

- Chapter 1 -

THE BOUNDARIES OF IDENTITY

Ambiguity, uncertainty and the ceaseless questioning of identity- these are the resources of the exiles. They are the resources of those who would live and move in these paradoxical marginal spaces and times and who, in order to do so, must struggle to resist knowledgeable practices of power that would impose upon them a certain identity, a set of limitations on what can be done, an order of "truth"...Here, where identity is always in process and territorial boundaries of modern life are seen to be arbitrarily imposed, the limits authored from one or another sovereign standpoint can be questioned and transgressed, hitherto closed-off cultural connections can be explored, and new cultural resources can be cultivated thereby. Here it becomes possible to explore, generate, and circulate new, often distinctively joyful, but always dissident ways of thinking, doing, and being political.¹

The issues to be discussed in this chapter make evident their disenchantment and rejection of the promise of security and enlightenment made by modernity. They rather engage with the realm of uncertainty and diversity that marks our human condition. In this respect, the previously stated crises of IR mainstream theories are a precedent for such an exercise. They also serve as an encouragement for bringing to the surface new elements capable of contributing toward the renovation and search for novel core elements in IR theory. Consequently, this chapter is focused on establishing groundwork for both the renovation of traditional elements in IR discourse and for shedding light on extremely original works that I argue can plausibly be included in the international sphere. In short, the aim of this chapter is to defend the central hypothesis of this thesis regarding the relevance of Arendtian thought for IR theories. I will also intend to verify that traditional formulations and practices of fixed concepts such as state sovereignty downplay the role of ordinary persons as agents in the international realm.

¹ Richard Ashley and R.B.J. Walker, "Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (September 1990): 263.

The first section of this chapter asserts that the insights of political philosopher Hannah Arendt can make a potentially vital contribution to IR theory, as it can be a good resource to fill up some philosophical and conceptual gaps in mainstream IR theory. Arendt developed a complex, radical conceptualisation of politics based on action and human relations, which implies a strong criticism to the Western thought that underpins mainstream IR theories. Her work can be considered an attempt to take into account the role of ordinary people in the construction of the political realm. The role of political identity thus becomes crucial for locating agency in persons instead of states. Consequently, I will further focus on her notions of agonism, distinctness, and *inter-est* for drawing compelling perspectives on identity construction that contribute toward a more comprehensive assessment of some aspects of the complex relation between self and other. This exercise will be useful for IR theory as it attempts to provide evidence of the importance of these relations, as we will see in the subsequent chapters the consequences of taking for granted the dynamics of self and other.

The second part of this chapter attempts to emphasise the particularly useful nature of Arendt's approach to 'the political' and how it intersects with normative fictions such as the traditional conception of state sovereignty. By contrasting traditional views of state sovereignty with Arendt, it is possible to question the locus of the political within a continuously moving and fragmenting realm in order to understand how we make sense of our contemporary world. I assert how traditional state sovereignty constructs and imposes its borders with effects on political identity, and how from this it is possible to locate political agency in persons according to Arendt. Moreover, I will claim how alternative understandings of sovereignty make possible a more flexible, less fictional framework for

assessing the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which in turn can be taken beyond the territorial borders of the state, and even beyond any sense of territoriality.

1. *Hannah Arendt and the Reformulation of the Political in IR Theory*

Arendt remains one of the very few women who have contributed significantly to the tradition of philosophical discourse, and she is the only one among them who has focused her reading and writing in that tradition so single-minded on the question of the political²

Hannah Arendt can provide an original and positive influence on international relations theory. IR unsurprisingly has not often taken her work into account although a very few exceptions have provided interesting approaches.³ The reason for such disregard is probably because Arendtian thought cannot be simply ‘poured’ into the international domain. After all, a great part of her insights do not deal directly with the main concerns of classical IR theory. Indeed, it could be said that Arendt disagrees with a great part of the conceptual bases of classical IR, therefore the inclusion of Arendtian approaches in IR would not by any means continue to work within the generally accepted framework of the IR tradition. I argue here, however, that her thought is capable of bringing new questions, original perspectives and solutions for contemporary international dynamics. It is therefore my intention to pursue this ‘unveiling’ of Arendt and its potential contribution to IR theory in a small but important way. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that the time seems to be ripe for setting out an atypical conceptualisation of politics capable of recapturing and relearning something we have forgotten for many years.

² Hans Jonas, “Acting, Knowing, Thinking: Gleanings from Hannah Arendt’s Philosophical Work,” *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 25.

³ See for example: Anthony F. Lang, Jr. and John Williams eds., *Hannah Arendt and International Relations: Readings Across the Lines* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); or Paul Saurette, “‘I Mistrust All Systematizers and Avoid Them’: Nietzsche, Arendt and the Crisis of the Will to Order in International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1996).

Currently, the important philosophical attempts to ‘bring the political back in’⁴ have reached the arena of IR theory. Thoughtful approaches have emerged from important feminist, critical theory and poststructuralist scholars who—without a doubt—have successfully pinned down the vital need of rethinking politics, the political and how detached from them we are. Moreover, they have made a fruitful contribution by fiercely directing attention to the topology and ‘figurative’ dimension of our current social and political order. Arendt also shares such concerns. Indeed, several scholars have recently started to point out that she shares a number of perspectives in common with postmodernism and critical theory.⁵ In particular, she was concerned with language, normative hegemonic visions and the rejection of positivism.

However, some Arendtian formulations differ from some postpositivist (mainly poststructuralist and postmodern) IR perspectives regarding issues such as agency or the possibility of an ontological reformulation of the international realm. Unlike postmodernists and poststructuralists, Arendt’s formulations contribute toward placing minimum normative conditions or at least some ethical guidelines in the international sphere. For example, one of Arendt’s strengths is her regard of time, place and community as *real*, thus valuable.⁶ Such difference brings the advantage of conceiving novel forms of reconfiguring the link between ‘ordinary’ human activity and ‘political’ life and, therefore, for alternative forms of conceptualising identity and placing agency. This point also entails a severe criticism to IR theories’ traditional tendency to downplay the importance of

⁴ Jenny Edkins, *Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

⁵ An example of works on this issue is Dana R. Villa, “Postmodernism and the Public Sphere,” *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 3 (September 1992). See chapters 1 and 9 by John Williams and Anthony F. Lang Jr., in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, 8, 12, 222-223.

⁶ John Williams and Anthony F. Lang Jr., “Introduction,” in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, 7.

identities and cultures as objects of study. Arendtian ‘real’, mutable, times, places and communities are in severe opposition to traditional realist utopianism.⁷

A crucial (yet notoriously difficult) Arendtian conception that can be plausibly used in IR theories is *action* as an exclusive prerogative of man and, thus, as “the political activity par excellence.”⁸ Action, for her, is determined by *natality* and *plurality*. The former implies that “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.”⁹ Natalty therefore enables action to occur within a “web of human relationships”¹⁰ through plurality. Plurality implies a condition of intersubjectivity¹¹ which entails a paradoxical communion between *equality* as human beings and *distinction* since each one is unique. However, only through action is the realisation of natalty and plurality possible. James Knauer expands a little more on plurality and adds significant elements to this exposition.

[P]lurality is a potential given by the fact of natalty, the birth of new human individuals, but it can be realized only through political association. It is in their acting and speaking together that unique individuals emerge out of the sameness and eternal recurrence of the species. And it is only when living together as acting beings in political association that human beings encounter other human beings, that plurality is realised.¹²

It seems clear right from the beginning that Arendt’s concepts of plurality, natalty, action (speech), politics, individuality and freedom are difficult and inextricably linked. I hope the following discussion goes some way toward illustrating why. Knauer’s words refer to the

⁷ Christian Reus-Smit, “Realist and Resistance Utopias: Community, Security and Political Action in the New Europe,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 2-3, 28.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 9.

⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 9.

¹⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182-3.

¹¹ Opposed to the classical Hegelian transsubjective process of reappropriation of an object-in-itself where knowledge becomes self-knowledge. Villa, “Postmodernism and the Public Sphere,” 714.

¹² Knauer, “Motive and Goal in Hannah Arendt’s Concept of Political Action,” *The American Political Science Review* 74, no. 3 (September 1980): 722.

importance of doing and speaking as the only elements that make the human condition of plurality possible. For Arendt, it is only through action and speech that two vital, yet in her mind non-contradictory, processes occur. First, in coming together to act and speak, our mutuality (what she calls “sheer human togetherness”¹³) with others is expressed and reinforced. Second, and contrary to recent political philosophy debates¹⁴ through *the same process* of action and speech, precisely the opposite—our individuality and uniqueness from others—is cemented for Arendt. In other words, the disclosure of the self as unique is not a private matter, as some liberals insist, but a very public one. Men *distinguish themselves* and appear to each other *qua* men, beyond mere bodily existence.¹⁵ This allows men to break free from the chains of cause and effect, to begin a causal chain anew, to give birth to something themselves.

Action, then, in Arendt’s view is *not* equivalent to reaction, although as I will show later in this thesis, her view of action as *praxis* is far more complicated than this. Moreover, we can gather from this that freedom for her is understood in the Aristotelian sense¹⁶ of freedom from necessity: to be uncaused by something else, and in particular to be free from the forces exerted on us by the past. Yet it is also clear that such freedom requires us not to withdraw from others¹⁷ into the realm of private solitude, but engagement with a plurality of others.

Action and speech are so vital for Arendtian theory that some scholars summarize the central thesis of her seminal work *The Human Condition* in relation to doing and

¹³ Arendt, *Human Condition*.

¹⁴ See the Liberal-Communitarian debate of the 1980s and 90s in which the togetherness of community and the distinctness of individuality were placed in stark competition. See the works of John Rawls, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre.

¹⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

¹⁶ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (VI 4-5, 1140), and Dante’s *Monarchia* which uses his conception of freedom.

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Florida: Hartcourt Brace and Company, 1978).

speaking as “the supreme expressions of civilisation for they reveal plurality and freedom as constitutive elements of a distinctly human existence.”¹⁸ Arendt is clear on this point, “[a] life without speech and without action... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, the only suitable space where action can happen in conditions of free human relationships is the *public realm* as it is the space of *common appearance*. The public sphere is the arena for human interaction that makes political action possible. Likewise, the space of common appearance refers to the convergence and exchange of various perspectives that construe a specific human, political reality and make sense of it. Arendt is explicit on this point, “[t]he presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves,”²⁰ and such a life of interaction between individuals is an element of the human condition, which is not compatible with the isolation of individualism. Quite opposed to the belief in classical structures of ‘truth’ embedded in societies, doing and speaking make the construction of narratives and history possible. When actions are translated to storytelling²¹ they are projected to remembrance²² and give sense and situation (between past and future) to the existential character of human life. Furthermore, action and speech as conditions for human political life offer the possibility for the emergence of

¹⁸ Leah Bradshaw, *Acting and Thinking* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1989), 3. Cited by Saurette, “I Mistrust All Systematizers,” 8.

¹⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

²⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50.

²¹ See Lisa J. Disch, “More Truth than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt,” *Political Theory* 21, no. 4 (1993). See also Chapter 7 in Emma R. Norman, *El Yo Político* (Mexico D.F: Ediciones Coyoacán, 2005).

²² See Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55-6. “Through remembrance man discovers this two-fold ‘before’ of human existence... memory has the function of recalling the past and making it present again to the mind. In this process of re-presenting, the past not only takes its place among other things present but is transformed into a future possibility. In remembering past joy we can hope for its return in the future, just as remembrance of past sorry instills in us the fear of impending disaster.”

novel forms of power by “acting in concert.”²³ If politics is about action, then political action cannot conceive other forms of power than the one derived from its agents (persons), which at the same time are created by action. Conversely, this conceptualisation of power could be another fruitful reason for thinking about ordinary people as political actors in an international, essentially political, arena. Issues regarding identity-related conflicts and mobilizations can be interestingly analysed under these perspectives.

The Arendtian conception of politics is at odds with its mainstream IR modern conception and locus of practice. Seminal poststructuralists and critical theorists such as Derrida and Habermas have raised thoughtful critiques against the ‘technologized’ character of politics and Arendt has done so too from a particular perspective against politics-as-making. A notion of making or fabricating, which Arendt designates by the Greek term *poiesis*, entails an immersion in the world of ‘things’ and an unpolitical dependence to which men devote so much time.²⁴ Such necessity is in clear opposition to *acting* (which Arendt identifies through the Greek, *praxis*) since for her *freedom* is a vital political goal, and it is certainly a freedom from the necessity of survival or a commodious life. In short, action as *praxis* is the condition for the realm of *human* affairs, of plurality, where everything fabricated, necessary or useful is excluded;²⁵ action as *praxis* is a kind of unconditioned action, free from instrumental, means-end logics. Her tough criticism of the western traditional substitution of *poietic*, instrumental ‘politics’²⁶ for acting is derived

²³ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), 44.

²⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 212.

²⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 25.

²⁶ Which *makes* things like laws, regulations and procedures and is centrally devoted to economic concerns of balancing budgets and providing welfare. This last, for Arendt, contains the ultimate displacement of the public sphere of the political into the ‘rise of the social’, a perverted form of the public that is concerned not with public matters but with private, household concerns governed by survival and necessity. See *Human Condition*, 68-73.

from her bitter critiques of how plurality –and in consequence the public realm of ‘real’ politics- have been erased due to the

[e]xasperation with the threefold frustration of action –the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process and the anonymity of its authors-... It has always been an temptation... to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents... they always amount to seeking shelter from action’s calamities in an activity where one man, isolated from all others, remains master of his doings from beginning to end.²⁷

This excerpt entails at least two interesting dimensions. First, it points to her rejection of the modern promise of security, enlightenment and the imposition of ideals and primary forms as a measure against the anxiety and uncertainty caused by action. In this respect, Marshall Berman adds more arguments to such a criticism.

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and at the same time that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries... in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But this is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity... in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air’.²⁸

The second dimension deals with Arendt’s passionate demonstration of how politics-as-rulership takes us away from freedom since the will of a plurality of men²⁹ is substituted for the will of one person over the rest. Thus great part of the population do not need to engage in politics. For her, the founding moment of this situation is Plato’s *Republic* -and the parable of the Cave as the hallmark of his political philosophy,- as an attempt to escape the fate of Socrates. Arendt asserts that “the philosopher-king applies the ideas as the craftsman applies his rules and standards; he “makes” his City as the sculptor makes a statue, and in the final Platonic work these same ideas have even become laws which need only be

²⁷ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 220.

²⁸ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (New York, 1982), 15. Cited by David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 11.

²⁹ Arendt used this word deliberately.

executed.”³⁰ But her criticism is not restricted to philosopher kings or Hobbesian sovereigns. It is clear that the *poietic* function of instrumental politics is as alive and flourishing in modern forms of representative democracy as it was in Imperial Rome or the absolutist monarchies of the Renaissance. In this sense, mainstream IR can be perfectly located within the view of fabricated politics in which only a few ‘experts’ or ‘professional politicians’ are in charge of political tasks and managing institutions. Politics is thus reduced to a form of ‘working’ which consists in applying ‘rules’ emanated from a faith in certain ideal forms. Here, ‘actions’ are assessed within a dynamic of means-ends which seek to accomplish an atemporal prefabricated plan. In other words, “politics must be understood as a process of fabrication in which the end utopian goal justifies and underpins rulership, control and domination.”³¹ Policies intended to provide national or regional security, economic stability, international economic or environmental cooperation –and it is difficult to find a single IR text that does not cover or imply at least one of these areas– are neither *praxis*-action nor political for Arendt. For they are concerned with questions of survival and/or commodious living or at the very least a predictable future in which both are more assured, and so remained governed by necessity: the opposite of human freedom.

1.1 Arendtian Perspectives on Identity Construction

This brief exploration of the Arendtian conception of politics suggests that her view of the subject requires authentic engagement and participation in political matters that can only be accomplished through action and speech. As a consequence, self-revelation, making everybody else know who you are and how your identity is distinct from that of others, is crucial. This can be translated to a conception of politics in which the uniqueness of

³⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 227.

³¹ Saurette, “I Mistrust All Systematizers,” 10.

personal identity immersed in plurality is one of its most important factors. In contrast, one of the most serious problems of mainstream IR is its view of people as aggregates of state's activities. As such, we face a "depersonalized" international realm "in which political detachment and systemic stability have been privileged."³² This is mainly because

to admit identity as a key issue in world politics is to admit diversity, difference, fragmentation, and claims to cultural particularism... Such factors significantly undercut the statist resolution upon which international relations is founded and upon which the discipline has attempted to dispel the unpredictability of modernity.³³

As a consequence, Arendtian perspectives on the vital role of persons in conforming a political environment can plausibly lead toward a conception of identity that, by virtue of being a vital element of the political, can strongly contribute toward locating persons as agents in IR. Although Arendt's insights on identity were developed under broad perspectives on agonism, agency or pluralism, it is a fruitful exercise to relate them to the current most accepted claims of identity construction in order to get a deeper sense of both politics and identity.

Identity possesses a non-essentialist, constructed social and political character formed through social and political processes.³⁴ Against social determinisms and homogeneous conceptions of collectives such as nationality, ethnicity, etc., the Arendtian conception of plurality would contend that such notions are rather engaged with the modern faith in ideal forms, thus detached from reality. In its stress on homogeneous national entities contained within the state as its institutional body, mainstream IR tends to conceive the relationships between individuals and political communities as self-evident

³² Albert J. Paolini, *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity and International Relations*, eds. Anthony Elliot and Anthony Moran (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 37.

³³ Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, 37.

³⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis, "Identity, Political," in *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, eds. Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (London: Routledge, 2001), 334.

questions. I am not alone in questioning such an assumption. Williams makes a strong argument to demonstrate that such relationships are inherently unpredictable.³⁵ If he is correct, works that deal with myths of homogenised images of communities such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*³⁶ are typical works that bypass the importance of individuals and communities in creating a specific political realm. Thus, they offer biased images of our current international, political realm.

By the same token, it is becoming fairly widely accepted that the only way in which identity can be affirmed is through the recognition of its social character via its constant rearticulation.³⁷ While not much has been made of the connection in the literature, such assertions are compatible with Arendt's view of the unconditioned action and speech of the *agon*. *Agonism* is a vital component of Arendtian politics, derived from her study of the classical Greek *agon*, a section of the Ancient Greek play where the chorus recedes into the background and the main characters or "protagonists" appear and account for themselves only with help of their actions and speech.³⁸ Agonism basically refers to popular contestation and confrontation of matters of common interest in a certain arena (*agora*), which, in those times, took place in the Athenian *polis*. This confrontation makes possible a constant rearticulation and reaffirmation of identities through the revelation of political actors which, by virtue of free action and speech, continuously affirm and reformulate human values within a scenario of unmediated political activity.³⁹ It is interesting to note that such an emphasis on managing difference through confrontation, contestation and

³⁵ Williams, Lang Jr., "Introduction," 4.

³⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

³⁷ Stavrakakis, "Identity, Political," 334-335. Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. (London, New York: Verso, 1990).

³⁸ Emma R. Norman, "Agonism," in *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, eds. Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (London: Routledge, 2001), 6.

³⁹ Norman, "Agonism," 6.

debate can be positioned in stark contrast with liberalism, which rather tends to avoid conflict.

The question of identity also entails the analysis of the crucial role of the ‘other.’ The self cannot be defined without its referential counterpart in the other, since they have mutually dependent meanings. One of the main problems with this question deals with the fact that “we want *equality* without its compelling us to accept identity; but also *difference* without its degenerating into superiority/inferiority.”⁴⁰ Although the role of power is crucial in moulding the relations between self and other at both individual and collective levels, it is also important to regard this question in relation to how the other should be conceived. By stating that plurality is conformed by equality and distinction, Arendt intends to claim that without equality it would be impossible to understand each other, but without distinction, there would be no need for speech or action, they would be impossible.⁴¹ Distinction is an element related to otherness. However, such terms are not equivalent for quite interesting reasons. Arendt considers important the notion of otherness as it entails a sense of *alteritas* that permits us to make distinctions. Yet on her account otherness can only refer to inorganic objects, whereas distinction applies to all organic life since it implies a more detailed account of variations between specimens of different or same species.⁴²

[O]nly man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself... In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that *is*, and distinctness, which he shares with everything *alive*, become uniqueness and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.⁴³

This capacity makes us not only distinct, but also *distinguishable* through action and speech. Distinctness certainly bears great importance because it cannot be translated into

⁴⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 249 [emphasis in the original].

⁴¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 175-176.

⁴² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

⁴³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176 [my emphasis].

common processes of ‘othering’ since they do not entail action and speech as prerequisites. For example, the classical, essentialist opposition between the ‘European being’ and its ‘exotic other’ is a typical opposition between self and other. In this example, the degree in which self and other are simultaneously represented is obscured because such oppositions are constructed only on the basis of prefabricated ideas. These kind of identifications make an account of a social realm conformed by “representation and will, social existence also means being perceived, and by the way, being perceived as different.”⁴⁴

The difficulties increase here because the classical meaning of the complex process of representation implies a difference between reality and what we think such reality is. The mere word suggests that there is an intrinsic degree of ‘inaccuracy’ in the extent to which reality and its plurality of reproductions in the mind fit together.⁴⁵ For example, the way we think about the ‘Middle East’ is not an exact image of the reality of the middle east (if the term is valid), thus constructing a representation. More complexity is added by the processes that involve the reception and consumption⁴⁶ of myriad ‘Middle East.’ In this respect, Arendt would contend that such a process is certainly not a representation because it does not comprise the act of distinction. The use of preconceived images for constructing a sense of the other stands as quite the opposite to acting and speaking since the former activity does not depend on self revelation but on consumption of images, of ‘objectifications’ of the ‘other’ instead of distinctions. In consequence, representation for Arendt depends on the disclosure of distinctness *revealed* through action and speech.

⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire: L'Économie des Échanges Linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 142. Cited by Gilberto Giménez M, “Paradigmas de Identidad,” in *Sociología de la identidad*, coord. Aquiles Chihu A (Mexico DF: Miguel Ángel Porrúa; UAM-Iztapalapa, 2002), 39 [my translation].

⁴⁵ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971-1991* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 207.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street, *Cultural Encounters: Representing ‘Otherness,’* eds. Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

Indeed, one could argue with Norman⁴⁷ that, for Arendt, representation is actually impossible. It is not representation, but re-presentation or, more strictly, presentation again:⁴⁸ something that requires a *presence*. Disclosure of identity requires presenting ourselves personally and living a human life by acting and speaking; without presence distinction is impossible. On one hand, we would only pretend to make sense of ourselves with reference to the inorganic or the dead. On the other, we would use not speech (*lexis*), but “‘mere talk’, simply one more means toward the end, whether it serves to deceive the enemy or to dazzle everybody with propaganda; here words reveal nothing.”⁴⁹ Representation describes an image. But just as a picture of a person (or a region), or your description to me of the personality of somebody I have not met or the character of a place I have not visited, cannot disclose their identity to me, representation cannot describe ‘the who’, the subject of the political. Presence and distinction permit one to avoid the extremes of reproducing the others ‘as they really are’ or to ‘subjugate the other’ to oneself, they permit dialogue and interpretation letting the others speak and defend themselves.⁵⁰ Such meditations are problematic for the international sphere, because if presence is required for designating and distinguishing the subject of the political, then only small political units can function. We cannot possibly meet face-to-face all the people of a region, nation, community, we therefore have to rely on images and representations as Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* clearly shows.⁵¹

In the previous section I mentioned briefly the importance of the public space, where political activity takes place and plurality is revealed. Such public presentation of

⁴⁷ Emma R. Norman, *The Political Self*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Essex, 1999, 137.

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 63.

⁴⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 180.

⁵⁰ Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 250.

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

persons also comprises a specific spatial dimension Arendt called *inter-est* (f. Latin, *inter*: between/among; *est*: is) or the *space in-between*. This is basically the space that lies between people that simultaneously separates them in their uniqueness and binds them together in the public arena creating a “web” of human relationships.⁵² Her point was in many ways to challenge not only those who argue identity and/or citizenship lies within the self (and can therefore be functional in private solitude, or through the formal, impersonal requirements of representative democracy). It also refers to the perversion of *inter-est* as the basis and motivation for political activity into ‘interests’ being that basis and motivation. The space in-between is “the ephemeral and intersubjective moment of dialogue between people taking on a public face and presenting themselves in the public role of active and engaged citizens.”⁵³ It is consequently in continuous creation and re-creation and makes possible an ephemeral *political space* that traces the location of political moments with its own boundaries. Such boundaries move beyond the territorial sense as they establish the network of locating human places, spaces, ties, identities, etc.⁵⁴ Against the loneliness of a single, totalitarian society, identity, as rooted in a community, is its counterpart, is part of the inherent plurality of individuals and its actions, communities are fragile and mutable.

2. Traditional State Sovereignty: Idealised Borders of International Relations

The Arendtian notion of politics and the preeminence of human agency in its realisation is clearly against traditional ways of conceiving politics in mainstream IR as they are engaged in ‘ruling’. In this regard, I would like to analyse these two differing perspectives through the criticism of the traditional notion of state sovereignty. The classical conception of

⁵² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182-183.

⁵³ John Williams, “Hannah Arendt and the International Space In-Between?,” in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, 203.

⁵⁴ Williams, “Hannah Arendt and the International Space In-Between?,” 205.

sovereignty can be considered a typical practice of politics-as-making as it is an imaginary entity put in the hands of a single autonomous body that establishes a rulership within its boundaries. Sovereignty is an abstraction frequently used in IR discourse that nonetheless has been subject to scant revision although some seminal thinkers such as Michel Foucault have shown their preoccupation with the subject.⁵⁵ Fortunately, during the last couple of decades this issue has been addressed in a critical way by some IR theorists throwing up compelling findings and new problems to be solved. In this sense, I think that the criticism of traditional state sovereignty and the way it intersects with Arendtian politics can be particularly useful for IR as it makes it possible to envisage a fruitful, alternative framework for drawing boundaries and mapping identities.

In short, sovereignty is a demarcation of political space and time.⁵⁶ Traditionally, the state is the entity that contains the “sovereign jurisdiction over territory, property and abstract space, and consequently over history, possibility and abstract time, that still shapes our capacity to affirm both collective and particular identities.”⁵⁷ This view of sovereignty suggests that it is essentially a mode of spatiotemporal *order* with the power and authority to determine political possibility within its borders. One of the main problems with sovereignty is its dangerous treatment as a fixed concept, without historicity and cultural specificity.⁵⁸ In other words, sovereignty entails modern immutable notions of time and

⁵⁵ See *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); and *Historia de la sexualidad: La voluntad de saber* (México D.F: Siglo Veintiuno, 1996).

⁵⁶ R.B.J. Walker, “State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1991): 452.

⁵⁷ Walker, “State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time,” 445.

⁵⁸ Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, “The Social Construction of State Sovereignty,” in *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct*, eds. Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (Cambridge, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3. Walker, *Inside/Outside*, 166.

space, specifically a notion of ‘spatialized’ time,⁵⁹ which means that a static conception of time is reflected in spatial configurations such as sovereignty. Modern approaches on time and space do not take into account the social formulation of such elements as modes of vital experience⁶⁰ with mutable meanings and historical limits. In consequence, sovereignty remains a frozen concept with little chance of renovation. Indeed, taxonomic attempts have hampered the renovation of sovereignty *qua* mode of ordering the vital experience of time and space.

Sovereignty remains an unproblematic concept for IR’s hegemonic state-centred approaches. Under the Westphalian system, sovereignty was easily identified with force and served as a tool for freeing the state from any legal or moral limitation.⁶¹ Prominent realists such as E.H. Carr downplay sovereignty by regarding it only as a “convenient label”⁶² that provides legitimacy to the independent state. Hans Morgenthau takes a juridical perspective: sovereignty is the strongest, centralized power capable of making and enforcing the law within a certain territory in contrast with decentralized international law.⁶³ In turn, the neorealist approach unwisely blends sovereignty and the state⁶⁴ into one concept (as if both terms alone were not problematic enough) with the sole purpose of finding a way to cope with anarchy.⁶⁵ From these perspectives, state sovereignty is an unproblematic concept of *supreme* and *absolute* source of political power and authority

⁵⁹ See John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁶⁰ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 201. With reference to Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*.

⁶¹ James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18. Cited by Rajat Ganguly and Raymond Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension* (New York: Longman, 1998), 42.

⁶² E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 230.

⁶³ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 299-300.

⁶⁴ Fred Halliday, “State and Society in International Relations: A Second Agenda,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 219, 221.

⁶⁵ Biersteker, Weber, “The Social Construction of State Sovereignty,” 5.

within and outside its borders (since there is no higher power in interstate relations). Within the framework of traditional sovereignty, the state is recognised as the only entity that decides how to deal with any problem both internal and external⁶⁶ in an international realm of ‘anarchy.’ In other words, the state is the only ‘ruler’. However, the growing role of multinational corporations and international organisations or the inevitable disintegration of some states make it more than obvious that this kind of conception of sovereignty is a fiction. The state’s power over its ‘jurisdiction’ is constantly defied and transgressed. The fragile condition of state sovereignty shows that its conceptual formulation reflects a “nostalgia for a politics of place” embodied in a particular ‘essence’ of how politics should be exerted⁶⁷ with the consequence of obscuring the historicity of the term. If, for classic IR, limits in time are nonexistent, political practices and structures such as state sovereignty are deemed almost eternal⁶⁸ when in fact they are nothing but ideals.⁶⁹

The way state sovereignty is traditionally assessed comprises two dimensions. The internal is the exertion of power and authority within its territorial boundaries, and the external is embodied in what we call the international arena, where fellow sovereign states face each other. From this, state sovereignty marks and accentuates the distinction between the *inside* and the *outside* and *emphasizes where the political community resides*⁷⁰ from a sense of where borders are drawn. Is not the study of the relations and interactions between

⁶⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 96.

⁶⁷ William E. Connolly, “Democracy and Territoriality,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1991): 464.

⁶⁸ Walker, “State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time,” 446, 450.

⁶⁹ Alexander B. Murphy provides an interesting account of how -since Westphalian times- sovereignty suffered numerous crises that challenged the existing “theoretical and functional bases of particular territorial arrangements.” Accordingly, the meaning of sovereignty changed with each crisis but the ‘sovereign territory’ remained as a reinforced *ideal*. “The Sovereign State as Political-Territorial Ideal: Historical and Contemporary Considerations,” in *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct*, 82-83.

⁷⁰ R. B. J. Walker, “Sovereignty, Identity, Community: Reflections on the Horizons of Contemporary Practice,” in *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community*, eds. R. B. J. Walker and Saul Mendlovitz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990), 70. Cited by Reus-Smit, “Realist and Resistance Utopias,” 15.

boundaries, the main concern of IR? To date, most of those borders are construed and negotiated according to the guidelines of modern statecraft, where the inside provides security, homogeneity and enlightenment while the outside represents its dark, disordered, threatening counterpoint. Such views obscure the possibility of imagining a multiplicity of outsides differently and impedes the formation of different spatial delineations in time.

In some aspects, Arendt has her points of similarity with realists such as George Kennan or Morgenthau—who was her close friend. Both were German Jews who migrated to the United States to escape Nazi persecution. Like Morgenthau, Arendt was quite skeptical of the capacity of international laws and institutions of enforcing their regulations.⁷¹ Likewise, she showed her exasperation with idealism and the faith in international institutions as she held the view that international disputes are ultimately settled by warfare, which in turn is an implication of state sovereignty.⁷² However, Morgenthau's realism is engaged with the politics of statecraft, power-as-domination and 'national interest'. But Arendt was concerned with the flaws of the modern nation-state system and the way in which human life is affected by such structures and considered 'irrelevant' in the face of them. By agreeing with such realist views on how to consider sovereignty in practice, Arendt established a strong point of departure that helped her to identify and criticise solidly the effects of its absolute, homogeneous dimension in issues that were mostly ignored by realists such as massive refugee flows. Arendt was concerned with the fact that sovereign, 'homogeneous' states impose severe criteria for drawing the line between 'us' and 'them' with grave consequences for those considered as 'aliens'.

2.1 Rethinking IR's Borders: The Social Construction of Sovereignty

⁷¹ Douglas Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt's Critical Realism: Power, Justice, and Responsibility," in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, 115.

⁷² Arendt, *On Violence*, 5.

State sovereignty as an account of the political community is capable of moulding a sense of both collective and individual identity. Charles Taylor asserts that “to know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand.”⁷³ A similar point can be made about state sovereignty. It is, indeed, an *arbitrary line* with a powerful influence on people’s minds,⁷⁴ with multiple effects through numerous, though not always discernible, practices. In this respect, connected with Arendt’s criticism on sovereignty it is important to destroy traditional state sovereignty’s sense of absolute and homogenous territorial order. What can be drawn from all this is that IR should take into account a plurality of political non-territorial and territorial spaces such as place, land, locality, etc. whose frontiers are subject to constant reformulation and loaded with continuously changing meanings, images and metaphors. A move toward painting more than one kind of frontier on IR’s canvas should consist in mapping the boundaries that identity constantly delineates and focus on the study of what it means to ‘cross’ a particular border. As seen, Arendt criticized the link between state sovereignty and nationalism as they mark a line between senses of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ she criticized the coupling of sovereignty and nationalism and the fusion of the nation and the state. However, she believed that the state, despite its ‘perversions’ is the adequate locus for the construction of a political realm. In this regard, it would be interesting to analyze these ‘perversions’ unveiling and examining the imagined dimension of the boundaries of national identity. The insights of seminal authors such as Benedict Anderson⁷⁵ in turn can be interestingly linked to the case of state sovereignty and can be used to analyze the connection between sovereignty and nationalism. Anderson’s views can

⁷³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 27.

⁷⁴ Paul Nugent, “Arbitrary Lines and People’s Minds: A Dissenting View on Colonial Boundaries in West Africa,” in *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, eds. Paul Nugent and Al I. Asiwaju (London: Pinter, 1996).

⁷⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

enrich the Arendtian perspective since state sovereignty, like nationalism is arguably *imagined*. In the following paragraph I will briefly expose Anderson's ideas on imagined communities and their link to Arendt's considerations on state sovereignty and nationalism.

In short, Anderson's definition of 'imagined communities' refers to large ethnic, religious or national groups in which most of the people do not know each other and would probably never face each other. It is a construction promoted by capitalist print that contributed to the creation, invention and imposition of a 'national' consciousness, imagined communities are inherently symbolic. Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."⁷⁶ The way in which communities are imagined is how they have to be distinguished; limited, refers to the imagined elastic boundaries between nations, the sovereign element implies a freedom from hierarchies according with the enlightened conception of the term.⁷⁷ From this, Anderson claims that a nation is a community by virtue of possessing a horizontal comradeship from within.⁷⁸

Arendt saw the modern idea of the nation as a model of exclusive cultural membership⁷⁹ which in turn is subject to the territorial boundaries of the state. In this vein, it is possible to apply Anderson's *imagined* perspective of nationalism to state sovereignty. This is so because even within the tiniest state it is impossible for its members to get to know each other, even when they not share the same senses of belonging "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."⁸⁰ The image of the nation is bound to the sovereign, territorial limits of the state. It should also be noted that traditional state

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁷⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7.

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁷⁹ Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt's Critical Realism," 130.

⁸⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. With reference to Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, 5.

sovereignty's notion of political community only entails its Western rationalist conception, which takes into account a unified moral and political realm that trusts in justice, progress and moral perfectibility⁸¹ in a modern universalist fashion. This is not a "happy coincidence" (to borrow a phrase from Kant). An ideal image of a national political community is crucial for the realist discourse since its lack would leave it devoid of sense its notions of security and political action.⁸² The limited sense of an imagined community is easy to relate to the boundaries marked by state sovereignty with the difference that those of the latter entail only a territorial dimension embodied in state's frontiers. This is important because an emphasis on state boundaries has equated them with national boundaries thus ascribing them a physical, territorial dimension whereas nations are rather marked by cultural particularities in the collective imagination.

Arendt criticized such a coupling of the borders of sovereignty and nationalism by an analysis of the fusion of the nation and the state during the French Revolution.⁸³ The coupling of "the exclusive cultural membership model of the nation with the absolutistic sovereign organization of the territorial state"⁸⁴ derived in the acceptance of only one nationality, thus for conceiving a single national community for the state. This result is not surprising, however, for the reason that "*states are treated as if they are the ontological and moral equivalents to individual persons.*"⁸⁵ Indeed, modern statehood is construed upon the tenets of modern individualism; individual autonomy is equated to the state and such treatment presupposes a single unified identity at the same time it makes possible the

⁸¹ Reus-Smit, "Realist and Resistance Utopias," 15.

⁸² See Reus-Smit, "Realist and Resistance Utopias," 14-18 for a full account of this issue.

⁸³ Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt's Critical Realism," 130.

⁸⁴ Klusmeyer, "Hannah Arendt's Critical Realism," 130.

⁸⁵ John Agnew, "Mapping Political Power Beyond State Boundaries: Territory, Identity and Movement in World Politics," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28, no. 3 (1999): 502. [Emphasis in the original].

pooling of power in the hands of a single sovereign.⁸⁶ According to Michel Foucault, state sovereignty guaranteed everybody the exercise of its proper sovereign rights. But its treatment at a legal level made possible the exertion of disciplinary constraints in the form of concealed mechanisms of domination,⁸⁷ whose success in being imposed depends on the secrecy of their exertion.⁸⁸

Concerning the ‘outside’ of state sovereignty, the equivalence between sovereignty and individuals made anarchy a logical condition, if aggression is seen as a ‘natural’ personal characteristic, the state serves as its territorial solution since such hostility can be placed into the arena of interstate relations.⁸⁹ Hence an idealised community is needed on the inside for the creation of a single sense of protection applicable to all its citizens and for its projection and defence in the putative ‘anarchic’ international realm.

Arendt has two more points against traditional state sovereignty. The first is related to the previously mentioned equivalence between sovereignty and individual autonomy since it has also been translated into a conception of freedom as “the liberal utopia of absolute liberation, sovereignty and autonomy.”⁹⁰ The second derives from the fact that sovereignty is translated to a sense of political community. Arendt certainly disagrees with the first issue since her sense of freedom is bounded to continuous creation through political interaction, therefore it is not about self-determination, “freedom cannot be about individuals, because individuals removed from the community are not free but suffer the terror of loneliness.”⁹¹ Her second criticism is related to her view of sovereignty established in *The Human Condition*, which marks an ambiguous line between power (acting in

⁸⁶ Agnew, “Mapping Political Power Beyond State Boundaries,” 509.

⁸⁷ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 105-106.

⁸⁸ Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad*, 105.

⁸⁹ Agnew, “Mapping Political Power Beyond State Boundaries,” 510.

⁹⁰ Saurette, “I Mistrust All Systematizers,” 27.

⁹¹ Williams, Lang Jr., “Introduction,” 13.

concert) and ‘genuine’ sovereignty conceived within the realm of action as “achieved by the many bound together.”⁹² She means that through the exertion of power, sovereignty can be achieved; consequently, the latter cannot exist if it does not emanate from a species of acting in plurality, which makes her criticise the rulership of traditional sovereignty as follows:

The age-old distinction between ruler and ruled... has asserted itself again; once more, the people are not admitted to the public realm, once more the business of government has become the privilege of the few, who alone may ‘exercise their virtuous dispositions’... The result is that the people must either sink into lethargy... or preserve the spirit of resistance to whatever government they have elected, since the only power they retain is the ‘reserve power of the revolution’.⁹³

Here Arendt shows how the political agency of persons has been encroached, moreover, how contemporary practices of politics annihilate -by virtue of denying political agency to ordinary people- a space in which ‘real’ politics can flourish. As a consequence, we need new theories capable of conceiving power without the ‘king’⁹⁴ and “a political philosophy that isn’t erected around the problem of sovereignty.”⁹⁵ But more important is to find “a way to think about politics in the absence of its defining constitutive fiction.”⁹⁶ Yet the issue of traditional state sovereignty is not the only or ultimate problem that has to be solved, its criticism is a step toward finding solutions for the pressing question of political community.

A fruitful reformulation of sovereignty suggests that it is conceived as a *set of practices socially created* by specific agents, in which sovereign recognition is determined

⁹² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 245.

⁹³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 237-238.

⁹⁴ Foucault, *Historia de la sexualidad*, 109-111.

⁹⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 121.

⁹⁶ Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 158. Cited by Edkins, *Poststructuralism and International Relations*, 6.

by certain cultural practices and ethnic, racial, religious, etc. criteria.⁹⁷ In addition, sovereignty is also an *effect*, which emerges in times of crisis, when a given order is shaken. Thus sovereignty “becomes a question for determining what issues, uncertainties and transformations elicit responses in discursive practices that attempt to fix meanings and social/political identities.”⁹⁸ Such understandings provide numerous advantages in various perspectives. Given that the nation is a foundational element of state sovereignty,⁹⁹ it is possible to analyse with more depth the points concerning traditional state sovereignty as ‘imagined’ and its coupling with individual autonomy. Regarding sovereignty as a contingent socially constructed process, it can be argued that such processes of construction share great similarity with identity. As Lacan is famous for suggesting, identity departs from a *lack* of identity¹⁰⁰ and a search of it, based on ideals that will never be fully accomplished due to the fact that identity “at both personal and political levels is only the name of what we desire but can never fully attain.”¹⁰¹ If this conception of identity is taken to the realm of sovereignty, then we would be able to explain how sovereignty as a set of practices -instead of an ideal- construes a specific sense of political community through measures such as immigration policies or criteria for national citizenship, etc. Moreover, such an approach makes possible the emanation of social and political orders beyond classic IR territorial ontology, taking into account that mainstream IR conceives a sense of inside and outside that presupposes self-evident and well-delineated borders. A contingent, socially constructed sense of sovereignty similar to identity construction demonstrates that

⁹⁷ Biersteker, Weber, “The Social Construction of State Sovereignty,” 12-13.

⁹⁸ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Sovereignty and the Nation: Constructing the Boundaries of National Identity,” in *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct*, 142. See also Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker, “Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 34 no. 3 (September 1990): 275.

⁹⁹ Doty, “Sovereignty and the Nation,” 143.

¹⁰⁰ Stavrakakis, “Identity, Political,” 335.

¹⁰¹ Stavrakakis, “Identity, Political,” 335.

the limit between the inside and outside is everything but obvious. The line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is rather blurry, even when states act in the international arena according to the most orthodox logics of ‘realpolitik’, they unavoidably construct a sense of identity based upon a ‘national fantasy.’ For example, it can be argued that the Gulf War and its rhetoric revolved around issues of representation of self/other upon historical constructions of race and sexuality. Mediatic focus on sexual atrocities and fears of rape played an important role for promoting a consensus in favour of the war to the extent that “[s]overeignty and violation in the international arena were linked to sexual counterparts of integrity and rape.”¹⁰²

Although identity plays an important role in the construction of sovereignty, it should be considered as one of the various factors that constitute agency in Arendtian terms. For her, “individuals enact themselves through their participation in the political, rather than being subject to constructions of their identity in ways they cannot control.”¹⁰³ Although identity and agency work in similar ways, a stress on agency implies a certain obligation of engagement through action that can help to set moral and ethical frameworks.

Regarding the question of borders, a focus on personal agency and sovereignty as socially constructed helps to include more senses of space (e.g. place, locality) in order to discern more tangibly how we construct our senses of ‘here’ and ‘there’ in our days. A focus on grass-roots makes formerly ignored elements (culture for example) come to the fore with more strength as their vital role in the establishment and development of

¹⁰² Abouali Farmanfarmaian, “Did you Measure Up? The Role of Race and Sexuality in the Gulf War,” in *The Geopolitics Reader*, eds. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 286-293.

¹⁰³ Anthony F. Lang Jr. and John Williams, “Between International Politics and International Ethics,” in *Hannah Arendt and International Relations*, 223.

international borders becomes increasingly evident.¹⁰⁴ The inclusion of culture thus permits a more accurate sense of what it means to ‘cross’ a border, and act depicted by Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson.

When people cross borders they move from one economic, social and political space to another. Just as borders may be both bridge and barrier between spaces, so their crossing can be both enabling and disabling, can create opportunities or close them off. Since borders are used to mark difference, those who cross potentially threaten to undermine and subvert the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’.¹⁰⁵

As a consequence, the relationship between territory and political identity can be located in popular quotidian activities in locales beyond the boundaries of fixed territories.¹⁰⁶ This approach sheds light on how cultures struggle and interact between official and unofficial orders marked by the state and its sovereignty. Indeed, this is a more plausible way to map how political identities are constituted within mutable times and spaces in which the latter tend to overlap. In this sense, the juncture between *locality* and *movement* becomes important. Locality should be conceived as a sense of *place*, as the topology where movements arise; movement should be considered as a form of action that reconfigures political community and connects localities to one another as a sort of “*politics which travel*.”¹⁰⁷ Political identity in contemporary times is clearly marked by these two elements, sometimes in innocent activities such as shopping at international borders or ‘trader tourism.’¹⁰⁸ Although “attachments to territory are as old as human society, and there is

¹⁰⁴ See the work of Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson for references on recent studies linking the role of culture with the study of borders in *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 11.

¹⁰⁵ Donnan, Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*, 107.

¹⁰⁶ See Arjun Appadurai’s interesting concept of ‘translocality’ in “Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography,” in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁷ Mandaville, “Territory and Translocality: Discrepant Idioms of Political Identity,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28, no. 3 (1999): 661, 663 [emphasis in the original].

¹⁰⁸ Donnan, Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*, 117-127.

little to suggest that the powerful ideological bonds that link identity, politics and territory will be loosened.”¹⁰⁹

Our contemporary times have also witnessed ‘discrepant’ practices of territory and identity such as diasporic communities or spiritualist movements.¹¹⁰ This bears a connection with the meaning of being an ‘exile’ in our times according to Julia Kristeva or Tzvetan Todorov, as “a being who has lost its country without thereby acquiring another, who lives in a double exteriority.”¹¹¹ Through a reinterpretation of Hugh of St. Victor, the exile incarnates a person whose identity is not bounded to any territory. “The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is a foreign country is perfect.”¹¹²

Conclusions

Can we still believe that traditional state sovereignty provides an account of the political community when it deliberately ignores the crucial role of identities in constructing it? One of the most salient conclusions that can be drawn from the critique of traditional state sovereignty is that until recent times, the lack of borders and margins on the inside have provided a safe terrain for comfortably labelling as ‘apolitical’ the everyday life of ordinary peoples. However, they continuously affirm or reject specific senses of belonging to the sovereign state within a rather fragmented scenario. Its idealised view ignores that political time and space move beyond the fiction of traditional state sovereignty within a continuously moving and fragmenting political realm. A study of the

¹⁰⁹ Murphy, “The Sovereign State as Political-Territorial Ideal,” 109.

¹¹⁰ Mandaville, “Territory and Translocality,” 662-671.

¹¹¹ Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 249.

¹¹² Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 250.

fictional constitutive character of sovereignty has proved to be crucial for revealing the extent to which IR is so engaged with utopianism at the same time it is detached from daily experience. In this respect, IR's traditional disregard of identity has proved to be alarming because it also shows a deep connection with sovereignty. As a consequence, the solution resides in emphasizing the plurality of options we have for conceiving a sense of identity by knowing where we are sometimes in terms of place, and some others as 'exiles,' that is, with no attachment to any territory. In addition, it is extremely important to reach a different understanding of sovereignty perceived as socially constructed, in continuous renovation and immersed in plurality.

The need to break free from the imaginary imposition of traditional state sovereignty entails the exploration of the foundational element of the political from the unique perspective of Hannah Arendt. The brief exploration of her view on politics offered here proved to be in harsh opposition to an international realm that deals with 'ruling' and imposing a prefabricated sense of order. Her singular view of politics as human relations demonstrate how far we are from politics yet how simple it is to reconsider the elements that would take us back to them. Arendtian thought has however some weak and problematic sides, such as the apparent vagueness of some of her concepts, which can give the impression of being if they are not studied with enough attention and deepness. For instance, she left no concrete examples of how agonism can be put into practice. Although this and other weaknesses¹¹³ are significant, "the sheer originality and vitality of her approach, predicated upon the breathtaking claim of the failure of the overwhelming

¹¹³ See for example Norman, "Agonism," and *The Political Self* chapter 5, or Williams, Lang Jr., "Introduction."

majority of Western political thought to be properly political, deserves consideration.”¹¹⁴

The application of her notions of politics, action and identity form a powerful contribution toward the destruction of IR normative fictions. In this regard I permit myself to call Arendt an *exile*, or a *dissident* in the way Julia Kristeva understood it:

Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the *dead father*, of gambling with death which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death... This ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence is... the work of a dissident. Such dissidence requires ceaseless analysis, vigilance and will to subversion, and therefore necessarily enters into complicity with other dissident practices in the modern Western world.¹¹⁵

I believe that the perspectives discussed in this chapter are capable of constructing a radically different view of the international realm, ignoring past core elements and pulling marginal ones toward the construction of an alternative international ‘reality.’ In order to continue contributing to this task, the following chapter will incorporate these conclusions into an analysis of the question of violence. I will explore the relation between what I will call human ‘superfluousness’ and traditional state sovereignty within the framework of the conceptions of violence drawn by Arendt, and its implications for the international scenario.

¹¹⁴ Williams, Lang Jr., “Introduction,” 9.

¹¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, “A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).