

## ARENİT'İN KAMUSAL ALANINDA KADININ DURUMU

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### Özet

Cinsler arası eşitsizlik ve hiyerarşi ile ilgilenen feminist bilim insanları genellikle temel kuramları ve tanınmış siyaset bilimcilerin eserlerini sorgularlar. Bu durum çeşitli tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Bu tartışmalardan birisi de çok sayıda yazarın, özellikle de feminist yazarların ilgisini çeken siyaset düşünürü Hannah Arendt'in değerlendirilmesinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, insanlık Durumu'nun tanınmış yazarı Arendt'in kadın konusuna bakış açısını ve onun çalışmalarında tanımladığı kendi kamusal alanında kadının durumunu incelemekten kaçınmasını çeşitli siyaset bilimcilerin bakış açısıyla araştırarak irdelemektir. Bu çalışmada, Arendt'in görüşlerini 'kadının durumu' açısından değerlendiren eleştirmenler feminist bakış açısı ile araştırılmış ve incelenmiştir. Çalışma, onun kamusal alana olan vurgusunu ve onun katı kamusal ve özel alan ayrımını göz önünde bulundurarak çeşitli değerlendirmelerin bir analizini yapmaktadır. Araştırmanın sonucu olarak, Hannah Arendt'in, siyaset bilimine olan önemli katkılarına rağmen, kendi görüşleri çerçevesinde şekillendirdiği kamusal alandan kadını dışladığı saptanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hannah Arendt, Kadın, Feminizm, Kamusal Alan

## WOMAN CONDITION IN ARENDTIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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### Abstract

Feminist scholars involved in understanding gender inequality and gender hierarchy often question major theories and the work of the main political scientists. This results in controversial debates, one of which stems from the evaluation of the well-known political thinker, Hannah Arendt who captured the interest of many writers, particularly the feminists. In this study, critics who assess the point of view of Arendt with regards 'the condition of woman' are researched and investigated within a feminist perspective. An analysis of a wide range of evaluations is carried out in the study by considering her emphasis on public sphere and her robust distinction between the private and public realms. Moreover, the absence of women in the writings of the renowned woman political philosopher, Hannah Arendt is analyzed and underlined in this research. The eminent writer of "Human Condition" and her avoidance to touch upon the woman condition are displayed in the study aiming at investigating the Arendtian public sphere through the lenses of a variety of political thinkers.

**Key Words:** Hannah Arendt, Woman, Feminism, Public Sphere

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of political theory is becoming increasingly problematic. Universalizing 'man' or 'mankind' has been questioned through a politics of interpretation. All the foundational texts, liberal or Marxist are all reread. The political theorists are concerned that the webs of power are still generated in various ways. Language gains importance in this context. There have been many re-readings in order to stress the treatment of 'women' in political discourse. Their assumption is a category of oppression and they focus on political action and change. In most studies 'man' or 'mankind' is shown not only to marginalize and lower women in theory and reality but also to presuppose a Eurocentric superiority. In this study, within a feminist perspective, the main concern is the omission of women from the public sphere of Hannah Arendt, which regularly underlines male supremacy.

In feminist critiques of the classical political theory, the human subject is identified as a man and more specifically as a 'public man'. There is a private world behind this public man and woman is sent to this private realm through omission, customs and nature. Most of the textual studies have impressively been the proof. The aim of this study is to explore the exclusion of women from the public sphere drawn by Hannah Arendt. Young describes this omission of women in the Arendtian public sphere by stating:

'Arendt herself was certainly aware of the developing feminist movement, but she did not respond to it publicly. She did not think of herself as a feminist and she was deeply skeptical of any single-issue political movement, especially one that brought into question the distinction she drew between the private and the public' (Young, 1997, 307).

In the private world there is sexuality, domestic labor, reproduction and child care. This is the realm of non-political practices and structures such as the family. The private is protected and regulated. The residents of the private such as women, children and servants, do not appear in the public sphere. However, man has a role in public affairs of the public sphere to which they belong.

Feminist theory has critically spotted 'man' or the abstract individual since 'he' frequently appears in the texts of classical political theory and in contemporary political discourse. Feminist critiques identified 'man' as patriarchalist, dominatory, competitive and violent in their re-readings.

This attitude of 'man' represents a male world or masculine values or men's interests. Feminists claim that traditional political theory is 'men's theory', traditional history is 'men's history' and traditional politics is 'men's politics'. 'Public man' as he appears in political theory is both male, a masculine body and is 'inherently male'.

What effect has the study of gender had on political science then? Political science has been the most resistant to feminist analysis compared to other branches of the social sciences. Feminism, or gender studies, is among the most significant intellectual movements of the late twentieth century, after the emergence of feminist movements in the 1960's. Compared to sociology, anthropology and psychology, political science has been quite slow in the area of gender studies. In this study, the work of the famous political scientist, Hannah Arendt, will be examined as an example of this reluctance by presenting the arguments of the writers who criticize Arendt, her treatment of the distinction between the public and private realms and the inferior situation of women in those Arendtian realms. Phillip Hansen, for instance, who states that the visible public-private split always and already is structured by and as a relation of domination, adds:

'Put more bluntly still, oppression –of women, of nature, indeed of men themselves – cannot be ended just by 'elevating' women to the status of citizens and property-owners within the dominant public-private relationship. And it is here that the historical importance of feminism comes into play. Because of its particular sensitivity to the hidden public-private split, feminism can point beyond prevailing conceptions and practices of citizenship to new forms of solidarity and community, which are grounded in the interrelationship of the individual to collective life, or personal political life, instead of their separation and opposition. Arendt falls into the patriarchal trap of obscuring the nature of the domestic sphere' (Hansen, 1993, 86-87).

In political theory, feminist theorists have helped to generate new challenges and well-established ways of understanding topics such as justice and morality. Some have proposed that standards of justice be applied to the private realm and the family as well as the public realm of state and civil society. Others have suggested new theories of morality based on feminist ethics. However, the work of political scientists who study gender is not well represented in the leading journals.

There are many modest efforts to re-read major authors and their works from a gendered perspective. In this study, the feminist readings of the

work of Hannah Arendt will be explored. In recent years, the work of Hannah Arendt has generated great interest within the feminist theory. For example, Carole Pateman attacks on the male supremacy in the texts by arguing that the bourgeois idea of a social contract, which was designed to secure civil rights for men, has historically and logically presupposed a sexual contract, which secures men's sex-right, or political right to women's bodies (Pateman, 1988, 41). Arendt, who wrote about oppression, subordination and violence, was not interested in gender issues and this is the reason why she has been severely criticized by many feminist writers.

Hannah Arendt is widely recognized as a brilliant political thinker of the twentieth century. She is known to create the controversial distinctions between work and labor besides force, power and violence. Her experiences as a German Jewish woman in the age of totalitarianism enabled her to search an original political philosophy. As an immigrant in Paris with no citizenship and eventually as an American citizen in the United States, her political theses were about the critique of nationalism, the paradoxes of the rights of man and the capacity of human beings to create a common space of political power.

The issues such as identity, ethnicity and racism, have been the area of interest of political and feminist theory for the last two decades. These issues, frequently studied by Arendt, have been theoretically reconsidered. Since the 60's, this new theoretical work has been developing in relation to feminism, a topic which was not an appealing domain for Arendt at all. She believed strongly that the main concerns of feminism, gender identity and sexuality were politically inappropriate. Therefore, it is possible to see a kind of impatience of Arendt with feminism. Her reason was the possibility of such issues to confuse the public sphere which was one of her major interest.

Feminist theory has been shaped by new multi-cultural and postcolonial context. It tends to focus on plural characteristics of power. Moreover, it emphasizes how sex-gender identities are carved by race, class, and other differences such as nationality and ethnicity and how those differences are feminized or sexualized. The political thought of Arendt originates from the German Existenz philosophy and her identity as a German Jewish woman. However, as a female philosopher, she dismissed feminism which is now quite different compared to the 1970's.

## 2. NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ARENDT'S ADMIRATION OF *POLIS* ON HER PUBLIC SPHERE

*The Human Condition*, the definitive expression of Arendt's political philosophy shows Arendt as the political philosopher of nostalgia, an anti modernist lover of Greek polis. It is argued that she sees modernity as the initiator of the decline of the 'public sphere' of politics. Her concepts of action, judgment and the public sphere contain perception for democratic politics but the question is the content of the gain from Arendt.

Arendt sought to bring back the resources offered first by Greeks, who produced classical political theory. She appears to have attacked people who forgot the heritage offered by the past. Through a recovery of the resources offered by the history of political thought, she attempted to reanimate the contemporary understandings of the possibilities of political life and the impoverishment that an apolitical life would mean. Çelik remarks Arendt's concentration on the polis of the ancient Greece:

'Arendt's appeal to ancient Greek politics should not be considered as an inconsistency in her thought, but rather should be regarded as a necessary effort to point out those significant aspects of ancient Greeks' political life that could illuminate the present and provide a source of inspiration for the future. In this sense, Arendt's appeal to the polis is an activity of critical appropriation rather than an effort to propose the ancient Greek model of politics for the modern world' (Çelik, 2004, 59-60).

Although Arendt's influence remained significant through her students and colleagues, her books ceased to be important articles of scholarly attention or to shape public debates in the 1970's. She seemed suddenly old-fashioned in a world of renewed interest in Marxism and several competing feminisms, multiculturalism and postmodernism. In spite of the fact that she used to be among the most widely read political thinkers in the 1950's and 1960's, for a time she was not much read in the 1970's. However, a number of younger political philosophers turned to her work for inspiration after the 1990's. Arendt entered the canon of modern political theory within a few years and her work became an important key reference point in debates. Moreover, it has been extensively taught in the universities.

From many areas, there has been a regeneration of interest in Arendt's work, but the most substantial has been feminism. As Mary Dietz states, Arendt, a non-feminist, guaranteed attention as the most influential woman ever to write political theory (Dietz, 1995, 17-50). In her lifetime

she was mainly ignored by feminists. After her death, she was commonly considered by some feminist writers as an example of woman whose perceptions were distorted by her connections with the dominant forces of masculinist thought. Therefore, she was declared by those feminist writers as the most influential female theorist of action, participatory politics and public realm in the twentieth century but with no influence upon the second-wave feminist movement.

Arendt's remark on the distinction between public and private realm has been as issue of discussion by many writers. She investigates the collapse of the public and the private realms into society. The private realm is where activities necessary to the maintenance of life take place. The public realm, on the other hand, is a space created by the interaction of people. By bringing economic concerns that were formerly private into the public realm, we become once again enslaved to necessity (Meade, 1997,113). Arendt's understanding of this distinction has also been clarified by Leah Bradshaw:

'Arendt thought that this distinction had dissolved in the modern world, to the detriment of both. Politics has not suffered a loss of dignity at the hands of twentieth-century philosophers so much as from the attentions of social theorists whose prescriptions for politics usually entail some project for equalizing the economic and social status of all citizens. The result has been that governments are preoccupied with what Arendt called housekeeping duties' (Bradshaw, 1989, 12).

Bonnie Honig, on the other hand, touches upon the issue of Arendt's worry about the devastation of the public realm and she argues that Arendt was not interested in issues such as feminism believing that they could harm the public sphere. As Honig declares:

'Arendt was impatient with feminism, dismissing it as merely another (mass) movement or ideology. She believed strongly that feminism's concerns with gender identity, sexuality, and the body were politically inappropriate. She worried that these issues might overwhelm the public sphere and she herself approached them through indirection and allusion' (Honig, 1995, 1-2).

The end of cold war in the late 1980's and early 1990's created a widespread crisis in critical imagination. The change in the communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union affected political discourse. While an anti-intellectual populism was spreading, the meaning of the left and right and also the meaning of the politics itself

seemed uncertain. This created a problem for people concerned with public life and political theorists. Meanwhile, feminists observed the simultaneous dramatic growth of feminist theory and its separation from the feminist movement. In this context, a renewal of interest in the work of Hannah Arendt became not only attractive but also enormously revitalizing.

Feminist writers who argue that the distinction between the two realms is an elementary aspect of patriarchy have been discussing the issue. Arendt's distinction between the public and the private is often seen as rigid and unproductive. She even identifies tyranny with the restriction of individuals to the private sphere. Thus, she has been criticized by Miczo who argues that in the present scheme, the isolated individual most closely corresponds to the laborer (Miczo, 2008, 146). Ideally, Arendt's public realm is the realm of freedom, in which people liberated from the depressing demands of necessity, have the opportunity to speak and act to be political. The public realm, however, cannot get rid of the private. On the contrary, it depends crucially on the private. In fact, the problem of most feminists is the identification of women with the private.

Margaret Canovan declares that Arendt's use of the distinction is different from these (Canovan, 1985, 180). According to Canovan, Arendt considered that the boundaries between private and public had become distorted in modern times. Arendt declares that within the pervasive realm of society many things which ought to be private had been made public, while others that ought to be public had been taken over by private interests and concerns. Canovan may be true but those boundaries between private and public, are and will be the most destructive forces for women as long as they are rigid and well-drawn.

### **2.1. Arendtian Public Sphere in *Human Condition***

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt underlined that 'everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody' (Arendt, 1958, 22-28). The public sphere is a 'space of appearance', a focus of universal attention which presents dignity and importance. Furthermore, she added that 'it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men' (Arendt, 1970, 8). Therefore, whatever appears in this brilliantly illuminated space is pushed to the center of common concern. It is possible to indicate that the first aspect of her public sphere is that this is a brilliantly-lit stage on which common attention is focused. Her special sense of the 'world' is discussed with the 'earth' which is the natural environment, which is given and inescapable. Men do not simply live on the earth as animals do but they use their capacity for creative work to

build themselves a second environment, an artificial human world besides laboring. This is the world of civilization, composed of buildings and machines, of works of art and lasting institutions such as states. In Arendt's 'brilliantly-lit stage' and her 'world' there is no room for women. This is the reason why she has been harshly criticized by feminist thinkers.

Arendt stated in *The Human Condition*, 'to live together in the world'. This means essentially a world of things which is between those who have it in common and as a table which is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. She also mentioned that this 'common world' gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so, it can create a public space between individuals, within which political action is possible (Arendt, 1958, 6). According to Arendt, the most important feature of this artificial human world is its relative durability. The world provides human with a stage for their actions and an objective frame of reference to test their impressions against reality. My concern is that Arendt had never mentioned the existence of women in this 'durable world'.

When people gather in order to discuss the common affairs of the world, they constitute a public space, a space of appearance, within which, the affairs of the common world become publicly visible and can be discussed. This is a solid, durable common world. As she quoted, 'without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things ..... without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes' (Arendt, 1967, 190-194). Arendt's description of 'the world' and 'the public space' seems to be perfect but the worry is about those people gathering and discussing. Who are they? Probably and mostly men! What are those common affairs that they have been discussing?

## 2.2. Exclusion of Woman in *Human Condition*

Separation of women from other people in addition to their separation from a human, man, world has never been her concern in spite of the fact that most women are still confined to home sphere, housework, home working of the informal sector. At present, the informal sector constitutes almost 30% of all economic transactions in the Third World and it is women who perform more than half of the informal sector activity (Honig, 1998, 20-21). Arendt has been criticized because she did not offer remedies for such obstacles in the women world. To illustrate, Lisa

Dish underlines the housework issue by announcing that 'consciousness-raising began as a resistance against the stultifying normalcy of the household, which feminists characterized as an obstacle not simply to women's career ambitions but also to their abilities to think, imagine, and analyze. She also adds that in this sense, then, consciousness-raising began from the dilemma of banality that Arendt took to characterize late modernity (Dish, 1997, 135).

According to Arendt, each person is a private individual, with private preoccupations such as families, careers, needs, etc. This private life should be safeguarded by private property which means 'a privately owned place to hide in'. The reason of her reference to the ancient Greeks and Romans in *The Human Condition* is the confusion of private and public matters in modern times. She believed that in the ancient world, the boundary between private and public realms was very clearly marked. The private sphere consisted of a household with a definite location in its family property. Moreover, it was the unit of economic production. The individual concerned with his family left all those private issues behind him and gathered with other citizens to take action on the public affairs of the common world when he came out of the darkness of his house into the shining light of the public meeting stage. How can we expect in practice, women to leave all private issues, motherhood as the most binding, at home if there is no economic and social opportunity for her in the home sphere? This may be the reason of Arendt's confinement of women in the private realm!

The conception of identity, as actively created through being present in public, is related to the connection between 'what' and 'who' we are. A political actor requires from others an attentiveness, a listening and a looking flexible enough to discern his or her activity. The need to be listened leads the actor to think about how to speak and which voice to choose. This continual need to make such choices may provoke impatience and reluctance. Political action can be so difficult, so frustrating, so demanding, particularly in a context of inequality. For egalitarian political interaction, feminist thinkers have to consider whatever active, flexible political attention involves.

Arendt underlines 'politics will always be a messy and uncertain practice, because it takes place in the already existing web of human relationships with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions (Arendt, 1958, 45). Susan Bickford points out that the emphasize of Arendt on respect and courage can not change this characteristic of politics and she stresses a politics that seeks to do justice to the differences among people, not to

erase those differences in the name of citizenship (Bickford, 1995, 332). Arendt stresses the recognition of human plurality which is basic to the possibility and importance of politics. She argues against the temptation to short-circuit public life by asserting absolute truths. It is crucial that mutual understanding be achieved through processes of communication that are never complete.

For her, what is crucial to political life is that public discussion continues indefinitely. Public discussion is not a means by which to arrive at decisions, but it is a goal in itself. She suggests that public sphere exists to offer the occasion for self-enlightenment and for achieving consensus in addition to reciprocal understanding. Thus, she argued that the public life of classical Greece included 'an incredibly large extent of citizens talking with one another'. In this context, it is obvious that her admiration of the antique Greek which had totally excluded women from its product, public space, is difficult to understand for feminists as Dietz, who announce:

'Inconceivable as it may sound to contemporary feminists, Arendt mentions women only twice in her lengthy discussion of the classical conception of labor and work, public and private. She observes, without comment, that in the sphere of the Greek household, men and women performed different tasks, and she acknowledges that women and slaves 'belonged to the same category and were hidden away' because their lives were devoted to the bodily functions' (Dietz, 1999, 237).

Arendt declares that in this endless talk, Greeks discovered that the world that we have in common is usually regarded from an infinitive number of different standpoints, to which correspond the most diverse points of view. In a flow of arguments, Greeks learned to understand, not to understand one another as an individual, but to look upon the same world from another's standpoint, to see the same in very different and frequently opposing aspects. Furthermore, Arendt argued in *Human Condition* 'every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth, whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots of all politics and all governments' (Arendt, 1958, 48-53). Truth of this sort represented the force of necessity, not the possibility of freedom (Arendt, 1965, 53).

In this conception, politics is not a matter of power or divisions between the ruler and the ruled or distribution of economic goods. It has to be a realm of self-creation through free, voluntary action undertaken in consort with and in relation to other people. Therefore, the public realm

in which politics takes place is above all else, a space between people, created by their discourse and mutual recognition. In the Arendtian public realm there is an escape from the 'body'. She identifies the earth with the feminine and natality (earth-born versus man-made). She goes on to describe the attempt to escape from the earth as a prison for men's bodies in terms of a rebellion against the body of the feminine, the symbolic mother. As Moruzzi evaluates the escape in terms of Arendtian expression:

'The body contours the self, but the definitions of the body shape the discursive world of politics. The attempt to escape the body, then, is a political issue: the repudiation of all known and all possible human experience. This concern that a rejection of humanity's shared spatial and temporal location is also a rejection of embodied gendered difference, not in favor of a less sexually prescribed set of relations, but in order to reject and abandon the gendered and specifically feminine body' (Moruzzi, 2000, 8-9).

Arendt's consideration of public space is not precisely a definition of community, and certainly not a community constituted by pre-established similarity among members. The notion of society is emphasized regularly in her definition of public realm. What Arendt means by society is a distortion of authentic public life characterized by a combination of conformity and egocentricity. Herdlike uniformity is therefore of the essence of society as she understands it (Canovan, 2002, 117).

There are several leading scholars in political behavior. For example, Lyn Kathlene, in an article on differences in social authority, communication styles and power among male and female legislators criticizes a standard liberal pluralist assumption which expressed that increasing representation of marginalized groups enables them to better pursue their rights (1994, 35). Based on findings that male legislators became more controlling of hearings as the number of female legislators increased, she argues that 'the social dynamics subordinate women's words and actions even in well-balanced male and female group interactions. As Michael Mann states, 'Societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting socio-spatial networks of power' (Mann, 1986, 11). Therefore, can we ignore power relations in the public realm and how can we disregard male dominance in that realm?

According to Arendt, viable political institutions cannot be erected on the foundation of the supposedly natural goodness of humankind. The moral that she draws is that 'the law is made for men, neither for angels nor for

devils' (Arendt, 1965, 84). She appeared to have been against natural goodness and innocence while affirming that virtue is capable of ultimate in lasting institutions. Much of the response to Arendt's work during her lifetime concentrated on her strict distinction between the political and the social, the public and the private. Political action in public space is concentrated on difference for Arendt. However, she seems to have forgotten power relations in public sphere.

Arendt credits Kant with breaking from the customary assumption that abstraction is requisite to impartially writing. Arendt agrees with Kant by arguing that 'impartiality is obtained by taking the viewpoints of others into account' (Arendt, 1982, 57). Departing from Kant, Arendt claims that it is not the philosopher but the storyteller who possesses an extraordinary talent for enlarged thinking. Her conception of 'the political' had several aspects. It signified not a state of a society but a determinate public sphere, a forum, an agora, set aside, jealously defended so that those men who wished to test themselves by the highest standards of excellence might compete, by speech and action, in the presence of their peers (Wolin, 1990, 170).

In her public realm, 'visiting' occupies an important place. She declares 'visiting means imagining what the world would look like to me from another position, imagining how I would look to myself from within a different world, and coming to understand that I might define my principles differently if I did not stand where I am accustomed to' (Arendt, 1954, 240-242). Where visiting promotes understanding, empathy obstructs it so, there is no empathy with another since empathy erases all difference. While visiting another place, there is experience of the disorientation that lets me understand just how different the world looks from different perspectives.

### 3. FEMINIST READINGS ON ARENDT

Although there have been many feminist critiques of Arendt, I will start with Joan Landes who attacks Arendt by declaring that Arendt's history is stubbornly partial. Moreover, she emphasizes that Arendt selectively appropriates marginal fragments from the past in order to recover lost meanings, concealed and repressed moments while proceeding from Benjamin's historiographical method (Landes, 1995, 197-198). As noticed by Miller, Arendt follows Walter Benjamin in 'constructing revolutionary history as an episodic set of stories needing to be remembered and told again, lest the true revolutionary spirit, with its redeeming commitment to freedom, be lost through failure of thought and

remembrance' (Miller, 1979, 183). Landes addresses with Miller by restating that 'the meanings of Arendt derived from the past can be misleading, and they often sound like so much wishful thinking'. She continues: 'this is not all'. For all her perspicacity, Arendt's compelling counter readings of modern revolutions are marked by a stunning blind spot: a marked resistance in her writings to the question of gender, and (in Arendt's own terms) to the stories of women.

Historically, women have attempted to influence the nature of public discourse. Arendt ignores the paradox of women's self-constitution as political subjects of the republic despite their exclusion from political rights, their subordinate status in civil and political law during the height of the French Revolution, their banishment from the political to the domestic sphere. The stories of women's attempts to achieve political agency during the radical Revolution are not easily accommodated in Arendt's model of revolutionary democracy.

Many American and European historians have studied how marginalized and oppressed groups participate or fail to participate in national and local politics. Work on the Parisian salons demonstrates us the ways that the politically powerless can shape forums for expression. They show how outsiders in particular work creatively to affect the public sphere. The women of the salons, who were the examples of those oppressed groups, used their marginal status to achieve their goals.

While presenting the terror, Arendt depicts it as 'the poor, driven by the needs of their bodies, burst onto the scene of the French Revolution' (Arendt, 1965, 221). Arendt distinguishes between two groups and two absolutely contrasting motives in her description: 'the populace' or 'immense majority' who are 'driven by daily needs', and 'the citizens' (the people) who are motivated by the love of public freedom. Arendt believes that the conditions of freedom are threatened when the majority, driven by the force of biological needs, moves into the public realm.

Arendt regards poverty and the unequal distribution of economic and social resources as posing problems which could be solved with technical not political solutions. She objects to a politics driven by a compassionate concern for justice and social equality. She states that 'the problem of poverty is not to be solved through socialization and socialism, but through technical means; for technology, in contrast to socialization, is of course politically neutral' (Arendt, 1965, 58). Arendt, appears to lower primary, social concerns of food, shelter, clothing, etc. in favor of public presence. As Benhabib states, Arendt treated schooling not as the priority

we all assume it to be but as a 'social', secondary concern (Benhabib, 1996, 204). Similarly, with regard to the American and French Revolutions, Arendt notoriously insisted that inclusion of the 'social question', that is, poverty, had no place in politics. She also gives importance to the treatment of words. She once remarked that her quarrel with most contemporary historians and political scientists was their growing incapacity for making distinctions. She stated that 'words were being used indiscriminately for all kinds of political phenomena, with the result that none of them retained any precise meaning' (1953, 78).

Arendt's answer to the question 'who are the people of the French Revolution who demanded citizenship on the basis of their needs' seems obscure. While categorizing *le petit peuple* imprecisely, women's presence among them, as well as within the active citizenry is obscure. However, according to Levy, Applewhite and Johnson, in 1789, women participated in the events at the Bastille Prison and three months later, marketwomen initiated the October March to Versailles (Levy, Applewhite and Johnson, 1979, 14). Early modern European women, in particular, are considered the chief agitators in bread riots due to their management of their family's income and their place as consumers and sellers in the marketplaces.

Arendt never addresses the radical implications of the discourse of natural rights when embraced by advocates of women, slaves, or the poor. Because she seems to accept uncritically the banishment of women, slaves, and laborers from the political sphere, she never worries about the ways in which the modern world associated freedom only with masculinity, and connected women to particularity. Arendt conceals the dilemmas posed for a philosophy of freedom by the presence of integrated subjectivity.

Arendt never derives any explicit principles of gender equality from her general perspectives on the *vita activa* and from the evidence of women's action's during the revolutionary era. She represents the French Revolution, like the American, as a wholly man-made series of events. The stories that she narrates are by men and about men. She fails to appreciate the novelty of women's presence in the revolutionary public sphere, and the powerful claims made by some on behalf of women's civil freedom and political equality. While not even registering women's presence as 'participants' in revolutionary public space, Arendt obscures what should count as another new 'beginning'.

### 3.1. Woman Question in Arendt or Woman Condition in Arendt?

A shift to Arendt studies has been produced by an advance towards the concepts such as woman, identity and experience. The focus of the earlier feminist on the 'Woman Question in Arendt' meant her treatment of women: where are they located in her theory? In contrast, the 'Arendt Question in Feminism' assumes her existence. While those who are interested in the 'Woman Question in Arendt' thought that her public/private distinction was clearly and hopelessly masculinist, other feminists who assert the 'Arendt Question in Feminism' are driven to abandon this distinction.

Sandra Harding discusses this distinction between the 'Woman Question in Arendt' and the 'Arendt Question in Feminism' (Harding, 1987, 135-156). In addition to Harding's work, it may be possible to go one step further and discuss the topic of the gendered place of women in public sphere under a title 'Woman Condition in Arendt'. This will obviously include the means to transform her thought into feminist theory. Therefore, according to some, Hannah Arendt, who herself was not a feminist, may emerge as a vital and stimulating thinker for feminists to engage. While some are finding something in her thought on which feminism can profitably build, some are more critical. However, this diversity poses the plurality which has been a major issue for her.

Arendt insists that equality is a consequence not of nature but of the emancipation of citizens, each of whom is equally entitled to his legal personality, to be protected by it, and at the same time, to act almost literally through it (Arendt, 196, 104). However, she fails to notice the demands of women for civil and political rights, that is, to achieve a legal personality. She does not address their successes or failures. She asserts that men are not born equal. Men are in fact naturally and decisively unequal but they become equal in the realm of politics. The equality that men enjoy in community is a function of their citizenship, of their admission to the public, political realm. Equality is not absolute, nor is it permanent. According to Arendt, it lasts as long as men remain citizens and participators in politics. Dossa Shiraz responds her by claiming that Arendt has no illusions that injustice is the origin of freedom and hence the conditions for politics, and political equality is the unnatural equality bestowed upon men (Shiraz, 1989, 81).

Another important discussion point about the dismissal of women from Arendt's work is the usage of male terms in her language. By considering the feminist movements which started in the 60's she could have used a

more gender conscious language. Michael Gottsegen marks that 'perhaps as a consequence of the fact that the citizens of the polis were male, or as a consequence of the tradition within which she wrote, Arendt's use of the male pronoun and the generic 'man' and 'men' is pervasive' (Gottsegen, 1994, 14-15). He also adds that when she writes 'man' she usually means not male nor female but human and she equates man and human in a way that is insufficiently conscious of sexual difference. The question 'why couldn't she go beyond tradition and use a gender aware diction?' can be raised to such authors. The probable answer will be this is a matter of scholarly integrity. Hanna Pitkin answers the question:

'Arendt was no feminist. Personally, she was strong, resourceful, assertive rebellious, ambitious, and of course fiercely intellectual. As a teacher she was authoritative, sometimes authoritarian in manner. Yet she was also shy about speaking in public, avoided face-to-face conflict, and felt she lacked 'quite a number of qualities' required for political leadership. Indeed, she was skeptical about whether women should be political leaders and told an interviewer that she regarded certain occupations .... not becoming to women because it just doesn't look good for a women to issue orders (Pitkin, 1998, 154).

Arendt seems to be discussing a series of key phrases, including 'representative thinking', 'thinking with an enlarged mentality', 'community sense', 'training the imagination to go visiting', 'communicability' and 'exemplary validity'. Man thinks successively through an act of imagination from the standpoints of differently situated other people. The result of such imaginative 'visiting' is an 'enlarged mentality'. My question is 'who is visiting'. Moreover, the person who is 'visiting' may imagine himself or herself judging from various different perspectives instead of going out and talking to and listening to other people. An elaboration of an interior, not an exterior, dialogue is the issue.

Arendt expects us to visit the standpoint of every individual. Then, we need to determine in each case what the relevant representative standpoints are. Her understanding of individual plurality can be converted into the contemporary understanding of differently situated social groups. Arendt fails to advise us which standpoints we ought to visit. While treating plurality solely as a matter of individual differences, she ignores group dominance and subordination.

### 3.2. Storytelling in Arendt

Richard Bernstein argued 'what makes Hannah Arendt distinctive is that she is neither a subjectivist nor a foundationalist but rather, attempts to move beyond objectivism and relativism' (Bernstein, 1985, 32). On the other hand, Hannah Arendt uses the term 'storytelling' to describe critical understanding from experience. However, she fails to explain how storytelling creates a vantage point that is both critical and experiential since she left herself open to charges of subjectivism.

There is a complex relationship between storytelling and impartiality. Storytelling is a means by which one 'visits' different perspectives. It is also a narrative form since in turn it invites others to visit. For Arendt, critical understanding involves telling or hearing multiple stories of an event from the plurality of perspectives that it engages. One purpose is to take a stand in full recognition of the complexity of the real situations in which judgments are made. Another purpose is to hold oneself to argue with and speak not only to those who agree but to those with whom one disagrees. Therefore, the point is not consensus or accuracy but plurality and accountability. After all the work done by Arendt on storytelling and sharing experience, that she was deeply involved in experience and subjectivity is amazing. However, how and why she avoided using this beneficial work from a feminist perspective which itself highlights the 'subjectivity' and 'women experience' is an area of wonder in this study.

Arendt never spoke 'as a woman' although she occasionally spoke 'as a Jew'. Furthermore, she overwhelmingly preferred to speak 'as an individual' which is a mode of self-identification as well as a mode of disidentification. Nancy Fraser emphasizes that 'the current revival risks recreating and reinforcing what is most unsatisfying in Arendt's political theory, namely, the overburdening of concepts of action, judgment and democratic process and their dissociation from justice and equality' (Fraser, 1997, 175). She concludes that the political process concepts in Arendt's thought are effectively fetishized, made to bear virtually the entire weight of normativity, a weight they cannot possibly bear.

Craig Calhoun, on the other hand, relates Arendt's stress on public/private sphere to her observation of the weaknesses of liberalism. He claims that 'Arendt stressed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the key feature distinguishing totalitarianism from mere tyranny is that the former works directly on private life, not merely limiting public life' (Calhoun, 1997, 236). Arendt suggests that public space cannot exist without politics, that it is called into being by politics as a specific kind of activity between people. According to her, politics can be about the making and remaking

of public space as much as about what we do in it (Arendt, 1953, 80). Arendt's suggestion seems a bit problematic since a vicious circle may be created while talking and talking over and over again in the public sphere while making and remaking it.

Another critique to her distinction between totalitarian movements and totalitarian rule (governments) emerges from Agnes Heller who adds a second distinction, which is the one between totalitarian rule and totalitarian society. The tendency to totalize society is inherent in every totalitarian rule that can restrict its objective to the political and ideological totalization of society (Heller, 1989, 255). In this type of society, Arendt does not have any statement about the confinement of women and their exclusion from the public sphere. In the case of Iran for example, the number of women taking place in the parliament is quite high but does that mean that today, Iranian women are in the public sphere more than ever before?

### **3.3. Communication in Arendtian Public Sphere**

Arendt can be questioned about the role and affects of the modern means of communication in her own context of public sphere. With the spread of industrialization and new technologies, the dominance of the printed media gives way to the electronic media, and to information technologies. Since the means of communication unite ever larger numbers of people who can have access to ever more impersonal channels of information and communication 'public' loses its base and becomes desubstantialized. For instance, in the current media of communication such as e-mail, communicating people neither see one another nor hear each other's voices. They are only as senders and receivers of electronic messages. In this new public there is no body or location in space. It is an anonymous public conversation. Seyla Benhabib declares in 'The Reluctant Modernism of Arendt' the decrease in the quality of public debate and reasoning and the fret in the line between intimacy and publicity (Benhabib, 1996, 206).

Benhabib underlines the exclusion of women from the public sphere throughout history. She states that the 'public' is a term of inclusion as well as exclusion. It is based upon defining the 'we' and the 'they'. Moreover, she stresses the problem of the regulative ideal democracy and the 'sovereign people' who can never be a fixed quantity in a democracy. It is the essence of democracy that the boundaries between the 'we' who decide and the 'they' about whom decisions are made will always be subject to questioning and contestation.

Hannah Arendt did not make a distinction between the monogamous nuclear male-headed family, and the 'home'. This is a distinction that is the central reason her assertion of the private sphere so often reads like an ahistorical justification of a specific gender division of labor that historically confined modern bourgeois women to the home.

For Arendt, 'loneliness' has a meaning in the context of 'the world' (Canovan, 1992, 92). Arendt means by 'loneliness' not only separation from other people but also separation from a human 'world' inhabited in common with other people, and therefore, the outcome is a loss of a sense of reality and ability to make sound judgments about experience. Arendt states in *The Human Condition* that this loneliness, the experience of not belonging to the world at all, is connected with the condition of modern masses in the wake of the industrial revolution and the political crises of the twentieth century. Has Arendt ever thought about the 'female loneliness'?

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Feminist scholars interested in understanding gender inequality and gender hierarchy often question foundational categories and theories. This results in contentious debates but sometimes produces original and innovative insights. As a result, feminist theory has enriched both political theory and the study of gender. However, political science as a whole seems to have failed to make use of these insights.

Contemporary feminist theory is entering a new phase of thinking about the issues such as domestic violence, child molestation, and marital rape in the private sphere, after two decades of criticizing the private/public split of Arendt, and the way in which this dichotomy has served to camouflage such domestic violations in the private realm. Arendt has shown the vitality of a robust private sphere, which fulfills our needs for intimacy, domesticity, and individuality. However, I would suggest the impossibility and improbability of the recovery of the public world without a parallel reconstruction of the private sphere.

As a significantly influential woman who writes political theory, Arendt captured the interest of many writers, particularly the feminists. Their argument is that the distinction between the public and private realms is the most serious feature of patriarchalism. Unfortunately, Arendt's distinction is rigid. Her ideal public realm is the arena of freedom where people can speak freely. Her public space depends remarkably on the private. One of the reasons why feminists criticize Arendt is the

identification of women with the private. In the Arendtian public sphere, a brilliant stage, there is no room for women. This is the major reason why she has been severely criticized by feminist thinkers.

According to Arendt, the private sphere consisted of a household with a definite location in its family property. It is also the unit of economic production. The individual gathers with other citizens to take action on the public affairs of the common world after leaving everything concerning about private issues when he came out of his house. However, in the real world, a mother cannot join the bright public meeting arena by leaving everything called private issues such as motherhood.

As a summary, the writings of Hannah Arendt have been a debate issue for a large variety of writers, particularly the feminists. Her rigid public sphere and her insistence on the definite distinction between the public and private realms will be a significant concern for the feminist thinkers. Moreover, the endless speech in the Arendtian public sphere suggested and supported by Arendt is a major area of critique. Finally, as argued during the whole study, the non-existence of women in her writings and the fact that she completely avoided woman condition in her writings is the central critique of many political thinkers.

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