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### Amor mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of world

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**Publication date**  
2010

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Borren, M. (2010). *Amor mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of world*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]. F & N Eigen Beheer.

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## Introduction Part III

### Politics of in/visibility: world as space of appearances

Denn die einen sind im Dunkeln  
Und die andern sind im Licht  
Und man siehet die im Lichte  
Die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘space of appearances’, i.e. ‘the space where I appear to others as others appear to me’<sup>2</sup>, is phenomenologically the most fundamental dimension of the world. The space of appearances is the phenomenological origin or beginning of the world, for every child that is born appears into the world. Anthropologically, Arendt’s privileging of appearance, and correspondingly of visibility, over being and invisibility, draws upon a dismantling of the metaphysical two-world theories.<sup>3</sup> Politically, Arendt’s focus on appearance and visibility implies an approach of politics which foregrounds civic participation, i.e. action and speech in public space. It is rooted in a phenomenological analysis of the (pre-)totalitarian experience of expulsion from the public and the destruction of the private spheres.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. The private and the public and the pathologies of in/visibility

Typical for Arendt’s account of the space of appearances is her phenomenological and normative distinction between the private and the public realms, on the one hand, and the one between the social and the political, on the other hand. This distinction is of a

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<sup>1</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 2004 [1928], ‘Mackie Messer’, *Dreigroschenoper*.

<sup>2</sup> HC, 198-99.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> On appearance and visibility in Arendt: Leibovici, 2006; Assy, 2004, 2005; Hammer, 1997b.

phenomenological, not of a conceptual nature.<sup>5</sup> This means that for Arendt private and public are distinct but related dimensions. We always need both, like day and night. According to phenomenologists, appearing is a process, that is, something becomes visible by emerging from a background of non-visibility. Crucial is the ‘that’, not the ‘what’ of this distinction: there is no static or given substantial content of the private, respectively the public. For phenomenological reasons, Arendt insists that there should be a distinction, not what this distinction consists in.

The distinction between the private and the public, and the one between the social and the political, which I will explicate shortly, indeed provides the framework within which to tell good from bad forms of visibility and invisibility. The former are politically sound and conducive to human dignity; the latter politically harmful and adverse to human dignity. The world as the space of appearances refers to a public space, as distinguished from, on the one hand, the private sphere and, on the other, the modern social sphere. Only where there is a space of appearances, a stage, as it were, is visibility politically sound. Private or natural and social visibility occur whenever life itself, natural man or *animal laborans* are exposed to the public eye, causing a perversion of both the private and social spaces of non-appearance and of the public space of appearances. I use the notion ‘participatory visibility’ in order to demarcate the visibility of the citizen from the visibility of *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, the natural and the social person.

### ***Public invisibility***

Arendt quite consistently maintained throughout her work that public invisibility constitutes the true inhumanity, or, as she calls it, ‘injustice’, ‘shame’ or ‘curse’<sup>6</sup>, of a number of regrettable political and social predicaments, including poverty or the social question, slavery, displacement and internment in concentration camps. She observes for instance that the (extremely) poor ‘stand in darkness wherever they go’ and that ‘darkness rather than want is the curse of poverty’.<sup>7</sup> What does the poor’s invisibility or obscurity imply? Basically, it means being excluded from the light of the public realm. In poverty, self-preservation is at stake, but politically far more disastrous is the loss or lack of access to the public space.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, the poor are deprived of the possibility of living a truly human and meaningful existence. They are withheld the opportunity to appear in deeds and words, to be seen by others and thus be remembered as individuals with unique biographies. Indeed, ‘the insult of oblivion’ is ‘the fact that [the poor’s] sufferings remained

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 71.

<sup>7</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 69; cf. MDT, 237-38.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 69.

*Introduction to Part III*

in the dark and were not even recorded in the memory of mankind.”<sup>9</sup> “Their lives are without consequence”.<sup>10</sup> Arendt quotes John Adams in approval:

[The poor man] feels himself out of the sight of others, groping in the dark. Mankind takes no notice of him. He rambles and wanders unheeded. In the midst of a crowd, at church, in the market (...) he is in as much obscurity as he would be in a garret or a cellar. He is not disapproved, censured or reproached; *he is only not seen* (...) To be wholly overlooked, and to know it, are intolerable.<sup>11</sup>

However, slavery, both in antiquity and in the modern age<sup>12</sup> ‘carries an obscurity even blacker than the obscurity of poverty; the slave, not the poor man was ‘wholly overlooked’.<sup>13</sup> Hence ‘the fear of these obscure people themselves ‘that from being obscure they should pass away leaving no trace that they have existed’.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, no written testimonies are left from slaves, except from liberated slaves, like for example Seneca. Slaves’ own experience of their condition is permanently foreclosed and hence ‘they remain shadowy types rather than persons’.<sup>15</sup>

Still, slaves ‘belonged to some sort of human community’: ‘their labor was needed, used and exploited, and this kept them within the pale of humanity. To be a slave was after all to have a distinctive character, a place in society’<sup>16</sup>, unlike a third group of invisible individuals Arendt describes, namely twentieth century displaced persons, in particular the stateless between the two World Wars in Central Europe. Like the poor and slaves, their actions were not seen, their opinions not heard. Since they had lost membership in any polity whatsoever, they suffered structural indifference. Arendt cynically remarks that the internment camp was ‘the only ‘country’ the world had to offer the stateless’<sup>17</sup>. In chapter 7, I will discuss the condition of statelessness in detail.

The one historical group suffering absolute invisibility, Arendt suggests, are the inmates of the concentration camps. As ‘holes of oblivion’<sup>18</sup>, the camps constitute ‘anti-

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<sup>9</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 69; MDT, 238.

<sup>10</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 69.

<sup>11</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 69; quoting from John Adams’ *Discourses on Davila* (1790), in Adams, 1851, 239. Cf. the quote from Brecht’s *Dreigroschenoper* over this paragraph; MDT, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Arendt here refers to black slaves in eighteenth and nineteenth century America.

<sup>13</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 71.

<sup>14</sup> HC, 55. Arendt quotes from Barrow, 1928, 168.

<sup>15</sup> HC, 50 n.41, quoting from Barrow, 1928, 156.

<sup>16</sup> OT, 297; cf. OT, 444.

<sup>17</sup> OT, 284 (‘die einzige Patria die die Welt dem Apatriden anzubieten hat’ (Arendt, 1955, *Elemente und Ursprünge Totalitärer Herrschaft*, 594)).

<sup>18</sup> OT, 459.

public spaces'<sup>19</sup>, maybe even non-places, u-topia's (ου-τόποι)<sup>20</sup>. On the invisibility of those in the camps, she writes: 'the inmates, even if they happen to keep alive, are more effectively cut off from the world of the living than if they had died.'<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon is unprecedented; neither slaves nor refugees were cut off from the world and their fellow-people. The invisibility of camp-life consists in complete spatial isolation, being sealed off from the rest of the world.<sup>22</sup> Its inmates are 'withdrawn from the sight and hence the protection of their fellow-men (...) [N]obody knows to whom he belongs, because he is never seen.'<sup>23</sup> This isolation is of a far more radical nature than ever witnessed before, Arendt argues. The oblivion which befalls the inmates does not just concern their life stories, but the very fact of their existence itself.<sup>24</sup> They were treated 'as if they no longer existed'<sup>25</sup> and even 'had never really existed' at all<sup>26</sup>, making them 'disappear in the literal sense of the word', that is, without leaving a trace testifying to their existence. The terror in the camps enforces 'organized oblivion'<sup>27</sup> making 'death itself anonymous'<sup>28</sup>. In the words of former Buchenwald-inmate David Rousset (1912-1997): '[H]ere the night has fallen on the future. When no witnesses are left, there can be no testimony.'<sup>29</sup> The abovementioned examples contain a number of important preliminary clues to the concept of public invisibility, and hence of public, participatory visibility, of which I will mention three. First, invisibility is to be analytically<sup>30</sup> distinguished from physical abuse, maltreatment, genocides, massacres, cruelty, material deprivation and 'physical safety'<sup>31</sup>; as well as from degradation, humiliation or contempt; and even from oppression and the loss of national citizenship and civil rights, including justice and equality for the law, freedom of opinion<sup>32</sup> and

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<sup>19</sup> 'Anti-Öffentlichkeit', Marchart, 2005, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) plays upon the ambiguity in the original Greek word ου-τόποι or ευ-τόποι, which means respectively non(-existing) or good place. Obviously, in the utopian tradition in political philosophy since, thinkers have mostly appealed to ευ-τόπος. Adversely, I wanted to draw attention to the first meaning, ου-τόπος or non-places.

<sup>21</sup> OT, 443.

<sup>22</sup> OT, 445.

<sup>23</sup> OT, 444.

<sup>24</sup> OT, 442.

<sup>25</sup> OT, 445.

<sup>26</sup> OT, 453.

<sup>27</sup> OT, 452.

<sup>28</sup> OT, 453.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in OT, 451.

<sup>30</sup> Though not practically. Obviously, invisibility in the examples mentioned always comes with the phenomena mentioned, so in practice cannot be separated from them.

<sup>31</sup> OT, 296.

<sup>32</sup> Among others OT, 295-96.

### Introduction to Part III

freedom of movement. ‘The disorder and the hunger, the massacres and the slaughterers, the outrage over injustice and the despair ‘when there was only wrong and no outrage’, the legitimate hatred that makes you ugly nevertheless, the well-founded wrath that makes the voice grow hoarse’<sup>33</sup> is worse than ‘the reality of persecution’ *per se*<sup>34</sup>. For example, Arendt contends that the ‘plight’ of slavery is ‘that it excluded a certain category of people even from the possibility of fighting for freedom’, rather than that they were deprived of freedom *per se*, since this ‘can happen in many other situations’.<sup>35</sup> And the ‘calamity’ of the stateless

...is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion... but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them (...). [T]heir freedom of opinion is a fool’s freedom, for nothing they think matters anyhow (...). Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice (...) They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to *action*; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to *opinion*.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike, for example, the criminal, the refugee’s ‘treatment by others does not depend on what he does or does not do’<sup>37</sup>. This is worse, more degrading, than having been robbed of one’s nationality *per se*, she suggests. The point here is that Arendt is interested in the existential and political meaning of public invisibility, i.e. of being deprived of the possibility of speaking and acting in public, for those suffering from it.

The examples listed suggest that the infelicitous predicament of invisibility comes in degrees. Some groups are more invisible than others. But, second, although it is important to remember that invisibility is a heterogeneous phenomenon, at least two axes of

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<sup>33</sup> MDT, viii. Arendt here paraphrases two stanzas of Brecht’s ‘An die Nachgeborenen’: ‘Wenn da nur Unrecht war und keine Empörung’ and ‘Dabei wissen wir doch:/ Auch der Hass gegen die Niedrigkeit / Verzerrt die Züge. / Auch der Zorn über das Unrecht / Macht die Stimme heißer.’ (Brecht, 2004 [1938], 725).

<sup>34</sup> MDT, 17.

<sup>35</sup> OT, 297; cf. HC, 55.

<sup>36</sup> OT, 295-96.

<sup>37</sup> OT, 296. Cf. the definition of the Jews in the Third Reich as ‘the objective enemy’. The ‘objective enemy’ refers to an ‘objective quality’ ‘in accordance with an ideology’ which a totalitarian regime attaches to a particular group which is entirely ‘independent of will and behavior’, as opposed to both the ‘real enemy’ and the ‘suspect’ (OT, 422-24).

in/visibility are apparent in each of the examples mentioned, access to the world, on the one hand, and narrativity or meaningful/lessness, on the other hand. Invisibility always implies having poor or no access to a stage, i.e. the public world, onto which one can make one's appearance and make one's opinion be heard. As a consequence, it always involves some degree of oblivion, to either one's contemporaries or posterity, or both. To be invisible means to run the risk of tracelessness, that is, of being without or not having a story in which the how and who of one's existence appears and is remembered, and hence of meaninglessness. In the extreme case of interment in the camps this condition is radicalized up to the point of erasure and oblivion of one's that and what. To be publicly invisible means to have been deprived of the faculty of disclosive speech. And Arendt warns that the public invisibility of some affect the entire society. The limitation of perspectives present in the public world, implies an attack upon human plurality, which flourishes by virtue of the abundance of perspectives, and hence upon the world. Ultimately, this implies an attack on, or impoverishment of, the world.

The more people there are in the world who stand in some particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be. The more standpoints there are within any given nation from which to view the same world that shelters and presents itself equally to all, the more significant and open to the world that nation will be.<sup>38</sup>

Third, at stake are agency and responsibility. The politics of invisibility might be accepted or refused by social groups. An important aspect of invisibility can be inferred from Arendt's conception of visibility as participation. The examples I discussed above may have suggested invisibility is always an enforced condition. In a number of conditions this is true without a doubt, most notably of course in the situation of the absolute invisibility of camp inmates. This having been said, Arendt stresses that invisibility may in some cases be self-appointed or self-inflicted to a greater or lesser degree. Examples she discusses, not without scorn, include those who conducted 'inward opposition' or went into *Innere Emigration*, 'inner exile', and withdrew 'from significant participation in public life', during the Third Reich.<sup>39</sup> She regards this aloofness and the escape into 'an interior realm, the invisibility of thinking and feeling'<sup>40</sup> as a politically irrelevant and irresponsible strategy and remarks, brilliantly sarcastically: 'No secret in the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such 'inward opposition'.<sup>41</sup> The politics of brotherhood, i.e.

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<sup>38</sup> PP, 176.

<sup>39</sup> MDT, 18-19; EJ, 126-28.

<sup>40</sup> MDT, 19.

<sup>41</sup> EJ, 126-27.

the withdrawal from the world into a small circle of like-minded people, is another example.<sup>42</sup>

### *Natural visibility*

Reversely, however, Arendt held that natural visibility is politically as disastrous as public invisibility. This light is not illuminative, like participatory visibility that throws things in relief, picking them out against a background of darkness, but blinding. She shows, for example, that the Reign of Terror after the French Revolution was accompanied by what could be called a ‘war on hypocrisy’<sup>43</sup> or a ‘hunt for hypocrites’<sup>44</sup>, in Robespierre’s words in which Robespierre *cum suis* passionately, relentlessly and violently pursued unmasking, that is, making allegedly dark motives visible. Totalitarian regimes expose its citizens even more mercilessly. Totalitarian terror exactly works through destroying the protective invisibility or healthy darkness of private life. Totalitarian regimes ‘proclaim the non-existence of privacy’.<sup>45</sup> ‘We know that the iron band of total terror leaves no space for (...) private life.’<sup>46</sup> In chapter 7, I will elaborate a third example, the natural visibility of the stateless and illegal immigrants. The slave and the poor woman or man sometimes suffer from natural visibility as well. Think, for instance, of the many civilization offensives, i.e. waves of forced civilization or enlightenment of the poor and uneducated masses by cultural-economic elites, to which the nineteenth century *Lumpenproletariat* was exposed in industrializing and industrialized North-West European countries. Compulsion, forced labor and detention penetrated deeply in the person’s private life.<sup>47</sup> These domestic movements have their foreign parallel in Empire; just think of Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘The white man’s burden’ (1899). And slaves, although incidentally treated well, have historically been regarded as commodities, to be bought and sold for labor or sexual purposes, without any right to privacy.

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>43</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 99, 105.

<sup>44</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 97, 100, 108.

<sup>45</sup> OT, 139.

<sup>46</sup> OT, 474; cf. 475.

<sup>47</sup> To mention but one example: the Dutch colonies, simultaneously labour colonies and penal colonies, established by the ‘Maatschappij van Weldadigheid’ (Society for Charity) in the 19th century in the moorlands of the regions Drenthe en Overijssel in order to uplift the poor and the criminal and to elevate their poverty. Especially the penal colony of Veenhuizen has gained a particular notoriety.

## 2. The social and the political and the pathologies of in/visibility

One of the most contested aspects of Arendt's thought is the distinction between the social and the political. This distinction leads us to the heart of the issue of social in/visibility. Arendt's somewhat idiosyncratic use of the terms 'the social' and 'society' concerns a set of attitudes and interpersonal relationships, that Arendt considers typical for the non-political *animal laborans*, namely necessity, material wants and natural bodily needs, i.e. life itself; and for *homo faber*, namely utility, instrumental concerns and controllability.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the principle of the body politic is equality, the principle or 'indispensable right' of the social is discrimination.<sup>49</sup> Discrimination here refers to the legitimacy of group differences.

Sometimes Arendt uses 'the social' in a normatively neutral sense, as comprising the sphere of the market, and of institutions such as schools, churches, and the like. As such, it is the sphere in which modern man spends most of his time. For whenever we leave the private sphere, 'we enter first, not the political realm of equality, but the social sphere', Arendt writes. 'We are driven into this sphere by the need to earn a living or attracted by the desire to follow our vocation or enticed by the pleasure of company'.<sup>50</sup> More often though, Arendt speaks about the social in depreciatory terms, as a third, typically modern, hybrid sphere between the private and the public. Despite its non-political nature, the social tends to pervade the public sphere and push aside concerns which are not related to the satisfaction of needs and the promotion of interests, namely action and freedom. She argues that attitudes and relationships typical of *homo faber* and *animal laborans* have become the norm of each and every attitude and relationship, including and most significantly, the public sphere. As a consequence, politics has become economized and turned into governance, management, the promotion of interest or the establishment of 'Regeln für den Menschenpark'<sup>51</sup>. Neatly fitting in this logic, 'administration' is used as the equivalent of 'government' in the US. The social also stands for the substitution of spontaneous, non-rule-bound action by making and behavior guided by particular rules and norms. Justice, as regards either socio-economic or socio-cultural issues, is a typically social concern.

The social possesses an inherent imperialist tendency that threatens to overwhelm the political, as a consequence of which, first, plurality is destroyed. Social man, i.e. the particular role we fulfill under a social perspective, is *animal laborans*, who is primarily concerned with meeting his or her material and emotional needs and wants. These are roughly identical and exchangeable in all human beings according to Arendt. Unlike the

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<sup>48</sup> Habermas calls these strategic acting, as opposed to communicative acting.

<sup>49</sup> 'Reflections on Little Rock', RJ, 205.

<sup>50</sup> 'Reflections on Little Rock', RJ, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Sloterdijk, 1999.

public sphere of plurality, that is, of equality, individuality and distinction, the social therefore is the sphere of normalization, conformism, homogenization and leveling of people. The ‘rise of the social’<sup>52</sup> since the beginning of modernity, has caused people to be concerned mainly with their private interests, but also turned them into mere conformists at the expense of the possibility of individuality.

Secondly, the reduction of political issues to concerns of necessity and utility strikes at the roots of an authentic public sphere in which citizens make their appearance vis-à-vis each other in words and deeds on equal terms and maintain the common world which only exists by the grace of attribution of meaning by means of storytelling, judging, etc. In short, what Arendt fears most is de-politicization and de-worlding, the loss or withdrawal of political, worldly reality and the equality and freedom that come with it.

### *Social in/visibility*

Whereas public space is the sphere of political equality, the social on the contrary is the sphere of sameness, that is, the extension of natural similarities between people belonging to the same social group.<sup>53</sup> Collective identities, such as ethnicity, gender and religion point to more or less immutable visible and / or audible natural features, such as skin color, bodily shape, mother tongue, etc. according to Arendt. ‘Zu einer Gruppe zu gehören, ist erst einmal eine natürliche Gegebenheit. Sie gehören zu irgendeiner Gruppe durch Geburt, immer.’<sup>54</sup> In a personal account of her own Jewish identity, in a famous correspondence with Gershom Scholem following the controversy that emerged after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), Arendt asserted that she saw belonging to the Jewish people as a ‘natural, given fact’.<sup>55</sup>

Tatsache ist, daß ich nicht nur niemals so getan habe, als sei ich etwas anderes, als ich bin, ich habe niemals auch nur die Versuchung dazu verspürt. Es wäre mich vorgekommen, wie zu sagen, daß ich ein Mann sei und nicht eine Frau, also verrückt. (...) Jude sein gehört für mich zu den unbezweifelbaren Gegebenheiten meines Lebens, und ich habe an solchen Faktizitäten niemals etwas ändern wollen. Eine solche Gesinnung grundsätzlicher Dankbarkeit für das, was ist, wie es ist, gegeben und nicht gemacht, ‚physei‘ und nicht ‚nomo‘, ist präpolitisch, hat aber doch unter außergewöhnlichen Umständen, wie etwa den Umständen jüdischer Politik, auch gleichsam negativ politische Folgen: Sie macht bestimmte Verhaltensweisen

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<sup>52</sup> HC, 38.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter 2, §4.

<sup>54</sup> ZP, 63.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Brief an Scholem’, IV, 31: ‚Ich (...) gehöre nur natürlicher- und faktischerweise zu [das Jüdisches Volk].‘ Cf. Young-Bruehl, 1982, 332-33.

unmöglich.<sup>56</sup>

Belonging to a group by birth, i.e. by the grace of nativity, which determines what we are - note the *etwas* in the first sentence of the previous quote - is in itself is a pre-political predicament, which can subsequently be turned into either an anti-political or a political one, Arendt held. An example of anti-political group affiliations is the withdrawal of groups from the public sphere into a close, warm world of their own, on the basis of warm feelings of solidarity, i.e. what Arendt calls 'love'.<sup>57</sup> I previously called this strategy the politics of brotherhood.<sup>58</sup> In the same interview, she says: ‚Ich halte [Liebe für den Juden] für apolitisch, ich halte es für weltlos. Und ich halte es wirklich für ein ganz großes Unheil.‘ The Jews are her prime example of such an a-political worldless people maintaining itself through the ages. Equally a-political is the pursuit of social visibility without a concomitant pursuit of political visibility. This is what happened in mainstream Zionism led by Theodor Herzl, in Arendt's view.<sup>59</sup> Still, social groups can constitute politically relevant ones, Arendt held, as soon as they start to mobilize and organize themselves, i.e. pursue political visibility. ‚Diese Organisation erfolgt immer unter Weltbezug.‘<sup>60</sup> In the 1940s, Arendt herself favored the establishment of a Jewish army, for instance, as a distinctly political answer to the persecution of European Jewry.

Problems occur when natural differences are reified into social differences. Arendt argues that in modern egalitarian societies, those groups who deviate from the norm, that is, who are visibly different from the majority, run the risk of evoking resentment. The typically social predicament of 'being unwanted', Arendt warns, is harder to bear than the political predicament of persecution, 'because personal pride is involved'.<sup>61</sup> Pride, Arendt held, is indispensable for our sense of self-respect and personal integrity. Her greatest concern is that these conspicuous natural differences from the norm tend to be reified into social visibility in public.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Brief an Scholem', IV, 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> HC, 53.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>59</sup> For an excellent account of Arendt's view on and engagement with the Zionist movement in general and of the Zionism associated with Theodor Herzl in particular, see the Ron Feldman's introduction to JW.

<sup>60</sup> ZP, 63.

<sup>61</sup> 'Reflections on Little Rock', RJ, 193; cf. 199-200.

### **Conclusion: the pathologies of citizenship**

The pathologies of in/visibility are interrelated. The laying bare of private life to the public eye is phenomenologically the reverse of the intrusion of the natural, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the social, into the political. The private and the social spheres should be shielded against the public eye, both of the state and of other citizens. Whenever this protection of private life is undermined, not only the private is affected, but public life as well. Reversely, the public sphere should be protected against natural and social concerns. When these ‘burst upon’<sup>62</sup> the public stage, they cause the perversion not only of the political, but of private life as well. What makes public invisibility and natural visibility experientially hard to bear, is being deprived of any chance of a political existence and hence a truly human, worthy and meaningful life. In chapter 7 and 8, I will discuss the pathologies of in/visibility: public invisibility and private visibility (chapter 7) and social visibility (chapter 8). Chapter 7 is devoted to a particular case, namely Arendt’s reflections in the 1940s and early 1950s on stateless aliens in inter-war Europe. By juxtaposing her account to current Dutch policies and practices concerning aliens in the last section, I will investigate the relevance and currency of this Arendtian politics of in/visibility. In chapter 8 I will discuss the exclusion of a number of social groups, Afro-Americans, the poor and women.

As its pathologies, both public invisibility, and natural and social visibility provide insight in the aspect of the world that is, under consideration in this chapter: the space of appearances and consequentially in important ingredients of the political. Arendt regards public visibility and natural invisibility as two sides of the same coin of sound political action, i.e. participation, and citizenship. They enable a good life which Arendt defines as a political life. In chapter 6, I will provide a more or less systematic reconstruction of Arendt’s phenomenology of public, participatory visibility and its complement, natural invisibility.

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<sup>62</sup> ‘The social question’, OR, 91.

