Hannah Arendt on Power, Consent, and Coercion: Some Parallels to Gandhi

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Abstract: Although Hannah Arendt is not known as an advocate of nonviolence per se, her analysis of power dynamics within and between groups closely parallels Gandhi's. The paper shows the extent to which her insights are compatible with Gandhi's and also defends her against charges that her description of the world is overly normative and unrealistic. Both Arendt and Gandhi insist that nonviolence is the paradigm of power in situations where people freely consent to and engage in concerted action, and both argue that power structures based on violence and coercion will ultimately fail, because the resort to violence implies an inability to gain free consent or cooperation. Any gains from violence are temporary, since agents will express themselves freely as soon as force is withdrawn. Arendt argues that dominating powers know this, and therefore rely on manipulation, propaganda, and outright lies to win people's consent, an analysis which can be used to explain some current social dynamics.

I. Introduction

I have noticed in my studies of Arendt and Gandhi a common fascination for understanding power dynamics within and between groups. Both specifically have interests in the nonviolent aspects of power relationships, and both hold up nonviolent power as the paradigm. Both share a conviction that power structures based on coercion and violence will be short-lived, doomed to fail. Both hold up their ideals of (nonviolent) political or human interaction that many say are unrealistic. Yet both admit that violence is prevalent in the world, while still insisting that their views are relevant and accurate.

Despite these similarities in views, not many have linked Gandhi's and Arendt's views to a great extent. This may be due to their different conceptual frameworks and use of terminology. I plan to highlight those links, as well as to point out the differences between the two.

In this paper I will concern myself mostly with the views of Hannah Arendt, but I will draw the connections to Gandhi at several points. The specific topic here addressed is, what makes a group powerful? What are the relationships within the powerful group, and how do they relate to those outside of their group? How does power sometimes switch from the agreement of a variety of creatively thinking persons to the single-mindedness of a group following their fearless leader? What are

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the dangers of this latter way of building power? What happens when consent wanes, and "the ruler" enforces obedience through threats and violence?

Both Arendt and Gandhi want to suggest that their paradigms of group interaction result in a more powerful group than those groups structured in hierarchies, using threats and violence. I will argue that there are times when that is true and situations when it is not.

II. Arendt on Power and Group Dynamics

Let's look at Arendt's views first, beginning with some of her terminology and key concepts.

In her seminal work, *The Human Condition*, Arendt describes the human capacity for action. Humans can initiate something new, bringing into being something that had not existed before. On a physical plane, babies are born, and with each baby comes new possibilities. On a political level, individuals bring to their community the capacities to think up new ideas, to dialogue with others about them, and to carry them through as members of a group. This introduction of the new into the world Arendt calls "natality." (Arendt, 1958, pgs. 177-8, 246-7).

Arendt insists that each person has the abilities to both begin and carry through their ideas. Yet very early philosophers (specifically Plato and Aristotle, in Arendt's eyes) wanted to separate these two stages of action rather than emphasize their continuity. And they went one step further: they declared that only a certain special kind of person could do the initiating (the thinking, reflective philosophers); while many others were not qualified at all to initiate, but only to carry through the ideas of others (slaves, women, and non-citizens). In contrast to the split between those who think and command on the one hand and those who obey without thinking on the other, Arendt imagines as an ideal an egalitarian society where all get to practice the wider range of their skills. (Arendt, 1958, 189-90 and 220-1; 1968, p. 109.) She calls such a political group an "isonomy" or "self rule," akin to a participatory democracy.

Arendt says that a community of people who have come to an agreement on a common course of action is powerful. Power is a relationship, not a property, of those that belong to a group. Power is dependent on an unreliable and temporary agreement of many wills and intentions; power is not something stable that can be "possessed." However, a group can try to prolong the power realized in its first meeting by continuing the group by mutual promise or contract. (Arendt, 1958, p. 244-5.)

Power arises from the people; domination, the control or coercion of the people by a ruler or group, is not power at all but rather impotence. Arendt insists that domination is an act of desperation on the part of a government that is losing power. (Arendt, 1972, p. 142-3, 152-3.) For Arendt "power and violence are opposites," since power emerges when the threat of violence is not needed, for all freely consent to a certain action and act of their own volition. (Arendt, *Crises*, p. 140, 155.)

Arendt preferred the word "power" to the word "nonviolence," and insisted that the pair of opposite terms should be violence and power instead of violence and nonviolence, because she thought that the term "power" had more active and positive connotations. For similar reasons, Gandhi coined the term *satyagraha* or "truth force,"

to emphasize the active aspect of nonviolence. (Arendt, 1972, p. 155; Gandhi, 1920/1961, p. 6, 51-2)

Habermas notes that Arendt contrasts her notion of power (often referred to as "power with," that arises out of cooperation) with Max Weber's. For Weber, power is "the possibility of forcing one's own will on the behavior of others." Certainly, this definition equates power with domination. Habermas explains Weber's view as a model of goal-attainment, based on the purposive-rational actor. The actor must have the means to compel the other to the desired behavior. This idea is modeled on so-called "will power." Just as we try to make ourselves do what we want to do, so we would like to make others do what we want them to do. In this scenario there is no qualitative difference between power and violence: violence is only a more extreme means to attain one's end. (Habermas, 1977, p. 3-4)

Arendt finds a wide array of philosophers through the centuries who have held, according to her, the same mistaken notion of power. C. Wright Mills called violence the ultimate power; Sartre and Voltaire described power as the ability to impose one's will on others. Jouvenal describes power as the relationship of command and obedience. All of these accounts are completely unsatisfactory for Arendt. (Arendt, 1972, p. 134-6.) The person that Weber describes, the purposive-rational actor, is not an "actor" at all in Arendt's sense, since he or she is not involved in sincere speech and interactions with peers, but rather treats others as raw material to be made into a pre-set plan. To treat people in this way is always an act of violence.

III. Analysis and Critique

Perhaps at this point the links in views between Arendt and Gandhi are becoming apparent. Both hold up as a paradigm for political action an egalitarian and participatory system, with a procedure based on speech and communication that shuns violence. In addition to announcing this "paradigm," there is in both a conviction that violence is self-defeating and impractical. Now, are these views just nice dreams? Or can they be defended as accurate? I will attempt to defend their overall accuracy, while drawing needed distinctions and trying to show a more detailed account of just what kind of claims Arendt is making. I will also critique her on a few points.

A. Internal Power Structure

1. The Role of Equal Sharing and Initiative In Contrast to Rulers and the Ruled

Arendt has as her "model" of political action, a group like the "Mayflower Compact," which she characterizes as different individuals, each with their own thoughts, coming to agreement through dialogue, and drawing up between themselves a list of rules which they author themselves and freely agree to obey. They are a self-governing body, both giving orders and following the orders they give themselves. There is no need for coercion or violence, since each is motivated to follow the agreement in which they participated. They get their power, specifically, from the fact that they agree to act in a certain way to achieve certain common ends. They get their stability, and to a certain extent their insurance of morality, from the fact that the minds of many independent thinkers, set about seeing any topic from a multiplicity of

views, will ensure a more balanced decision on the part of the group. (Arendt, 1965, 167, 173.) Although unity is necessary, Arendt insists in *The Human Condition* that unity must be based on a plurality of unique thinkers. (Arendt, 1958, 175-6; 1965, 227.)

However, if "acting in concert" (Arendt, 1958, p. 244; 1972, p. 143) is the core descriptor of power (and an accurate one, I agree), I think Arendt must admit that a group can be powerful without being diverse. A group of like-minded people ("the masses" as Arendt calls them in *Origins of Totalitarianism*), or a group of non-thinking followers blindly obeying a leader, could as well "act in concert" without any of the safeguards of variety that Arendt insists upon. I suggest that Arendt could call such groups dangerous, but she could not call them powerless. They could fall away from her ideal without necessarily displaying less power.

However, it could be argued, does not the phrase "act in concert" refer to, in fact explicitly require, variety? Do not musical concerts have violins, oboes, and trumpets? Yes, but, unlike jazz (which more closely fits Arendt's democratic ideal), classical concerts are based on individual instruments taking their orders from the composer and conductor. Certainly individuals are irreducibly individuals, they are not made on the assembly line; but if, when they gather, they set aside their differences and viewpoints (perhaps considering them irrelevant), and agree to a common plan, then for all practical purposes they are a mass.

Arendt suggests that practicing the democratic ideal of allowing all individuals a chance to speak their minds and see their own ideas reflected in the eventual policy of the group will guarantee a greater degree of cooperation with the plan, and therefore, more power. But this may not necessarily be the case. Perhaps a heated dialogue will heighten the awareness each has of the compromises involved in the eventual outcome; perhaps someone who is involved in drafting the group's proposal is most dissatisfied, since most aware of what may be wrong with it. Perhaps other members slumbering in indifference or convinced of their own unworthiness may be more willing to accept the work plan of others.

The experiences of being an equal, active participant in a group, compared to being a follower in a group, are certainly different. Arendt suggests that the former is the more fulfilling, since the person is exercising all their capacities—in other words, is brainstorming, dialoguing, and both initiating and carrying through an action. (Arendt, 1958, p. 176, 218; 1965, p. 281). We can perhaps say when looking structurally at the human person that indeed Arendt must be objectively right, that the person engaged in political action is more fulfilled. But that may not be how it is subjectively experienced at the time by the person.

Let's take Malcolm X as an example. During the time of his life where he was a member of the Nation of Islam and considered himself nothing more than the mouthpiece and servant of Elijah Muhammad, he had, from his own accounts, a feeling of fulfillment. Later, when he left the Nation of Islam and began to come up with his own ideas and put these ideas to action in a new community, we could say that he was more fulfilled, since he was using more of his capacities. He noticed himself that his own thought had become more nuanced, had matured. His new

community, he announced, was ready to dialogue with other community leaders and was more flexible in its views. Certainly in retrospect, having experienced both, Malcolm preferred his later thoughts and actions to his earlier ones. But that perspective was not available in his earlier days. Still, his enthusiasm and hard work for the Nation (in the mode of "obedient follower") obviously made the Nation more powerful.

The conclusion I want to draw from the example above, is that, although I think Arendt is right in arguing that the "political actor" in her sense is more fulfilled, a group of political actors might not be more powerful than a group of followers obedient to a leader. Arendt herself does not necessarily argue against the view I have just stated; however, I suggest that in her theoretical work on power (such as in her essay "On Violence" and her book *On Revolution*) she often focuses only on two extremes: the democratic egalitarian group that is gaining power; or the tyrannical groups consisting of rulers and the ruled which is losing power. (Arendt, 1958, p. 202; 1965, pgs. 247-8; 1972, p. 155). At other places in her work she addresses the reality of popular tyrants (Arendt, 1958, p. 203): certainly Hitler's Nazi Germany is one main example. As she explains in *Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hitler is made powerful by the support and cooperation of a fuzzy-thinking mass of conforming people. (Arendt, 1951, pgs. 308, 311-14; 1972, p. 143.)

2. The Role of Consent and Support

To understand internal group dynamics as Arendt sees it, we must look at the extent to which group members are treated equally, informed accurately, and allowed to create options. When it comes to the practical workings of a group, there is a question of how agreement and concord is reached. Arendt's ideal is free consent, the result of dialogue between equals. The opposite extreme is physical constraint and violence, where members are forced against their will. I have gleaned five gradual but distinct categories from my readings of Arendt's works that fit on a continuum between the two extremes. Following are the categories along with brief descriptions:

1) Free Consent: Based on reason, community members hearing all sides of the story, having access to accurate information, persuasion through best argument.

2) Strategy, Manipulation: Playing on people's emotions to get them to act irrationally, against their own or others' best interests.

3) Propaganda and Lies: The community is subject to misinformation that hinders their abilities to make rational choices. Winning the people's consent through misleading them.

4) Coercion, Threats of Violence: Threats of jail, torture, or death; life-threatening economic sanctions.

5) Physical Constraint, Violence: Regardless of the person's lack of consent, they are forced bodily to obey orders or are killed.

In addition Arendt will argue that the first three are powerful, but the last two are signs of diminishing power.

Let me explain in more detail the many different gradations of group consent and coercion. On one extreme is Arendt's ideal, our first category, which calls for group members all to become involved in the thinking and dialogue processes, the agreements and the carrying out of the common plan of action. Here, free consent is most clearly guaranteed; since each member can voice dissent and affect the final plan, one would think that the final plan enacted has been scrutinized and accepted. To have a group so committed to their own plan would ensure power.

However, this ideal is rarely realized, and the second "falling away" from the ideal (to use a structure akin to Plato's Republic, of successive models of political community falling away from the ideal) would involve dealing with disagreements not easily reconciled. The group needs unity of result; a group divided in plan and goal is weakened by the division. How will this unity be maintained? Strategy and psychological manipulation enters the scene. For Habermas, "strategic action" can still be part of political action, but Arendt does not want such actions called "political" according to her categories. When words become "weapons," when views are presented with "winning" or "losing" as goals, dialogue as true communication has ended. (Arendt, 1958, 180, 200.) But in this way, the group's unity, and therefore power, may be continued.

Our third category can be referred to as "lying and propaganda." Here, a subset of the group (whether majority or minority), in order to maintain power or make itself more powerful, decides to influence the actions of others by giving them faulty information on which to base their decisions for action. The other participants still act with a subjective feeling of freedom (and therefore they consent); they base their actions on what they know. However, we can say that unbeknownst to them, they have been controlled by the group that has lied to them. As Plato explained thousands of years ago in the *Republic*, this view can be rationalized as being more humane than overt violence; it is also more practical, because the "controlled" people move of their own volition, and so save the controllers the effort of having to move them against their will. (Arendt, 1968, p. 229.)

The fourth and fifth stages leave the realm of free actions and consent and enter the realm of force. Here the mask of legitimacy is ripped off the group, whether it be the government or a revolutionary group; the individual no longer wishes to cooperate and yet is compelled to do so. The fourth, coercion, involves threat of violence: if one does not cooperate, harm will come. Some philosophers, like Sartre, will emphasize that freedom remains even in situations of coercion. For example, say that the government comes to draft you into an unjust war, and threatens to kill you if you will not go. Yes, you do have a choice: you can join, or die. Sartre argues you are therefore responsible for joining and fighting if you choose to do so. And yet I want to argue that your choice here is so limited that it counts as "freedom" only in the most restricted sense.

Of course I want to mention quickly that this fourth stage is often the focus of Gandhi's satyagraha actions. As long as the threat works, rulers maintain their power, and it is easier for them because people do what they're told under their own volition. However, resisters grab onto that little bit of freedom left to them. Overcoming their

fear, they are not cowed by the threats. They refuse to go along, suffering the consequences. Often the dominating power is not prepared to carry out the threats; or when they do, they face the further unmaking of their legitimacy, and thereby lose power in other quarters just as they are trying desperately to hold onto it in a specific area. (Gandhi, 1920/1961, pgs. 30, 52, 57).

In the fifth stage, violence, there is no choice at all; people are directly physically compelled. Perhaps people are imprisoned; chained; dragged; muffled; or shot as an example to others. For Arendt, this is the height of impotence; it shows the group or ruler's inability to convince its subjects in any way, by any means (lying, incentives, threat of sanctions). The job of directly physically constraining and forcing is most difficult, consuming time and labor. For living subjects, violence rarely exists in its purest form, but is mixed with coercion. Prisons and concentration camps survive by getting people, through manipulation, lies and coercion, to walk into cells, line up to eat, and work. It even depends on them, in some cases, to walk to their own deaths. Occupied territories and prisons, Arendt suggests, are just plain too costly to keep up for very long. The heavy cost itself will tend to erode the system of domination. (Arendt, 1950, pgs. 50-1, 54.) Nonviolent resisters challenge the dominator to acquiesce, either to let their voices be heard and influence the government, or to move to a more costly system of oppression. When a thousand resisters challenge, "give us what we want, or you'll have to lock us all up," the dominators must weigh, how much will they lose, in labor, in power and in resources, as well as in legitimacy and acceptance of the larger community, if they lock up the protestors. Is it a price that can be paid? Or should the demands be filled?

As regards this continuum, I think Arendt has an important point. As long as people continue to consent, and to act freely so as to give their energies to the government, that government will become more powerful. So, categories 1-3 are the locus of powerful governments. However, Arendt notes, governments 4 and 5 are becoming less powerful. The most violent government, with the least cooperation, Arendt insists, is the least powerful government. Therefore Arendt's phrase: that violence is not power, but impotence.

However, since this is a continuum, does this mean that the government based on lying and propaganda is less powerful than the egalitarian, participatory government? Arendt notes that governments based on lying and propaganda are unstable. They risk having their lies unmasked, thereby losing power. She expresses a confidence about the truth always being found out in the end (although in other passages she fears the ability of power to stamp out particular facts altogether). (Arendt, 1968, 231, 253; 1972, 18-19.) I suggest, once again, that it is difficult to compare, across the board, instabilities of various governments, considering that Arendt's paradigm is itself unstable.

An example of how a "lying, propagandizing" government became powerful is Nazi Germany, and their plan to exterminate the Jews was based on the Nazi party's ability to motivate the actions of many individuals through lying and distortion. Nazi youth in the military were told that they were furthering history, aiding nature's plan; Jewish Council members were told that if they only cooperated, the Nazis would be

more humane and spare some people; the people rounded up for the camps were told that if only they boarded the trains cooperatively, they would be better treated. Because of these lies, the massive power of the Jewish people was mobilized, unfortunately, for the wrong end. Such feats could never have been enacted, Arendt speculates, if the Nazis could rely only upon their own manpower.

Arendt herself does some wishful thinking about the Jews during World War II: if only they had not cooperated with the German authorities, surely more Jews would have survived. Certainly, Jews cooperated because of the threats of violence made against them (as well as the lies they were told), and therefore their freedom and power was severely limited. Yet in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt quotes R. Pendorf: "There can be no doubt that, without the cooperation of the victims, it would hardly have been possible, for a few thousand people, most of whom, moreover, worked in offices, to liquidate many hundreds of thousands of other people." (Arendt, 1963, p. 117.) The sad thing, Arendt notes, is that more of the Jews would have been saved even if they were merely disorganized. But they were not; there was an organized Jewish leadership, and that leadership cooperated with the Nazis.

Arendt refers to Freudiger's calculations which estimated that about half of the Jews could have saved themselves if they had only not followed the instructions of the Jewish Councils. This calculation is based on the fact that in Holland, where there was total cooperation with the Nazis, only 519 of 103,000 Jews survived. In contrast, of the 20,000-25,000 Jews who escaped the Nazis and went underground to survive, 40-45% were saved. (Arendt, 1963, p. 125.) The fact that the Nazis were not as successful in their extermination of the Jews in the cases where Jews refused to comply illustrates Arendt's point that consent and compliance gives power to the government; withdrawal of consent takes its power away.

Gandhi had similar hopes that nonviolent resistance could be used with success to protect the Jews from the Nazis. In a newspaper article dated 1938, (collected in *Nonviolent Resistance*), Gandhi asserts that if he were a Jew, he would challenge the Germans "to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or submit to inhumane treatment."(Gandhi, 1938/1961, p. 348). But on the success or even appropriateness of such tactics Arendt seems to be of two minds. However, if we look closer, we can see she is making important distinctions. She thought that through noncooperation Jews could save more of their own lives. But she did not imagine a Gandhi-style "baring of the neck" vulnerability ritual (see also 1921/1961, p. 57), where Jews would gather in public and dare the Nazis to shoot them down or capitulate to their demands. Arendt states she has little faith that this particular method Gandhi used would work in all situations, dealing with all rulers. She asserts in some cases, rulers have no qualms about destroying whole populations. (Arendt, 1951, p. 310; 1972, p. 152.) She suggests that the Jews, knowing their oppressors, should engage in non-cooperation by going underground and fleeing. She was more confident of German Gentiles' ability to do a Gandhi-style protest since the Germans would be more hesitant to massacre their own. She cites with excitement the protest of German non-Jewish wives of Jewish husbands, who surrounded a prison and successfully demanded the release of their husbands. (Arendt, 1963)

B. Can Violence Be Powerful?

At this point, I think there is a need to debate the issue of whether Arendt's notion of power is accurate.

Both Habermas and Luban have noted that Arendt's use of the word "power" is not descriptive of our world as it is, but is instead normative and supportive of radical democracy. Luban suggests that perhaps the more traditional, supposedly descriptive views of power, such as Max Weber's, are also normative, though normative in favor of the existing rulers. (Habermas, 1977, pgs. 7, 9; Luban, 1979, p. 82.) Still, how can Arendt's idea of power be accurately descriptive, when we seem to see powerful violent governments all around us? Isn't Arendt's use of the term so peculiar that it goes against our everyday usage of the term, in which domination and violence are considered examples of great power?

I suggest that Arendt's view gets at the heart of the political situation and aptly describes the world as it is. She is not just spinning a fairy tale. To recap: Arendt sees "power with" as true power, and "power over" as a mistaken notion of power, at times even a lack of power. On this issue she shares insights with Gene Sharp and Mohandas Gandhi. How does a single leader become powerful? When the people, the basis of power, for whatever reason, hand over their power to the ruler. When they pledge allegiance, or give support and practical experience, then they as a unit, leader and people together, are powerful. This is an example of "power with." They are powerful together. (Of course, the paradigm of power is an egalitarian group.) However, the people may not always be aware that they are the source of the leader's continuing power. Sharp points this out in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*: the government may seem to form a "monolith" that towers above and rules the people, leaving them powerless. However, this monolith is a mirage. Without the cooperation of the people, the monolith would crumble.

Arendt herself makes a distinction between "leaders and followers" and "rulers and the ruled." In the former relationship, followers are still aware of the issues, and put their trust in their leaders' judgment. But they still experience themselves as the source of the leader's power, and they are aware that the leader is dependent on them. They know that they can recall the leader at any time. When the situation becomes "ruler and the ruled," however, the people no longer have the sense of themselves as the source of the ruler's power. They experience themselves as powerless, able only to follow orders. (Arendt, 1958, 189-90.) In such a situation, of course, resentment can build, and there may be rebellion in the future.

Once the people realize that they are in fact supporting the ruler, rather than merely suffering under him, they can learn that if they withdraw their support, the tyrant must topple. Arendt points out that the King has no power if no one obeys him, "for in politics, obedience and support are the same." Arendt's understanding empowers people, in contrast to Weber's view, which makes the tyrants seemingly invulnerable. (Arendt, 1965, p. 228.) Arendt's insight explains why popular revolts against materially strong rulers are often successful. (Arendt, 1958, p. 200-1). Arendt refers to Gandhi's experiments with noncooperation as "enormously powerful" and a "successful strategy." (Arendt, 1972, p. 152.)

Gandhi saw his role as educating his fellow Indians that British rule in India could exist only so long as the millions of Indians cooperated. He encouraged them to withdraw their support; when they did so, the British were faced with two options: to give in to their demands, or to increase the oppression. With the latter option, as was described before, comes the added cost of repressive measures as well as the scrutiny and condemnation of others both inside and outside India.

Arendt suggests that not all governments, when faced with resistance, will choose to meet the demands of the protestors. There are times when rulers decide they can afford to pay a high price (in the short run, perhaps) to dominate successfully an uprising; they decide the bill to pay for subjugation is not too high. (Arendt, 1972, p. 152.) In fact every day we see countries around the world where rulers decide they can "afford" to crush resistance. It could be argued, *contra* Arendt, that it is not at all apparent that the most violent governments are losing power: they seem to be more entrenched than ever!

Let me suggest that most "successful" repressive governments do have a power base somewhere: perhaps it is a minority of the population; perhaps it is merely the military; perhaps it is an outside superpower. And it is this source of "power with" which gives them the power to dominate others. It is not the relationship of domination in itself that is generating power; that is the fruit, although it is the bitter fruit, of an "acting in concert" of a group of people, who regard each other with dignity but regard outsiders with violence.

Sometimes a small group can overpower a larger group if that larger group is isolated, unorganized, and unwilling or unable to converse and plan with each other. We often cheer at the dynamic of a small but coordinated and dedicated people's movement taking over a petrified bureaucracy, which only had the "facade" of power. Arendt described the uprising of French students in 1968 as such a phenomenon. (Arendt, 1972, p. 148). An event like Castro's takeover of Cuba follows the same storyline: the people were unwilling to defend a government with which they were disaffected; so Castro's small band of revolutionaries toppled them and took over. The success of such a revolution is due more to the nonviolent power dynamic at work in the larger population than it does to the meager means of violence that the revolutionaries possess.

Well, this same dynamic of the small organized group controlling the larger unorganized group as often (or perhaps more often) works in the favor of ruling classes everywhere. The people are isolated from each other; a small group, however, including government officials, military and police, is united in vision and coordinates its actions to the point where they cannot easily be defied. They may organize themselves in such a way to nip any competing powers in the bud. Or: a coup d'etat, where the military sends scattering the elected officials. (Certainly, by the way, questions of supplies and resources further complicates power balances; it not merely a question of numbers of people.)

But I still want to clarify that in these scenarios what is generating power is the group, however large or small, that is acting in concert; the act of domination itself is not a source of power, but a challenge to power, or a drain on power, or a sign of that

power's limitation. I think that this is what Arendt means when she says that domination and violence are signs of impotence. "Power over" is perhaps a shorthand way of saying that a group that is powerful ("power with") has the ability to dominate others who are not organized or concerted to the same extent as themselves.

But power is temporary; it can be challenged; groups can split up, their members leave, perhaps even join the "other side." Arendt suggests that systems of domination and violence are unstable. And yet, the egalitarian "Mayflower Compact" style groups have their changes as well. Arendt herself admits that her paradigmatic councils and soviets are often the most short-lived of power groups. (Arendt, 1965, pgs. 262-3.) I think it is hard to categorize one or the other group as being more stable. Certain groups provide more satisfaction to their members than others, and so have a more loyal following or membership, whether it is a revolutionary group, a satyagraha group, or a government.

It is important to note that both power and violence have their shortcomings; neither is invincible. Arendt sums up this contrast of weaknesses by saying that "violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it." (Arendt, 1972, p. 155).

How can violence destroy power? Arendt notes that power needs only one material prerequisite: for people to gather together in a space; and one communicative prerequisite: when people are together, they must be able to communicate to each other. Isolation that results in loss of power can be accomplished by violence either materially, through scattering people with gunfire; applying a curfew where people are shot if they go outside houses or gather; or by plain slaughter of everyone. Isolation through restrictions on speech can be accomplished through destruction of alternative presses; also through spies and informers who will turn over to the government anyone saying something unfavorable to the government or anyone involved in any disallowed political activity. (Arendt, 1958, p. 200-1; 1972, p. 154.) It is no use denying that superior weapons of violence can obliterate any group, no matter how righteous and committed it is. A group like this can only hope that those with the violence will see the high costs of their action and desist from the slaughter.

What can violence accomplish? Violence can coerce people into obeying orders. Violence can destroy other power groups so that only one power group remains. But what can violence not accomplish? It cannot get people to change their minds and agree with a position or policy with which they don't want to agree. It can influence and force outer actions, but it can't reach inside the people and change them. Therefore as soon as the force of external coercion is gone, the people can revert to their former behavior. Although a violent group can destroy other power groups, it cannot enhance its own power through violence. This is the most frustrating aspect of violence, since creating or augmenting power is exactly what those who use violence actually want to accomplish in their violent acts.

C. Powerful Groups and External Relations

I want to bring up once again this problematic notion that a powerful group can wield its power for good or ill. To be powerful, Arendt suggests that the internal

structure of the group must have some fairness involved, since the people must consent and cooperate with each other. An ideal group would listen to the ideas and perspectives of all so that they would have the soundest ideas and plans. However, there is nothing to prevent a group from talking amongst itself and deciding to destroy its external enemies using violence. For example, one of Arendt's favorite paradigms of political action, democratic Greece, often decided to colonize its neighbors. (Arendt, 1958, pgs. 198-9.) Likewise revolutionary groups and resistance groups (like the French Resistance during WWII) can decide to attack through violence the competing power, in their cases the government under which they suffer. (However, more often than deploying violence, the French Resistance made newspapers, deciding to combat the government's propaganda, wooing away the government's followers, and in that way weakening its power.)

Arendt's ideal sees groups relating to each other in the same way they relate to each other internally: through dialogue, listening, and coming to a common agreement amongst themselves. Arendt calls this the "combination of powers" and sees this as the basis of the federal system. (Arendt, 1965, 168-9.) This is the theory behind a federal government like that in the U.S., based upon many powerful states. Rather than warring with each other, the states find ways of listening to and cooperating with each other. By refraining from war, and concerting their actions on the federal level, they become more powerful. This same idea is behind the "federation of nations" that Kant describes in his essay "Perpetual Peace." (Kant, 1789, p. 115-8.) Once again, power is in its fullest fruition when dialogue and agreement are at its center.

However, groups and nations have many options of how they are to relate to each other. A group could decide to dominate its neighbor through coercion or violence. But, as before, such actions would not generate power but only drain the power of the groups. A country that must resort to military takeover of its neighbor shows that country's inability to make a persuasive argument and find common cause with its neighbors. Because of this, it may destroy the other group, but it cannot through violence win the consent of the other, and therefore it cannot harness the power of the other group to its own to make itself more powerful. At most, it is stamping out a competing power, so that its own power may shine the more brightly in the void it has created for itself.

D. Conclusions: Parallels to Gandhi

I have already mentioned many of the parallels to Gandhi during the paper. However, I am sure I have only scratched the surface as regards comparisons. But at this time I would like to mention one more major correlation between the works of Gandhi and Arendt. Gandhi was very insistent in his satyagraha actions that his "opponents" never feel coerced by his actions. He meant to challenge them but not to force their hand. Gandhi is much more sensitive to the damage wrought by coercion than, say, Gene Sharp is. Gandhi was concerned that coercion could only bring a temporary success, as long as the threat was at hand. But when the threat was gone, and the resisters went back home, concessions made under coercion could be undone. Gandhi was more interested in the more permanent change that could take place when

the opponent's heart was changed. That, he felt, was reform that could be depended upon. This issue is dealt with very well and in-depth by Joan Bondurant in her book, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict.* (Bondurant, 1958, p. 9-11.) Bondurant adds the distinction that there is non-violent moral coercion present in Gandhi's satyagraha actions; but this is very different in character than coercion based on physical threat.

I think this last point of Gandhi's is very much in the spirit of Arendt. It emphasizes the shortcomings of coercion and violence. It shows the importance of dialogue and agreement.

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