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## **The Impossibility of Multiculturalism – Modernity and Politics**

**Abstract:** *The politics of multiculturalism today raises scepticism not only among ordinary people, but also of the European political class. In times of crisis it offers an excuse for various hasty and often outrageous decisions. The proposition of French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010 concerning the mass deportations of Romani people residing in France is certainly one of them. Yet, this problem cannot be simply reduced to a particular, more or less reasonable political decisions neither result merely from current situation. The crisis is also closely related to the conditions of contemporary political practice and the shape of the public sphere. This article aims to shed some light on this issue in terms of H. Arendt's philosophy. We examine the possibility of multiculturalism in a society subjected to the forces of science, capitalism, and the doctrine of the Rights of Man. We assume that where politics ceases to be a living practice based on dialogue and confrontation of diversities, and grounds itself in the realm of necessities, a peaceful multiculturalism becomes simply impossible.*

### **Introduction**

In what way does modernity affect identity? Do the dynamics of civilization indeed support diversity and pluralism, or are they perhaps a cause for their disappearance, and even promote crisis and violence? In other words, is the project of a multicultural society, i.e. a society of integrated differences, possible? Or, perhaps the scepticism it increasingly raises in Europe requires a more profound examination of the nature of politics itself. We may find an explanation to these questions in a number of Hannah Arendt's wide-ranging remarks about modernity. According to her, modernity manifests 'the loss of the world' and is sign of the decline of

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politics properly understood.<sup>1</sup> Its decline is ‘...among the most potent causes of the current worldwide rebellious unrest, its chaotic nature, and its dangerous tendency to get out of control and to run amuck.’<sup>2</sup> The culture of capitalism, the increased emphasis on scientific and technological reason, as well as the strengthening of the Rights of Man and the order which goes along with it, paradoxically even more prevent people from manifesting and confronting their distinctive identities. This article sheds some light on this complex and controversial interdependence.

I would like to stress clearly that the purpose of this article is not a criticism of multiculturalism, nor a criticism of the Rights of Man, science, or even capitalism, and in particular it is not a polemic with Hannah Arendt. Instead, it is rather an attempt to present, in her language and according to her views, the political conditions of the developing multicultural societies in today’s world. I do not think that the dilemmas of multicultural politics were completely alien to Hannah Arendt. As a German Jew she experienced the most extreme manifestations of ideological cultural conflict, and then for many years lived in the United States, where she witnessed a violent emancipation of different cultures. My remarks consider the changes in the political sphere which seem to be less and less governed by the ideal of freedom, but which instead develop in the clench of various conditions, or according to H. Arendt, ‘necessities’. This is an essay about the possibility, or impossibility, of multiculturalism. In this sense, it is about the *conditions* of individual pluralism and diversity which appear in the public realm (for instance as an expression of different cultural, communitarian, religious, or sexual identities).<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Politics, action and pluralism

To correctly understand the essence of this practical interdependence, we need to clarify from the beginning the term *action*, which Hannah Arendt adopted from Aristotle and creatively developed according to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. From our point of view, this notion is of extraordinary importance here because it is the principal vehicle of ‘meaning’ in politics.

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<sup>1</sup> This is in reference to various statements by Chancellor Angela Merkel from 16 October 2011 delivered at a meeting with the youth of the CDU; President Nicolas Sarkozy from 10 February 2011 delivered at TFI; and the inaugural speech of Prime Minister David Cameron from February 2011.

<sup>2</sup> H. Arendt, *On Violence*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York 1970, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to very much thank the editorial board and anonymous reviewers for critical comments which induced me to articulate the purpose of this article in a more direct way.

She placed action by two other, more instrumental in character, occupations of what she describes as *vita activa*, namely next to: *work* (fabrication) and *labor*.<sup>4</sup> Action permits one to reveal ones distinctiveness and identity, and is necessary since it pushes people towards communication. We are not sovereign and living in common accordingly to nature, but are compelled to search for agreement. Action as a way of self-approval is a way of subjectification and as such it has – among other tasks – a distinctive status close to Heidegger’s ‘Being’ [*Dasein*]. It allows people to appear and stand out distinctively among other entities, allows one to reveal one’s attitude and initiative, and so it permits the exhibition of man (used in this article in the inclusive gender sense) as he/she *IS* – argues Arendt. Action allows coming-in-to-presence [*Anwesen*], to recall once more Heidegger’s terminology. The same applies to *speech*: only the exchange of opinions and sharing them with others allows for depicting the world as it appears to be. And, *vice versa*, as Arendt writes, the fact of being someone: ‘(...) *can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity* (...)’ – in absolute loneliness.<sup>5</sup> That is why *lexis* and *praxis* are so political in nature: ‘(...) *the political realm arises directly out of acting together, the ‘sharing of words and deeds’*.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, to think critically and be impartial, as well as the ‘*enlargement of the mind*’ are therefore possible only due to politics.<sup>7</sup> Arendt compares politics to a banquet table, which both connects and divides the people who are sitting around it. Without this agora and without the practices related to it, man is not only deprived of the ability to speak, but also stops reasoning at the same time. Personal experiences, ‘*the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind*’ do not bring about this sense of the reality of the world and the considerable presence of other people.<sup>8</sup> Such a pre-metaphysical understanding of being active was particularly significant for the ancient public sphere, which remains for Arendt an inexhaustible source of meanings and references, although its ideals in political life slowly recede.

In accordance with the ancient concept of *archein*, Arendt points out that the free agency of man is also about establishing the existence of things, that is revealing the unexpected reality; it gives rise to what didn’t exist until the moment, what could only be suspected before. Arendt the philosopher assumes that action: ‘(...) *marks the start of something, begins something*

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<sup>4</sup> On the relationship of Arendt’s theory of action and Aristotle, see: F. Moreault, *Hannah Arendt, l’amour de la liberté: essai de pensée politique*, Presses Université Laval, Quebec 2002.

<sup>5</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s political philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, pp. 42–23.

<sup>8</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 50.

*new, seizes the initiative, or, in Kantian terms, forges its own chain.*<sup>9</sup> The reality of truly human life, which takes place in the public realm [*koinon*], not in the shelter of the domestic life [*oikia*], is essentially a stage of wonderful surprises, spontaneous births and opportunities that can deliver the ‘immortal fame’ of action.<sup>10</sup> Arendt is close to the ancient thought about the essence of human life as something that fulfils itself in ‘interruptions’ and in what is ‘extraordinary’.<sup>11</sup> The annihilation of this realm of improvised actions, the inhibition of this spontaneous drama, and the pattern of stuffing it in the frames could only lead to undesirable consequences. ‘Conditioning’ politics, its codification and putting it into dependence on external factors turned against the boundless forces of pluralism.<sup>12</sup> Although action is always a source of uncertainty and risk (Heidegger) and it brings unpredictable (non-automatic) effects, it is at the same time an essence of the freedom that reveals un-codified aspects of human life, i.e., plurality. Arendt’s understanding of politics as a domain of the ‘(...) *coexistence and association of different men*’, where people ‘(...) *organise themselves politically according to certain essential commonalities found within or abstracted from an absolute chaos of differences*’ is always associated with the reality of differences and their confrontation.<sup>13</sup> In this mode, the contemporary sociologist Frank Furedi points out that the politics of multiculturalism, born in the late 1960s and 1970s, was in fact a substitute for genuine discussion about what should be common for people, and thus it did not allow for a real clash of differences. This politics (*live and let live*) was easily and dogmatically proclaimed, and not reflexively and jointly developed in action; it was a manifestation of the crisis of the political community and a sign of the depoliticisation of the discourse rather than the fruit of authentic interaction.<sup>14</sup> Multiculturalism was not a consequence of the political process, but an empty statement.

In the writings of Arendt, the sources of this destructive process of collapsing politics are complex and multi-faceted. They are associated with the movements of civilisation: scientific discoveries, the development of destructive technologies, as well as with the social and intellectual changes in under-

<sup>9</sup> H. Arendt, *Introduction into politics*, in: *The Promise of politics*, Schocken Books, New York 2005, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. Manent, *Cours familier de philosophie politique*, Fayard, Paris 2001, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> H. Arendt, *The concept of history; ancient and modern* in: *Between past and future; six exercises in political thought*, The Viking Press, New York 1961, p. 43 (see, in the same book: *What is freedom*, pp. 165–166).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>13</sup> H. Arendt, *Introduction into politics*, op., cit., p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> See: F. Furedi, *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?: Confronting Twenty-First Century Philistinism*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London 2004.

standing the importance of such phenomena as *vita activa*, or *vita contemplativa*. Arendt admits that these sources may eventually have a religious character, and even esoteric: for example, they can be the result of the ‘anti-political edge of Christianity’, which brought about the degradation of the public sphere, or a result of conceptual confusions and misunderstandings spitefully provoked by some unspecified evil spirit – *Dieu trompeur*. Elsewhere, Arendt sees the causes of this process in a dynamic and active form of being that presents itself as an illusion.<sup>15</sup>

Because of these complex mechanisms, of which only a small part will be described below, some human occupations that did not give man the possibility of fulfilling his/her potential, appeared and proliferated. The work of *homo faber* serves the exchange, utility and reproduction of the beautiful. The socialised labor of *animal laborans* is focused on the vegetative side of life – both pushed the search for stability and meaning outside politics, which – according to Arendt – alone truly engages the human disposition to speak and act.<sup>16</sup> Their diffusion inverted the once-existing hierarchy of the *vita activa* occupations and, according to Arendt, had disastrous consequences: loneliness, death of common sense, as well as dehumanisation.<sup>17</sup> The order of the human condition was *ipso facto* destroyed: what once seemed mundane, superficial and shallow has become the most important.

The postmodern instrumentalisation of political life, which was earlier understood as a space of freedom initiating action, where everyone tested ideas and participated in creating a common language, has led to a dramatic reduction in diversity and expanded the areas of isolation and loneliness. The fear of the unknown and unpredictable consequences of action distracts people from engagement and self-expression, and also minimises any ‘communicational activities’. Arendt interprets this political history in terms of escalating anxiety, or – in Heidegger’s terms – gradual falling, in which *in-worldly* labor and work (fabricating) functions as a *placebo*: they release one from anxiety and become a sort of necessity and duty. Yet the thing is, as Arendt argues, that this necessity, regardless of whether it flows from natural human needs or is anchored in the logic of the common institutions, has nothing to do with politics.<sup>18</sup> Politics understood as acting in both the name of biological necessities and freedom is contradictory.

Freedom, however, is the environment of pluralism of identities – the guarantee of their reality and authenticity. The lack of freedom brings,

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<sup>15</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> See: H. Arendt, *Introduction into politics*, op.cit., pp. 144–145.

according to the wording of Girard, *indifferentiation* – a crisis where differences obliterate suddenly and disturbingly. Despite the appearances of pluralism and the cultural movements of emancipation, and regardless of ambitious ‘identity projects’, people are becoming more alike and less willing to accept diversity. The calm of this ‘apolitical politics’ is disrupted only by crises. Perhaps the full potential of *vita activa* – the will to act, identity and diversity – manifests its force exactly at that moment. The most human needs emerge due to dramatic and incomprehensible activities, in frightening forms full of violence, ready to sacrifice life itself. Thus pluralism and political life seem to return today mostly in the form of ugly, violent and exaggerated collective actions. In this world all people behave like vexed neophytes.

The remarks of Arendt tend, however, in an opposite direction, and the philosopher of course does not endorse any form of violence. On the contrary, she proposes a completely different way of dealing with the unforeseeable consequences of the current crisis. Her view grows out of the hope for a certain form of action rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. It is expressed by both the human faculty of forgiving, announced by Jesus and constituting the remedy for unpredictability (in the private sphere), as well as by the Abrahamic doctrine of keeping promises, which is a precautionary measure against the chaotic uncertainty of the future (in public sphere).<sup>19</sup> Arendt writes that: ‘(...) *without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities – a darkness which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfils, can dispel.*’<sup>20</sup> Both of these attitudes can be a source of durability, and at the same time they can be combined with the very essence of the miraculous and deprived of any automatism acting among other people. This is Arendt’s original answer to Heidegger’s problem of the *temporality* of Dasein, that is on the interplay between the real and possible. These proposals however, go contrary to the tendencies observed by Arendt, particularly the nature and dynamic of scientific civilisation.

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<sup>19</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 237.

## 2. The Archimedean point of reference

In the main course of modern science, dominated by the ‘natural’ view of things, culture with its nuances and relativity appears to be of secondary importance, something a bit trivial. The technical and ‘computer-like’ model of inquiry, so significant for modern science, is not only closed to pluralism and the uniqueness of cultural identities, but – as Arendt assumes – is closed for the reality of man’s *world* in general. This sceptical diagnosis offered by the German philosopher underlies her pessimistic reflection on modernity and politics. It sounds quite puzzling considering the remarkable achievements of science and the degree of insight obtained from examining the slightest areas of human reality. So, what is the problem and what precisely constitutes this ‘loss of the world’?

In Arendt’s interpretation, the modern sciences have reached a universal point of view on nature and on earthly reality. This option was adopted deliberately and explicitly beyond earth: in the cosmos or in the interior world of the man, in the structures of his mind. Arendt calls this perspective Archimedean and maintains that its adoption has had unpredictable and destructive consequences for human culture, which lost its stability and plunged into despair, and specifically into modern nihilism.<sup>21</sup> From a scientific perspective, the earth is only a special and relative case, and knowledge of it seems as though it’s discerned from a distant cosmos.

Starting with the discovery of Galileo, who confirmed experimentally a dramatic imperfection of the human senses and the superficial character of the so-called ‘common sense’, while at same time depicted an extremely promising cosmic perspective on the world, the human ability to observe and measure began to expand at the cost of increasing distance, distrust and alienation from the world. ‘*The modern age – writes Arendt – began when man, with the help of the telescope, turned his bodily eyes toward the universe, about which he had speculated for a long time seeing with the eyes of the mind, listening with the ears of the heart, and guided by the inner light of reason learned that his senses were not fitted for the universe, that his everyday experience, far from being able to constitute the model for the reception of truth and the acquisition of knowledge, was a constant source of error and delusion. After this deception, the enormity of which we find difficult to realise because it was centuries before its full impact was felt everywhere and not only in the rather restricted milieu of scholars and philosophers, suspicions began to haunt modern man from all sides.*’<sup>22</sup> The world became incomprehensible.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> H. Arendt, *The concept of history; ancient and modern*, op.cit., pp. 54–55.

A similar step with the same consequences, but towards the internal cosmos of the human mind, was taken by Descartes, who articulated the response of humanity to the discovery of Galileo. The French philosopher, in a most significant way for the initial phase of modernity, expressed and generalised the extreme disbelief in the ability of the human senses to reveal the truth. The relativity of human experience resulted in doubts and the loss of any certainty. The *being* and the world of phenomena were severed forever; henceforth everything could be a dream as well as an opus of evil spirit. Through Descartes's doubting became the rule of philosophy, just like in the ancient times it was wandering [*thaumazain*]<sup>23</sup>. The creation of the 'school of suspicion' is indeed the merit of this French philosopher. This 'multi-threaded articulation of a doubt', as Arendt writes, brought about a state whereby: '(...) *man in his search for truth and knowledge can trust neither the given evidence of the senses, nor the "innate truth" of the mind, nor the "inner light of reason"*'<sup>24</sup>. Hence the opposition to the notion of a self-manifesting truth, and to traditions that proclaimed the existence of such truth, as well as the negation of the essence of being, which according to this interpretation can change its character in such a dynamic way and be so distant to any common assessment that it ceases to be a source of stability. At the same time, Arendt points out that the source of disbelief is not religious in origin, but is an expression of alienation and a specific falling into the depths of ourselves. In the search of certainty, man fell into the abyss of his own *Self* – henceforth the main object of introspective thought [*cogitatio*].

Nothing was simply a worldly thing anymore, and reality was either withdrawing increasingly towards some 'universal reference point', suspended in the space, or it became a work of merely subjective impressions and experimental projections of the mind. We become alienated guests on the earth – '*universal beings*' – as Arendt writes.<sup>25</sup> As a result, for the scientist hurrying in this direction, man '*(...) is no more than a special case of organic life and to whom man's habitat – the earth, together with earthbound laws – is no more than a special borderline case of absolute, universal laws, that is, laws that rule the immensity of the universe.*'<sup>26</sup> Modern science has changed forever our lively, sensual experience and consequently the value of the realm of action and appearance, where a man shows who he is. The symbolic evidence of this turn was the triumph of the 'spirit of algebra', i.e., an important reduction of the sensual experiences and the 'natural language' into mathe-

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<sup>23</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., pp. 273–274.

<sup>24</sup> H. Arendt, *The concept of history; ancient and modern*, op.cit., p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> H. Arendt, *The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man*, see: <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/TNA18-Arendt.pdf>, p. 43 (accessed 28.01.2013).



mathematical symbols (*reduction scientiae ad mathematica*) – into products of pure reason.

According to Arendt, we live in a scientifically and technologically defined world, in the sphere of ‘objective truths’ and practical ‘knowledge of how’, manipulating the perpetual transitory process in which the world always appears as a mobile unit, for example, as a ‘humanity’ subjected to historical process, metaphorically depicted as a ‘stream’. In the trap of these abstractions settled by the reason alone, to paraphrase Arendt: ‘*Invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing, every individual entity that is visible to us, degrading them into functions of an over-all process.*’<sup>27</sup> The splendour of the truth which is self-revealing in the details of the nature [*physis*], including that emanating from the existence of each individual life, has ceased to be the source of knowledge. The scientific image of the world has caused ‘dehumanisation’ and a kind of escape into the ‘whole’, where the world is presented as a rational scheme or system.<sup>28</sup>

This also applies to politics, in the sense in which science is its essential narrative. The most obvious manifestation of the rationalisation of politics is its bureaucratisation – a particular form of administration which deprives one of political freedom, ‘suspends’ action, and thus prevents authentic expressions of pluralistic differences. The excess of bureaucracy, the ‘rule of no one’ weakens not only politics’ resilience and power, but brings about frustration. Action that reveals the multiplicity, diversity of cultures and languages, and so reinforces politics itself, becomes an unnecessary luxury, a funny scramble interfering with ‘normal behaviour’, because people in this modern scientific perspective should be only copies of the same generalised model reproduced in the mass society.<sup>29</sup>

Modern man, under the influence of this mechanistic understanding of the world, intervenes in human life in the same way as he does in the natural environment. In theory, this involves applying ‘the test of causality’ into interpersonal issues. But in practice this is not possible – argues Arendt – because the boundary between natural and fabricated reality blurs, and nature is somehow included in the world of human affairs.<sup>30</sup> In spite of this trend, Arendt affirms that: ‘*No one can look at the remains of ancient or medieval*

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<sup>27</sup> H. Arendt, *The concept of history; ancient and modern*, op.cit., p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 103. In spite of this trend, an interesting example appears in the discussion about the need to take into account the multicultural and pluralistic perspective in the presentation of a scientific curriculum. See: R. Dennick, *Analyzing multicultural and antiracist science education*, “School Science Review” Vol. 73(264)/1992, pp. 79–88.

<sup>29</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., pp. 40–41.

<sup>30</sup> H. Arendt *What is freedom in: Between past and future; six exercises in political thought*, The Viking Press, New York 1961, p. 144.

*towns without being struck by the finality with which their walls separated them from their natural surroundings, whether these were landscapes or wilderness., (...),’ and adds that today: ‘(...) the distinction between town and country becomes more and more obliterated’<sup>31</sup>. Arendt is afraid not so much of the fact that contemporary forms of culture are becoming significantly more related to nature (which is rather good in itself), but of the fact of increasing the possibility of penetrating the environment. What is upsetting is that man injects into nature a specific element of human ‘unpredictability’. As a result, not only is nature incorporated into the human world, but human activity is incorporated into the natural environment.<sup>32</sup> In this area man is potentially irresponsible, and even destructive, taking into account his incredible technological capacities. ‘Politics’ loses its autonomy. This interpretation of Arendt’s is both convincing and at the same time begs for an opposition. Can we accept such a fluid and independent understanding of the political realm – a very distinctive view of the great tradition of political philosophy that has its modern sources in Machiavelli? In our time it is very difficult to agree with this concept, just as it is difficult to accept the differences between people without any conditions.*

### **3. *Homo laborans* and the triumph of society**

Since capitalism, by definition, converts any value into capital, culture can have meaning only if it supports accumulation, or at the very least does not prevent it. Because capitalism refers to the homogeneous view of human needs and to the technocratic ideal of managing them, culture cannot be its ally. Cultural pluralism reflects the risky affectations of the human soul – an unresponsive way for reckoning passions according to capitalist theory. Despite diverse and even conflicting needs, capitalism – seen in a slightly crude way – forces the idea of a homogeneous identity of human beings. According to Arendt, both Marx and the liberal economists are wrong when they affirm that: ‘(...) *that there is one interest of society as a whole which with “an invisible hand” guides the behaviour of man and produces the harmony of their conflicting interests.*’<sup>33</sup> We can add, with a bit of benevolence, that capitalism can function sometimes thanks to diversity, but only on its own terms, e.g. ‘black Barbie sells well’. Capitalism takes into account the cultural particularity precisely because it uses it. If it does not bring about any

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<sup>31</sup> H. Arendt, *The concept of history; ancient and modern*, op.cit., p. 230.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., pp. 43–44.

worth, capitalism turns away from it immediately. As such it needs a framework for a coordinated, consistent system in which it can pretend that it takes into account something other than the biological needs of man. Instead it adjusts to culture and to the plurality of the human communities only as long as these accept its logic and the rules of its game. Culture – yes, but only on the liberal principle of *laissez – faire!* Such a vision of ‘sponsored’ multiculturalism is represented by, among others, Slavoj Žižek, for whom ‘*multiculturalism becomes in fact the ideology supporting the free market deprived of any restraints.*’<sup>34</sup>

The issue of capitalism appears on the margins of Hannah Arendt’s considerations. She claims it is a symptom of the crisis and the all-embracing sickness, rather than their cause: an evidence of the disappearance of *bios politikos*, as the realm of true freedom, action and pluralism. Where Marx finds the causes of injustice and crisis, Arendt is looking for the symptoms, even if a detailed analysis of these authors shows many apparent similarities. According to Arendt, real public life ended with the distinguishing of the importance of the private sphere and its constitutive aim of sustaining the life process. Private life has become one of the main concerns in the public realm. Charles Taylor describes this shift in the history of Western civilisation as ‘the affirmation of ordinary life.’<sup>35</sup> The solicitude for the ordinary man turned into the issue of social solicitation for survival and assistance. Necessary life activities related to *labor*, that were deprived of any specific human value in ancient times, completely absorbed the vast majority of people, to the point that the spheres of economy and property management emerged, what Arendt describes as ‘society’. The utopia of Marx, where ‘socialised humanity’ [*gesellschaftliche Menschheit*] with its ‘labor force’ is only ‘entertaining of the life process’ came true.<sup>36</sup> Arendt writes: ‘*Perhaps the clearest indication that society constitutes the public organisation of the life process itself may be found in the fact that in a relatively short time the new social realm transformed all modern communities into societies of laborers and jobholders; in other words they became at once centered around the one activity necessary to sustain life.*’<sup>37</sup> It is therefore no longer a political reality, but a reality

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<sup>34</sup> After: M. Warchala, *Rewolucjonista ironiczny*, “Dziennik”, 26.03.2007. See: S. Žižek, *Multiculturalism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, “New Left Review” No. 225/1997, pp. 28–51; K. Mitchell, *Multiculturalism, or the united colors of capitalism?*, “Antipode” No. 25/1993, pp. 263–294; J. Cruz, *From farce to tragedy: reflections on the reification of race at century’s end* in: *Mapping multiculturalism*, eds. A. Gordon, and C. Newfield, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1996, pp. 19–39.

<sup>35</sup> Ch. Taylor, *The sources of the Self, The making of Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>36</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

servicing purely biological needs, indispensable to survive in nature. According to Arendt, the fundamental feature of such a society is conformism, which substituted the truly political activity revealing the pluralism of attitudes for so-called 'behaviour' – a ritualised activity of economic agents.<sup>38</sup>

The social sphere brought about the glorification of *labor*, i.e., it emphasised the importance of this occupation of *vita activa*, which had an incomparably smaller value than the fabricating-world occupation of *work* and the politically most valuable *action* (not to mention of the entire field of *vita contemplativa*). Simultaneously, it became an organisation of private interests and accumulated properties, an organisation of consumption and exchange, just as was imagined in works of Karl Marx and Adam Smith, criticised by Arendt. The triumph of *animal laborans*, that is of the man of labor, was a victory of 'wordless specimens of the species mankind', ejected from the world, imprisoned in the privacy of their own bodies, in the trap of everyday consumption and the search for abundance.<sup>39</sup> A society that invaded the public realm became henceforth the guardian of private cravings for wealth and, in fact, had to protect individuals against each other. The mobility of private property has undermined the durability of this world.<sup>40</sup> Marx's distinction between private and public interest finally faded in the social sphere. The public sphere is gone: '(...) because it has become a function of the private and the private because it has become the only common concern left.'<sup>41</sup> In this deplorable situation of 'the socialisation of mankind' it is hard to talk about pluralism and such actions as would allow man to see and appreciate pluralism. His only refuge was the unavailable sphere of intimacy.<sup>42</sup>

Arendt writes that mass society, in its capitalistic embodiment, does not need culture, but looks for entertainment and other products that stimulate the biological processes of life, in other words, that are functional. Culture is attractive only insofar as it can be bought and sold and included in the processes of 'social metabolism'. To paraphrase Arendt, one can say that cultural differences do not develop – quite the opposite: they are trivialised and destroyed for the needs of ordinary survival. Maybe that is why cultures which do not participate visibly in the process of consumption and do not fit the pattern of utility appear to philistine modern societies as insignificant and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, pp. 32–35.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 69.

<sup>42</sup> The Bulgarian intellectual Julia Kristeva argues that Arendt underestimates mental life and intimacy, and treats them as dishonest remains of subjectivity and loss of transcendence. See her book: *Female Genius: Life, Madness, Words: Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, Colette: A Trilogy*, 3 vols., Columbia University Press, New York 2001.

weak, and perhaps because of these unfair judgments those cultures take revenge with atrocious and barbarous actions.

For real culture to endure it must find a source of stability and establish bench marks that can be admired, followed and cultivated. The notion of 'culture' seems inappropriate in reference to a preying mass society focused only on maintaining eternal consumption. The concept of 'mass culture', according to Arendt, does not exist.<sup>43</sup> It is just mass entertainment. Culture in the sense of art, but also as a system of customs and traditions, is on the total defensive: '*The point is – writes Arendt – that a consumers' society cannot possibly know how to take care of a world and the things which belong exclusively to the space of worldly appearances, because its central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches.*'<sup>44</sup> For Arendt, culture is linked necessarily to the 'cult' of gods, and the 'cult' of what belongs to them: taste, elegance, sensitivity to beauty, but within the political community. The lack of culture is for Arendt the same thing that to the Greeks was a sign of barbarism: 'over-refinement' as she describes it, and '(...) *Indiscriminate sensitivity which did not know how to choose (...)*'.<sup>45</sup> This 'undifferentiated sensitivity' is, however, not only the product of capitalism.

#### 4. The Weak Politics of the Rights of Man

The keeping in power and affirming of the universal order of the Rights of Man, and thus maintaining the ideology of individual freedom, is a way of cultivating the pluralist *status quo*. Yet we can reasonably doubt whether the strengthening of the universal logic of the Rights of Man does not produce an irresolvable paradox, where everyone has the right to be different, but only after they accept the obligation to be the same. In the light of the universal Rights of Man each may search for his or her own identity, even if ultimately he/she finds no fundamental differences. The politics of multiculturalism encloses people in terms of their ethnic origins, just as the established Rights of Man closes them in universal categories. We can find here a quasi-biblical anthropology, which isolates each man, strips him of any culture, but awards his dignified solitude with the highest esteem in the face of, not God, but of a higher order of nature. In this perspective, any cultural or political identity, any difference (pluralism) seems to be only a 'possibility' that gives way to a particular idea of the unity of mankind. The practice of common

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<sup>43</sup> H. Arendt, *The crisis in culture: its social and its political significance in: Between past and future; six exercises in political thought*, The Viking Press, New York 1961, p. 211.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 211.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

hermeneutics, where differences were submitted and discussed, ended. The Rights of Man are today the essence of democracy – its meta-narrative. It is not the power of all or of the majority that determines today the specificity of this political regime, but that of individual rights. The Rights of Man, understood in such a way, are *ipso facto* ‘over’ or ‘outside’ politics – according to Étienne Balibar.<sup>46</sup> The ‘political’ dimension of the Rights of Man is interestingly explained by Hannah Arendt, who maintains the sceptical arguments of Edmund Burke and, following in his footsteps, stresses the importance of the ‘eternal inheritance’ of the rights, nurtured within the nations, over abstractions: ‘*The pragmatic soundness of Burke’s concept seems to be beyond doubt in the light of our manifold experiences.*’<sup>47</sup>

In the past, as Arendt notes, rights were strictly applied to a particular segment of the reality. They were ‘located’, and their boundaries were marked by the palisade surrounding the city.<sup>48</sup> In a sense, the rule of rights (law) had an ‘architectural’ structure; establishing it was not a political activity, but rather performance and competition, that is, *Agon*. Yet, Montesquieu saw the law as a result of interpersonal relations [*rappports*], dictated by their specific character [*esprit*]. The law was a kind of organised memory and a certificate of identity, but it did not protect from the unpredictable consequences of actions, which revealed its pluralistic potential: both creative and devastating. Along with the *Declaration of Human Rights*, this order finally collapsed. This revolutionary document proclaimed the liberation of man from any guardianship and the need for its protection against the power of the state or the consequences of the industrial revolution.<sup>49</sup> Rights of Man, as a response to secularisation, brought a new justification for equality, and paradoxically (because human rights were to be independent of any government), a new concept of the sovereign nation that had to protect these non-negotiable and ‘inalienable’ rights.<sup>50</sup> The nation became, from then on, the ‘image of man’. Arendt writes, with a certain irony, that: ‘(...) *man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order; when he disappeared again into a member of a people.*’<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> É. Balibar, *On the politics of human rights*, see: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cons.12018/pdf> (last accessed 28.01.2013).

<sup>47</sup> H. Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, Meridan Books, Cleveland and New York 1958, p. 299.

<sup>48</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> H. Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, Meridan Books, Cleveland and New York 1958, p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

It seems that the form of law in the modern world, and especially in Europe, constitutes evident proof of the impact of the Archimedean perspective. This is not a purely theoretical issue. Rights of man do not have any formal boundaries, and their abstract character is a source of their power in a cosmopolitan world, where citizenship is granted from the very fact of being a human. Doubts may arise from a mere consideration of the difficulties and the constant turmoil in contemporary attempts to determine what those rights exactly mean, states Arendt. The practical and political problem, however, lies primarily in the fact that the Rights of Man, conceived and placed outside government, do not have a sufficient protection – there is no one to ‘fight’ for them – according to Balibar.<sup>52</sup> Arendt illustrates this problem with a convincing and bitter example of the fate of stateless people who, deprived of any place on earth, look in vain for their community and nation. They can rely only on the grotesque, as Arendt describes it, ‘help’ of human rights associations and organisations, which however are unable to resolve their practical dilemmas.<sup>53</sup> She notes with bitterness that people who escaped from the ‘barbed-wire labyrinth’ could experience the nakedness of the human being.<sup>54</sup> And conversely, in a sense, the Rights of Man transforms them into stateless persons. Hence she proclaims the superiority of political rights and the rights of citizenship over Rights of Man, and argues that the idea of order and of justice outside a government’s tutelage and outside the care of a political body is essentially meaningless. This raises the question – do the Rights of Man *really* protect people in a state of political lawlessness?

The order of the Rights of Man and scientific knowledge allow us to respond the current problems of the world only in theory. In the post-totalitarian era they are a guarantee of security and justice. Yet, it is hard to deny that this rule of law not only ignores the diversity of experiences and practices of different cultures, and therefore it not only transgresses the ‘frames of democracy’ but – according to Balibar – it speaks about people only in cosmic or and cosmopolitan terms, but began to penetrate the constitution of human diversity. The thing is, as Arendt writes elsewhere: ‘*Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear*’<sup>55</sup>. However, the reality dominated by the rule of the Rights of Man cannot emphasise this

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<sup>52</sup> É. Balibar, *On the politics of human rights*, op.cit.,

<sup>53</sup> H. Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, op.cit., p. 292.

<sup>54</sup> See the autobiographic confessions of Stefan Zweig about the terrible situation of being deprived of a homeland, in his book: *Świat wczorajszy* [translation M. Wisłowska], PIW, Warszawa 1958.

<sup>55</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op.cit., p. 57.

diversity; instead it imposes a common nature on all human beings and as a result it only supports an individualised mass society, where people are enclosed in the circles of their loneliness (as Tocqueville wrote), or, to use Arendt's expression, are: '*imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience.*'<sup>56</sup> The inviolable truth of individuality of each isolated entity is inscribed in the nature of the universal Rights of Man, but these autonomous metaphysical beings find themselves somehow 'cheated of their strength.'<sup>57</sup> The most important revolution happened, therefore, within the anthropology of human rights, within the view about human nature that lies behind these Rights. Man emerged as an emancipated and isolated being; abstracted and deprived of any home; true only in his wild, naked existence.'<sup>58</sup> Arendt writes: '*(...) a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man.*'<sup>59</sup>

Man, in his originality, uniqueness and diversity has been pushed into his/her private life. This sphere today poses a constant threat to the public realm, which is organised, in contrast, according to the principle of equality. Arendt writes: '*The dark background of mere givenness, the background formed by our unchangeable and unique nature, breaks into the political scene as the alien which in its all too obvious difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity – which are identical with the limitations of human equality.*'<sup>60</sup> In ancient times, the differences between citizens (within limits) were not a problem, because in the realm of politics they could be articulated, confronted and – if needed – overcome through action. In the realm of politics man could escape his own biology and leave the sphere of necessity. Politics was a space of equality, at the same time as it was an arena of competition. Together with Rights of Man, i.e., with 'de-politicisation', equality ceased to be the object of efforts, and became an obvious ideal guaranteed to all people without any exception. Equality is now seen as part of human nature, but precisely speaking its source is biology. In this way, the differences that appear in the social realm are seen as 'foreign' and hostile to equality. Thus, Arendt reaches a pessimistic conclusion and claims that civilisation is closed to the dark world of differences.

There is another issue that appears in this context. It is namely the problem of *freedom*, which in the modern western world began to express itself in the search for safety and security, beyond the realm of politics, which, as Arendt notes, is today wrongfully and superstitiously associated with totalitarianism.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 204.

<sup>58</sup> H. Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, op.cit., p. 300.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 300.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 301.



The liberal credo which says that less politics equals more freedom, and Lord Acton's view that '*all power tends to corrupt*' dominates political thinking today.<sup>61</sup> According to modern liberal theory, the state has to take care of the preservation of life and respond to people's needs. Its role therefore is to be active in the field of economics and resolve social problems. The problem of freedom has been radically generalised and rectified in this context. Man is somehow closed in the universal order of utilitarian expectations and needs. His uninhibited 'possibility of starting' is now very limited. To paraphrase Arendt, one can say that safety became a new 'ideological super-sense', and politics as a realm of competing activities has been neutralised by the organisation of the Rights of Man, which acts to rein in attempts to kick too rapidly.

## Conclusions

The problem of pluralism emerges in the writings of Hannah Arendt in the context of her phenomenological reflections on the human condition, and in her comments on politics. The issue of multiculturalism appears only indirectly and in the margins of her writings. The German thinker was in some ways conservative and Eurocentric; sometimes she perhaps did not have enough esteem for 'new identity projects.'<sup>62</sup> She certainly did not like modernity and probably did not want to be modern. A troubling picture is prompted by her considerations: a view of a reality of superseded actions and simulated pluralism, where the chances for unveiling a genuine multicultural society have had radically reduced. This is a world where people flee from being active, resign from self-expression, and continue the drama of Heidegger's *falling* – the misery of the inauthentic life. The suppressed energy of acting is accumulating, and will definitely explode someday. The potential of *vita activa* was, in Freud's terms, so 'repressed' that it emerges only with violence. Politics is no longer a realm where this accumulated potential can be discharged. Science, perhaps the greatest pride of our civilisation, has become a source of uncertainty and scepticism, impossible to relieve oneself of. The cosmic narration anticipated by Galileo has today diminished the value of the human world. The modern preoccupation with holistic processes has radically weakened the interest in humanities and in such phenomena as

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<sup>61</sup> See: H. Arendt, *Introduction into politics*, op.cit., p. 99.

<sup>62</sup> See: A. Lane, *Is Hannah Arendt a Multiculturalist?*; and K. Curtis, *Multicultural Education and Arendtian Conservativism: On Memory, Historical Injury, and Our Sense of the Common* in: *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing our Common World*, ed. M. Gordon, Boulder, Colorado 2001.

culture. Capitalism upgraded the private to the realm of politics, and strengthened the importance of the biological needs of man and his body. It turned upside down the existing hierarchy of human activities, which now contribute not only to the end of politics and the development of a conformist society, but also to the trivialisation and destruction of all living cultures. And finally, the Rights of Man – the essence of contemporary European democracy – preserves a specific anthropology where man is seen as an abstract, isolated entity, whose pure and wild existence is relegated to private life. Concerned with biological safety, the Rights of Man reduces all people to the same level and deprives them of their cultural and specific characteristics, which previously bore testimony to their dignity.

A lame substitute has appeared in the place of politics. As Arendt writes: '(...) in the modern world, both theoretically and practically, politics has been seen as a means for protecting both society's life-sustaining resources and the productivity of its open and free development.'<sup>63</sup> Such an understanding of politics upholds its essentially prosaic character. In this perspective the future is seen as a stifling process, where so-called 'politics' penetrates our work and our biological lives, as well as governing us more and more intrusively according to the 'objective standards' of safety. The sense of freedom will always be repressed in this narrow context, increasing the chances of fulfilling Tocqueville's prophesy of a gentle but despotic power holding everyone by their hands, where action will take a destructive and anarchic form as a new kind of sinister politics, conceived not as a promise but through violence. As Arendt writes: '*The practice of violence, like all action, changes the World, but the most probable change is to a more violent world*'<sup>64</sup>. This is also a world where there is less space for human varieties: the pluralism of identities and multiculturalism. From the perspective of Hannah Arendt, the failure of multiculturalism and pluralism, announced today even by moderate thinkers and politicians, is not the effect of the behaviour of immigrants themselves (the clash of civilisations), anachronistic nationalism, or the effect of the erroneous assumptions of multicultural politics (i.e. that cultures are able to peacefully coexist). Rather it is the result of numerous macro-structural processes of 'normalisation' inscribed in the dynamics of post-industrial civilisation.

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<sup>63</sup> H. Arendt, *Introduction into politics*, op.cit., p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> H. Arendt, *On Violence*, op.cit., p. 80.