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Storytelling for migrants' voice, advocacy and representation in the public sphere: A reading of Arendt's The Human Condition

Bachelor Project: Readings in the History of Political Thought

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1. Introduction

The current debate around migration frames migrants, including refugees, as a problem in need for a solution. After the French Revolution, the rather newly formed European states started to gradually lose interest in controlling emigration, and shifted their concern to controlling immigration (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020). The figure of the migrant became unfit for the emerging international order based on the sedentary, territorially bound citizen of the nation-state. After the First World War, international institutions, namely the League of Nations and later the United Nations, wanting to address the increasing number of displaced people, started developing the specific "problem" framework that still underlies the international migration regime (IMR). Adopting the nation-state perspective, these people were framed as a burden, a risk to society and to the myth of ethnic homogeneity. At the same time, a humanitarian discourse based on the need to help these apolitical, unfortunate figures developed under the influence of organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children (Saunders, 2016; Schewel, 2022).Taking these two main components (nation-state perspective and humanitarian discourse) of the current regime into consideration, the first research question (RQ1) of this paper can be formulated: *What are the harms posed by the current IMR on migrants?* Although some argue that a clear IMR has not yet emerged, and that it is still a highly contentious and muddled issue in public policy, this thesis understands IMR drawing from Krasner (1983) definition of regime as the "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (p. 2). Therefore, the IMR is constituted by any institution, organisation, norm, law, and procedure governing the movement of people across borders.

Hannah Arendt, having lived herself the experience of being a refugee, stateless, explicitly analysed the refugee "problem" and the role of the nation-state in some of her works, specifically *We refugees* (1943) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958). Her work has had a great influence on refugee/migration studies, and many of her arguments are used to understand present dynamics. Numerous scholars have explored the relevance of some of her concepts, such as the condition of statelessness, the right-to-rights, the impact of nationalism, and the difference between human and civil rights. Therefore, another question (RQ2) can be put forth: *How have scholars read Arendt to understand the harms posed by the current IMR on migrants?* This question will introduce the second half of the literature review behind this thesis. As I will discuss more in depth in the following section, most of the works using Arendt to analyse the implications of the IMR have focused on the first component, namely the impact of the nation-state in shaping the system and the harms directly emerging from it. In this sense, such research is largely based on the insights offered by *We refugees*

and *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* and only briefly upon the concept of 'public' as defined in *The Human Condition* (1958/2018).

Thus, a third and last question (RQ3), addressing the second component of the regime, can be formulated: *How can a reading of The Human Condition contribute to our understanding of the harms on migrants arising from the humanitarian discourse characterising the IMR?*

Before delving into the next sections, a specification on the terminology chosen is necessary. "In the first place, we don't like to be called 'refugees'. We ourselves call each other 'newcomers' or 'immigrants'" (Arendt, 1943). The opening sentence of *We refugees* (1943) brings out the importance of categories and makes a point which is still highly relevant in the present context. As Carling (2023) highlighted, drawing a clear, distinct line between the term refugee and migrant risks bringing up negative consequences for policy, analysis and protection of people on the move. Starting from the definition of international migrant, i.e. anyone who changes their country of usual residence irrespective of the reason for migrating or the legal status (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020), it becomes clear how 'migrant' is an umbrella term that includes international students, migrant workers, refugees and any other group. For example, undocumented migrants can be refugees that were denied such status, which clearly shows that neat distinctions between migrants and refugees are artificial and flawed (Shaw, 2021). Additionally, categories often come with generalisations. What Arendt (1943) criticised about imposing the term refugee on people was that it denied them of their agency and recognition of their own free will, as the refugee was depicted as this helpless, unfortunate person. Finally, emphasising this fabricated difference between migrants and refugees could reinforce the narratives about 'bogus' asylum seekers and 'illegitimate' migrants, whose movement is then identified as unjustified and therefore unauthorised, illegal. Although I recognise the significance of categories to make sense of what surrounds us and inform policy, it should be kept in mind that such distinctions are arbitrary and typically dynamic rather than fixed. For the reasons highlighted above, in contrast to many scholars who deal solely with Arendt works as related to refugees, I choose migrants as term and subject of this analysis.

This thesis will argue that Arendt's (1958/2018) *The Human Condition* can provide us with tools to diagnose the problems associated with the humanitarian component of the system. In particular, employing the concept of storytelling as introduced in *The Human Condition*, it can shed light on three harms: migrants are prevented from accessing reality, denied future remembrance, and excluded from plurality by not disclosing their unique identity and distinctiveness. The paper will thus be structured as follows. First, a general overview of the conventional understanding of the harms arising from both components of the IMR is presented. Then, a second overview of the literature is discussed, this time with a focus on how Arendt's concepts are employed to understand these harms.

However, it will be highlighted how scholars have introduced Arendt into the debate only insofar as the first component of the IMR, the nation-state perspective, is concerned. This research mostly draws insights from *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and although some have marginally included *The Human Condition*, none have done so to discuss the second component of the regime. Therefore, the paper will continue by explaining how, while *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* deal more with the formal concerns related to the nation-state (i.e. rights), a further reading of *The Human Condition* is needed to grasp the informal aspects of the regime, that is, to expand our understanding of the harms posed to migrants by the humanitarian discourse. Finally, a discussion on the significance of storytelling for migrants' representation, advocacy, and voice will be included, followed by a conclusion highlighting the possible implications, limitations, and prompts for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Impacts of nation-state system and humanitarian discourse on migrants

This section will review how previous scholars have contributed to answering the first research question: *What are the harms posed by the current IMR on migrants?* It will do so by dividing the literature based on whether the focus is the nation-state system component or the humanitarian discourse one. The harms deriving from the first one can be identified as: focus on security and border control, limited pathways to legality, unequal power dynamics; and the harms deriving from the second one: paternalism and dependence, limited scope of protection, commodification of vulnerability.

One of the most evident consequences of a regime built upon the nation-state system is that anything not fitting within such system can easily be considered a threat to the status quo. Migrants, seen as culturally, socially different, are perceived as challenging the myth of ethnic homogeneity underlying the nation-state (Lohrmann, 2000). Consequently, the migrant is dealt with in a securitised manner: governments prioritise erecting and militarising borders over human rights' protection (Triandafyllidou, 2022). This approach has several consequences for migrants' lives. Firstly, the increased presence of violent borders, often also associated with the process of border externalisation (that is, the outsourcing and delocalisation of "the responsibility for border surveillance and migration management" (Giuffré, Denaro & Raach, 2022, pp. 571-572)), makes regular migration routes more dangerous and encourages people to rely on unsafe, clandestine routes and on smuggling networks to secure a passage (Brachet, 2018). Secondly, it is not uncommon for migrants to be detained in harsh conditions for long periods, especially while waiting to be assigned a specific legal status or be deported. For example, Italian CPRs (Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio, Centres of Permanence

for Repatriation) have often been criticised for violating basic human rights and unrightfully detaining migrants, as well as some instances of torture (De Michelis, 2021). Migrants categorised as "irregular" can be held in such centres up to 18 months, with the explicit aim to ensure national security and deter future migrants from attempting a journey to Italy (Il Sole 24 ORE, 2023). Lastly, this securitisation approach is also highly interlinked with the criminalisation of migration. Classifying migrants as "irregular", therefore quite literally as breaking the law (then imposing financial penalties or imprisonment), they may not seek access to essential services or report crimes in the fear of prosecution (Kubal, 2014).

As far as the limited pathways to legality are concerned, although overall migration policy changes have become less restrictive, it is important to highlight how this trend is not linear across policy types and migrant categories. In general, a study by de Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli (2018) found that while entry and integration policies "have become less restrictive, […] border control and exit policies have become more restrictive" (p. 324). Similarly, if policies towards high- and low-skilled workers, students and refugees have become more open, the ones towards irregular migrants and family migrants have tightened recently (p. 324). Their study highlights how the main aim of restrictive policies is to affect selectivity, that is, the ability of governments to control "who" is allowed to immigrate rather than the "how many" (p. 353). Therefore, this increased selectivity results in migrants having to meet more and more requirements to migrate "legally". Consequently, many migrants may find themselves in precarious, temporary conditions, or become trapped in an undocumented status. This can easily make them vulnerable to exploitation, unable to exercise their rights or integrate properly into society.

Finally, scholars have argued that the nation-state perspective adopted by the IMR, as it prioritises the interests of destination countries, reinforces unequal power dynamics and economic inequalities (Balogun, 2023; Castles, 2005). Examples of such dynamics can be found in guest worker programs or any other system of temporary working visa. These programs aim at temporarily recruiting people from other countries to fill in labour shortages in the destination country. This creates a system where migrants are seen as disposable resources rather than actual individuals with rights. As Frisch famously observed while discussing the massive recruitment of foreign workers in Europe, in particular Germany, in the 1950s-60s: "We wanted workers, but we got people instead" (Borjas, 2016).[1] These programs risk reinforcing existing inequalities in two ways: internally, by enhancing the competition between national and foreign workers, often resulting in a race-to-the-

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[1] Although most guest workers programs aim at temporary migration, therefore implying that people should go back to their country once their contract end, it is key to remember that generally these programs have resulted in permanent settlement (unintended by the destination countries). In this sense, it is inevitable to get "people" and not merely "workers".

bottom for rights and wages, therefore widening the gap between the rich and the poor; and globally, by richer countries generally benefitting more from the labour of migrants from poorer countries than the other way around, enhancing the global economic divide (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020).

Previous research has also analysed the harms arising from the humanitarian discourse that characterises the IMR. As mentioned in the introduction, migrants are often depicted as these helpless, passive figures in need for rescue and guidance. This conception is often related to the assumptions that migrants are not aware of the possible risks of the journey, that it is not worth it to leave in the search for a better future and that they should help development in their own country (Bakewell, 2008; Pécoud, 2023; Schewel, 2022). This loudly echoes the colonial paternalism that 'civilised' European nations know better than the 'irrational' non-European ones, and that they just want to "help them in their own homes" (Bakewell, 2008; Pécoud, 2023). Therefore, humanitarian interventions that employ this view quite evidently undermine migrants' agency and ability to advocate for themselves, focusing only on vulnerabilities and aiming to create (or reinforce) a system of dependence.

Concerning the next harm (limited scope of protection) there are few disagreements among scholars. On the one hand, some argue that this humanitarian framework often focuses only on providing basic needs (i.e. shelter and food), disregarding long-term wellbeing that may derive from proper education, healthcare services and job opportunities (Jaspars & O'Callaghan, 2010; UNHCR, 2024). In this sense, they claim that humanitarian discourse hinders long-term integration and may trap migrants in a state of survival rather than allowing them to fully exercise their social, economic and political rights. On the other hand, others believe that focusing first on providing basic needs is necessary for people in more extreme situations that may not yet afford the luxury to think about further socio-economic opportunities (Humanitarian Coalition, n.d.; Sande Lie, 2017). Nonetheless, it can be concluded that applying a generalised conception of migrants as helpless people trying to merely survive can negatively affect their long-term wellbeing.

Lastly, institutions pushing for the narrative of the poor, helpless migrant may do so with business intentions. As in other numerous other fields, an "industry" around migration can be identified, including for example employers, migrant networks, smugglers, and other intermediaries (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020). These intermediaries usually have their own interests to put forward. For example, looking at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the two main international migration organisations, and their discourse, the interests behind are quite evident. In his article, Carling (2023) criticises the use of the expression 'migrants *and* refugees'. In his view, the agenda pushed by the UNHCR, classifying refugees as a separate category in need for special provisions, undermines the

protection of 'ordinary' migrants. Simply put, the UNHCR has a clear interest in promoting these narratives as their funding depends on it. At the same time, the article was published in the IOM Journal and may advocate for the opposing view for similar business reasons (as classifying refugees as distinct from migrants would deprive them of governance in that category and reduce their influence). Therefore, scholars have argued that this commodification of vulnerabilities, prioritising business interests above migrants' individual needs and experiences, has a dehumanising effect on these people (Barnett & Weiss, 2008).

This section has analysed what harms arising from the IMR previous research has identified, providing an overview of how scholars have answered the first question put forward by this thesis (RQ1). However, numerous scholars have highlighted the importance of bringing Arendt into the discussion to obtain new language and perspectives to understand the current migration context. The following part will discuss how some studies have employed Arendt's insights, drawing mainly from her works *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* and to some extent *The Human Condition*, to answer the same question. It will shed light on further ways to make sense of the harms inflicted by the first component of the IMR: the nation-state perspective.

2.2. Reading Arendt on the refugee: statelessness, the right-to-rights and the nation-state in the present context

As observed above, much of the research on the topic employing Arendt's ideas is based on the essay *We refugee* and on the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (with a particular focus on Chapter 9 – The decline of the nation-state and the end of the rights of Man), and only marginally on *The Human Condition*. This section will go over secondary literature on the topic by following an imaginary arrow between the three works: from Petersen (2021) employing Arendt's 1943 essay, to Pupavac (2008) linking the insights from her essay to the ones from Chapter 9 of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* to Shaw (2020) focusing only on said Chapter 9, and finally Gutierrez (2022) and San Martín (2010) taking one step forward by including observations from the two previously mentioned works and *The Human Condition*. These five studies can all be characterised as discussing the harms posed by the first component of the IMR, that is, the nation-state characterisation of the migrant as a problem. The main harms identified are: pressure on migrants to assimilate and homogenise, considering migrants only insofar as what they can contribute to the host society, relegating human rights to civil rights, classifying their lives as 'expendable', and depriving them of belonging to a political community and the rights associated to it.

Petersen (2021) examines an art project, 100% FOREIGN?, based in Denmark and consisting of 250 life stories of people who were granted asylum in the country between 1956 and 2019 (p. 1). Her aim is to discuss the dilemmas characterising refugee integration, and she uses Arendt's essay

We Refugees to support her argument (pp. 16-18). This essay (Arendt, 1943) gives a rather graphic account of what it meant to be a refugee in that period, or how Arendt preferred to say, a newcomer or immigrant. Petersen (2021) discusses how Arendt resists the refugee label not only for the deprivation of agency that often comes with it, but also to "erase all traces of refugeedom […] and partly by the inducements and pressure of the host community" (p. 17). However, as Arendt describes as well, total assimilation is generally not possible and damaging to migrants. In the 1950s like today, despite the 'insane optimism' for assimilation that may push some migrants to force themselves to become ordinary members of the host society, it is evident that migrant experiences, "navigating between different cultures" and generating unique identities, go beyond traditional notions of citizen "born and bred" (p. 16-17). Petersen also reports the story of 'Mr Cohn' described by Arendt to emphasise the dangers of assimilationist erasure. 'Mr Cohn' was a German Jew who sought refuge in Prague, Vienna, and Paris. His only way to fit with the membership system imposed by nation-states was to change identity, pretending to be a Czech, Austrian, French patriot, trying to prove "all the time [his] non-Jewishness" to belong somewhere and be accepted as part of the host society (Arendt, 1943, p. 273). However, as Petersen (2021) concludes in her paper, this mechanism pushes migrants into sameness and deprives them of their right to properly participate in society, as the differences that could provide meaningful contributions are silenced rather than embraced (pp. 4, 17). Therefore, it can be argued that the main harm caused by the nation-state identified by Petersen is the pressure imposed on migrants to assimilate and homogenise, and the consequent losses of identity and potential for social change.

Pupavac (2008) discusses two main concepts presented by Arendt in *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, respectively the idea of the 'migrant-hero' and the issue of human rights as civil rights. Arendt (1943) writes:

> Since nobody would treat him as a dignified human being, he began sending cables to great personalities and his big relations. He learned quickly that in this mad world it is much easier to be accepted as a 'great man' than as a human being. (p. 270)

Starting from this statement, Pupavac explains how the individual, often exceptional, migrant has better opportunities than 'ordinary' ones (e.g. patronage and protection). Whether it is the individual political migrant, or the refugee artists, these people are more easily accepted into destination countries. She claims that this process of "singling them out as exceptions from the mass of anonymous, ordinary refugees" is "compatible with exclusionary policies and may even help legitimise the status quo" (p. 282). This conception that migrants are only worth if they are exceptional or carry out heroic deeds is still rather evident in present days, when the news proudly

report of a migrant saving a national's life and then receiving honorary citizenship.[2] Pupavac follows up on these considerations by discussing the shortcomings of what should be universal human rights but are actually civil rights, depending on citizenship. She bases her ideas on Chapter 9 of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where Arendt (1958) describes the exclusionary practices generated by the nation-state. Arendt attributed to the Minority Treaties the responsibility of convincing everyone that "people without their own national government were deprived of human rights" (p. 272), and that a country had no responsibility towards people insisting on a different nationality (p. 275). What happened in those years, in Arendt's words, was that "the nation had conquered the state", as the precarious balance between nation and state inherent in the structure of the nation-state broke down, and "the supremacy of the will of the nation over all legal and 'abstract' institutions was universally accepted" (p. 275). This is where Arendt identifies the origin of the problem of human rights, that should be universal by definition, but that are actually dependent on a government to guarantee them, *only* to those belonging to a nation-state. Pupavac (2008), defining this as the "frailty of human rights against political belonging" (p. 281), therefore also identifies as one of the main harms arising from the nation-state system the confinement of human rights to civil rights.

Shaw (2021) has analysed two Central American and Mexican migration movies mostly through Arendt's concept of the right-to-rights, that is belonging "to some kind of organized community" where they can act and speak, therefore exercising what makes them human (Arendt, 1958, pp. 295-300). The main aim of her article is to examine the conceptualisations of "the scale of value applied to human life" deriving from these movies, and the effect they can have on guaranteeing human rights or failing to do so (p. 278). She examines the role of film in ascribing value to lives that are usually understood in terms of statistics or generalised as figures bringing instability and danger into society. Shaw harnesses Arendt to explain how rights are still heavily dependent on citizenship status. In this sense, this research falls under the category of studies discussing the harms posed by the first component of the IMR, that is, the nation-state characterisation of the migrant as a problem. With the nation-state tying human rights to nationality, stateless people, deprived of such belonging, are reduced to 'naked' human beings. Migrants, cast out of any kind of organised community, lose their right-to-rights and are therefore outside of the law, with no inalienable or universal right to protect them. This concept of naked human without rights is then linked to Bauman's (2004, as cited in Shaw, 2021) idea of human waste, the "outcast and outlaws [...] products of globalization and the fullest epitome and incarnation of its frontier-land" (p. 281). Shaw's point, presented through Arendt

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[2] A few examples: https://www.trevisotoday.it/attualita/treviso-migrante-salvato-conte-14-febbraio-2024.html, https://www.brusselstimes.com/658448/brussels-midi-hero-who-rescued-woman-from-train-tracks-is-an-undocumented-migrant, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/frances-president-macron-rewards-migrant-hero-who-saved-dangling-child

and Bauman, is that migrants "have been denied value because they have been reduced to their most vulnerable form of humanity and cast out of productive public spaces" (p. 281). Moreover, migrants are further reduced to concepts and abstraction by generalised depictions and numbers (for example, news only reporting large numbers of people drowning in the Mediterranean, with no further information). In doing so, migrant lives are easily classified as abstract figures, almost non-existent and therefore expendable. Shaw argues that certain movies have the capacity of making these people 'real' by providing an "identity to those who are often nameless", transforming these lives from expendable to 'grievable' (pp. 282-283). Overall, it can be argued that Shaw identifies as the main harm posed to migrants by the nation-state system the fact that they are made into waste, expendable lives.

San Martín (2019) and Gutierrez (2022), albeit differently, take one step further towards the argument that I will also present in the next section, by including the harms posed by the migration regime on the access to the public sphere. In his thesis, Gutierrez focuses on the recreation of a public space along the Mexico-US border. What Gutierrez identifies as one of the harms of the nation-state system is the arbitrary creation of borders that interrupted spaces that were until then considered as a whole. As he writes, "we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us" (p. 29). He links some of the ideas presented in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to the current US-Mexico context, such as the pan-movement ideals behind the "Make America great again", or the propaganda that uses conspiracy theories against the migrant 'enemies' (pp. 23-26). Most importantly, the main parallel Gutierrez draws is (although acknowledging the differences) between the intent of total domination by the Nazi regime in concentration camp and the one by the US along the southern border (pp. 27-28). However, he argues that a solution can be found in Arendt and her understanding of the public space to harness the cosmopolitan opportunities of the border, by reshaping the border space occupied by the wall (p. 65). San Martín (2022) also focuses on the consequences of the deprivation of the public. What she emphasises is how the migrant does not fit in the nation-state system, and how that results in the lack of some human rights. Through Arendt, she identifies "the ability to interact in the public realm through action and speech" as the most fundamental of all human rights, denied to migrants (pp. 142-143). San Martín takes the example of the former migration of Spanish people to Argentina and the current one of Argentineans to Spain. She opposes the condition of the Spanish being allowed to participate in the public life with no problems, exercising their rights of freedom, action, and speech, to the one of the majority of the Argentineans now who, being defined as 'irregular', are unable to participate in the public sphere and are forced into invisibility (pp. 146-148). What San Martín's and Gutierrez's research have in common is the identification of the same harm posed by the nation-state component of the migration regime, using Arendt's ideas as the baseline: nation-states, by

constructing human rights as dependent on citizenship, and casting people who do not belong (migrants) outside of any community, deprive them of the access to the public sphere and consequently of the access to what makes them human as such, that is speech and action.

As this literature review has highlighted, most of the secondary research on the migrant-refugee chooses to draw insights from Arendt's two prominent works on the topic, *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* mostly analysing the formal concerns arising from the regime (e.g. legal constraints, human and civil rights). However, as San Martín (2019) and Gutierrez (2022) have already done to some extent by introducing her conception of the public, I argue that, to have a more comprehensive understanding of also the informal harms posed to migrants by the international regime, and in particular by the humanitarian discourse, a reading of *The Human Condition*, and in particular of her account of storytelling, is necessary. The next sections will precisely do this.

3. Arendt's storytelling applied to migrants' representation, advocacy, and voice

In her book *The Human Condition*, Arendt defines numerous concepts in such novel ways that she creates new meanings and a whole new vocabulary to use as lenses to understand past, present, and possibly even future contexts. I argue that this is the case for storytelling, as it provides a new perspective to understand the harms posed to migrants by the humanitarian discourse that characterises the IMR. On the one hand, this humanitarian discourse highlights the importance of protecting migrants' rights. On the other hand, it generally defines them as passive, helpless, often naïve victims in need for saving, and this carries some harms. Pushing these narratives onto migrants deprives them of their ability to carry out storytelling as defined by Arendt. Therefore, a reading of *The Human Condition* can help us identify three main harms arising from this: preventing migrants from accessing reality, denying remembrance, and excluding them from plurality by not allowing them to disclose their unique identity and distinctiveness. To reach this conclusion, the following sections will: first, introduce *The Human Condition* with a focus on the private and the public and how these two concepts alone can help us understand the harms posed by the nation-state component of the IMR; second, discuss storytelling and its position in action to show how storytelling is necessary to go further and understand the harms posed by the humanitarian discourse component of the IMR.

3.1. The Human Condition – action, plurality, and private versus public

In her work *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1958/2018) explores the complexities of human existence. In particular, she defines the *vita activa* and its threefold composition, by famously articulating the concepts of labor, work, and action. Labor is the human activity related to biological

processes and necessities of the body, allowing for the survival of the species, basically mere life itself. Work is the activity associated with artificial, tangible things in the world, fabricated with our hands. It can be understood as life in the world. Action is the activity associated with human interactions and political life, it is what characterises us as humans; it is essentially life in the world with others (p. 7). Each one of these activities corresponds to a human condition, respectively life, worldliness, and plurality. For this analysis the most relevant concepts among these are action and plurality. Expanding on the definition of action, Arendt differentiates it from labor and work by describing it as "the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter" (p. 7). Because she identifies it as "*the* condition" for political life, she holds it as the highest activity of the human condition and therefore as what defines us as humans. Action includes both word (speech) and deed (p. 176). Her choice of opening quote to start the chapters on action foresees the key role played by speech, and stories in particular, which I will analyse in depth in the next section: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (Dinesen, as cited in Arendt, 1958/2018, p. 175). Arendt defines plurality as "the basic condition for both action and speech" (p. 175). It is the basic condition in the sense that we need others to act and speak to, but also that these others need to be different from us for such interactions to have meaning. As she writes:

> Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior,
> if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was
> the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. (p. 8)

In simpler terms, plurality means that we are among differentiated others.

Before delving into the three chapters dedicated to labor, work, and action, Arendt introduces the distinction between the private and the public, explaining the relevance of these two realms for the *vita activa*: they are the space where human activities belong. As other scholars have also applied these two concepts to analyse migrants' current situation in relation to the nation-state system, I will now briefly cover the private and the public in relation to the migrant figure, as this will also allow me to set the stage for the following argument on storytelling.

The claim I intend to propose here, supported by other scholars' work as well, is that the nation-state system can deprive migrants of proper access to both the private and the public space. The public sphere includes two realms: the one of appearance and the one of the common. First, being in the public means being heard and seen by other people. Arendt claims that something is real only once it is public in this sense (p. 50). Second, public means the world "common to all of us", which is not the Earth itself but rather the world constituted by the "human artifact" and the "human affairs". More simply put, the things we make and the interactions we have. She describes this common area

as a table "located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (p. 52). While the public is rooted in the presence of others, the private lies in the absence of others. Being in the private means being deprived of appearance (and therefore reality), of authentic interactions, and of anything permanent. Everything happening in the household for example is private, meaning hidden, concealed. What happens inside of us, in our intimate life is also private. Although at first glance it may seem that the public holds a higher value than the private, the latter is actually a precondition for the former. The private is the realm of necessities, that is, people in their households eat, sleep, drink and do everything else linked to their survival: they labor. The public (the *polis*) is the realm of freedom, where people can fulfil their humanity through action and speech. However, it is only through "the mastering of the necessities of life in the household" that people gain access to the freedom of the *polis* (pp. 30-31). Therefore, the lack of access to either realm can be harmful.

Some migrants, while in a legal limbo waiting for a decision on their status, find themselves living in immigration/detention centres, tent cities and similar structures. These places do not provide them with four walls they can consider a private space where to carry out all their necessities, and are therefore always, involuntarily, out in the space of appearance. Leaving the household implies having satisfied all the bodily needs and courageously *choosing* to participate in the political realm. Hence, those migrants lack a proper access to the public (Arendt, 1958/2018, pp. 30-31, 64; Gutierrez, 2022, pp. 69-73). At the same time, it may also be that migrants have a functional private space but are still denied access to the public. This is the case for migrants who are forced to remain in the shadows, in the invisibility of their household, as they would for example risk being treated like criminals because considered unequal or unworthy of being listened to (San Martín, 2010, pp. 143-146). Either way, migrants are deprived of the possibility to fulfil their human potential through action and speech in the public realm.

Another explanation as to why migrants are negated access to the public can be found in a brief passage she writes on nationalism in Chapter 35 of *The Human Condition*. Arendt (1958/2018) claims that one of the processes of world alienation was the substitution of the family unit with society, and of the private house with the nation-state. As she writes, this substitution "rests on an identification of the nation and the relationships between its members with the family and family relationships", with 'blood and soil' ruling the relationships between its members (p. 256). In this sense, "homogeneity of population and its rootedness in the soil of a given territory become the requisites for the nation-state" (p. 256). This substitution, implying the loss of a privately owned share in the world, other than playing a key role in the "formation of the lonely mass man and [...] of the worldless mentality of modern [ideology]" (p. 257)—that is, the emergence of totalitarianism

analysed in depth in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—can also be interpreted in relation to migrants' deprivation of the public. Since these people would not fit into the 'blood and soil' concept, they would not be included in what is considered the 'new' private (namely, the nation), therefore making them unable to access the public. However, it could also be argued that this substitution led to the total "eclipse of a common public world" (p. 257), and that hence nobody, migrant or not, would have access to the public realm as Arendt intended it.

Overall, this first introduction of the private-public had two aims: firstly, illustrating how Arendt's ideas can and are used by some scholars to illustrate the harms posed by the IMR insofar as the nation-state component is concerned, highlighting how this system deprives migrant of access to the public sphere; secondly, it provides a framework to discuss the concept of storytelling, which will then be used to analyse the harms posed by the other component characterising the regime: the humanitarian discourse.

3.2. Storytelling in action

Arendt first touches upon storytelling specifically when explaining the difference between the private and the public. She introduces storytelling as having the ability to transform "the greatest forces of intimate life […] into a shape to fit them for public appearance" (p. 50). In other words, whenever a thought is put into words, and other people are there to hear it, then this thought becomes real. Therefore, it can be said that one of the roles of storytelling is transforming things from non-real to real. The presence of others is necessary to construct this shared reality, as it is made by individual perspectives confirming and building on one another. Being unable to speak and being heard in the public would then have consequences for those isolated people on the margin of such reality, making them quite literally non-existent. Arendt goes deeper into the concept of storytelling when discussing action. In particular, she explains how we disclose ourselves through stories. Speech has the ability to answer the question "Who are you?" (p. 178). Although the mere deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance, it is only through words that the doer can identify themselves as the actor. Fundamentally, for any activity to be relevant to human action, the doer has to also be a speaker, and only then can they be an actor (pp. 178-179). Most importantly, this self-disclosure is focused on the "who" rather than the "what", meaning that it reveals unique personal identities rather than general qualities (e.g. colour of hair, a nationality, a legal status etc…). The agent-revealing capacity of storytelling is closely linked with distinctness. Distinctness, opposed to otherness in the sense of trivial differences (for example animals being different in colour or size), is specifically a human characteristic. As she writes, "only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something" (p. 176). Therefore, it could be argued that

being unable to or prevented from generating a unique story about ourselves would deprive us of our humanity.

As already mentioned above, plurality is necessary for stories to be listened to and potentially reproduced. The two characteristics of plurality are indeed distinctness (a plurality of perspectives and subjectivities), and equality, meaning that humans are equalised as peers to be able to understand each other. If we were not equal, we would not be able to grasp each other's stories. Moreover, plurality also allows for action and speech to become immortal. Action and words are the most ephemeral and least tangible of human "products". At the same time, they are the highest of such products, and essentially what characterises us as humans. Therefore, the stories that emerge out of them is what allows for action and speech to become imperishable (p. 198). Once a word or a deed is put into a story, such story will be remembered, repeated and will possibly outlive the actor.

Overall, Arendt's conception of storytelling highlights the position it holds both in explaining the complexities of human interactions and in the creation of a shared in-between world. More specifically, storytelling has the ability to bring the private into the public, transforming it from non-real to real; to make action and speech permanent; and to actualise the human condition of plurality by disclosing the "who", each unique personality. With this in mind, we can understand how humanitarian discourse, by forcing a certain narrative, a certain story onto all migrants, prevents them from telling their own individual stories. Consequently, lacking this opportunity, migrants are prevented from accessing reality, denied future remembrance, and excluded from plurality by not disclosing their unique identity and distinctiveness. Going back to previous considerations, it could even be argued that, with no access to plurality and proper interactions with each others' stories, migrants are deprived of their humanity. Finally, the possible implications of this analysis for migrants' representation, advocacy and voice can now be discussed.

3.3. Discussion – representation, advocacy and voice

Representation and advocacy are often complex issues, as the risks of reflecting power relations, mobilising stereotypes, and reproducing certain narratives, are always involved (Petersen, 2021). As far as migrants' representation is concerned, there are three main concerns: conforming to pre-existing tropes and exacerbating victimisation, emphasising assimilation, and minimising agency (should they be represented or represent themselves?). Moreover, representation, by generalising lived experiences, risks placing more importance on a category rather than a unique identity, a "what" instead of a "who". For example, news framing migrants as victims of trafficking, other than completely ignoring the reasons why some have to resort to smugglers (i.e. restriction of legal pathways and border enforcement), depict them all as victims in need of rescuing. By imposing such narratives onto them, they are prevented from telling and sharing their own story, as nobody is there

to listen and reproduce it. They are reduced to a "what", whatever that may be, a victim, a migrant, a nationality, an 'illegal', a criminal, and so on. This is also rather evident in information campaigns on the topic. Most of these videos, intended to dissuade people from migrating (although not really effective), portrays for example a naïve child or woman getting tricked by a trafficker to move abroad and ending up in exploitative work conditions. Such campaigns, then resulting in anti-trafficking rescue missions, fully disregard these people's aware choices and dismisses them as uninformed.[3]

Similar considerations can be made concerning advocacy. Advocacy is a form of speech that "suggests speaking on behalf of or in solidarity with someone who is not able to speak for themselves" (Mickwitz, 2020, p. 459). Basically, it has the intention to extend someone's voice to others. However, there is the issue of speaking *with* versus *for* someone else. To put it simply, for example, should we just 'passively' advocate for the protection of migrants' rights or should we rather focus on 'actively' emphasising their capacity to contribute to and transform society? It could be argued that in order to respect people's identities and potential for political change, advocacy should merely be a megaphone to reproduce such unique stories.

Although some scholars have argued that the storytelling of migrants can only be 'precarious', I believe that the key to accurate and beneficial representation is exactly storytelling how Arendt intended it: storytelling can allow migrants to exercise their voice and disclose their personal, unique identities in a political community. Jørgensen (2022) defines precarious storytelling as "performed by people in precarious conditions and discloses their struggle to live a life in extreme conditions", characterising people living "on the threshold of being part of organizations, who have little or no capital and perhaps have no political rights" (p. 60). Although he recognises that this is because these people (who he identifies as refugees, illegal immigrants, temporarily employed or underpaid and poor) do not have a place to make their stories public, the generalised account he gives of their stories is rather victimising and misses the possibilities offered by storytelling.[4]

If we go back to the understanding of advocacy as a megaphone, this conceptualisation fits perfectly with Arendt's *polis* as 'organised remembrance'. To counter generalised and agency-depriving narratives, we would need to enact the condition of plurality intended as among equals. People, migrants in this specific case, would be able to tell their story, disclose their unique identity, and actively participate in the political, public life. All of this, following Arendt's (1958/2018) ideas,

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could be made possible by the *polis* intended not as the city-state in its physical location, but as "the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (p. 198). The role of the *polis*, in the case of stories, is indeed a kind of organised remembrance, in which individual stories are reproduced and shared.

4. Conclusion

This thesis explored the harms that arise from the international migration regime, identifying the two main components as nation-state perspective and humanitarian discourse, and the consequences for migrants. Starting from the RQ1 *What are the harms posed by the current IMR on migrants?* I presented the conventional understandings of these harms and the ways in which scholars have expanded them through Arendt. In particular, much research has been done on the first component, drawing from her two main works on the topic of the refugees, *We Refugees* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and dealing mostly with formal concerns: the condition of statelessness, the right-to-rights, the difference between human and civil rights. I argue that, to further grasps the harms posed by the IMR, a reading of *The Human Conditions* is necessary, as it provides us with the tools to understand the more informal aspects of it (i.e. the discourse). Specifically, I analyse storytelling and find three main harms arising from the humanitarian discourse of the IMR: migrants are prevented from accessing reality, denied future remembrance, and excluded from plurality by not disclosing their unique identity and distinctiveness, consequently deprived of humanity in Arendtian terms.

Discussing the significance of this analysis for migrants' representation, advocacy, and voice, I find that the *polis* as organised remembrance fits with the idea of advocacy as a megaphone, allowing for people to tell their stories and then faithfully reproducing them among everyone else. Going back to the article by Petersen (2021) discussed in the second half of the literature review, it could be claimed that the aim of the art project presented, 100% FOREIGN?, was precisely the one to create a collective portrait, including every individual migrant's story, in order for them to be included in the socio-political life of Denmark. Therefore, future research could focus on analysing or creating other forms of this type of advocacy, and on how to implement them in practice so that diverse voices are actually amplified and not lost or silenced. Ultimately, a shift towards storytelling, as defined by Arendt, holds the potential to transform how we represent migrants, fostering a more inclusive and just political community, both on a national and on a global level.

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