to do.” (1973: 189).

Arendt devotes the last chapter of *The Human Condition* to her critique of the Modern Age. As I indicated above the heart of this critique is how particularly capitalist economics suspend political categories, by their promise of commonwealth and well-being in general. Yet, if the promise comes from economics the price has to be paid. Increasing the number of authoritarian tendencies in today’s politics is one of the significant signs of the transformation of human beings into human materials, ready to be used in an ultimate efficiency. The result of seeing the human being as *material* is not a matter of efficiency, but it is an ultimate form of *violence*: “The only possible achievement in either case is to kill man, not indeed necessarily as a living organism, but qua man.” (1958: 188). Seeing humans as materials constantly threatens plurality and the world that only plurality can rebuild.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html](http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html). According to same UN report, “nearly 20 people are forcibly displaced every minute.”

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