

Arendt's Agonistic Politics: A Contribution to a Normative Model of Democracy

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Abstract

Hannah Arendt's notion of agonistic politics which include principles of freedom, equality and plurality provides an important contribution to the shaping of a normative grounding for democracy. The relevance of her contribution to democratic theorizing cannot be underestimated given the groundedness of her reflections. Her reflections are also relevant as an analytical frame in analyzing various facets of the political reality specifically the context of the Philippines especially in enriching the discourse on active citizenship.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Agonistic Politics, Public and Private, Plurality, Democracy

I. Introduction

The problem of politics and its meaning today as raised by Hannah Arendt¹ is a significant question given the various issues that beset our contemporary political reality. These problems which are important concerns of political theorizing include among others multiculturalism, citizenship, and feminism. The issue of minority rights, active citizen participation and inclusion of minority groups like women and national minorities in public discourse are only a few of these political concerns.

One of the general themes that tackle these various concerns is social justice. However, social justice needs a procedural dimension to be able to realize its substantive potential. This is where democracy becomes relevant. A procedural model of democracy which emphasizes on normativity ensures a more comprehensive way of dealing with the aforementioned political concerns. The issue of normativity becomes a key concern since the discourse on the normative basis of democracy will have important ramifications for analyzing important aspects of concrete political realities.

While there are various normative models of democracy, however, what is crucial for this paper is not the choice of a better model but how some elements in Arendt's agonistic politics can contribute to the broadening of the discourse on the normative dimension of democracy. Thus, this paper will deal with these important elements that contribute to the shaping of a normative claim for democracy. I will be discussing here general principles that help define democracy including the core understanding of the *Political* in Arendt.

¹ Hannah Arendt extensive discussion of the problematique concerning politics is spelled out in "Introduction Into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 93 - 200.

It is within this context that I will argue for the relevance of Arendt's agonistic conception of the political as contributory to the understanding of a normative model of democracy. I will further argue that Arendt provides not only a potent but also a grounded understanding that is consistent with the aims of democracy. This argument will be elaborated in three stages. First, I will show the significance of Arendt's conception of the political in democratic theorizing and in coming up with a normative model of democracy by exposing her views on the role of violence, the public and private divide, the notion of solidarity and common good, and active citizen participation as well as its contribution to a normative model of democracy and its implication to the Philippine political situation. Next, I will provide a critical analysis which thoroughly examines the various critique of Arendt's notion of the political which includes nostalgia, role of violence, public and private divide, and lack of institutional support. The intent here is to clarify Arendt's key presupposition against these criticisms. Finally, I will provide a brief summary that illustrate Arendt's contribution to a normative model of democracy which also shows the possible implication to Philippine politics.

II. Arendt and Democracy

There are various dimensions in Arendt's understanding of the political that is relevant for democratic theorizing. However, for the purpose and scope of this paper, I will limit my discussion on democratic elements within Arendt's work which include the role of violence, her understanding of the private and the public, the problem of solidarity, the need for active citizen participation, and its contribution to a normative model of democracy with possible implication on the Philippine situation.

All the themes that will be discussed are foundational elements that can contribute to a normative theory of democracy. We emphasize here the normativity of Arendt's

position given her insistence on the need for important principles to be present for real discourse to be possible and for politics to take shape and be sustained.

A. The Role of Violence

It is very clear for Arendt that violence as well as brute force has no place in the public. She refers to violence as anti-political since it goes contrary to the principles that the political upholds. These include principles of free speech and equal voice. Violence, then, as much as possible should be limited to the pre-political or the natural environment. It is in this domain where man is caught in the reality of necessity. However, a necessary violence is needed in breaking away from the dictates of this necessity. It is through this that the move to the domain of the public or the political becomes possible.² An extensive discussion on the delineation of the political and pre-political will be done in the succeeding section.

Arendt also emphasized that when violence exceeds or goes beyond the household or nature and extends to the political, serious problems arise. This is exemplified by violence in enormous proportion that occurred in our age namely the rise of totalitarianism exemplified by Nazism in Germany that led to holocaust and the use of atomic bomb which killed hundreds of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.³ These examples clearly illustrate how violence if allowed in the public domain can go out of proportion.

The rise of totalitarianism as shown in Arendt's analysis is due to our conception of politics as constitutive of violence. This is illustrated by our understanding of politics that is based on the ruler-ruled dynamics. The ruler-ruled understanding of politics removes the sense of freedom since

² Ibid. See also *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 22- 78.

³ Ibid., 153 - 191.

power is taken over by the ruler. As a result, it leads to a justification of despotism which if we trace its development in history leads to tyranny and in uncontrolled proportion translates to totalitarianism.⁴

Furthermore, there are also various elements in our understanding of politics that mirrors the tendencies of totalitarianism. These include our understanding of politics as based on kinship. The problem here arises in the assertion that politics should be based on family relation, therefore, putting emphasis on unity or commonality. This understanding of politics limits political discourse to one or few voices which threatens the continuity of politics for in lack of plurality of voices, truth is imposed. Here the existence of various opinions is not recognized. In this taking over or monopoly of voice, violence is also manifested.⁵

Further, Arendt is wary that in an attempt to deal with the problem of violence, modern states instead of limiting it to the pre-political, transferred the capacity for violence to the state. The intention is to isolate it in a power that is presumed to have control over other domains. However, as we have seen in totalitarian governments, violence as manifested by the state has gone out of proportion that causes problems like the holocaust as perpetrated by the Nazi regime.⁶

The tendency to impose truth rather than elicit it from the public is similar to what Arendt observed in the Greek context especially in the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy where the primacy of the public and political is replaced by academic life. In this movement, the exercise of discourse in the public arena becomes limited to only a few

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973).

⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition* and "Introduction Into Politics".

⁶ Arendt, "Introduction Into Politics".

elites.⁷ As shown in history, this primacy of the elite led to the formation of oligarchy which is also a precursor to totalitarianism.⁸

In fact, Arendt again parallels this with the reason why the atomic bomb was able to wedge its destructive effect. This is because we give emphasis to the role of experts, the scientist to impose their technical knowhow without subjecting them to public scrutiny. The expertise of a limited few, the scientists, as well as those in power have used the potential of a technology like the atomic bomb which did not just destroy the political but the very life itself to wield their power.⁹

What is unfortunate here is that this tendency is coupled with a sense of acceptance mostly from the majority of the populace that removes our capacity for action. Arendt believes that human capacity for action is only possible when freedom and plurality exist. It is only in this domain of a world created by men that is referred to as politics where any resistance to the totalizing tendency of totalitarianism can be possible.¹⁰

Arendt also reacts to the tendency of historical study for totalization when she denounces the pronouncement that asserts a common history of mankind rather than plurality of ideas. This is another threat to the political in that the emphasis is on commonality rather plurality. She also points to the other violent tendencies in the political realm which includes infiltration of shady interests and deception as also having no place in the political. This is the reason why the Greeks do not consider international relation as political

⁷ Ibid., 108 – 153.

⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

⁹ Arendt, "Introduction Into Politics", 153 - 191.

¹⁰ Ibid.

because this is where shady interests and deception happen in forging alliances with other foreign regimes.¹¹

It is clear, then, that Arendt asserts violence, brute force, shady interests and deception as having no place in the political. The intrusion of the aforementioned violent tendencies into the public domain can spell the end of politics since they erase all traces of freedom, equality and at the same time of plurality.

B. Public and Private

Another important aspect of Arendt's political conception is often referred to as the distinction between the private and the public. What Arendt clearly emphasize in her work is the distinction between the pre-political and the political. While the public and private divide is also discussed by Arendt, it has to be properly understood first in the context of the delineation between the political and the pre-political.¹²

The distinction is important since it defines the clear boundaries that if breached by violence disasters are bound to happen. Arendt uses here again the Greek model where the household or that which represents the natural is considered pre-political. It is pre-political in the sense that it becomes a pre-condition for the political to be realized. While maintaining the clear lines, Arendt emphasizes that the inability to break from the bondage and dictates of the household, man is not free to participate in the affairs of the public.¹³

Arendt, however, maintains that the breaking away also entails some violence. This comes in the form of submitting the slaves or women to take over the role in the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22 - 78.

¹³ Ibid.

household; otherwise, participation in the polis is not possible. Again, this violence should be limited to the pre-political. I emphasize here that for Arendt, the household is a direct opposition to the political. It is important to emphasize this for this would legitimize the importance of a sense of freedom attained that makes public participation possible.¹⁴

The breaking away, then, translates to freedom. Freedom here means freedom from the necessities of man's "naturalness", that is, the context of the household. It is in this sense that this freedom attained entails courage. Arendt draws parallelism from the courage exhibited by Greeks in their capacity to leave the household to pursue their adventurous spirits. However, the leaving behind of the household is not yet politics. It is only when the adventurous spirit is transformed into an association of men that has the courage also to form a world constituted by plurality that recognizes the equality of voices without coercion that politics is realized.¹⁵

The movement, then, towards the public gives man a sense of equality with fellowmen. The equality attained here is not the equality of social status or of social goods as we refer to in modern times. It is instead an equality of voices. It is, as reiterated by Arendt, a place of free men who contest political realities without fear of coercion and without actually falling into each other. This means that clear boundaries are also maintained in between men so much so that they are not subsumed to each other's voice.¹⁶

It is in this domain that free speech then becomes a reality. Free speech is also one of the reasons why slaves and barbarians are excluded from the political. It is because slaves are tied down to necessity while barbarians are unable to achieve free speech. Also, Barbarians are known

¹⁴ Ibid. See also "Introduction Into Politics", 108 – 153.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

for violence rather than nonviolent disagreements which if allowed can be disastrous to the political domain. While slaves are caught in necessity, barbarians as presumed by Arendt to come from "illiberal" societies are unable to respect free speech since they are dictated by the ruler and ruled dynamics which subsume the voices of the rest to that of the ruler.¹⁷

Finally, Arendt emphasizes this distinction between political and pre-political since the infringement into the public by family or kinship concerns removes the capacity for impartiality. Family or kinship concerns tend to cloud objective judgement. Kinship aside from its tendency towards uniformity which removes plurality also has the tendency to bring limited self or familial interest into the domain of the public which leads to the loss of the character of publicity that is the concern for the political world and not of the natural world of kinship.¹⁸ This re-creation of the natural world as well as the transformation of the pre-political and political to public and private will be discussed next.

C. Solidarity and Commonality

Arendt's notion of the public or political can be better described as a common world. This common world is a shared world not of common values, mores and culture but a common world of shared aspiration. It is a world that shares common commitment to upholding the elements of freedom, equality in participation and plurality.¹⁹

While we have already stressed on the notion of freedom that is in moving from the pre-political to the political and the notion free speech as well as equality in participation as men equal with other free men, we should

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

also emphasize here the notion of plurality. Consistent with what we have emphasized earlier, this notion of plurality is an opposite of unity which means greater plurality of voices not limited to elite few.

Furthermore, plurality is important in constituting this world for it is consistent with the Greek notion of φρόνησις (*phronesis*), of practical wisdom that entails truth attained from various dimensions. In the context of the political, the plurality of voices of people coming from difference perspective is what constitutes the search for truth. It is important here to emphasize that for Arendt, the world of opinions or δόξα (*doxa*) as defended by Socrates matters significantly in shaping the public or the political. It is this realm that was lost when Plato and Aristotle allowed the academe and philosophy to take over.²⁰

Arendt better describes this political world, then, as a world constituted by men when they come together but ensure that they do not fall into each other. This means that they share a sense of commonality but do not get subsumed into the other. Thus plurality is maintained. This also provides room for greater contestation which is what democracy and political culture entails.²¹

It is also important to emphasize that this constituted world by virtue of it being constituted is an artificial world. It is artificial not in a negative sense but in the sense that it is created by men. It is a cultural achievement. This distinguishes it from what is natural, in fact it puts some structure into the lawlessness of wilderness. This constituted world, however, should again be distinguished from the world attained by work. While it shares a degree of continuity and institutionality with those artifacts achieved

²⁰ Frederick Dolan, "Arendt on philosophy and politics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Edited by Dana Villa (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 261 - 276.

²¹ Arendt, "Introduction Into Politics".

in work, it is distinct for it is not focused on the mastery of the artisan that asserts his will over his product. Instead, the political is characterized by the continuous discourse and presence of diverse and free men and it is their presence that this world becomes possible. While it goes beyond man himself, it is also not lasting enough if the contestation is not present. Thus, it is lasting but at the same time temporal. It is lasting in that it goes beyond generations but is re-created depending on the needs identified by the continuous democratic discourse of citizens of free and equal men.²² This basically affirms the notion not just of common good but also of solidarity because we share in the creation of a common world.

D. Active citizen participation

This brings us to an important element in democracy which is active citizen participation. The realization of this brings together the various elements and principles already mentioned. Foremost here is the characterization of the political as a place of freedom and equality. These foremost elements are important since freedom and plurality paves the way for the possibility and realization of action.

Action as understood by Arendt proceeds from free speech. From free speech man attains free action. Action here owes much again to the Greek understanding which is *ἀρχεῖν* (*archein*) and the Latin word *agere*. Both words emphasize the start of something new. The primary importance of action then is in its capacity to create something new. The creation of something new is what can counter the destructive tendencies of totalitarianism.²³ We have noted earlier that totalitarianism only arise and is sustained when man is caught in a condition of inability to act.

²² Ibid. See also *The Human Condition*, 22 – 78.

²³ Ibid.

The re-emphasis on action, then, provides for creation of new structures that oftentimes goes beyond human conception. This becomes true when people gather together to topple a dictator or when groups of people constitute themselves into a political body to assert rights and to overcome the horrors of holocaust. In fact, Arendt refers to this as a kind of miracle. This is not the miracle in the spiritual sense but a miracle manifested in man's capacity to alter the course of senseless brutality which becomes possible when groups of people without being tied to the natural course of history or to traditional and fixed forms of judgment acts with common purpose.²⁴

Given the equality in political participation and the recognition of plurality, it is inevitable that what can be attained is not a smooth resolution. In fact, we can refer to action as problem rather than a blessing because the various voices have the tendency to create more contestation.²⁵ However, this is precisely the point of active citizen participation, that is, in constant contestation new public spaces are developed. It creates a common world. It is a common world because of the common aspirations of citizens to freedom and equality of voices. Yet, it remains a plural world in that people continue to recognize each other's differences. This paves the way for greater citizen participation since by sustaining difference, contestation is maintained, as a result, active citizen participation is also nurtured.

E. Towards a normative model of democracy

The elements discussed as essential in Arendt's agonistic politics actually points to elements needed for a normative model of democracy. While Arendt disavows norms in that norms have a tendency to constrain freedom

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2000).

and plurality, Arendt also provides key principles on how politics and therefore democracy have to be understood. She prescribes to us that the elements of non-violence, clear delineation of spaces, solidarity and common good as well as active citizen participation are essential in the realization and sustenance of politics.

Eliminating violence would mean in contemporary terms the openness of spaces for genuine dialogue where our own individuality and the uniqueness of groups are recognized. It also means not being constrained to participate because the public sphere is not monopolized by experts or of those who simply protect their personal interests. The public space is plural and therefore voices and opinions and not absolute truth should prevail.

A clear delineation of spaces is also needed in democracy. While we conventionally understand democracy as the rule of the masses, we have seen in history how those who participate are unable to rise above their imprisonment to the dictates of necessity. This is the reason why in the Philippines, patronage politics based on kinship still persists. This is because we have not created a clear divide of what is political and what is pre-political nor have we developed matured and critical citizenry that can distinguish between the two.

It is also in this age of great division that we have to temper the divide by emphasizing solidarity or working for the common good. This is emphasized by Arendt in saying that the political is not just characterized by plurality but also of a shared world that is constituted by men. Plurality which can translate to compartmentalization has to be balanced by a sense of a common and shared world. There is also the need for a kind of democracy where people recognize this shared world that is not based on kinship but on something they have developed by themselves and that which also include plurality and freedom.

The way to achieve this is to push for active citizen participation. This is crucial in democracy. When people fail to participate; when they simply allow themselves to be dictated by particular ruling class or by elite few, democracy just like politics will be prone to totalitarianism. Active citizen participation, then, is the lifeblood of democracy.

The normativity then, of Arendt's political conception can be referred to as an agonistic model. This means that by emphasizing freedom, equality and plurality that despise violence and promote active citizen participation, Arendt is moving towards a dynamic view of politics. By allowing free men to engage in public discourse without eliminating their plurality, Arendt is promoting a politics that is based on constant contestation devoid of violence. This is important for the sustenance of a democratic culture.

F. Implications for Philippine Politics

The normativity of Arendt's agonistic model can be better grasped if understood within the context of the Philippine political reality. Its implication on the understanding of political dynasty, possibilities of totalitarianism and most importantly in active citizen participation is very relevant in the political reality of our nation today.

The understanding of political dynasty becomes a key concern especially in the revival of the discussion towards federalism. The need to divide the country into federal states is an attempt to break free from the oligarchy of the capital. However, it is a double-edged sword in that it can also allow local political dynasty to further proliferate.²⁶ This is not an argument for or against federalism. What Arendt's agonistic politics is teaching us is that for a republic to reach a level of

²⁶ Patrick Riordan, S.J., *Philippine Common Goods: The Good Life for All* (Davao City: Ateneo de Davao University Publication Office, 2016), 49 – 77.

maturity it should break free from the clutches of political dynasty that is based on kinship and family ties. Politics should be based on the exercise of men as free and equal. This is what can bring about a vibrant public.

The same chains that shackle our political culture due to family and kinship ties are also the very reasons for totalitarianism. In the present administration of Rodrigo Duterte, totalitarianism is a big possibility especially in how the administration through the state has wedged its authoritarian power that comes with violence. However, we can also point to the elitist political culture that has developed for centuries which this administration promises to topple, including its incessant fight against oligarchy that does not only control the economy but the political dimension as well. Both realities given their tendency for violence: authoritarianism on the one hand and elitism on the other hand are precursors for a certain form of totalitarianism that Arendt despises.

More importantly, however, is the present context where there is a growing sense of participation in the public discourse especially through social media. While many would abhor the throwing of dirty accusation and "trolling" acts by several members of opposing camps and their loyal followers, there are important contributions here to the active citizen participation that Arendt's agonistic politics promises. The need to maintain different positions and the vibrant clash of these positions is a hallmark of a vigorous democracy. More than the acts of division that this reality brings, the vibrant clash of positions manifest the active participation of citizens in the affairs of the state. This is important to maintain and respect for it is only through which that totalitarianism can be prevented.

This point is shared and made clearer by Eriksen and Weigard. In their commentary on Habermas's social theory, they emphasize that new forms of communication such that of new media is Janus-faced. On the one hand, it can be a

venue for manipulative interest but it can also serve as a venue for legitimate criticism.²⁷ I believe this is what the role of social media provides. It can be a venue for destructive communicative exchange but more than that it can serve as a venue for legitimate clash of positions.

Of course we should emphasize that the clash of positions must be tempered by the notion of solidarity. This means, however, that there is a need for solidarity based on shared commitment of respecting differences and at the same time a shared commitment in building a public where clash of positions is undertaken in a non-violent even if in an agonistic way.

III. Critical Evaluation

The contribution of Arendt's notion of politics in the normative model of democracy has also attracted various critics from the philosophical quarters. She is accused of a sense of nostalgia in returning to the classics – the Greeks. There are also those who would insist on the role of violence while several have also commented on her notion of the public and private divide. There are even those who accuse her proposal of lacking in institutional mechanism to fully enforce her prescriptions. I will attempt here to let Arendt speak by being charitable in interpreting her works to be able to respond to critics in a way that is consistent with her philosophy.

A. On Nostalgia

A fundamental critique on Arendt's notion of politics is her sense of nostalgia that is when she constantly refers to the Ancient Greek philosophers namely Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in providing justification for her notion of politics.²⁸

²⁷ Erik O. Eriksen and Jarle Weigard, *Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 194 – 196.

²⁸ Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*.

The notion of plurality and freedom are essential characteristics of what characterizes the Greek notion of politics. This is despite the fact that during the Greek era plurality of voices might not be of the same character as the multi-culturally diverse context we have now. It is clear during the Greek times that constant discourse is highly encouraged and in fact highly significant in conceptualizing the realization of full humanity. However, the question remains whether this kind of conceptualizing that is pursued by Arendt is still relevant in a significantly different context of our contemporary time.

Benhabib discusses that the intention of Arendt in her return to the Greek is beyond nostalgia, but it is rather more of a recovery of what is essential in the past to make it relevant in the present. This is something not so foreign even in the field of historical study when we learn from the past to make better the present. However, there is something more here than simply a recovery of the past. What is essential here is also a claim that the truth as espoused by the Ancient Greeks is not mere artifact that does not speak to us in this contemporary times. What the Greeks have discovered is a truth that contains value across historical milieu. The idea of the public and private divide, for example, is just one of a few contributions to political theorizing in that it clearly delineates spaces where politics would become a reality.²⁹

This notion of politics that is grounded on free speech that is a result of being freed from the necessities of the household validates a political intuition that matters related to basic necessities be removed from political discourse. It also affirms another basic intuition that political matters must be discussed in a condition of freedom from coercion. Furthermore, I will also elaborate in the succeeding sections how spaces that are independent of politics also become a necessity in this tumultuous world of politics that is true not only during the time of the Greeks but even today.

²⁹ Ibid.

What is important to note then, is that for Arendt, the necessity of going back to the classics is to reclaim some truth that would be significantly relevant today especially in the field of political theorizing. The recovery is not just mere sentimentality but a manifestation of the dynamism of truth where the past constantly dialogues with the present.

B. Role of Violence

While it is clear to Arendt that violence has no place in politics even at a small degree, it is important to tackle proponents of violence at the political level namely Carl Schmitt and Keith Breen. Schmitt is explicit in stating that violence becomes inevitable in the friend-enemy relation so much so that war becomes inevitable.³⁰ Breen in his proposal would argue not for the elimination of violence but for its tempering with moderation and care.³¹ I will tackle both these contentions separately.

Carl Schmitt's notion of the political as already mentioned does not directly propose the essential role of violence. However, his proposal of the political as based on the friend-enemy relation or one that is based on antagonism assumes the inevitable possibility of violence specifically that of war. His proposition simply describes the typical contemporary political domain that is marred by various forms of conflict oftentimes bloody ones.³² Following Arendt, we have learned, however, that giving any small opening to the role of violence in the political sphere would be problematic for we do not know how to contain it once it has taken over the political sphere. Again clear examples of this include the grim picture that totalitarianism of the Nazi regime has brought to us. The moment we allow violence

³⁰ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

³¹ Keith Breen, "Violence and Power: a critique of Hannah Arendt on the political" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 33:3 (2007): 343 - 372.

³² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.

into the political sphere, we cannot imagine the catastrophe it can bring to us.

This is the primary reason that Chantal Mouffe's conception of radical democracy is developed by divesting Schmitt's notion of politics from any form of violence. She discussed this by showing the transformation of antagonism into an agonism that by grounding it on discourse rather than on violence. She still maintained the friend-enemy relation but translated it into a contestation of ideologies that is more like what Arendt is prescribing, that is, a constant contestation of different views but devoid of violence.³³ It is only in the lack of violence where free speech becomes possible.

An explicit recognition of violence is from Keith Breen who would propose not the elimination of violence but the tempering of it by way of moderation and care. Breen argues that violence is always tied to power and elimination of violence but not of power makes Arendt's proposition not viable. He argues, then, that instead of eliminating violence it must instead be tempered by moderation and care.³⁴

Again, I think we are left with a familiar reply from Arendt, that is, while any form of violence while it can be possibly tempered by moderation and care is potentially dangerous. We can never predict the capacity of violence's institutionalization and in the process create potentiality for totalitarianism. This is illustrated for example by the proposal to transfer the capacity for violence to the state. While it can deliver good results for a certain period, it can also serve as the basis for the destructive effect of totalitarianism to become legitimized. This should help emphasize that no amount of violence can be allowed at the

³³ Chantal Mouffe, *Return of the political* (New York: Verso, 1993).

³⁴ Breen, "Violence and Power: a critique of Hannah Arendt on the political".

political level and no amount of moderation and care can counter its dangerous effect.

C. Public and private divide

Arendt's proposal of the clear delineation of the political from the pre-political which was translated by contemporary authors as the public and private divide has gained the ire not only of those who accuse her of nostalgia but also of women who would claim that the personal is political.³⁵ For them, any claim to create clear delineation between the private and the public limits the participation of women. Arendt's response to this can come in two levels but this does not fully fill the gap of her proposal.

First, we have to be very clear that Arendt did not conceptualize the public and private divide. This is a very liberal conception that springs from more modern than ancient origins.³⁶ What Arendt proposes is the divide between the pre-political from political.³⁷ These are two different but related concepts. However, we have to be clear of the difference so as not to wrongfully accuse Arendt of any inappropriate proposal.

Second, it must be noted that while Arendt distinguishes the public from the private she further makes a distinction between privacy and intimacy. What she discourages is the role of intimacy in that it clouds the capacity for free speech and therefore the attainment of real democracy as shown in family and kinship ties. However, she highly encourages the role of privacy. Benhabib explicitly

³⁵ Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 211 - 220.

³⁶ The history of the public and private divide is extensively tackled by Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 386 - 398.

³⁷ Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 211 - 220.

invokes this reading of Arendt that is in fact friendly to the feminist movement.³⁸

Arendt's conception of privacy while delineated from the public or political can also be a space where one can recover from the turmoil of the political. She recognizes the reality that the political can also be exhausting thus the need to find shelter to recover and recharge. This is more similar to the home. Given this, Arendt is definitely supportive of policies and legislation that support the care of children and women as they belong to the household and as they should be nurtured for better participation as citizens.³⁹

However, the clear divide between the household and the public and the exclusion of those which the Greeks perceive as having the incapacity for free speech namely the slaves and barbarians creates a gap in Arendt's proposal. This can be understood as excluding people from free participation. This is a concern that Iris Marion Young expressed in her criticism of the proposal from Habermas that seems to exclude those incapable engaging in the argumentative deliberative model namely those incapable of argumentative speech.⁴⁰

Yet, it seems to me that Arendt is not pointing at the similar proposal that Habermas forwards. Instead, the reason why Arendt is excluding the slaves and barbarians in following the Greek model is simply to ensure free speech. This means the exclusion of those that can in fact hamper the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the politics of difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990). See also Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, translated by William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) and *Inclusion of the Other Studies in Political Theory*, edited by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo de Grieff (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998).

realization of the democratic ideals, that is, that each one has freedom and equal voice in the deliberative process.

D. Lack of institutional Support

Finally, many would argue against Arendtian prescription as not really feasible in this contemporary context especially that any discourse on democracy has to account also for structural and institutional mechanism that will make possible the fulfillment of the normative needs especially those that concern social justice.⁴¹ Without clear mechanisms, justice and corresponding rights might not really be fulfilled.

This criticism is definitely valid in the context that Arendt does not thoroughly prescribe a definitive norm or model. However, consistent with Arendtian proposition, any proposal of creating a structure that becomes fixed is a precursor to totalitarianism. What she is espousing, then, is a constant tension brought about by plurality of voices which is closer to what Chantal Mouffe is proposing that is to constantly maintain a normative model of democracy that is agonistic and contestation-laden for anything that is not contested has no room in the domain of politics.⁴²

This does not mean that a further proposal that might not be directly provided by Arendt is not possible. What Arendt provides us are general sketches of the politics which can be pursued and developed further. The underdeveloped aspects of her arguments do not preclude the possibility of institutional structures as long as it is consistent with the principle of what politics should be – free, equal, plural, active and agonistic.

⁴¹ Benhabib, *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*.

⁴² Mouffe, *Return of the political*.

IV. Conclusion

We have seen how Arendt's understanding of politics has laid the ground for a normative model of democracy that though not fully developed has provided foundational basis in arguing for a particular normative model. This is clearly elaborated by her understanding of politics that include the notion of violence, the clear divide of the public and the private, the active role of citizens and the move towards greater institutionalization that includes solidarity.

The role of violence should definitely be limited to the private or the pre-political. We have seen how this is possible in the delineation of the pre-political and the political or the contemporary version of the public and private. Thus dealing with violence is only possible through the delineation of proper domains.

It should be noted also that Arendt's notion of action should translate into the democratic ideals of active citizen participation. Without active participation from citizens, there will be a greater possibility for the various threats to the political to arise. These threats include among others the take-over of totalitarianism given that the inability of people to act or to alter the course of history makes them vulnerable to the dictates of totalizing tendencies.

Also, as a response to the lack of institutionalization, we can only point to the future where further development of Arendtian thought can be undertaken. Her project which involves the proper understanding of politics can only be interpreted as pointing us towards a further project of realizing this in our present times which does not preclude any institutional proposals.

Finally, we have seen how this normative claim is reflected in the analysis of the Philippine political context where political dynasty, possibilities of totalitarianism due to state authoritarianism and elitist culture can be countered by

a vibrant political culture characterized by respect and agonistic clash of varying opinions that manifest the presence of active citizenry.

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