

A Feminist Re-reading of Hannah Arendt's notion of Space of Appearances

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Abstract: Hannah Arendt's works faced criticisms from various feminist thinkers for an alleged gender blindness and conformity to masculine ideologies. However, there are still some thinkers like Nancy Hartsock who argue that Arendt's political thought is relevant to feminist discourse. This paper aims to provide a feminist re-reading of Arendt's distinction between the private and public realm by giving emphasis on the space of appearances as the quality that makes the public realm authentic. I argue that Arendt's notion of space of appearances, together with freedom and human plurality, can be heeded for the feminist discourse as well. To substantiate my claims, this paper shall be divided into three parts. The first is intended to focus on Arendt's notion of space of appearances as found in her prominent works. The next part focuses on various perspectives of feminist thinkers on Arendt. This is to situate her political thought within the feminist discourses. Lastly, the third section is intended to answer the main question I wish to address in this paper: What is the relevance of the Arendtian notion of space of appearances to the feminist discourse?

Keywords: Arendt, *The Human Condition*, space of appearances, feminist discourse

In feminist discourses, Arendt received mixed impressions of her political thought. Some feminists like Adrienne Rich and Mary O'Brien heavily criticized her rigid distinction between the private and public realms. They argued that Arendt's perspective on private and public realms still subscribes to patriarchal and masculine ideologies.¹ According to both thinkers, the private remains hierarchical and oppressive for women, while the public remains masculine and impossible for women to freely participate

¹ See Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York & London: W.W. Norton Company, 1979), 212 and Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1981), 99.

authentically. On the other hand, there are also feminist thinkers like Seyla Benhabib, Susan Bickford, Mary Dietz, Nancy Hartsock, and Bonnie Honig who believe that Arendt's political thought, especially her notion of human plurality in public space, can be iterated and helpful in recognizing the place of women in the public.² For instance, Hartsock, in her work *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, argued that Arendt's notion of power does not subscribe to masculine ideologies as it highlights collective action rather than violence.³ Bonnie Honig, on the other hand, highlighted the agonistic quality of Arendt's public realm and argued that this is relevant in the feminist discourse.⁴ The diverse and different interpretations of Arendt's works led to various questions surrounding Arendt and feminism: Is Arendt hostile about the problems of women? Is it truly possible to appropriate Arendt's philosophy for feminist theory?

In this paper, I would like to associate my agenda with various feminist thinkers like Seyla Benhabib, Susan Bickford, Mary Dietz, Nancy Hartsock, and Bonnie Honig in the hopes of proving the relevance of Arendt in the feminist discourse. My agenda is to advance the development of feminist interpretations in Arendt's philosophy. By so doing, I will revisit Arendt's distinction of the private and public realm, and the rise of the social to re-examine Arendt's political thought from a feminist perspective. The focus of this paper is on how the space of appearances as the authentic public realm can be utilized to promote a public space that does not subscribe to male ideologies. In so doing, I do not intend to impose and claim that Arendt herself is a feminist or that her entire philosophy is appropriate to feminism. I posit that Arendt's political thoughts on notions such as space of appearances, human plurality, and freedom are also vital notions for feminism. These notions of Arendt's political thought showcase her *phenomenology of oppression and liberation*⁵ that can help us illuminate the importance of women in the space of appearance.⁶

The first part of this paper is dedicated to an elaborate discussion of Arendt's notion of space of appearances. I will survey her prominent works

² For this discussion, see Bonnie Honig ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

³ Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 259.

⁴ Bonnie Honig, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity" in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 135–166.

⁵ I borrow this statement from Seyla Benhabib who argues that a deeper reading of Arendt's works would bear genuine affinity to the radical claims of contemporary feminism. Benhabib also cited Nancy Hartsock's emphasis on the Arendtian notion of power, community, and action to further this claim and Ann M. Lane's parallelism between Arendt's political thought to that of feminism. See Seyla Benhabib, "Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of Public Space," in *History of the Human Sciences* 6:2 (1993), 99–100.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

such as *The Human Condition*, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann Trial: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *Between Past and Future*, *On Violence*, *On Revolution*, *Men in Dark Times*, and *Thinking without a Banister* to strengthen the understanding on space of appearances. The second part shall situate Arendt in the feminist discourse by citing the ideas of various feminist thinkers who made commentaries on her works. The third part shall provide an adequate feminist interpretation of Arendt's political thought with particular focus on her notions of space of appearances, human plurality, private and public interests. Finally, this paper shall end by answering the main question posed in the abstract: What is the relevance of Arendt's notion of space of appearances to the feminist discourse?

Arendt's Space of Appearances

Arendt criticized traditional thinkers for their incapacity to make distinctions and how ideas, notions, and concepts were negligently used interchangeably and ambiguously. By contrast, Arendt's works are focused more on establishing and clarifying distinctions between notions that appear to be similar but are different to some extent.⁷ Some notable distinctions that Arendt posed are the following: *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, violence and power, and private, public, and social realm. Among these distinctions, she is highly criticized for her rigid distinction between private and public realms. Critiques argued that the distinction is modeled after the Greek *polis* and is no longer applicable in modern society.⁸ The distinction appears simple and evident, but Arendt provided a different categorization of the two. Arendt argued that an individual lives two different lives in two different realms. In the private, one is considered as an *animal laborans* who fulfills his or her basic necessities in life. While in the public, one is considered a *homo faber* who is given the freedom to build and fabricate the artificial world of the public space.⁹ According to Arendt, the two realms stand in contrast to one another, "the distinction between a private and public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities"¹⁰ Public realm, contrary to private realm, caters to the politics of people speaking and acting together. Arendt further argued

⁷ Margaret Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm" in *Hannah Arendt Critical Essays*, ed. by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 179.

⁸ Benhabib, "Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of Public Space," 98.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 139. See also Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," 22.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 28.

that the distinction of the two realms can be revisited as the modern age paved the way for the rise of another realm, the social.¹¹

The rise of the social realm blurs the distinction between the private and public. The social for Arendt, is also referred to as the emergence of society wherein "... the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices—from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual"¹² Amidst the rise of the social, Arendt contends that the distinction between the private and public realm must be observed because the two maintain a balance for the two separate, distinct lives of individuals. The private realm is seen by Arendt as a place to hide, fulfill necessities, and is the condition that makes one human.¹³ By contrast, Arendt highlights how politics is based on the premise that all individuals are of equal standing and that this politics is beyond the inherent hierarchy in the household or in the private realm. Thus, for Arendt, the public assimilates politics, equality, freedom, and human plurality, while she remains ambiguous whether these categories of action can also be present in the private.¹⁴

Some commentators find this insistence of Arendt to promote the distinction between private and public realm amidst the rise of the social realm problematic.¹⁵ Because of Arendt's distinction, one needs to temporarily abandon the private to be able to participate in the public. Abandoning the private would entail that one needs to pass on fulfilling their natural necessities to someone else.¹⁶ For instance, the ancient household assigned women, children, and slaves to remain in the private so that the father—the only citizen in the household, can participate in the public.¹⁷ Hence as modeled after the Greek *polis*, the private realm represents oppression, denial of freedom and equality.¹⁸

There are also some kinds of participation in politics that Arendt refused to qualify as political action. For instance, she cited that voting is a private act. It is an act done privately and anonymously, for Arendt, this is insufficient to be considered as political action or political participation.¹⁹

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mary Dietz, "Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics" in *Hannah Arendt Critical Essays*, 236; See Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Human beings are social and political beings that must exercise their speech and action by personally appearing in public.²⁰ The public realm is comparable and often interchangeably referred to as space of appearances. A public realm is not a simple place where people gather together. It is a spatial metaphor wherein space of appearances transpires. Margaret Canovan in her essay, “Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm” refers to this as the *authentic* public realm.²¹

Space of appearances is one of the most essential notions that Arendt introduced in *The Human Condition* and are present in her other works such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann Trial: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *Between Past and Future*, *On Violence*, *On Revolution*, *Responsibility and Judgment*, and in *Men in Dark Times*. It is further developed immanently in her collection of essays in *Thinking without Banister: Essays in Understanding*. Prominently discussed in *The Human Condition*, when talking about politics—participation, freedom, rights, and power—Arendt would always refer to human plurality as the basis of the human conditions in space of appearances. Human plurality for Arendt is the *sine qua non* for the space of appearances.²² Hence, any attempt to disregard human plurality is tantamount to the abolition of public realm per se. Arendt further discussed space of appearances as a space wherever human beings are together exercising their speech and action. It represents the various forms as to which public realm is organized. However, space of appearances as warned by Arendt is not a literal space but a potential or spatial metaphor that can exist but can also collapse when speech and action are no longer realized.²³ What Arendt meant by this is that space of appearances is not understood as something natural and automatically realized when there is a space. It is rather any place that is artificially built as long as speech and action of the plurality of people is exercised. Hence, if we call a space a space of appearances but it is rather controlled by the privileged few, by certain authorities—it still does not qualify as space of appearances in Arendtian sense. This is also the spatial metaphor in which power is manifested not through violence, strength, or force, but through speech and action.

For Arendt, power is not something measurable, unchangeable, or reliant on strength and force. Since strength is an individualistic natural quality that emerges in isolation, power for Arendt springs between human beings when they speak and act together.²⁴ For Arendt, power is boundless, limited only by the presence of others, since human power corresponds to

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ Canovan, “Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm,” 180.

²² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220.

²³ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

human plurality. This plurality entails dividing or sharing power amongst people, but it does not entail diminishing or decreasing it.²⁵ Meaning to say, power is not something that belongs absolutely to just one group of individuals, it is shared amongst everyone without decreasing each and every individual's power. Power as exhibited in space of appearances, emphasizes on the unique distinctness (that is different from othering)²⁶ of individuals to confirm themselves through speech and action. This was also elucidated by Arendt in *Responsibility and Judgment* when public realm is referred to as an offering to provide space of appearances for political speech and action.²⁷ This was further emanated in *Men in Dark Times*, when her discussion focused on various persons and how they were affected by the historicity of their own time. In this work, it is in the public realm, by providing a space of appearances, that people show in deeds and words who they truly are.²⁸ The work further developed in entailing that during dark times, there is no public realm to illuminate speech and action, there are people like Jews under Nazism, who were deliberately excluded from the public.²⁹

Space of appearances is also implicitly present in her other works. The predecessor of *The Human Condition*, *Origins of Totalitarianism* represents the emergence of totalitarian propaganda that is actually aimed at the abolishment of space of appearances. Totalitarian propaganda reduces human beings to mere cogs to the bureaucratic machines of the Nazis.³⁰ In this sense, I interpret that when totalitarianism transpires, a public space is no longer a space of appearances. A totalitarian society cannot qualify as a public realm in the definition of Arendt as they do not provide a space of appearances where people can exercise their freedom and be active participants.³¹ In a totalitarian regime, people are reduced to mere masses, who simply vote and follow so-called leaders, supposedly representing them.³² In return, people do not appear and participate as political beings endowed with speech and action. Totalitarianism tramples on space of appearances, it transforms the public space into empty spaces devoid of appearances. A totalitarian public space does not value the plurality of individuals, their power, and capabilities. Hence, in Arendt's report on Adolf Eichmann, she evaluates that Eichmann evidently did not portray any

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken books, 2003), 8.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1968), viii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1966), 308–309.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 311–312.

³² *Ibid.*

remorse and conscience with his involvement in Nazism.³³ Because of his apparent disregard of his own agency and distinctness from others, he allowed himself to be utilized for the extermination of the Jews. In Arendt's terms, Eichmann's notable role in Nazism cannot be classified as a political action. *Between Past and Future*, *On Violence*, and *On Revolution* provided a more contextualized interpretation on space of appearances that is grounded on the notions of freedom and equality.³⁴ Arendt likened the space of appearances to the Greek *polis* where people act and where freedom can appear.³⁵ In some of Arendt's essays like "Freedom to be Free," Arendt's discussion is much more grounded in emphasizing the role of space of appearances in ensuring that freedom persists as the *raison d'être* of politics.³⁶ Arendt further elaborated on this idea in her lecture, "Freedom and Politics, a Lecture." For Arendt, freedom entails action, freedom to participate and to start new beginnings amongst other human beings.³⁷ This makes human beings different from other animal life. She highlights the importance of freedom and participation in establishing the artificial world of politics. Arendt wrote:

... no life would develop out of inorganic processes, and that no man would emerge out of the evolution of animal life. The decisive difference between the "infinite improbabilities" on which the reality of our earthly life rests and the miraculous character inherent in those events which establish historical reality is that, in the realm of human affairs, we know the authors of "miracles." It is men who perform them—men who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own.³⁸

It is seemingly obvious that space of appearances is an unproblematic notion that would promote human plurality, equality, and freedom. However, Arendt's distinction between private and public realm and the rise

³³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1964), 112.

³⁴ For this discussion, see Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1965), and Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970).

³⁵ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 154.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, "The Freedom to be Free: The Conditions and Meaning of Revolutions," in *Thinking without Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, 368-386 (New York: Schocken book, 2018), 373.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, "Freedom and Politics, a lecture" in *Ibid.*, 236.

³⁸ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 171.

of the social realm are important considerations. Because of Arendt's distinction of the realms, space of appearances is much more complex than a simple space that promotes plurality, equality, and freedom. When we consider her distinction, it will entail mainly two things: (1) the public cannot include all human beings as some need to be left behind in private to fulfill labor, and (2) there are certain private matters that simply cannot be brought out to the public. The first problem in Arendt's distinction seems to pose a paradox in her promotion of human plurality and freedom for it systematically subordinates a portion of the human race and refused admittance to some.³⁹ The second point, on the other hand, believes that private matters have no place in the public realm. Arendt firmly advocates that the public realm is only concerned about politics and the welfare of its people beyond their identities and private agendas.⁴⁰ In her essay "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel," Arendt utilized the jury as an analogy to promulgate this stance. A jury is called to appear in court to deliberate on the verdict of a case presented to them based on evidence and for the benefit of the public. Arendt mentioned that a jury possesses both private and public interests, yet they do not reach a verdict based on their personal interests; instead, their judgment is guided solely by what they consider beneficial to the public.⁴¹ This is the analogy utilized by Arendt to emphasize the difference between private and public interests and why there are concerns and issues that simply cannot be politicized. The difference between private and public interests is one of the major contentions of Arendt as to why she rigidly promotes the separation of private and public realms. Additionally, rights for Arendt can also be understood privately and publicly. For Arendt, the basic inalienable rights of an individual as a human person are considered private rights. While public rights are additional rights that individuals enjoy when they actively participate in the public, not for their own personal agenda but for the welfare of the general public.⁴²

Arendt focuses her argumentation more on what a public space ought to be to ensure that the public will be an end in itself. Arendt in turn, criticizes those people who participate simply for their personal gains and interests. However, Arendt did not provide any emphasis as to how we can arrive at this public space. She did not talk about the nuances of a public space that only caters to the privileged few. A question that reverberates in reading Arendt is how can human plurality flourish in a public space that is designed

³⁹ Dietz, "Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics," 239.

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel," in *Thinking without Banister*, 507.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 506.

to be enjoined only by some? This question resonates with Judith Butler's⁴³ critique in *The Force of Nonviolence*. Butler criticizes how we perceive society as if individuals are atoms that are abstracted from their material conditions and from their relations with other people.⁴⁴ Butler argues that our assumption of the social form of individuals is the masculine man. As Butler writes, "He sprang, lucky guy, from the imaginations of liberal theorists as a full adult, without relations, but equipped with anger and desire, sometimes capable of a happiness or self-sufficiency that depended on a natural world preemptively void of other people."⁴⁵ This is perhaps, one of the gaps in Arendt's contention of the space of appearances. Albeit the space of appearances is promising to combat totalitarianism and ensure human plurality, it is still limited by questioning how can we arrive at this public space for those people who do not fit into the standards of whom public space is for. Hence, it is only crucial to reread what Arendt meant by distinguishing the private interests from public rights. Indeed, because of the inequalities that persist among human beings, is it not only natural that the private interests of those who are marginalized or initially excluded in the public to be push forth in the public space?

With these in mind, Arendt is a challenging thinker for feminism. Since sex and gender issues are typically concerned with the bodies of women and their domestic welfare, some prominent feminist thinkers believe that this stance of Arendt and what she qualifies as private concerns as separated from public concerns is problematic. Moreover, her works face feminist criticisms, as some called her work silent, ignorant, and blatantly supports women subordination in the private and women's exclusion in the public.⁴⁶ Even in situations wherein women are clearly involved in the public like during the French Revolution,⁴⁷ Arendt deliberately did not include the issues related to women and their roles in both private and public in her philosophic discussions. This leads to the following questions: is Arendt still relevant to feminism? How can we defend her notion of space of appearances? To answer these questions, it is necessary to first situate Arendt in relation to the feminist question.

⁴³ Judith Butler's preferred pronouns are they/them. See also Jules Gleeson, "Judith Butler: The Backlash Against 'Gender Ideology' Must Stop," in *The Guardian* (7 September 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/07/judith-butler-interview-gender?CMP=share_btn_url>.

⁴⁴ Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), chapter 1, EPUB.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For this discussion see, Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*.

⁴⁷ For this discussion, see Joan B. Landes, "Novus Ordo Saeclorum: Gender and Public Space in Arendt's Revolutionary France," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 195–220.

Situating Arendt within Feminist Discourse

Adrienne Rich expected Arendt, as a woman, to include feminist discussion in her works.⁴⁸ To her dismay, Arendt is hardly concerned with feminism. However, I argue that this should not automatically dismiss the possibility of feminist interpretations and appropriations of her works. Arendt is known for her refusal to associate herself or her works to feminism and that she did not also specifically address women's concerns in her works.⁴⁹ This refusal is not a direct proof that she is, as other feminists would call her, a woman conforming to masculine ideologies.⁵⁰ Elisabeth Young Bruehl in her work *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* tried to defend, contextualize, and reinterpret the works of Arendt based on her life and experiences.⁵¹ Bruehl argues that the works of Arendt can be further developed and understood once we compare it to her personal experiences. Having this in consideration, we can also understand Arendt's political thought in her interviews as well. For instance, in Arendt's 1964 interview with Gunter Gaus, Gaus started the interview by stating that Arendt was the first woman philosopher to ever be invited to the series of interviews he conducted. Arendt protested this idea by saying that she did not belong to the circle of philosophers and associated her work more with political theory.⁵² She then made a sweeping contention against the other statement of Gaus that philosophy is a masculine occupation by saying that "it does not have to remain a masculine occupation! It is entirely possible that a woman will one day be a philosopher"⁵³ This stance alone can be understood from a feminist standpoint. Her political thought should not be easily dismissed as conformist or ignorant, contrary to the perspectives of some feminists like Rich.

Various thinkers interpret Arendt's works by claiming that Arendt is insisting to block private identities with its proliferation in the public. For some thinkers like Rich, Arendt's political thought recognizes that private

⁴⁸ For this discussion see, Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ See Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, 212; O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 99.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Young Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁵² Gunter Gaus conducted a series of interview wherein he invited philosophers of his time. Arendt is the first woman philosopher to be interviewed by Gaus. Here, Arendt wanted to distance herself from philosophy. She contends that her works reverberates more on political theory rather than the philosophic tradition. Arendt, albeit does not want to consider herself a philosopher, still argued that it is not because she thinks philosophy is a masculine occupation or that women are incapable of becoming a philosopher. See Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Gunter Gaus," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken books, 1994), 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

identities—like sex or gender identities—have no space in the public.⁵⁴ For Bonnie Honig however, rather than interpreting this as discriminatory or disillusioned, this could be promising as it could pave the way for new identities to manifest in the public.⁵⁵ New identities that would showcase individuals' capabilities, participation, and contribution rather than boxing them in their private identities.⁵⁶ This is not to say that Arendt is right in saying that private identities have no place in public, but rather, this is to argue that individuals should appear in public more than their private identities. For example, a woman can appear in public not solely on the basis of her sex or gender, but on the basis of her capabilities. The problem with Rich's criticism of Arendt is that she expected the feminist question of the writings of Arendt simply on the account of her so-called identity as a woman.⁵⁷ For Rich, Arendt has a moral responsibility to pose the "woman question" or to include feminism in her works simply because she is a woman.⁵⁸ This disregards other identities of Arendt that may have influenced her writings, such as her German Philosophic tradition. Hence, for this paper, I do not force the feminist question or the woman question on the reading of Arendt. I am doing the opposite: I attempt to locate how some of Arendt's notions can fit into feminist discourses. Rethinking Arendt's work is not tantamount to proving that Arendt insinuates feminism in her works. This effort is an attempt to iterate her political thought to map some indirect allusions to feminism. This will be done in the next section of this paper wherein I simultaneously re-establish the Arendtian space of appearances while also exposing its limitation.

⁵⁴ As discussed by Ann M. Lane, Adrienne Rich highly criticized Arendt for her apparent prioritization of the public identities and political action. This entails that Arendt provides a male-centered idea of the public as the women who fulfil their labor and who remain in the private were not recognized. Arendt also ignored notable women activists like Olive Schreiner, Emma Goldman, and Jane Addams in her works. For this discussion, see Ann M. Lane, "The Feminism of Hannah Arendt," in *Democracy* 3:3 (1983), 109, <https://democracyjournalarchive.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/lane_the-feminism-of-hannah-arendt-democracy-3-2_-may-1983.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Honig, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," 155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ This problem was highlighted by Honig by arguing that we should accept that Arendt's works are not really feminist works just because it was written by a woman. Through this, we can instead refocus our attention to how we can appropriate the political thought of Arendt to feminism. Instead of forcing the feminist question in her writings, we can focus on appropriating Arendt to the feminist discourse.

⁵⁸ Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 3.

Re-establishing the Arendtian Space of Appearances

Arendt's rigid distinction between private and public realms allegedly ignores the intersectionality between private affairs and public affairs. With Arendt's categorization, it ignores the reality that there are issues and concerns that intersect between the two realms. However, in this section, I will present my critique and, at the same time, redeem the philosophy of Arendt to tease out what feminists can learn from her political thought. Arendt was silent, ignorant, and accused of deliberately shutting off women in her works.⁵⁹ Joan B. Landes mentioned in her essay, "*Novus Ordo Saeclorum: Gender and Public Space in Arendt's Revolutionary France*" that Arendt was able to argue for the importance of the French revolution in history but ignore the involvement of women in such revolution.⁶⁰ As previously mentioned, her heavy grounding on the Greek *polis* is seen by various thinkers as problematic. The problem with the distinctions between private and public realms lies in the strict compartmentalization of life's activities, despite the fact that certain struggles—such as those experienced by women—intersect both the private and public spheres. According to some commentators of Arendt, women are treated as a univocal body in the private realm.⁶¹ There is this homogenizing assumption that sex identities, just like being a woman, are private forms within formed identities. In the public, on the other hand, it gives hope to the possibility of expressing oneself in their multiplicity or plurality. This entails that if one wants to participate in the public, one must temporarily abandon his or her identity in the private.⁶² This means that the identity of women is reduced to private and limited to bodily function, biological matters, and their roles. It led feminist thinkers to criticize Arendt as someone who reduces private realm to a patriarchal masculine realm and how the public realm is deemed to only cater to the privileged men.⁶³ The distinction between private and public realms gives justification as to why women are treated as the second sex and why sex and gender roles persist. This connotes how the private realm disallows a lot of people, especially women, from being political. On the other hand, there are various thinkers who would argue that this reading of *The Human Condition* can be reevaluated.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Landes, "*Novus Ordo Saeclorum: Gender and Public Space in Arendt's Revolutionary France*," 195.

⁶¹ Honig, "*Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity*," 139.

⁶² Dietz, "*Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics*," 239.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

For some, Arendt did not altogether claim that the Greek polis, exactly as it is, is the politics that is to be promoted. For Dietz and Canovan, *The Human Condition* needed to be read with more of an open mind and with a deeper understanding. According to Dietz, we should not easily dismiss Arendt's works as irrelevant or in conformity with patriarchal and masculine ideologies.⁶⁴ She cited some evident considerations, particularly how Arendt defines notions like power and space of appearances. Power, as often attributed to masculinity, can potentially lead to violence.⁶⁵ However, the notion of power in the Arendtian sense is devoid of this attribute.⁶⁶ For Arendt, power is not exercised through violence but is instead expressed through speech and action, with people who collectively act together or in concert.⁶⁷ Albeit, Arendt utilized the Aristotelian notion of the *polis*, this does not entail that Arendt conservatively conforms to this philosophic tradition. She would refer to this tradition as a foundation of her political thought, but she would still clarify and iterate most of its claims. Her discussion about the *animal laborans* is an acknowledgement of the reality during Hellenic period,⁶⁸ but this does not equate to what she wants to preserve in her promotion of the private realm. In the same work, Arendt acknowledges how women and slaves were treated as private property, hidden in the private realm.⁶⁹ Arendt also clarifies that the private and public realms are much more complex than the simplified idea that private property is the condition to allow people to participate in the public.⁷⁰ She later declared that "... the modern age emancipated the working classes and the women at nearly the same historical moment must certainly be counted among the characteristics of an age which no longer believes that bodily functions and material concerns should be hidden"⁷¹ Hence, I agree with Dietz and Canovan in their arguments that *The Human Condition* can be reevaluated to further the discourses on feminism. Moreover, to avoid misreading Arendt's position, it is best to supplement her ideas by also referring to her other works, interviews, and essays that were able to clarify the tone of her discussion in her previous

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶⁵ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 70.

⁶⁶ Arendt gave emphasis on power as act in concert because she criticized how power is often exercised through violence. For this discussion, see Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 35–37.

⁶⁷ Patricia Owen, *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

⁶⁸ Dietz, "Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics," 231.

⁶⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

works. Especially since *The Human Condition*, as Arendt herself declared, is an incomplete work.⁷²

Arendt further promotes the public realm as a space wherein action and freedom can genuinely transpire. In her words:

It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly ... No man, moreover, can live in it all the time. To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all ... and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality ... The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm ... Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed— but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.⁷³

To engage in the space of appearances, every individual must be recognized as a free human being distinct from each other. Distinctness is very important because it recognizes the value of every individual for their own sake. In the space of appearances, speech and action must be continuously practiced. The space of appearances is a place run through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.⁷⁴ As previously mentioned, space of appearances does not pose a literal or specific space where people come together, it is a metaphorical representation of how the

⁷² Hannah Arendt, "Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt," in *Thinking without a Banister*, 447.

⁷³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198–199.

⁷⁴ Arendt, *On Violence*, 56.

identities and participations can be politicized or through interaction in the public space.⁷⁵

To some extent, this is similar to John Rawls' veil of ignorance. The veil of ignorance in Rawls posits that in order for justice to prevail, we must nullify certain personal circumstances that human beings may exploit to push forth their personal agendas.⁷⁶ Rawls further notes in *A Theory of Justice* that in order for this to happen, "assume the parties are situated behind the veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations."⁷⁷ This is further emphasized by Martha Nussbaum in *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, and Species Membership*. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum argues that the veil of ignorance is "a commitment to impartiality as a good in itself ... The parties want to pursue their own advantage; but the Veil ensures that they do so only on terms that are fair to all."⁷⁸ What Arendt wanted to do in the space of appearances resonate with some aspects of Rawls' veil of ignorance. Albeit Arendt did not altogether claim that the personal identities and private matters of individuals must be behind the veil of ignorance, it is similar in a sense that both thinkers imagine that a fair public space caters to the benefit of the common good, more than the personal interests. Both thinkers do not entail that the individual identities and private interests would be disregarded in the public. But rather, the relationality with the other should always be considered. This can emerge when we ensure that the public is an end in itself and not a means solely for private interests.

Again, space of appearances is not a univocal single space, but it is a spatial metaphor that should acknowledge multiple sites for multiple identities and expressions. The importance of the space of appearances is not about the number of individuals who come together in the same space. It is about the plurality of perspectives in people who are gathered together.⁷⁹ Human plurality in the Arendtian sense, equally values every human person for their distinctness and capacity, not reducing them to mere numbers who do not think for themselves.⁸⁰ The public, although consisting of distinct

⁷⁵ Patricia Owens, "Hannah Arendt, Violence, and the Inescapable Fact of Humanity" in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, ed. by Anthony F. Lang, Jr and John Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 56.

⁷⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 136.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 136–137.

⁷⁸ Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, and Species Membership* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 57.

⁷⁹ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public" in *Hannah Arendt Critical Essays*, 267.

⁸⁰ Rosalyn Diprose and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *Arendt, Natality, and Biopolitics: Toward Democratic Plurality and Reproductive Justice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 63.

individuals, must go beyond their personal private interests and must also exercise their public interests.⁸¹ This very condition that Arendt did not elaborate on can also be read as the missing prong in her notion of space of appearances. The problem lies in what can qualify as private interests and what can be accounted for as public interests that call for public concerns. Private interest is defined by Arendt as individualistic and feminist movements cannot be classified as such. Simply discounting feminist movements as individualistic just because they promote reproductive rights and the alleviation of the oppressive situations in the private is an oversimplification of a complex problem. The concern of Arendt that the identity of being a woman cannot be brought out to public concern⁸² is perhaps a misnomer that feminist concerns automatically omit solely private interest and not of a public one. She also mentioned that politics should be concerned with public rights, one that is not just of an individual, but what is common to others. Commentators of Arendt failed to realize that Arendt also discussed this in her work when she discussed the rise of the social in the modern age.

The possibility of describing the profound difference between the modern and the ancient understanding of politics in terms of a clear-cut opposition ends here. In the modern world, the social and the political realms are much less distinct. That politics is nothing but a function of society, that action, speech, and thought are primarily superstructures upon social interest ... This functionalization makes it impossible to perceive any serious gulf between the two realms; and this is not a matter of a theory or an ideology, since with the rise of society, that is, the rise of the "household" (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a collective concern. In the modern world, the two realms indeed constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself.⁸³

Parallel to the collective concern that Arendt was referring to, the concerns of feminists, of women insisting on participating in the public, do not only convey their private personal interest but represent that of the common public. The feminist concerns do not aim to redirect the attention of the public to their personal private interest; the aim is to be included and be

⁸¹ See Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel."

⁸² Arendt's concerns with politicization of identity are elucidated in her correspondence and exchange of letters with Gershom Scholem. The exchange was initiated in response to Arendt's controversial take on the Eichmann trial. Scholem is adamant in enforcing Arendt's Jewishness in her writings while Arendt contested that her Jewishness is a private matter. See Marie Luise Knott ed., *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem* trans. by Anthony David (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁸³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33.

recognized much more than their physical body. This alone could fit into the idea of Arendt that public is not solely concerned with the individual's interest but that of a more world-centric and public interest.⁸⁴ The interest of feminism is to establish the very condition that will allow them to be *equalized*⁸⁵ among others.

Arendt may not explicitly mention feminist concerns, but her political thought exacerbates the struggle for rights, speech and action, political identities, and opinions which are all indirectly applicable to feminist concerns. The problem with Arendt's apparent disregard to the feminist concern in the public poses an assumption that people who appear in the space of appearance are already free, who can exercise their power, speak, and act together. But what about in instances, like in the case of some women, wherein they were not freed from the conditions of their private lives? What if the basic necessities are the very conditions that prohibit them from participating in the public and to be political? What about in instances wherein the private needed emancipation that is only possible through politics in public? The problem with Arendt is that she discussed public realm, the space of appearances, without discussing the necessary conditions of the people who will participate in the public.

The proposal of space of appearances and freedom are promising but only if we will include the very condition of the people to appear and to be free. Human plurality is much more than the diverse number of people gathered together. Human plurality should also acknowledge the plurality of struggles of individuals in various realms. The reading on Arendt as someone who easily dismisses the identity of individuals as private interest needs to be reevaluated. Susan Bickford, in her essay "In the Presence of Others: Arendt and Anzaldua on the Paradox of Public Appearance," highlighted the importance of identity as a public phenomenon in the paradox of the public space.⁸⁶ For Bickford, there is a paradox in the identity and space of appearances in such a way that there is a constant agonism between subjectivity and intersubjectivity.⁸⁷ The feminist struggle to demand a space in the public and to participate in the space of appearances does not solely focus on how one can freely express themselves but rather focuses also as to

⁸⁴ Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," 196.

⁸⁵ When Arendt affirms that equality only existing in the public, she does not entail that injustices can legitimately persist in the private. What she meant by equality as a condition of the public or what she refers to as *equalized* is that people artificially built a community wherein people are equal regardless of their natural differences and private identities. That equality is something that is artificially built and created in the public. See Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel."

⁸⁶ Susan Bickford, "In the Presence of Others: Arendt and Anzaldua on the Paradox of Public Appearance," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 314.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

how one can appear together with other people. This becomes a paradox as the space of appearances do not only cater to being with each other but also portrays a space wherein people struggle against one another. Appearing in the space of appearances makes oneself subjected not only to freedom but also to judgment.⁸⁸ Judgment in this sense, emphasizing on the agonistic quality of the public, is not altogether pessimistic. Judgment together with opinion highlights that appearing in the public is not only about the individual's oneself but also about perceiving other people as other appearing individuals.

Space of appearances does not endow one's individual recognition to appear alongside other people just for their personal interest. One is appearing alongside other people to collectively be political to achieve politics as an end in itself.⁸⁹ Again, space of appearances is a place wherein people speak and act in concert. Where plurality of individuals is recognized and every individual freely shows themselves to participate in public. However, this trait of space of appearances only makes sense if it is grounded on people who already enjoy their private rights, the basic rights that they need to have. Arendt may distinguish the private from public realm, but she did not altogether consider the two to be antagonistic of one another. On the contrary, the two actually complement one another.⁹⁰ As Arendt puts it, "... privacy, was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one's own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human."⁹¹

This is why the *vita activa*, the activities of life, is not solely focused on the activity of action but it exists in a non-hierarchical order alongside labor and work that may be deemed to be nonpolitical. This is further elaborated by Arendt in her essay, "Labor, Work, Action" that *vita activa* may be seen as opposite to *vita contemplativa* but they are conditions that emanate from each other.⁹² Parallel to this, private and public realms needed to be given equal importance. As much as it is our right to participate in the public, it is also our right to resort back to private life.⁹³ The two realms, although they are different, are still related and constantly affect one another. Distinguishing them need not lead to isolating the realms rigidly as if they do not influence one another. By acknowledging this, one can cater to a space of appearances that people can gather in without falling into the mistake of

⁸⁸ See Arendt, *On Revolution*, 221.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel," 510.

⁹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 64.

⁹² Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action" in *Thinking without a Banister*, 291.

⁹³ Arendt, "Public Rights and Private Interests: A Response to Charles Frankel," 511.

altogether abandoning the private. The agenda of feminists is not to use the public space or politics to solely gain something for themselves. The agenda is to push oneself in order to be part of the public. So that their opinions are recognized as a viable part of the public and not be reduced as mere bickering that is only welcome in the social and private. Take for example, women's rights to suffrage movement.⁹⁴ While the struggle may be framed as a fight for private rights (in terms of Arendt), its ultimate goal is not personal gain, but the political and public.

Conclusion

Feminist concerns can qualify as political because they represent cultural and collective experience. In response to Arendt's categorization of private and public realms, one cannot simply abandon one's private life. As Arendt puts it, both are needed for the growth of individuals. Feminist concerns are not simply individualistic and isolated concerns. These are things that concern the world and should have been brought to the light of the public to ensure that human dignity and human plurality will be observed by all people, both in the private and public realm.

The world-centered approach of the public needs reevaluation. In some instances, people who participate in public life have the tendency to imitate a world that only caters to the privileged few. It may also lead to the ignorance of the welfare of everyone else, for a crooked view of how the world ought to be. Arendt made a sound point that politics should be an end in itself, that it should be world-centered and not of private interests. However, my contention, alongside various feminist thinkers, is how do people, like women, reach this when the conditions of some women are not the same with most people who appear in the public. The public space that Arendt is promoting only makes sense if it will cater to the will of everyone, especially the marginalized and not just the privileged few, not just the rich, white, and male. This is the reason why it is necessary to first understand how we can establish a public space where actual people, from various backgrounds, will appear. A space where women will not be shunned off and their concerns will not be easily dismissed as private matters. Feminist concerns qualify as public interest as it involves the welfare of women in the world, as they aim to establish a public that includes the multiplicity of their identities.

This paper is both a critique against Arendt's rigid distinction on private and public realm and at the same time, an iteration of her notion of

⁹⁴ For this discussion, see Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2009).

space of appearances and freedom from a feminist perspective as an attempt to redeem the relevance of her political thought to emerging issues related to feminism. Perhaps, Arendt's political thought can be understood not as abandonment or dismissal of feminist concerns, but only as a missing link that can still fit into the goal of feminism. After all, feminism and some of Arendt's political thought share the same goal—to arrive at an authentic public realm wherein people can participate and appear with one another, to achieve a common political goal.

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