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## **Arendtian Rightlessness and Palestinian Exile in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah***

**Mohammad Ilham Fahmi Rusdi, Halimi, Abdul Basid**

Master's in Arabic Language and Literature, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim

Malang, Indonesia

e-mail: [m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com](mailto:m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com)

| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <b>Article history:</b><br>Received: April 20, 2026<br>Accepted: May 08, 2026<br>Published: May 11, 2026                                                                                                                                                                           | This study examines the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's <i>I Saw Ramallah</i> through Hannah Arendt's political thought. It argues that exile in the memoir is not merely a condition of geographical displacement but a structural form of political exclusion that deprives Palestinian subjects of homeland, legal recognition, mobility, sovereignty, and social belonging. Using a qualitative method with an interpretive-critical approach, this study analyzes selected narrative fragments, spatial symbols, and textual descriptions related to displacement, statelessness, alienation, restricted movement, and collective trauma. The findings show that Barghouti represents exile as a multidimensional violation of human rights. The Palestinian subject is not only alienated from territory but also separated from the political community that should guarantee fundamental rights. The transformation of homeland into occupied space, the ambiguity of citizenship, the status of the "outcast," and the denial of return reveal a condition of rightlessness. Through Arendt's framework, the memoir demonstrates that human rights cannot function effectively without political membership and legal recognition. This study concludes that <i>I Saw Ramallah</i> offers a literary critique of political structures that deny Palestinians the fundamental conditions for possessing and claiming rights. |
| <b>Keywords:</b><br><i>Exile;</i><br><i>Hannah Arendt;</i><br><i>Human Rights;</i><br><i>I Saw Ramallah;</i><br><i>Palestinian Literature;</i><br><i>Political Exclusion;</i><br><i>Rightlessness;</i><br><i>Statelessness;</i>                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Corresponding Author:</b><br><b>Mohammad Ilham Fahmi Rusdi</b><br>Master's in Arabic Language and Literature, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim (UINMA)<br>Malang, Indonesia<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com">m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com</a> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

### **1. Introduction**

The Palestinian exile represents a multidimensional humanitarian crisis that extends beyond mere geographical dislocation. This condition encompasses the degradation of political space, the absence of legal recognition, and the loss of guaranteed human rights protection. In the Palestinian socio-political landscape, displacement from the homeland constructs a problematic social structure; where subjects lose not only their physical domicile but also their legal and political nexus with a state entity that should serve as a guarantor of their rights. This reality indicates that exile is not merely an incidental consequence of conflict, but rather a manifestation of structural mechanisms that relegate Palestinians to a position of permanent vulnerability and alienation. Consistent with the arguments of (Abdelhady et al., 2024), Palestinian communities trapped in statelessness suffer from the deprivation of "the right to have rights," resulting from the absence of effective state protection capable of securing their fundamental rights.

Conceptually, exile is defined as a state of discontinuity between the individual and the political community that serves as the basis for the legitimacy of formal rights. This phenomenon does not merely result in physical separation from the homeland but also

destabilizes identity, mobility, citizenship status, and the subject's existence as a legitimate member of the public sphere. In studies of Palestinian refugees, exile constructs a layered subjectivity; where refugees are not positioned as passive objects, but rather as subjects carrying collective memory, national consciousness, and potent political agency. In line with the findings of (Järvi, 2024), the Palestinian refugee experience cannot be simplified merely as a narrative of suffering; instead, it must be understood as a process dynamically shaped through political participation, the preservation of collective memory, and the ongoing discourse of identity struggle.

Mourid Barghouti's memoir, "*I Saw Ramallah*," serves as a crucial material object for examining these issues, as the text narrates the return of a Palestinian subject following decades of exile. However, the depiction of homecoming in this memoir is not presented as a total restoration of homeland, identity, or political rights. Conversely, Barghouti's narrative reveals that physical proximity to Palestine does not automatically erase alienation, restricted mobility, or the citizenship crisis. (Omar & Saidin, 2023) emphasize that *I Saw Ramallah* documents Barghouti's temporary return to Palestine after thirty years of exile, while simultaneously presenting a critique of Palestinian life shaped by separation, the illusion of return, and an unstable political climate.

Within the framework of Hannah Arendt, the problem of exile can be analyzed through the concept of "the right to have rights," defined as the fundamental right to belong to a political community capable of recognizing and protecting an individual's rights. Human rights are insufficient when understood merely as universal moral claims; they require a political and legal structure that allows a person to be recognized as a subject entitled to claim protection. (Horst & Lysaker, 2021) demonstrate that Arendt's thought remains essential for interpreting the refugee experience, as statelessness, political violence, and the loss of political membership reveal the fragility of the modern human rights system. (Bell, 2021) further asserts that the concept of "the right to have rights" remains relevant in explaining the limitations of rights within a system that is heavily dependent on formal citizenship.

Existing scholarship has examined Palestinian exile through memory, identity, refugee subjectivity, and bureaucratic violence. These studies show that Palestinian displacement is not only a geographical condition but also a political and legal crisis. However, they have not sufficiently explained how Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile as a literary articulation of Arendtian rightlessness. Schiocchet (2024) Järvi (2024) complements emphasizes.

Recent research reveals that Palestinian exile produces a condition of "permanent temporariness," a state in which refugees live in a prolonged waiting period without certainty regarding the restitution of their right to return. (Omar & Saidin, 2023) state that Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon experience a form of "social death" due to land dispossession, the denial of political existence, and the continuously delayed desire for repatriation. Meanwhile, (Perdana, 2025) demonstrates that *I Saw Ramallah* represents Palestinian suffering following the 1967 Naksa through personal memories that simultaneously reflect the collective memory of the Palestinian nation. These two studies reinforce the position that *I Saw Ramallah* should not only be read as a personal memoir but also as a literary text that preserves collective political memory.

While previous studies have examined Palestinian exile through the lenses of memory, identity, refugee subjectivity, and the experience of return, limited attention has been given to how *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile as a condition of rightlessness in Arendtian terms. Palestinian literature has often been discussed as a fragmented and transnational literary field shaped by displacement and refugee experience (Abu-Remaileh, 2021). Studies on Palestinian refugees also show that exile constructs complex subjectivities involving memory, political agency, and national consciousness (Järvi, 2024). Meanwhile, (Omar & Saidin, 2023)

emphasize the condition of Palestinian refugees as a form of social death shaped by dispossession and the deferred desire to return. However, these studies have not sufficiently explained how Barghouti's narrative transforms the loss of homeland, restricted mobility, citizenship ambiguity, and political exclusion into a literary articulation of the loss of "the right to have rights."

Building on this gap, the study addresses two questions. First, how is exile represented in *I Saw Ramallah* as a form of human rights violation against Palestinians? Second, how does the memoir reflect Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" through the experience of Palestinian exile? This study argues that exile in Barghouti's narrative signifies not only the loss of geographical space but also the disappearance of the political foundation that enables individuals to possess, claim, and maintain their rights. This argument is grounded in Arendtian scholarship, which explains that human rights require political membership and legal recognition in order to be meaningfully guaranteed (Arendt, 1973; Bell, 2021; Horst & Lysaker, 2021).

## 2. Literature Review

Studies on Palestinian exile show that displacement cannot be understood merely as geographical separation from homeland. Schiocchet (2024) emphasizes that "home" in the Palestinian context functions as a moral, affective, and contested space of belonging. This argument is important because the Palestinian homeland is not only a physical location but also a symbolic and political site shaped by memory, loss, and the desire for recognition. (Järvi, 2024) complements this view by arguing that Palestinian refugee subjectivity is formed not only through suffering and dispossession but also through political agency, collective memory, and national consciousness. Together, these studies indicate that Palestinian exile operates simultaneously as a spatial, emotional, political, and historical condition.

Beyond the affective dimension of exile, recent scholarship also highlights the legal and administrative mechanisms that sustain Palestinian rightlessness. Lundberg (2023) demonstrates that stateless Palestinians frequently encounter bureaucratic violence, in which administrative systems delay, suspend, or deny legal recognition. This form of violence is not always physical; it operates through documents, permits, residency procedures, and formal uncertainty. Such findings are highly relevant to *I Saw Ramallah*, where the exiled subject is repeatedly represented as a foreigner who must justify his presence before political and administrative authorities.

From an Arendtian perspective, the condition of refugees and stateless persons reveals the limits of modern human rights discourse. Flohr (2024) shows that Arendt's writings on refugees expose an existential paradox: the refugee remains biologically human but loses the political standing required for rights to be recognized. This argument is central to the concept of "the right to have rights," which suggests that rights require more than universal declaration; they require membership in a political community. Abdelhady et al. (2024) directly connect this concept to the Palestinian condition by showing that Palestinians who lack effective state protection experience a loss of the right to have rights.

In relation to *I Saw Ramallah*, (Alsaleh, 2019) reads Barghouti's narrative as an account of impossible return, where physical return does not fully restore the displaced subject's relation to homeland. (Perdana, 2025) further emphasizes that Barghouti's memoir represents Palestinian suffering through personal memory that simultaneously reflects collective national memory. These studies provide important foundations for understanding Barghouti's work. However, they do not sufficiently examine how the memoir articulates exile as a literary representation of Arendtian rightlessness.

Based on this scholarly gap, the present study contributes to existing research by integrating three elements: Palestinian exile, literary representation in Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, and Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights." This study does not merely read exile as memory or identity crisis; it interprets exile as a structural condition in which the Palestinian subject is deprived of political membership, legal recognition, and the institutional basis for claiming rights.

### 3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative method with an interpretive-critical approach to analyze the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*. This approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the interpretation of literary meaning, political symbolism, and the relationship between textual representation and human rights discourse. In literary research, interpretation is central because meaning is constructed through language, narrative structure, symbol, and contextual relation. Therefore, this study combines close reading and thematic interpretation to examine how exile is represented in the memoir.

The primary data of this study are selected textual fragments from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, particularly the Indonesian translation titled *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar and published by Pustaka Alvabet in 2006 (Barghouti, 2006). The selected passages focus on exile, displacement, statelessness, restricted mobility, alienation, citizenship ambiguity, and the denial of political recognition. The secondary data are taken from scholarly works on Hannah Arendt, human rights, refugee studies, statelessness, Palestinian exile, and literary criticism. Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" is used as the main theoretical framework because it explains how individuals may lose effective rights when they are excluded from a political community capable of recognizing and protecting them (Arendt, 1973; Flohr, 2024).

The data collection process was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher conducted a close reading of the memoir to identify passages related to exile and rightlessness. Close reading is relevant in literary studies because it allows the researcher to examine textual details, narrative patterns, figurative language, and symbolic structures within the literary work (Gallop, 2007). Second, relevant textual fragments were selected and recorded through note-taking. Third, the selected data were categorized into several thematic groups, including prohibition of return, outcast identity, bureaucratic uncertainty, restricted mobility, separation from homeland, collective exile, and traumatic memory. Fourth, each category was interpreted through Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights." Finally, the interpretation was connected to previous scholarship on Palestinian displacement and refugeehood in order to situate the analysis within broader academic debates.

The data were analyzed using thematic interpretation. This technique is appropriate because thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across selected textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study, thematic interpretation was not used merely to classify textual evidence, but also to explain how recurring images, narrative fragments, spatial symbols, and identity markers construct exile as a condition of political exclusion and human rights deprivation.

### 4. Discussion

This section discusses the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's memoir, *"I Saw Ramallah."* The discussion is structured based on textual data illustrating experiences of displacement, separation from the homeland, legal status uncertainty, restricted mobility, the stigmatization of refugees, and the collective trauma of the Palestinian people. Each data point is analyzed by linking excerpts from the

memoir to Hannah Arendt's concept of rightlessness—a condition in which an individual loses membership in a political community capable of guaranteeing and protecting their rights. Thus, this section not only explains the forms of exile within the text but also demonstrates how exile is represented as a structural and systemic violation of human rights.

#### 4.1. Exile as Structural Human Rights Violation in *I Saw Ramallah*

The following table presents selected textual evidence from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*. The excerpts are taken from the Indonesian translation by Khairil Azhar and are used as primary data to identify the major forms of exile represented in the memoir. The selected data include prohibition of return, outcast identity, administrative uncertainty, stigmatization, restricted mobility, prolonged exile, separation from homeland, collective displacement, and traumatic memory.

**Table 4.1**  
*Exile Data in Mourid Barghouti's I Saw Ramallah*

| No | Textual Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                      | Page | Indication Exile                     |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------|
| 1  | Israel membiarkan ratusan orang tua masuk ke sana, tetapi mencegah ratusan ribu pemuda pulang. Dan dunia pun menemukan sebuah nama buat kami. Mereka panggil kami kaum naziheen, orang-orang terbuang | 5-6  | Prohibition of Return to homeland    |
| 2  | Keterbuangan seperti kematian. Orang mengira itu terjadi hanya pada orang lain                                                                                                                        | 6    | Exile as loss of ordinary life       |
| 3  | Sejak musim panas 1967 aku menjadi si asing yang terbuang, yang selama ini adalah selalu orang lain dalam bayanganku.                                                                                 | 6    | Outcast identity                     |
| 4  | Orang asing adalah orang yang senantiasa memperbarui Izin Tinggal-nya. Dia isi berbagai blanko dan beli beberapa perangko untuk itu                                                                   | 6    | Refugees' administrative uncertainty |
| 5  | Dia merupakan orang yang selalu ditanya 'Dan asalmu darimana, Saudara?'                                                                                                                               | 6    | Stigmatization of refugees           |
| 6  | Dia menjadi orang yang biasa dipersempit ruang gerakanya, kadang dirangkul dan di saat yang sama dibuang.                                                                                             | 6    | Restricted sphere of movement        |
| 7  | Di sinilah aku, berjalan dengan tas kecilku menyeberangi sungai ini. Sebuah jembatan kayu yang panjangnya hanya beberapa meter tetapi memisahkanku selama tiga puluh tahun dalam pengasingan.         | 14   | Prolonged exile                      |
| 8  | Bagaimana bisa potongan-potongan kayu legam ini mampu menjauhkan sebuah bangsa dari cita-citanya?                                                                                                     | 14   | Separation from homeland             |
| 9  | Semua mereka yang sudah ditakdirkan terbuang memiliki ciri-ciri yang sama.                                                                                                                            | 208  | Collective experience of exile       |
| 10 | Di pembuangan, sumpal di tenggorokan tak pernah menghilang: Selalu datang lagi.                                                                                                                       | 210  | Traumatic memory of exile            |

**Source:** Selected textual data from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar, Pustaka Alvabet, 2006 (Bargouthi, 2006, pp. 5-14,208-210).

The data presented in Table 4.1 show that exile in *I Saw Ramallah* appears through interconnected forms: prohibition of return, foreignness, administrative uncertainty, restricted mobility, separation from homeland, collective displacement, and traumatic memory. These forms reveal that exile is not simply a private emotional condition. It is a political structure



that deprives Palestinian subjects of recognition, protection, and the possibility of full participation in the homeland.

#### **4.1.1. Prohibition of Return and the Construction of Outcast Identity**

The prohibition of return is one of the clearest forms of rightlessness represented in *I Saw Ramallah*. Barghouti's narrative shows that the Palestinian subject's access to homeland is not determined by personal belonging, historical memory, or moral claim, but by the authority of occupying power. The homeland becomes a controlled political space, while Palestinians are categorized as displaced subjects whose return is conditional and restricted. This condition reflects a broader pattern in Palestinian literature, in which displacement, fragmentation, and exile become central to the formation of literary and political consciousness (Abu-Remaileh, 2021).

The term *naziheen*, translated in the Indonesian edition as “orang-orang terbuang,” is significant because it marks the transformation of Palestinians from members of a homeland into subjects excluded from political recognition. Barghouti explicitly links this naming to Israel's prevention of “ratusan ribu pemuda” from returning home, indicating that exile is not only a personal loss but also the result of political control over access to homeland. In Arendtian terms, this condition reflects the loss of “the right to have rights,” since the subject is deprived of membership in a political community capable of guaranteeing legal and human protection (Arendt, 1973). This interpretation is reinforced by studies that connect Palestinian statelessness with the absence of effective political protection and legal recognition (Abdelhady et al., 2024). Exile therefore appears not simply as geographical distance but as a structural mechanism of political exclusion.

#### **4.1.2. Foreignness, Bureaucratic Violence, and Social Death**

Barghouti's representation of the foreigner reveals the administrative dimension of exile. The exilic subject is repeatedly required to renew permits, complete forms, buy stamps, and prove the legitimacy of his presence. In the memoir, “orang asing” is described as someone who must continuously renew his residence permit and carry various proofs of legality. Such bureaucratic procedures show that exile is maintained not only through physical borders but also through documents, stamps, permits, and legal uncertainty. This condition corresponds to Lundberg's (2023) concept of bureaucratic violence, in which stateless Palestinians experience the suspension or denial of legal recognition through administrative systems.

The repeated question “Dan asalmu darimana, Saudara?” further reveals the social dimension of foreignness. The exiled Palestinian is never allowed to possess a stable identity; his belonging is continuously questioned. In this sense, exile becomes a form of social death because the subject remains biologically alive but loses the social and political conditions that make life fully recognized. Omar and Saidin (2023) describe this condition among Palestinian refugees as an attempted form of social death, shaped by land dispossession, political exclusion, and the deferred desire to return. From an Arendtian perspective, this condition demonstrates how statelessness exposes the fragility of human rights when political membership is absent (Flohr, 2024).

#### **4.1.3. Restricted Mobility and the Political Meaning of the Bridge**

The image of the bridge in *I Saw Ramallah* is central to Barghouti's representation of exile. Although the bridge is physically short, it symbolizes decades of political separation. The narrator states that the wooden bridge is only a few meters long, yet it has separated him for thirty years in exile. This contradiction between physical shortness and historical distance shows how political borders transform ordinary space into a structure of exclusion.

The bridge does not merely function as a setting; it becomes a symbol of blocked return, suspended belonging, and controlled mobility. Through the question “Bagaimana bisa potongan-potongan kayu legam ini mampu menjauhkan sebuah bangsa dari cita-citanya?” Barghouti transforms the bridge into a political image of national separation. This contradiction reflects the broader condition of Palestinian mobility, which is often marked by fragmented journeys, temporal uncertainty, and political restriction (Lindholm, 2021).

Through this image, Barghouti shows that exile is produced by the political regulation of space. The homeland may be visible, remembered, and desired, yet it remains inaccessible because movement is controlled by external authority. (Schicchet, 2024) explains that home in the Palestinian context is not only a physical location but also a moral and affective site of belonging. In *I Saw Ramallah*, however, this belonging is interrupted by borders, permits, and occupation. Restricted mobility thus becomes a human rights issue because the Palestinian subject is denied not only the right to return but also the right to inhabit, move within, and participate in the public life of the homeland.

#### **4.1.4. Collective Exile and Traumatic Memory**

Exile in *I Saw Ramallah* is not presented only as the narrator’s private experience. It becomes a collective Palestinian condition shared across generations. Barghouti connects personal memory with national memory, showing that displacement is not an isolated biographical event but a historical structure that shapes Palestinian identity. The statement “Semua mereka yang sudah ditakdirkan terbuang memiliki ciri-ciri yang sama” transforms exile from a private wound into a collective condition. Alasaleh (2019) argues that Barghouti’s return is marked by impossibility because physical return does not fully restore the homeland that has been politically and emotionally lost. Similarly, Perdana (2025) emphasizes that *I Saw Ramallah* represents Palestinian suffering through personal memory that simultaneously reflects collective national memory.

The traumatic dimension of exile appears through recurring images of loss, silence, and emotional suffocation. Trauma in the memoir is not confined to the past; it returns repeatedly through memory, place, and the impossibility of complete homecoming. The image of “sumpal di tenggorokan” that “tak pernah menghilang” suggests that exile produces a recurring trauma that cannot be fully resolved by physical return. This is consistent with studies showing that exposure to political violence and war among Palestinians has long-term psychological consequences, including trauma, anxiety, and depression (Abudayya et al., 2023). Even when the narrator physically returns, the return does not fully restore what has been lost. This confirms that exile is not resolved by physical presence alone, because the deeper problem lies in the loss of political belonging and the continuing denial of rights.

#### **4.2. The Loss of the “Right to Have Rights” in *I Saw Ramallah***

The following table presents selected textual evidence related to the loss of “the right to have rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*. These excerpts are taken from the Indonesian translation by Khairil Azhar and are used to identify how the memoir represents political sovereignty, territorial occupation, alienation from homeland, family fragmentation, citizenship ambiguity, statelessness, historical exile, and the denial of mobility. The selected data demonstrate that rightlessness in Barghouti’s narrative is not only experienced as personal displacement, but also as the collapse of political and legal structures that should guarantee rights.

**Table 4.2**

*Textual Data on the Loss of “The Right to Have Rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s I Saw Ramallah*

| No | Textual Evidence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Page | Indication Loss of Rights                               |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Tapi tanah itu, kemudian, jadi ‘Wilayah Pendudukan’.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 9    | Loss of political sovereignty                           |
| 2  | Ketika kau mendengar di radio dan membaca di koran serta majalah, dalam buku-buku dan pidato-pidato, kata ‘wilayah pendudukan,’ tahun demi tahun, perayaan demi perayaan, dari konferensi puncak ke konferensi puncak berikutnya kau akan mengira letaknya di ujung bumi ini | 9-10 | Discursive alienation from homeland                     |
| 3  | Dia bukan lagi ‘yang tercinta’ dalam puisi perlawanan, atau butir tertentu dalam program partai politik. Dia bukan argumen atau metafora. Dia membenteng di hadapanku.                                                                                                       | 10   | Homeland as material but politically inaccessible space |
| 4  | Dulu tak seorangpun mempertanyakan hakku pergi ke Ramallah, kini kutanyakan apa yang bisa kulakukan untuk menjaga hak putraku mengunjungi Ramallah                                                                                                                           | 19   | Intergenerational uncertainty of return rights          |
| 5  | Dan kini aku ke luar dari pengasingan, menuju... tanah air mereka? Tanah airku? Tepi Barat dan Gaza? Wilayah Pendudukan? Wilayah Areas? Judea dan Samaria? Pemerintahan Otonom? Israel? Palestina?”                                                                          | 19   | Ambiguity of citizenship and national belonging         |
| 6  | Senapannya adalah sejarah diriku. Itulah sejarah pembuanganku. Senapannya telah merampas tanah puisi kami dan menyisakan puisi tentang tanah itu.”                                                                                                                           | 20   | Violent dispossession and loss of territorial rights    |
| 7  | Dia seorang tentara pendudukan, dan bagaimanapun juga situasinya berbeda dariku, khususnya pada saat ini.                                                                                                                                                                    | 20   | Unequal political power and domination                  |
| 8  | Kami di sini di jengkal tanah yang sama, tapi dia tak membawa tas di tangannya, dan dia berdiri di antara dua bendera Israel yang berkibar bebas di udara dan dalam legitimasi internasional                                                                                 | 20   | Unequal recognition before political authority          |
| 9  | Tidak ada izin dan tidak boleh ada kunjungan. Bertemu di Amman merupakan pilihan yang lebih mudah bagi semua orang                                                                                                                                                           | 205  | Denial of mobility and family reunification             |
| 10 | Apakah tanah air benar-benar menjadi obat bagi semua duka? Apakah mereka yang tinggal di tanah air lantas lebih sedikit kesedihannya?”                                                                                                                                       | 206  | Incomplete restoration of belonging after return        |

**Source:** Selected textual data from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar, Pustaka Alvabet, 2006 (Bargouthi, 2006, pp. 9-10,19-20,205-206).

The data presented in Table 4.2 demonstrate that the loss of “the right to have rights” in *I Saw Ramallah* is represented through the degradation of sovereignty, the transformation of homeland into occupied territory, the ambiguity of national belonging, the intergenerational uncertainty of return, military domination, unequal political recognition, and the restriction of



mobility and family reunification. These textual fragments show that rightlessness in Barghouti's memoir is not limited to the absence of abstract human rights. It emerges from the absence of a stable political community capable of recognizing Palestinians as subjects entitled to claim, exercise, and protect their rights.

From an Arendtian perspective, these conditions reveal that human rights become fragile when individuals are deprived of political membership and legal recognition. The Palestinian subject in Barghouti's memoir may retain memory, attachment, and moral claim to the homeland, but these are insufficient without institutional structures capable of guaranteeing rights. Thus, Table 4.2 strengthens the argument that *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile not merely as displacement, but as a systemic condition of rightlessness.

#### **4.2.1. Occupied Territory and the Loss of Political Sovereignty**

Data 1 and Data 2 show that the Palestinian homeland is transformed into "Wilayah Pendudukan." This transformation is not merely a geographical description but a political reclassification of the homeland. The phrase "occupied territory" circulates through radio, newspapers, magazines, books, speeches, and political conferences, producing a symbolic distance between Palestinians and their land. Although the land is physically near and materially visible, political discourse makes it appear remote, controlled, and inaccessible.

This condition is central to Arendtian rightlessness. For Arendt, rights require a political space in which the individual can appear as a recognized member of a community. When the homeland becomes occupied territory, Palestinians lose not only access to land but also the political structure that should guarantee their rights. The loss of sovereignty therefore becomes the foundation of other forms of rightlessness: restricted mobility, unstable belonging, and the impossibility of claiming rights through a recognized political authority.

This reading is also consistent with (Shalbak, 2023) argument that human rights in Palestine cannot be separated from the question of self-determination and political sovereignty. In *I Saw Ramallah*, the phrase "Wilayah Pendudukan" marks the collapse of homeland as a secure political space. The land remains materially present, yet the subject's relation to it is mediated by occupation, authority, and legal exclusion.

#### **4.2.2. Lost Homeland and the Separation of Nation from Territory**

Data 3 confirms a transition in the narrator's awareness, where the homeland is no longer positioned as a metaphor in poetic lines or political jargon, but rather as a concrete material reality. This shift in perspective holds crucial theoretical significance: the homeland is no longer merely an abstract symbol but has transformed into a physical space that can be visually observed yet remains beyond the subject's legal possession. Thus, the alienation from the homeland in this memoir is not only emotional but also political, as the subject's affective connection is insufficient to restore rights without authoritative political recognition. This aligns with (Stewart, 2021) assertion that "the right to have rights" requires a positive legal framework capable of guaranteeing rights in a tangible manner, rather than simply positioning them as universal moral claims of a speculative nature.

#### **4.2.3. Ambiguous belonging and the Crisis of Return**

Data 4 and Data 5 reveal the crisis of return and national belonging. The narrator recalls that in the past no one questioned his right to go to Ramallah, whereas now he must think about how to preserve his son's right to visit it. This shift shows that the right of return has become uncertain across generations. Exile does not only affect the narrator; it also shapes the future of his child, who inherits a disrupted relation to homeland.

The narrator's question—whether he is returning to “their homeland,” “my homeland,” “the West Bank and Gaza,” “Occupied Territory,” “Autonomous Rule,” “Israel,” or “Palestine”—shows that the homeland itself has become politically unstable. The crisis is not only territorial but also linguistic and juridical. The inability to name the homeland clearly reflects the instability of citizenship, sovereignty, and political recognition.

In Arendtian terms, this instability reveals the absence of a secure political community through which the subject can claim rights. The narrator does not simply suffer from nostalgia; he confronts a political condition in which the homeland no longer provides a stable legal and symbolic ground for belonging. This supports (Bell, 2021) argument that rights become limited and unstable when they depend on fragile or inaccessible citizenship.

#### **4.2.4. Military Domination and Unequal Political Recognition**

Data 6, Data 7, and Data 8 show how rightlessness is maintained through military domination and unequal political recognition. The narrator describes the soldier's gun as the history of his exile. This image is powerful because the gun is not merely a weapon; it becomes a symbol of the political force that has taken land and transformed Palestinian belonging into memory, longing, and poetry.

The contrast between the narrator and the soldier further reveals unequal political standing. They stand on the same piece of land, yet the soldier stands under internationally recognized flags, while the narrator carries a bag and moves as a subject under inspection. This unequal position shows that the Palestinian subject is physically present but politically unrecognized. His presence does not automatically become belonging because it is controlled by the authority of the occupier (Horst & Lysaker, 2021).

In Arendtian terms, the problem is not simply that Palestinians are deprived of movement; they are deprived of the political status that would allow their presence to be recognized as legitimate. Rightlessness is therefore produced not only by territorial exclusion but also by unequal recognition before political authority. The memoir exposes how military power reorganizes space, identity, and legitimacy, leaving the Palestinian subject present in the homeland yet deprived of secure membership within it (Arendt, 1973).

#### **4.2.5. Restricted Mobility and Family Fragmentation**

Data 9 and Data 10 show that the loss of rights also appears through restricted mobility and the fragmentation of social life. The statement “Tidak ada izin dan tidak boleh ada kunjungan” demonstrates that movement is not a natural freedom but a permission-based privilege. Family gatherings, weddings, visits, and ordinary social relations must be reorganized around borders, permits, and prohibitions. The fact that meeting in Amman becomes easier than meeting in Palestine shows how occupation restructures intimate and social life.

This condition confirms that the denial of mobility is also a denial of belonging. The homeland cannot fully heal the wounds of exile when access to it remains conditional and when those who live there continue to experience separation, surveillance, and restricted movement. Thus, Barghouti's memoir demonstrates that the loss of “the right to have rights” is not only a legal abstraction; it is experienced in the daily impossibility of visiting, residing, gathering, and belonging (Lindholm, 2021).

This analysis also strengthens the connection between Barghouti's literary representation and Arendt's political thought. If rights depend on membership in a political community, then the denial of mobility and family reunification reveals the fragility of that membership. The Palestinian subject is not only displaced from land but also from the ordinary practices through which social life and political belonging are maintained (Shalbak, 2023).

Based on the accumulated evidence, the loss of “the right to have rights” in *I Saw Ramallah* is constructed through occupation, political renaming, intergenerational uncertainty, military domination, unequal recognition, restricted mobility, and family fragmentation. These forms demonstrate that rightlessness is not merely the absence of rights in a legal sense, but the collapse of the political conditions that make rights claimable. Barghouti’s memoir therefore reveals that Palestinian exile is not only a geographical wound but also a crisis of political existence (Harvey, 2012).

#### **4.3. Critical Reflection on Arendt’s Framework**

Although Arendt’s concept of “the right to have rights” is useful for understanding the political condition of Palestinian exile, its application to the Palestinian context requires critical caution. Arendt’s framework was primarily developed from the experience of European statelessness and refugeehood in the twentieth century (Arendt, 1973; Flohr, 2024). The Palestinian case, however, involves not only statelessness but also colonial occupation, territorial dispossession, militarized borders, and the prolonged denial of return. Therefore, Arendt’s theory should not be applied as a complete explanation, but as a conceptual lens that helps illuminate one crucial dimension of Palestinian exile: the loss of political membership as the foundation for claiming rights.

This limitation is important because human rights in Palestine are closely tied to broader questions of self-determination, sovereignty, and prolonged occupation. Shalbak (2023) argues that human rights discourse in Palestine remains limited when separated from the question of self-determination and political sovereignty. Saul (2021) similarly emphasizes the importance of understanding prolonged occupation through the principle of non-domination. By acknowledging this limitation, the present study strengthens rather than weakens its theoretical position: Arendt’s framework is used critically, not mechanically.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study has examined the representation of exile and the loss of “the right to have rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* through Hannah Arendt’s political thought. The analysis shows that exile in the memoir is not merely represented as geographical displacement but as a structural condition that deprives Palestinian subjects of homeland, mobility, legal recognition, political membership, and social belonging. Through images of return, foreignness, restricted movement, bureaucratic uncertainty, and traumatic memory, Barghouti constructs exile as a multidimensional violation of human rights.

The study further demonstrates that the loss of “the right to have rights” is represented through occupied territory, unstable national naming, intergenerational uncertainty of return, military domination, unequal political recognition, and restricted mobility. The Palestinian subject becomes rightless not because of the absence of abstract human rights, but because of the absence of a political community capable of recognizing and protecting those rights (Arendt, 1973; Horst & Lysaker, 2021). In this sense, *I Saw Ramallah* reveals the fragility of human rights when citizenship, sovereignty, and legal recognition are denied.

This study contributes to literary studies, exile studies, and human rights discourse by showing that literary narratives can expose the political structures behind displacement and statelessness. Barghouti’s memoir does not merely document personal suffering; it offers a literary critique of the systems that transform human beings into outcasts. Future studies may extend this discussion by comparing *I Saw Ramallah* with other Palestinian refugee narratives or by examining the limits of Arendt’s theory in relation to postcolonial and settler-colonial contexts.

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