Between the Social and the Political

Feminism, Citizenship and the Possibilities of an Arendtian Perspective in Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT In this article, I try to explore some of the elements of the potential for active citizenship, as conceptualized by Hannah Arendt. Inspired by, but not limited to her work, I attempt to find some important common points of the Arendtian reconceptualization of politics and the prospects for a feminist analysis of the conditions for active citizenship and gender equality within a post-socialist context. On the other hand, I would like to show how, within an East European context, the feminist approach that wants to be useful for a concrete analysis and inspire substantial actions cannot avoid the questions of the relationship between the social and political as argued by Hannah Arendt.

KEY WORDS Arendt ◆ citizenship ◆ Eastern Europe ◆ feminism ◆ political ◆ social

INTRODUCTION

The so-called 'Velvet' revolutions in Eastern and Middle Europe reopened the question of the concept of citizenship both as a status and as questions of political participation and political inclusion. However, due to the phenomena of rapid social and historical amnesia, the main political players have not yet succeeded in translating the former civic practices of dissident and opposition movements into active forms of freedom. Inasmuch as the concept of freedom in liberal capitalism as a model of 'citizenship' prevailed, the new democracies were only partially founded on the principle of the inclusion of new actors and current

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agendas into a new and different political environment. As a result, the political transformation in these countries (insofar as it has taken place at all) shows that new political agendas are too narrow to allow active participation of those outside the traditional political institutions. A very restrictive definition of the 'political' has, on the one had, effectively blocked initiatives for the equal political participation of women in post-socialist systems. The demands for the introduction of mechanisms ensuring the equal participation of women in the political arena are thus seen as illegitimate and unacceptable. On the other hand, the ambiguous acceptance of a simplistic liberal-democratic agenda with its limited view of politics, rules out the rethinking of the structural relations between public, private and intimate spheres and issues. These problems are almost completely absent from the theories of transition whose repeated invocation of liberal-democratic norms had dominated the discussion on post-socialism. This becomes especially problematic when these theories were transferred indiscriminately to East European conditions (see Sauer, 1996; Jalusic, 1997). As a result of this, there is relatively no or little questioning of the inequality, exclusion or 'gender blindness' nor is there reflection concerning the consequences this deficit of critical approach engenders within the given liberal-democratic model. One could easily argue that 'women's issues' and some other social minorities' issues 'had to wait until the critical issues of nationhood were resolved' (Graham and Regulska, 1997: 71) or define them as individually solvable problems.

Feminist initiatives which developed within this climate, trying to shed light on the problems regarding the position of women or even demanding more rights or better situations for women, had to face a threefold problem. On the one hand, they had to confront the aversion, especially women's, to politics (a consequence of the anti-political spirit of the 'Velvet' revolutions, perceived as an activity of the corrupt post-socialist elite), on the other hand, they were surrounded by a widespread anti-feminism, a phenomenon especially prevalent among the female educated elite. At the same time, they had to encounter an extremely strong and resistant neoliberal capitalist legitimization in the sense of Erwin Goffman's 'strong discourse', 'which is so strong and so hard to fight' (Bourdieu, 1998: 95).

The way most women's initiatives in the Eastern and Central European countries elected to deal with these circumstances was extremely interesting as means and ways of civil society initiatives, initiatives which for the most part did not expect the state's participation or aid: on the contrary, within most of these countries, the state was considered as something unwanted, undesired (which was both a reaction to the past experiences with the more or less totalitarian state and a reflection of the current liberal ideology as well). As non-governmental initiatives, these groups developed widespread activities. They were, however, mostly socially,

humanitarian or culturally oriented. They rarely advanced to the realm of institutional politics, and often they harboured aversions to state institutions. It seems as if they mirrored some leftist sentiments which were quite prevalent during the first wave of neo-feminist movement(s) in Western Europe and North America. Numerous practices were developed that one can describe as social activities and, interestingly, in many of the post-socialist countries it was exactly the women's movement (women's NGOs) that nearly replaced a large part of the social-humanitarian activities of the state, especially in those countries where, due to the rapid liberalization of the economy, or even violent outcomes like war in the worst cases, the social consequences turned out to be very unfavourable.[1] Thus, it seems that, regarding political organization, these groups developed a certain strategy which resembled the strategies of the women's movements in the 19th century and to the dissident experiences of the 1980s – in the sense of forming parallel spaces of difference and diversity while trying to avoid mainstream politics.

The questions opened by these movements were, from the perspective of the liberal state, considered 'social' questions. The groups mainly saw themselves as social movements as well. They took over many activities, which could, in some other time and circumstances, be performed by a welfare state – at least from the point of view of the state itself. However, many of their activities built the groundwork for new definitions of the boundaries between the private and public, state, civil society and the family and for initiating the question which might have seemed non-existent from a neoliberal point of view: namely questions of intimacy, the question of what includes privacy, whether it is only the family unit which represents the unique private space, or something else, and how much individuals count within this unit. Namely, within the ideological framework of the neoliberal post-socialist reconstruction it would seem that the question of post-totalitarian reorganization, regarding the private and public, was a simple question of the renewal of the customary family model as the main 'social unit' which should support the state and its economy. The public was understood as a political-institutional public and the private as traditional family privacy.[2]

The liberal ideology inculcated the former socialist modernization (social emancipation) of women without feminism and thus, at the political level, simply ignored new forms of privacy, individuality and the kind of autonomy which socialism brought to women. Although these forms were never firmly politically and/or legally grounded they were more a specialized 'culture' of socialism that could be used for transitional purposes. This was the reason why women functioned socially, in all regards, as a much more adaptable part of the population on the one hand. Yet, paradoxically, on the other hand, they were politically marginalized. This phenomenon actually provided an immense resource in the sense of

the so-called original accumulation of capitalist systems: women took over all possible jobs (including prostitution) and were the most prepared to seriously take up the liberal slogan of 'flexibility', which exposed them to the uncertainties of the market economy and consequently led to the reduction of social and other types of security, and thus predictability.

The ideology of the 'strong woman', which appeared within the socialist framework, could also serve the gender-specific ideologies of the mass neoliberal market society: socially 'strong women', used to working within the economy and at home, took over the additional private burdens brought on by market and capitalist economy. They were responsible for the (family's) private and social sphere(s), yet without having access to the political elite, and hence without the possibility to transform their condition or the relation between the private, the social and the public. Women behaved within this framework as isolated parts of the mass society where every individual is responsible for his or her own private affairs and where, in the well-known words of Margaret Thatcher: 'society does not exist'. The belief that any individual social and political success should only be the result of one's own individual merits and personal best, was very effective for the forming of women's survival and promotional strategies. The empirical research shows that, nowadays, women in post-socialism prefer individual strategies of survival and promotion (see Butorova et al., 1996: 131). In particular, those who are successful explicitly refuse the idea of any collective women's action or promotion politics in the sense of lending support to women as a group.

Women, isolated within private spaces, i.e. families, have no possibility for developing an alternative sense of community that would be different from the liberal, communitarian and nationalistic approaches. If a competition among successful women prevails there is no sense of solidarity to be developed. The belief that all individual problems should be solved personally or within the surrounding family and that collective activity represents the loss of time and energy, and, moreover, cannot really solve individual problems, won over any prevailing rationale. It seems to me that, apart from the prejudices created on the basis of the specific East–West exchange of ideas and the legacy of the past, with regard to a collective engagement, this situation also contributed to an aversion towards feminism as one of the possible and more viable forms of collective political activity.

WHY HANNAH ARENDT'S PERSPECTIVE?

Hence, one of the most important questions for the women of Eastern Europe who act within the public eye is, in my opinion, the question of which course of political activity is to be chosen, what kinds of actions are

appropriate to use. The main dilemma here seems to be the choice between the communicative, socialized, 'women-friendly' and even pro-feminist collective action within the activities of a civil society, i.e. NGOs (more socially oriented activities such as the struggle against violence perpetrated against women, etc.) and the more competitive, institutional, party politics (also more individual and self-promotional oriented politics). This dilemma is reinforced by the question whether to underline one's own gender identity as pertinent for political action or not and this is *volens nolens* connected to the question of feminism.[3] Or, to put the question differently: how can one act out of one's own 'gender identity'? How can one formulate this action without gender becoming a homogeneous pattern under one fixed social identity where differentiation among its potential elements is no longer possible? Another question is, how can the prevailing relationship between the public and the private be shown as questionable and problematic, not as something necessarily traditionally liberal and pre-given? How to politicize the private without falling into the trap of blurring the differences between the public and the private?

These considerations are the framework of my analysis, with some elements of Hannah Arendt's notion of politics and active citizenship. Why Hannah Arendt's framework? Why might her thoughts be particularly important for contemporary Eastern and Central European feminism?[4]

The question of what is the importance of Hannah Arendt's thinking for western feminist analysis is, nowadays, nothing unusual any more. Until now, feminist political theorists not only reread and challenged a large part of (male) western political thought but also Arendt herself. There already exist many feminist responses to Hannah Arendt and many discussions of these responses. Many elements of her thought have been affirmed as important for feminism, especially her notions of plurality (substantiated with the gender difference) and 'natality', her notion of action which is seen as conditioned by birth, plurality and worldliness, and her analysis of authority in positive terms, her view of power as a 'network of human action', etc. For the present, there exist almost no serious feminist texts about a transformation, revision, reconstitution or rethinking of the political or politics without a reference to Arendt, despite the fact that most feminists discovered her relatively late.[5] Since she was discovered by the feminist movement, one can identify mainly three approaches of feminist writing:

1. The early responses had located Arendt within the canon of (male) western political thought. In general, they were extremely critical towards Arendt as a non-feminist and rejected her as a male-thinking theorist (see Rich, 1979; O'Brien, 1981, and for discussion on their thinking, see Dietz, 1995: 23–6).

2. The second stage were rereadings of Arendt which looked for elements of feminist analysis within her work. They were pointing out the usefulness of her theory for feminist analysis, analysing and also 'gendering' her concepts of the communicative action, 'natality', plurality, power and authority as potentials for a feminist political practice and theory (see inter alia Elshtain, 1992; Hartsock, 1996; Held, 1989; Jones, 1993; Tronto, 1996).
3. The third view was feminist self-reflection through Arendt: the issue of how feminism can incorporate this self-reflectivity with a 'little help' from and through a dialogue with the Arendtian concepts. This approach could also be expressed by the Arendtian method of 'understanding' or 'thinking (about) what we are doing' and 'thinking what we are doing when we think'. Some analysts expressed this clearly in their texts and, like Elisabeth Young Bruehl, concluded with the thought that most of the feminist analyses of Hannah Arendt tell us more about feminism itself than about Arendt and this in itself is the most valuable result of the encounter between Arendt and feminism (Young-Bruehl, 1996: 322). Hence, nowadays one discusses both 'the Woman Question within Arendt's texts and the Arendt Question in feminism' (Young-Bruehl, 1996; Dietz, 1995; Honig, 1995c).

It seems to me that it would be worth, especially within the East European context, to emphasize this third perspective. Particularly considering the strong anti-feminist sentiment, one should propose the (re)reading of some feminist concepts through Arendt's glass and, vice versa, (re)reading Arendt through some feminist approaches: like the relationship between public and private and the relationship between social and political. Though I am not going in for an extensive presentation of the numerous feminist receptions of Arendt's thinking, I would like to pay some attention to certain basic accents from the feminist rereading of Hannah Arendt.

The main feminist emphasis in analysing Hannah Arendt's political thinking went along with the rethinking of her theory of action as a critique of the traditional political theory, which can be taken as a 'paradigm' for an active citizenship concept. In relation to this, her differentiation among the elements of the human condition (natality, plurality, labour, work and action) was seen as important tools for the analysis of contemporary politics.

The main controversy which came to appear newly among feminists within the debate about the interpretation of Arendt's theory of action was partly a reflection of the general, non-feminist interpretations of Arendt and to some extent also a reflection of the specific feminist interventions into the critique of (liberal-democratic) political theory. The

controversy was about which aspect of her double-edged theory of action (political action) is more important for feminist analysis and action: the 'communicative action' approach, the 'action in concert', the networking and collective action or the so-called 'agonal', 'competitive' aspect of Arendtian politics, which might seem to represent an elite and individualistic version of political struggle (see Benhabib, 1995; Honig, 1995b). This debate might be of great importance to the situation in contemporary Eastern Europe described earlier, where it seems that the line between feminism and anti-feminism runs along the lines between the defenders of collective action and defenders of individual promotion of women or between civil society and state and party political division. If developed, it could also show the necessity for both modes of action to be developed and open a question about how can they support each other within a feminist context as well.

Also, many western feminist rereadings expressed a great deal of uneasiness in the face of the Arendtian analysis and critique of the so-called 'social', particularly her thesis that the rise of 'the social' destroys the public and political space and that privacy and intimacy should be protected against the public disclosure and the intrusion of the social (for interesting discussions see, for example, Benhabib, 1996; Dietz, 1991; Jones, 1993; Pitkin 1981, 1995; Tronto, 1996). Most of these authors saw and still do see the Arendtian account of the social as problematic, since, in their opinion, it does not sufficiently allow the important feminist content (the personal and the private issues such as violence and domestic labour, for example) to become directly politically relevant. Hence, they argue, such an account (if not reinterpreted) either blocks the redefinition of citizenship as an active political life in a more women-friendly way (see Tronto, 1996; Benhabib, 1996; Jones, 1993) or nothing private can be political thus everything (since no agenda) can become political (Heller, 1990; Pitkin, 1981, 1995) and no reasonable collective action is possible anymore. Therefore, the majority of feminist interpretations either reject the Arendtian differentiation between 'social' and 'political' as an untenable liberal reduction or depict it as inconsistent and therefore try to accommodate it to different feminist concepts like ethics of care or similar (Jones, 1993; Tronto, 1996).

In general, there are many important and fruitful points of an Arendtian approach that one could discuss here. Yet, I try only to put forward three, which are, in my opinion, most important points, especially for the anti-feminist and anti-political situation within East and Central Europe. The first is the aforementioned criticism about the social as conformist; the second, her notion of the conscious pariah; and the third, her assessment of intimacy as a safe space for developing one's own relatively independent identity.

THE NOTION OF THE 'SOCIAL' AS CONFORMIST

If we want to think about the conditions for active citizenship, about gender identity, politics and feminism, about anti-political and anti-feminist sentiment in an Eastern European context, it is, in my opinion, exactly the Arendtian differentiation between the 'social' and 'political' that is one of the most important theories to bring to bear on the discussion.[6] However, this differentiation should not be read and understood as a differentiation of the 'content' of each sphere. Although such interpretation is possible, especially if we derive it from Arendt's most systematic work, *The Human Condition*, and leave aside her other writings, I think this is neither just to Arendt nor sustainable regarding her work as a whole.

Hannah Arendt's notion of politics as active citizenship and public judgement was primarily developed out of her exploration and the critique of the so-called 'social'.[7] The conclusion about the decisive importance of the political for human existence she came to was, above all, through her own experience with the totalitarian system within Europe and through questioning of the so-called general human emancipation and the Jewish social position and identity (also her own) within modern European society in the 20th century.

It was out of experience with the widespread conformist behaviour within Nazi Germany that the questions arose which developed the ruling principles of her 'method' of thinking and judging, and which made her sometimes quite unpopular among other professional thinkers. Namely, on the one hand, the question why were the Jews as a social group the first and the main victims of the totalitarian experiment? and, on the other hand, the question what was the problem with society and public judgement, and with the educated intellectual elite who was ready to forget the elementary principles of human solidarity and to tolerate or even to support the most dreadful human experiments such as the Nazi regime? Both questions together formed the initial points of Arendtian analysis of totalitarianism and her critique of the social, and accompanied her through her whole life. Through answering them she has shown that modern anti-Semitism represents a novel form of social hatred: the Jewish population was neither a 'scapegoat' for Nazism nor was anti-Semitism a final result of a 2000-year-old hostility towards Jews who were automatically condemned to play the eternal victim role. Both the 'Jewish fate' and the modern European anti-Semitism represented a mirror of the contemporary situation of the social (also of the paradoxical 'social emancipation' of some groups) and of the condition of the nation-state at the beginning of the 20th century (see Arendt, 1986: 3–88).

Hannah Arendt analyses three constitutive elements of totalitarianism: anti-Semitism, imperialism and the total domination. Through the

analysis of the 'rise of the social' as a capitalist expansion and as a growing mass conformist movement, she shows the decline of the public realm in the traditional sense. With the help of a critique of the Hobbesian concept of the state, she describes how the modern nation-state becomes a kind of a 'power business', it provides only for the accumulation of power, and expands its means of power all over the globe to enable the economic exploitation. In times of crisis such a state shows its total powerlessness to guarantee the humanistic ideals, to protect its own minorities, and to render the framework for equality for all citizens. Humanistic and Christian ideals, toleration and love towards others can, in view of the stateless groups without citizenship, exposed to their 'mere social existence' and assimilation, be easily transformed or can transgress into social hatred able (within the modern sovereign state and under the democratic condition) to even legally conquer the nation-state institutions and use them for its own totalitarian, violent purposes.

Within this context, Arendt represents the 'Jewish question' as an example of one of the most problematic, unsolved modern political questions in terms of inclusiveness, and, together with this, also as an example of the unsolved question of the nation-state: the Jews embodied one of the most capable, developed and adaptable social groups, on the one hand, and yet one of the most politically vulnerable, marginalized groups, on the other. This was the reason why they could, within the 20th-century nation-state system, be transformed into a stateless people and thus, refugees, defenceless people, becoming people without the possibility of existence, exposed to holocaust. Having a 'social identity' only, not being politically recognized by any state as having equal identity, were the European Jews (representing merely 'naked human beings') in the environment of a collapsing European nation-state system, without any possibility for the protection of their existence (Arendt, 1986: 123–57, 267–302).[8]

In short, we could say that one of the main problems with the modern nation-state system and its national economy was that it was permanently and radically marginalizing – excluding certain social groups from / out of the political. It allowed and enabled them social emancipation only, the 'emancipation' from certain constraints of private existence and identity, inasmuch as it enlarged certain activities of the household into the economy of capitalism. It has thrown them into the public or social, semi-public space: in spite of this they did not become political in the sense of active citizenship. Most of these groups were directed to 'use other means', not politics, for their influence and power. They could interfere, but only in extraordinary circumstances, as a part of the 'social force'. As individuals, they ought to rely on assimilation and a 'social type of power', striving for social acceptance; on private or semi-public action through sentiment, love, humanitarian work; or on a private search for other mechanisms of power. If we follow Hannah Arendt, this type of

action and demanding of social recognition have exceptional anti-political features and are of a very fragile nature unless the rights of the group are not legally and politically guaranteed. It actually represents something which she called 'perversion of equality from a political into a social concept' (Arendt, 1986: 55).

I think that it is this critique of the social as a conformist pressure towards assimilation and adaptation to the mass behaviour and of 'social emancipation' (Arendt spoke about social emancipation in the cases of women, workers and also in the case of Jewish population[9]) which can help us (with its 'method') to think over the situation of socially and politically marginalized groups: the ones that succumbed to the 'logic of the social' and its emancipation and were 'liberated' on this basis – namely thrown into the public as apolitical, social subjects. These groups are nowadays often socially and economically free, however they are not free in a very political sense and therefore their existence is often in imminent danger: these are the groups, which have been so far in existing history excluded from what was called politics, not admitted or declared as non-political by definition (or, rather, through their 'function' within the social and private; see Arendt, 1974: 71–3). It seems to me, although I am not suggesting any direct parallels, that Hannah Arendt's approach to the problem of the 'social' and 'social emancipation' can be highly inspiring for questions such as the political (in)equality of women or for the questions such as nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, etc.[10] Maybe it is even more so for the case of feminist thinking, which has, within the last 30 years, many times fallen under the influence of different social, anti-political streams of thought and sometimes incorporated them into its own ideology. This approach can also be possibly fruitful for the very reason that Arendt herself never directly dealt with the questions being put forward by feminists (except in a few footnotes, remarks and in one article).

SPACES OF FREEDOM

However, and this is my second point, there is one important additional element to this story about the powerlessness of the politically marginalized social groups to be mentioned: and it was this element which led Hannah Arendt to develop her powerful argument regarding 'identity politics' against marginalization, exclusion (and also against totalitarianism) in terms of politics as the only possible defence against (totalitarian) dangers of the rise of the conformist social and of the decline of politics. This element is about judgement and about personal responsibility (developed in the so-called 'dark times'). While searching for the individual attitude and way out for the member of a socially and politically

marginalized group, Arendt developed a distinguished, personal and political attitude, the 'pariah'.[11] In her opinion, there existed two possible reactions to the discriminatory practices of a given social surrounding: one was to adapt to the social, to assimilate to the pressures of the social conformist ideal, and to search for social recognition, while giving up one's own identity (the so-called 'parvenu' position). The other was to accept marginalization and build one's own identity ghetto, to withdraw into privacy (the so-called 'pariah' position). She also suggested (recalling her own experience) a 'third solution', as the only possible protection and response against social pressures or discriminations and also as a political solution: not to deny one's own identity and assimilate, but to fight back stressing one's own discriminated identity. (Arendt herself described this in an interview in 1964. When she was a child the reaction of Arendt's mother to her child's experience of anti-Semitic remarks from other children was that 'You mustn't it let get to you. You must defend yourself!' [Arendt, 1994a: 8]. Later on, when the Jewish question became much more than just the problem of one's own 'personal fate' and when this was more clearly articulated by Arendt herself, this, at first sight, very personal attitude was expressed through a very political form: 'If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen not as an upholder of the Rights of Man, or whatever' [Arendt, 1994a: 12].)

To defend oneself, not to draw back, to stress one's own identity even though it may be undesired and redundant, but not to deny it, would be the description of this 'strategy'. Through this one can both learn defence against the discrimination of the social surrounding and exercise non-adaptability, resistance against the constraints of the social and against the overwhelming 'logic of obedience' as seemingly the only one 'political principle' (there is nothing else left). This can be a source of the so-called 'conscious pariahdom', based upon identity building through a political response against discrimination.

There are, of course, other readings of the Arendtian 'social' possible: since Arendt, especially in her work *The Human Condition* (1958), explores the phenomenon of the social as 'publicized' private matters (such as domestic labour, etc.), her critique of the social might as well be understood as opposition to the politicization of the private condition or as refusing any questions about the private matters to become public. In this sense her analysis of the social might be interpreted as an inexorable liberal view both against a welfare state and against any equal opportunity measures and thus as hostile towards feminist attempts to challenge the division between private and public. However, it could be said that Arendtian opposition to 'socialization' or direct making public of the private is not the striving for the absolute closure of the private in the sense that private matters should not be discussed as relevant for politics.

It is rather, on the one hand, the warning against 'social emancipation' as 'inadequate', insufficient or even dangerous[12] if it is the only mechanism of identity recognition, if it is not accompanied by a political consciousness and judgement. On the other hand, this opposition opens the path towards differentiation between behaviour (passive and reactive social attitude, connected to a conformist pattern) and action (conscious political activity, connected to 'pariahdom'[13]).

I think that we could also find something similar to the Arendtian 'social' (the phenomenon of social conformism) within the contemporary East and Central European context – as one sort of all-embracing liberal-capitalist logic and practically working ideology together with the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) of nationalist thinking. The already mentioned strong liberal discourse is a remarkable part of this, and is virtually compensating for a public discourse and – through the visual media above all – also radically penetrating into the realm of the private and intimate. This phenomenon is restructuring the relationship between the public and the private as well: the neoliberal discourse which dominates in the public and in the media (the literary 'creation' of 'watching' and 'voyeuristic' society which could be seen as 'the social' in the Arendtian, negative sense) is occupying the place of the public discussion and creating anti-political conformism (anti-feminism is, as I have argued elsewhere, a part of this, see Jalusic, 1998). It succeeds in doing this through a radical attack on the boundaries of the private and an intrusion into the privacy and intimacy, through the use of constraining enforced 'public' images and dominant media identities. These are identities which are forced upon us and which successfully assimilate everything different on the one hand and resist all that is different which cannot or does not want to adapt, on the other. It is within this perspective that, in my opinion, the differentiation between the 'social' and 'political' offers us a possible way of defence and of thinking about the conditions for active citizenship and, connected to this, about the possibilities of an effective feminist approach within the post-socialist condition.

The third point I would like to discuss is the aforementioned question of political identity. Only the conscious pariah is able to oppose conformist logic of the social. However, such a conscious and responsible actor does not develop automatically from any 'original position' or originally given and natural identity. In order to develop the capacity for political judgement as the most important element of (non-conformist) active citizenship, a set of conditions is required. Arendt did not develop any such 'set' of conditions in the normative sense. However, from her assessment of political identity (which also originates via her autobiographical life and experiences) as something which comes to appear through the play between the social and the political, the elements for supporting the formation of the conscious pariah can be drawn.

A political 'identity' does not rely on any essentially biological or even prescribed or constructed social identity, notwithstanding the fact that political action is necessarily accompanied by some kind of identity or is a result of an identity struggle. Yet such identity is not 'pre-existent', or pre-political, something which is biologically, socially or in any other way conditioned. Identity in the political sense is distinctively individual and comes to exist through the process of political action itself (although it can be expressed through a group identity too). It is a result of the tension between seemingly eternal biological identities, which are ascribed to us through the social surroundings, and our ability, our power, to transcend them (these 'identities') through action. Acting is the basic human capacity and hence a unique political possibility. Political identity – in Arendt's 'who-ness', the '*who* am I' as the acting being – is different from 'what-ness' – from '*what* am I', the ascribed, inborn, inherited, etc. identities. Regarding the 'what-ness' of identity it does not make a big difference whether such identities are considered 'biological', thus inborn or 'social', therefore acquired. A good example of the difference between ascribed and politically acquired identity would be represented by the difference between women as a given group identity and feminists as a political identity, which is not necessarily dependent on one's biological or social gender. Political identity springs from the relationship between the social (ascribed, inborn, acquired) 'status' and the possibility of its political transcendence. Hence we could consider feminism as such political transcendence of 'socially constructed' gender relationships: the feminist political identity is not identical with one's gender identity.

It is precisely this topic which should be reflected upon in the present contemporary Eastern European situation. Namely, we still live in the situation where identities appear and are seen as something entirely given, born to, or ascribed from outside. One should think about the possibilities of transcending, transforming these at first sight completely fixed, unchangeable 'inborn' or ascribed identities through political activity and about the conditions required for this. There are, above all, ethnic and gender identities (but others – such as cultural – as well) which are seen as something fixed within one area and therefore unchangeable. The experiences of war and the building of the nation-state in some Eastern European post-socialist countries, together with requirements for homogenization of all undesired differences under one roof, were an especially fruitful ground for the reproduction of fixed and unchangeable identities. I illustrate this with one example concerning women. The Polish sociologist Mira Marody wrote in 1993 about 'the habitual perception of gender differences as belonging to the biological rather than social realm. In this context a fight for gender equality seems as ridiculous as, for instance a fight for the equality of blondes and brunettes as the beautiful and the ugly' (Marody, 1993: 858). This quotation shows how much the

discussion of the gender identity as a 'natural' condition prevailed and how any feminist view of this seemed obsolete.

Nevertheless, for a political transformation which springs out of the political acting of a conscious pariah, and which could be called active citizenship, some conditions or at least elements of them need to be fulfilled and also a certain degree of courage within those acting subjects must be developed. And herein lies the political potential of the differentiation and relationship between the public, private and intimate and the power of the intimate sphere. In this sense it is exactly this differentiation that represents one of the most important conditions for active citizenship also in the light of an eventual feminist approach.

Under the conditions of modern growth and domination of the social as a mass conformist society, the traditional differentiation between private and public erodes away in any case, especially through mass media dominance. Hence, in Arendt's opinion, the sole difference between private and public is not sufficient for the defence against the pressures of mass behaviour (since the 'social' is colonizing both private and public). Her approach offers an additional possibility, an important additional 'space' for freedom that was taken in the past as a privilege by philosophers of all kinds or other privileged gentry folk: the space one can withdraw into from the constraints of the social, a safe pre-political and non-public sphere, called the 'intimate sphere'.[14]

If the citizen's active political capacities are to be developed, everyone should have a space and the opportunity for developing the capacity of judgement. However, this can happen only if one has the possibility to create and to have a free use of a 'room of her / his own' (not necessarily 'spacious'), where she or he is not necessarily exposed to (conformist) constraints of the social, i.e. to the anti-political force of social behaviour, to mass public conformism (meaning the influence of pressure regarding the opinion of others, imposition of social roles, different identity roles; for example gender roles, – but also the unwanted closeness of others, possible violence, everything that abolishes the distance boundaries between individuals, etc.).[15] The idea of such spaces was, in my opinion, also shaped through feminist political activities and ideas, and it has also been expressed by the demands for equal opportunity politics and politics in the sense of 'state intervention' (which in many cases – such as demanding state measures against violence against women – is in fact aimed at the very protection of the women's privacy). However, both within and outside feminist circles such politics was sometimes misinterpreted as a focus on abolishing the boundaries between private and public.

CONCLUSION

The Arendtian opposition to the direct political relevance of the private and social should be read parallel with the idea of a 'supportive space' (not a space in a topographical sense) for the formation of a conscious pariah.[16] Therefore, I am inclined to the suggestion of P. Boling that Arendtian differentiation of 'the social' (behaviour) and 'the political' (action) are 'not to be read as physical locations but as different modes of spirits in which people approach their problems' (Boling, 1996: 80). With such differentiation between the social and political in mind, it is also possible to think about the conditions for the active non-conformist feminist approach (as an active citizenship potential) in terms of retaining plurality among women (although I might be a feminist, I am not a member of any homogeneous block 'women' who think the same way) and one's own intimacy separated from the social and political identity (in a sense of 'vive la petite différence' among women[17]). This also means that we can think about equality and gendered political identity in a different mode as it was usually understood by both many feminist authors and their critiques. Or, as I have put elsewhere, feminism as a political identity should be understood in a strict pluralist way, especially in Eastern post-socialist Europe (see Jalusic, 1998).

NOTES

1. There was a recent discussion in Slovenia of the 'nature' of feminist 'social' projects such as SOS hotlines for women or women's safe houses, etc. Against the assumption that these projects show a development of a feminist 'social work', the critic stated the following: 'Feminist social work' is a *contradictio in adiecto* – a feminist action is political action par excellence and any other social help or support is only a part of this political action' (Dobnikar, 1997: 130). In this connection see a very interesting chapter on the topic of 'NGOization of Feminism' in unified Germany where the author analyses the phenomenon of NGOs being 'more and more called upon to replace state activities and the social sector and function as repair networks for economic and political disintegration processes' (Lang, 1997: 112).
2. This understanding saw the private as a uniform family space which is / should be free from the intervention of the state and not be a place for the individual's autonomy. It was connected to the attempt to 'reconstruct' the private / public dichotomy in post-socialism, which, from the mainstream political perspective, was seen as a completely non-contradictory 'natural' process. It did not assume that the 'construction of the boundary between the public and the private is a political act in itself' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 80). Within this view, the private sphere was supposed to have been destroyed in socialism by the abolition of private property and through the politicization of everyday life and the many state interventions into personal, intimate affairs. One thesis in the opposition's critique of the socialist system was that it was a kind of 'Gemeinschaft', where private and public space did not exist,

and therefore have to be rebuilt. The family especially was supposed to have been grossly 'socialized'. The argument for reconstruction used a very specific, old liberal notion of the private. It did not subsume the concept of the individual (male or female), who has the right to his or her intimacy, but was developed under other influences, including the church, as a kind of 'communitarian' concept of privacy. Its foundation, 'the family', again is a kind of 'Gemeinschaft', declared as a 'social subject', as a 'person' so to speak. The powerful argument against the totalitarian state as interfering into private affairs (stemming from the dissident critique of socialism) was now translated into the demand for quasi non-intervention into this kind of community, family.

The concrete functioning of this approach can be shown in the many tax systems which introduced old family tax methods instead of individual ones, new judicial systems which did not explicitly recognize the equality of those with different sexual orientation or legalize homosexual marriages (in Slovenia, for example, calls for such recognition existed but could not be enacted), etc. In this sense the individual's autonomy was in many cases not supported or was even subject to attempts to destroy it in spite of the argument of 'non-intervention', as in the case of reproductive rights in many of the countries discussed.

3. In relation to politics and political activity within Eastern Europe, we can, as I have argued elsewhere, understand anti-feminist attitudes as a certain response to the past, present and future participation (of women) in public affairs and politics, and also as a reaction to their contemporary general and individual situations. Female anti-feminism in Eastern and Central Europe is, on one hand, a reaction to stigmatization. In many cases when women (politicians, scientists, reporters, etc.) proclaim themselves not to be feminists, such public rejection of feminism can also indicate a certain defence strategy, showing us a different starting point for post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries. It also seems that two kinds of anti-feminist positions have to be distinguished: one that is principled and one pragmatic, although both are a reaction to changes and to claims from the 'outside'. The principled position would be a general negative attitude towards the issue of the equality of women. The pragmatic position is about the relation towards images of what feminism is supposed to be. Although they are probably both interrelated, it seems that the second, pragmatic anti-feminism, prevails today because there is in general very little doubt expressed about the necessity of the legal equal position of women (for more about feminism and politics in Central and Eastern Europe, see Jalusic, 1998).
4. I use the notion of a line of separation between 'West' and 'East' within this context only to draw attention to the different points of departure regarding the past political and social experience of the various actors within the so-called Western and post-socialist Eastern European democracies.
5. A good overview and selection of contributions on this topic can be found in Bonnie Honig's collection of essays (Honig, 1995a). See also, among others, Benhabib (1996), Bickford (1996), Boling (1997), Dish (1996), Young-Bruehl (1996).
6. I think that in the Arendtian case of the 'social', its reception among feminist thinkers is, with the exception of few authors (like Bickford, Vollrath, Canovan, Boling, Dish, also Honig, not the only feminist theorists among them), still a case of 'distorted communication' (I am using here Canovan's expression for the relationship of Habermas to Arendt, see Canovan, 1983: 107ff.; Vollrath, 1995: 9–17). But I am not going to develop this here.

7. Especially in her major works *Rahel Varnhagen* (1974), *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1986), *The Human Condition* (1958), *On Revolution* (1963b).
8. This point is not only important for contemporary understanding of the question of the refugee and general migrant's and citizenship problems all over the globe but, within the European context, also for the explanation of the new wars and conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, etc.
9. Especially in the works *Rahel Varnhagen* (Arendt, 1974), *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958: 72–3), *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt, 1986: 54ff.), *On Revolution* (Arendt, 1963b: 112).
10. I am, of course, perfectly aware of the danger of direct parallelisms in such cases. The Jewish position of a social group cannot be immediately compared to that of women, ethnic or other marginalized groups as E.Y. Bruehl has rightly pointed out (see Young-Bruehl, 1996: 324). However, there might be, as some authors have shown, quite important parallels among marginalized identities regarding the possible building of individuals' and political group public awareness and political action (see Bickford, 1996: 95–139; Boling, 1996: 61–81; Dietz, 1995: 32–40; Honig, 1995b: 149–56; Orlie, 1995: 343–7).
11. As to the Arendt works see above all the following texts: Arendt (1974, 1978, 1983: 33–56, 1986: 56–68). See also some interpretations of this attitude and 'concept': Benhabib (1996: 1–34), Feher (1989), Honig (1995b), Markus (1989), Minnich (1985), Orlie (1995), Shklar (1983).
12. Such 'identity politics' in a social sense can be dangerous since it produces social hatred towards other 'identity politics' and groups.
13. This would mean a sort of 'jumping' from the private identity to the public in the sense of transforming one's own 'private' problem or social identity within a broader, public context.
14. See Arendt (1958: 38–49, 71–3) where she writes about the discovery of the 'intimate sphere' and its importance with regard to the 'rise of the social'.
15. Arendt indicates the idea of such space(s) particularly in *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958) and (*Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*; Arendt, 1982) and in essays like 'Crisis in Education' (Arendt, 1968) and 'Philosophy and Politics' (Arendt, 1990).
16. Unlike the classical notion of judgement as a privileged contemplative and unworldly philosophical activity, Arendt – having in mind the deadlocks of totalitarian experience with non-judging and loss of so-called 'common sense' (Arendt, 1963a) – pleads for the democratization of this traditional philosophical privilege of 'leave me alone', in the sense of independence and autonomy. She considers it an option for everyone to develop political potential and the capability for judgement. And herein lies the 'political' potential of the private – in the sense of one's own intimate sphere – for active citizenship.

    The political potential of the private is not in the transmission of the political mode of action into the private. Furthermore, the entering of competition in the sense of public competition can be destructive for private relations such as love and friendship. Of course, in order to acquire such free space one must politicize the private and show it as both possible sphere of constraint and freedom. (This is what feminists have done with revealing the problem of violence within the private.) In order to become a political being, to be aware of the importance of politics and of the maintenance of the public space, every individual needs both 'subjectivation' (education) in the family (private and intimate sphere) and the existence of the public space (the difference between public and private). Arendt's approach towards

education as a pre-political activity (in the essay 'Crisis in Education', Arendt, 1968) can be seen, in spite of her underlining the importance of the family, as explicitly anti-patriarchal. First, she does not connect the family with any patriarchal ideologies and tradition, and second, she sees parental authority in the positive sense as something different from violence and demanding obedience.

17. This was Arendt's seemingly 'anti-feminist' expression: she used it in opposition to the unified women's social movement which she criticized in her review of Alice Ruehle-Gerstel's book in 1993 (see Arendt, 1994a). It can be found in some of her exclamations in favour of Rosa Luxemburg's position, who, like her, criticized the women's movement and was very distanced to it in some regards. However, the slogan 'Vive la petite différence' Arendt repeated many times (see Arendt, 1968: 44) amounted to, as E. Young-Bruehl (1996) noted, the differences among women themselves and not to the sexual difference between women and men (see also Honig, 1995b; Markus, 1989).

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