

The Relevance of Arendt's Critique of Violence to Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence Against Women

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Abstract: Hannah Arendt criticizes how violence is traditionally perceived as an essential part of the human condition. She argues that there is a need to iterate violence because its meaning is often blurry, misguided, and interchanged with other concepts like power, strength, and force. In this paper, I rethink Arendt's critique of violence to analyze the role of hegemonic masculinity in the emergence of violence against women. Albeit, Arendt is not a feminist her critique of violence is a helpful foundation for the discourse on hegemonic masculinity and violence against women. This paper answers the following question: what is the relevance of Arendt to hegemonic masculinity and violence against women? In addressing this question, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part showcases Arendt's critique of violence. The second part discusses hegemonic masculinity and the role it plays in violence against women. Lastly, the third part focuses on the relevance of Arendt in hegemonic masculinity and violence against women. This paper shows that Arendt's critique of violence is not only relevant to tyranny, totalitarianism, and wars but also in subtle and more banal forms of violence. More specifically, I argue that through Arendt's critique of violence, we

can analyze how hegemonic masculinity is misconstrued as power that sometimes leads to violence against women.

Keywords: Arendt, hegemonic masculinity, violence, violence against women

INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt argues that the twentieth century has become a century where violence—wars and bloody revolutions—is inevitable.¹ Violence, especially when utilized as a necessary means to achieve certain political goals, often corresponds to a destructive potential that may lead to irreversible negative outcomes.² Hence, Arendt asserts that the integration of violence into politics must be revisited. She strongly contends that it is possible to exercise power without resorting to violence and that violent acts are not always natural or instinctual. In this paper, I intend to explore the relevance of Arendt's critique of violence in other discourses. Specifically, I will appropriate her critique to one of the most pervasive problems women face both in the private and public realms—violence against women.

The most widespread form of violence against women—whether physical, sexual, or psychological—is perpetrated by a male husband or intimate partner.³ Aside from husbands and intimate partners, violence from non-partner perpetrators that consist of male relatives, friends, acquaintances, or strangers are also common forms of violence against women across the globe. These kinds of perpetrators are resorting to violence to assert their power *over* women.⁴ Unfortunately, violent behaviors of men are often perceived as a normal development of their supposedly masculine traits in reference to their gender norms.⁵ However,

¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women," in *World Health Organization* (2021), 20, <<https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/145c0488-87d1-4d3f-a562-f98f9bd5dac2/content>>.

⁴ Dherick Fraga Santos, et al., "Masculinity in Pandemic Times: Where Power Decreases, Violence Increases," in *Saúde e Sociedade*, 30:3 (2021), 2.

⁵ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 3rd ed., (San Francisco: Westview Press, 2009), 156.

I am convinced that it is problematic to view violence of men as natural expressions of their masculinity. Considering violence as a natural and inevitable part of masculinity can potentially lead to problematic assumptions like victim blaming and rape culture that put the accountability to the victims more than the perpetrators. It is important to emphasize that I do not intend to discriminate and assume that all men are violent. I only emphasize that some masculine traits that we deem to be normal needs to be problematized for underpinning violence against women. I also emphasize that various forms of masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinity, should be revisited as these are not natural instinctual drives of males but are byproducts of gender norms.

To substantiate my claims, this paper shall be divided into three major parts. The first part will provide an exposition of Arendt's understanding of violence as found in her prominent works. This section shall focus on how violence must not be interchanged with power, how violence is not always an irrational and instinctual act, and lastly, how violence is not a reliable means to ends. The second part shall focus on the discussion of masculinities, giving particular focus on hegemonic masculinity. Later, I will bridge its connection with issues pertaining to violence against women and utilize Philippine society as an example to support my claims. The third and last part shall appropriate the critique of Arendt on violence to hegemonic masculinity and violence against women. This paper will end by answering this question: what is the relevance of Arendt to hegemonic masculinity and violence against women?

ARENDT'S CRITIQUE OF VIOLENCE

In *On Violence*, Arendt revisited various debates surrounding violence in politics and in the sciences. In her critique, Arendt engaged with various thinkers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Frantz Fanon, and Jean Paul

Sartre as they highlighted the role of violence in politics.⁶ Engels, for instance, claims that violence is “an accelerator of economic development.”⁷ Meanwhile, Sartre, in his interpretation of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, argues that it is through violence that meaningful improvements in various injustices can be realized.⁸ The predominant reason why violence is seen this way is that many thinkers associate violence with the assertion of power. For Arendt, this is also evident when totalitarian regimes and authoritarianism resort to violence to claim absolute power.⁹ The nature and cause of violence is also being studied in the natural and social sciences. For zoologists, for instance, violence is believed to be instinctual and an irrational act.¹⁰ Arendt strongly disagrees with these notions on violence as she believes that violence can be understood as follows: first, violence is not always irrational and instinctual; secondly, violence is not synonymous with power; and, lastly, violence is not a reliable means to political ends as it leads to irreversible effects.¹¹

In Arendt’s first contention—that violence is not always irrational or instinctual—she problematized how violence is often associated with natural or biological claims. The research of social and natural scientists, particularly of zoologists, identifies violent behavior as a *natural* reaction and that aggressiveness is an instinctual drive.¹² It is further believed that violence, because it happens collectively, is a natural prerequisite of life and the struggle for survival. In this sense, violent acts will only be seen as a natural impulse and not related at all to logic and rationality. Against

⁶ For this discussion, see Arendt, *On Violence*.

⁷ As cited by Arendt, in *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 90. See also Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 30.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Authority in the Twentieth Century,” in *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken books, 2018), 72.

¹⁰ Arendt, *On Violence*, 63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

this, Arendt argues that “to speak about the nature and causes of violence through the lens of social scientists and natural scientists is presumptuous ... this research has little to no relevance to the problem of violence in human interactions.”¹³ Indeed, if violence is believed to be a natural impulse or a completely irrational act, no accountability can be demanded for any violent behaviors portrayed by human beings. In this sense, it is as if violent acts cannot be calculated or rationally instigated. Hence, Arendt argues that there are some instances that violence is instigated with a thorough rational decision.¹⁴ Again, to limit our understanding of violence as natural or instinctual is to deny the capacity of individuals to control their violent tendencies and to be accountable when one strategically commits violence.

The second contention of Arendt is that violence and power are distinct from each other.¹⁵ Violence is often perceived as the epitome of power. Arendt argues that albeit violence often appears alongside power, they should be viewed as opposites. She argues that when one relies on using violence, what it truly means is that they lack power or that their power is weakened:

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

To further substantiate this differentiation, it is important to note that Arendt refers to ancient Greek democracy as the framework for the model of the ideal public realm. In ancient Greek democracy, politics was based on *peitho* or the “power ... of persuasion by talking with one another.”¹⁷ This was the legitimate mode of interaction in ancient Greek politics while violence was excluded in the public. To this end, the foundation of politics for Arendt involves human beings’ ability to speak and act together.¹⁸ This activity of the human condition is only possible because Arendt believes that power belongs to the people who act in concert.¹⁹ In this way, power for Arendt can be understood as a nonviolent activity between people who are gathered together.

Hence, from the Arendtian purview, it is problematic to assume that power entails violence. When this happens, it usually portrays power not *with* people but power *over* others.²⁰ Power over others is often present in totalitarian regimes. Totalitarian regimes do not only hold total control over the public realm, but it has dominated everyone in all spheres of life.²¹ Totalitarianism aims to dominate and terrorize the lives of people from within. It is not only in the public realm, but it penetrates and intrudes even the private lives of each and every individual.²² The success of totalitarian movements can only be achieved through violence. Hence, they have to incorporate violence as part of their political means because this is the only way to ensure permanent domination. This is why, for Arendt, violence does not demand active engagement. Indeed, the seizure of power can also be understood as the eradication of speech and action.²³

¹⁷ Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” in *Thinking Without a Banister*, 175.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 179.

¹⁹ Margaret Canovan, “Introduction,” in *Ibid.*, xviii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 237. See also Arendt, *On Violence*, 39.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, “The Hungarian Revolution and Totalitarian Imperialism,” in *Thinking without a Banister*, 129-130.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1976), 312.

Thus, Arendt clarifies that “the extreme form of power is all against one, while the extreme form of violence is one against all.”²⁴ On the one hand, the former can be seen during extreme instances when people would act in concert to overthrow one violent leader. On the other hand, the latter usually happens when a leader who has little to no power to lead its people will resort to violence as his final attempt to claim his absolute power through totalizing his people. With this in mind, Arendt's notion of power is more inclined to be understood as power *with* every human person, not power *over* others which only manifests in violence. It should not just belong to one person or group, but it should belong to the people who speak and act together in politics.

Thirdly, Arendt concerns herself with the destructive tendency of violence. Another reason as to why violence is usually permitted as a tool for power is because totalitarian regimes and authoritarianism utilized violence as a means for their political goals. However, for Arendt, violence as a means for political power is problematic since the end of human action is always uncertain. As she writes,

Since violence-as distinct from power, force, or strength - always needs implements (as Engels pointed out long ago) ... The very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies, and which are needed to reach it. Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals.²⁵

²⁴ Arendt, *On Violence*, 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Arendt stipulates that violence is perhaps the easiest method to reach the end of human action, but this method is undeniably one of the most dangerous ones as it could lead to irreversible effects.²⁶ The irreversible effects of violence can lead to changing the world but, according to Arendt, “the most probable change is to a more violent world.”²⁷ For this reason, Arendt offers a nonviolent democratic politics. It is important to note that this non-violent democratic politics does not denote a perfectly harmonious politics since, for Arendt, instability and disagreement are ineradicable elements of the public realm. However, she does advocate that this non-violent public realm must be upheld consistently through the protection of individual rights and freedom.²⁸ For her, violence has no place in human interactions and should not be understood as the same as power.

Various commentators of Arendt, like Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib, and Bonnie Honig would expand on Arendt’s critique of violence beyond the issues with totalitarian regimes and authoritarianism.²⁹ In the following sections of this paper, I will similarly expand on her notion of violence by focusing on violence against women.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ While Hannah Arendt is not a straightforward theorist of human rights (except for a few passages in *Origins of Totalitarianism* wherein she highlighted rights as inalienable), her works can be read as so. Cf. Arendt, “Freedom and Politics: A Lecture,” in *Thinking Without a Banister*, 220-244.

²⁹ For this discussion, see Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020). Cf. Seyla Benhabib, “Feminist Theory and Hannah Arendt’s concept of Public Space,” in *History of the Human Sciences*, 6:2 (1993), 97-114; and, Bonnie Honig, “Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 135-166.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is one of the most pervasive problems that feminists, government agencies, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and other groups aim to eradicate. It comes in various forms: physical, sexual, sociological, economic, and even psychological. It can happen to any woman at any time in any given place, even at her own home. Oftentimes, violence against women in the domestic sphere occurs at the hands of male domestic partners and male family members. Based on the 2022 National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS), 17.5% of Filipino women have experienced violence from their intimate partners,³⁰ which is higher compared to the 17% rate gathered in the NDHS 2017 survey.³¹ This increase in violence rate was aggravated by the Corona-Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic.³² The pandemic forced people to stay at home and practice social distancing. While this was essential in curbing the spread of the disease, it also increased the precariousness of women's situation by increasing the likelihood of male-incited domestic violence.³³ This was made worse by the fact that the country's main focus was on how to combat COVID-19, leaving the help desks for anti-violence against women and children limited while some women and children quarantine with their perpetrators. Aside from domestic violence, sexual violence

³⁰ For this discussion, see Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF, *2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS): Key Indicators Report* (Quezon City and Rockville: PSA and ICF, 2022).

³¹ For this discussion, see Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF, *Key Findings from the Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey 2017* (Quezon City and Rockville: PSA and ICF, 2018).

³² For this discussion, see National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines (NAST PHL), "The Shadow Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic," in *Gender and Development Corner, Department of Science and Technology—NAST* (9 March 2021). <<https://nast.dost.gov.ph/images/gad/Activity%20report%20Shadow%20Pandemic.pdf>>.

³³ Santos, et al., "Masculinity in Pandemic Times: Where Power Decreases, Violence Increases," 2.

especially in public spaces is also rampant. According to the 2016 Social Weather Station (SWS) Safe Cities Quezon City Survey, an estimated three out of five women experienced physical or sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime.³⁴ In the same report, three out of five men also admitted to committing sexual harassment toward women at least once in their lifetime.³⁵ What makes this even worse is that male-incited violence, which often manifests in sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, is stigmatized and often not addressed properly. According to the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), this is evident when victims of sexual violence are ashamed to report that they have been sexually abused or assaulted.³⁶ Unfortunately, when various organizations and government agencies attempt to address this problem, they often end up blaming the victim or perpetuating a rape culture. For instance, the Lucban Municipal Police Station (MPS) posted last June 2020 a public advisory on *Facebook* to end violence against women. However, in the same post, they advised women to not wear revealing clothes to avoid getting harassed.³⁷ The Angono MPS also did the same thing when they posted rape-prevention guidelines but, again, shifted the focus on what women should do to avoid getting raped.³⁸ These public advisories put the

³⁴ Angelli Ancheta, “No Place for Harassment: Construing Street Harassment as Gender-Based Sexual Violence and Providing Remedies Therefor,” in *Ateneo Law Journal*, 63:2 (2018), 542.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “PCW reiterates ‘choice of clothes’ not cause of sexual violence, calls for gender-sensitive info materials,” in *Philippine Commission on Women* (16 June 2020), <<https://pcw.gov.ph/pcw-reiterates-choice-of-clothes-not-cause-of-sexual-violence-calls-for-gender-sensitive-info-materials/>>.

³⁷ Consuelo Marquez, “Lucban police probed for victim-blaming social media post,” in *Inquirer.net* (12 June 2020), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1290775/lucban-police-probed-for-victim-blaming-post-vs-women>>.

³⁸ Agence France-Presse, “Police in Angono slammed for anti-rape advice,” in *Rappler* (18 July 2018), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/207637-angono-rizal-police-facebook-post-anti-rape-advice/>>. Cf. Syrah Vivien Inocencio, “PNP to update rape prevention guidelines,” in *Inquirer.net* (19 July 2018), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1012041/pnp-to-update-rape-prevention-guidelines-pnp-rape-tips-durana-angono-facebook>>.

burden and blame on the potential victims more than the perpetrators.³⁹ This is why many victims of violence against women who admitted to getting sexually harassed did not report or did not do anything about what happened.⁴⁰ Unreported sexual violence cases and the tolerance of male-incited violence are contributors as to how rape culture and victim blaming are rampant in various societies like the Philippines.

There are public campaigns in various social media platforms that call for radical change in the hopes of exposing rampant sexual violence and eradicating the stigma that comes with it. Clare Bethel argues that the “#MeToo” campaign together with the “#TimesUp” movement call for radical change in attitude towards harassment.⁴¹ These movements aim to expose that sexual violence is a hidden epidemic that must be recognized. Additionally, they aim to remove the stigma embedded in victims of sexual violence. Bethel acknowledged that sexual violence does not only happen to women, but it remains to be a gendered crime that affects a lot of girls and women.⁴² One issue that is explored in these campaigns is how masculinity often leads to hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity per se has various types and has been understood to have a historical and socially constructed background.⁴³ The ideal masculine traits put enormous expectations on how men ought to act, sometimes resulting to

³⁹ Marquez, “Lucban police probed for victim-blaming social media post.”

⁴⁰ Philippine Daily Inquirer, “Shine more light on gender-based violence in remote areas,” in *Inquirer.net* (5 January 2021), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/136721/shine-more-light-on-gender-based-violence-in-remote-areas>>.

⁴¹ The #MeToo hashtag has been used in social media to protest gender-based and sexual violence. Social media, with the help of the #MeToo hashtag, helps a lot of people, especially women who do not have a voice in the public sphere or women who also fear the repercussions of speaking out. The #MeToo hashtag became a movement globally to expose the reality of sexual violence in various fields such as the workplace, show business, politics, and universities. Cf. Elena Cohen and Deepti Misri, “Introduction: Protest,” in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 46:3-4 (2018), 14-27.

⁴² Claire Bethel, “#MeToo: The Perfect Storm Needed to Change Attitudes Toward Sexual Harassment and Violence,” in *Harvard Public Health Review*, 16 (2018), 2.

⁴³ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 187.

masculinity that is characterized as toxic or hegemonic.⁴⁴ Hegemonic masculinity is often used to point out the problematic practices and violent behaviors of men in the process of justifying their masculine traits. This justification sometimes led to the perpetuation of homophobia, oppressive gender norms, misogyny, masculine domination over women and some men, and other gender-based violence.⁴⁵ As Raewyn Connell wrote,

hegemonic masculinity is the form embodying male domination and exercising power and authority over women (and other men), with all the consequences of oppression, violence and privileges. That is, hegemonic masculinity would represent the traditional archetype of virility and male stereotypes in accordance with a patriarchal culture ... subordinate masculinity is found on the fringes of traditional lifestyles, with behaviors and feelings conventionally attributed to women ... comprise both male behaviors of a homosexual orientation and some other ways of ... values normally seen as typical of women (a caring ethos towards people, an emphasis on feelings

⁴⁴ Although the term toxic masculinity is often referred to in various feminist discussions, I opt to focus on hegemonic masculinity because of the problematic origin of the term toxic masculinity. The term was originally used by the Mythopoetic Men's movement and the Promise keeper during the 1980s and 1990s to reject hypermasculinity because they perceive it as detrimental to the spiritual life of the family. However, their rejection of hypermasculinity was done through conforming to an essentialist notion of masculinity. Hence, the movement against toxic masculinity can also potentially strengthen gender norms and hierarchy. Because of this, various thinkers are skeptical whether addressing the problematic behavior of men should be reduced to calling it toxic masculinity because of the term's problematic origin. Cf. Carol Harrington, "What is 'Toxic Masculinity' and Why Does it Matter?," in *Men and Masculinities*, 24:2 (2021), 345-352.

⁴⁵ David Duriesmith, "Adaptation of Militarized Masculinity and Violent Extremism in the Southern Philippines," in *Conflicting Identities: The Nexus Between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia*, ed. by Katherine E. Brown, David Duriesmith, Farhana Rahman, and Jacqui True (Bangkok: UNDP & UN Women, 2020), 12.

and emotions, solidarity with feminist stances and the like).⁴⁶

Hence, paying attention to the phenomena of hegemonic masculinity leads to a nuanced analysis of masculinity's role in violence against women that does not hastily generalize that all men are violent. Indeed, it highlights the fact that masculinity poses two dangers: first, it may tolerate men as perpetrators and, second, it may physically and economically exploit men.⁴⁷ As the above quotation indicated, aside from women, men are also victims of hegemonic masculinity, but the perpetrators are mostly men as well.

Social media platforms have become very helpful spaces for some women to share their experiences as survivors of male-incited violence and establish linkages in their struggle against a common enemy. However, they can also be avenues that further perpetuate hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, rape culture, and victim blaming. Hence, some thinkers like Danielle Stern argue that aside from social media, it is important to also create a safer environment to promote discourses.⁴⁸ For instance, as an educator, Stern utilizes her classroom and encourages the participation of her students to reframe dominant narratives of rape culture. Through this, Stern hopes that her students will understand the history, intersectionality, system, and institutional violence against women.⁴⁹ Stern points out that the classroom setup helps provide space for all people—including women of color, poor, trans women, and queer women—to talk about their traumatic experiences so that their narratives will also be heard. For her, this provides a more inclusive environment for intersectionality compared to some social media platforms.⁵⁰ Stern

⁴⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, 222.

⁴⁷ Sam De Boise, "Is masculinity toxic?," in *NORMA*, 14:3 (2019), 148.

⁴⁸ Danielle Stern, "Embodied Interventions: Feminist Communication Pedagogy and Rape Culture," in *Women's Studies in Communication*, 41:2 (2018), 108.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

suggests that we must embody the feminist communication pedagogy, inclusive of intersectionality in all platforms such as classrooms, streets, and social media platforms to circumvent violence against women and rape culture.⁵¹ In doing so, misogynistic attitudes will potentially be addressed that will later on remove the stigma against victims of violence against women.

Unfortunately, in the Philippines, addressing hegemonic masculinity is quite a challenge given that it is often tolerated and even performed by influential and powerful figures, like former president Rodrigo Duterte. Duterte appears to have contributed to the normalization and perpetuation of gender stereotypes and male superiority.⁵² As president of the country, he performed qualities of hegemonic masculinity, such as misogynistic remarks, rape jokes, vulgarity, explicit sexuality, and willingness to engage in violence.⁵³ In the majority of his presidential speeches and interviews, Duterte's misogynistic remarks, like rape jokes, narratives about abusing housemaids, and collecting several mistresses have become typical parts of his speeches.⁵⁴ This is problematic because his actions potentially normalize and trivialize hegemonic masculinity in the country. Duterte's words and actions did not only reinforce violence against women, misogyny, and male dominance; they also seemingly enabled rape culture and victim blaming in the Philippines. These qualities of hegemonic

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Teresita Quintos Deles, *WOMEN UNDER SIEGE: Manifestations of populism and its impact on gender equality in the Philippines* (Pasig: The International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance, 2020), 4.

⁵³ Jeremy de Chavez and Vincent Pacheco, "Masculinity in the Age of (Philippine) Populism: Violence and Vulgarity in Duterte's Hypermasculine Discourse," in *Masculinities and Social Change*, 6:3 (2020), 265.

⁵⁴ For this discussion, see Joshua Berlinger, "President Rodrigo Duterte Claims He Abused Maid as Teenager," in *CNN Philippines* (30 December 2018), <<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/12/30/President-Rodrigo-Duterte-abused-maid-teenager.html>>. Cf. Joe Sterling and Buena Bernal, "Duterte jokes about rape while rallying troops to fight militants," in *CNN* (28 May 2017), <<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/26/asia/philippines-duterte-speech>>.

masculinity portrayed by Duterte are alarming because a lot of Filipinos see these qualities as “authentic, organic, and relatable.”⁵⁵ In fact, many Filipinos cheer and roar in laughter upon hearing these remarks from Duterte. This only goes to show that Duterte’s image of hypermasculinity is not something unique or new; it is rather a manifestation of an already existing hegemonic masculinity in some Filipinos. Duterte’s display of hypermasculinity is an epitome of how hegemonic masculinity continues to be an unnoticed reality in the country.

This is not to say that the Philippines in general is a country where rape culture and victim blaming are the only reality. There are efforts from various organizations, universities, NGOs, and government agencies, like the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), to combat violence against women, rape culture, and victim blaming. For instance, the women’s coalition EveryWoman launched a Facebook page called “Bantay Bastos” (closely translated to “Watchdog Against Vulgarity”) that aims to combat the misogynistic culture of the Philippines.⁵⁶ Miriam College’s Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) provides training, advocacy, and research to address violence against women and how it is a silent crisis in the country. According to WAGI, violence against women does not only happen because of triggering environment, urges, or sexual cravings. Violence against women often happens because the perpetrators need to prove that they are more powerful than women.⁵⁷ However, these efforts are constrained if people in respectable positions, like the former President of the country and his supporters, continue to embody hegemonic masculinity. If left unaddressed, a notable change will not happen.

⁵⁵ Chavez and Pacheco, “Masculinity in the Age of (Philippine) Populism,” 265.

⁵⁶ For this discussion, see Katrina Domingo, “‘BantayBastos’: Shame Campaign vs. Misogynist Public Officials Launched,” in *ABS-CBN News* (8 March 2018), <<https://www.abs-cbn.com/focus/03/08/18/bantaybastos-shame-campaign-vs-misogynist-public-officials-launched>>.

⁵⁷ Tria Garcia, *Violence Against Women in the Philippines* (Norway: Master’s Thesis, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2020), 52.

It is indeed worrying to know that some men think that resorting to violence is an impulse to protect their masculinity when it is being challenged. Their embodiment of hegemonic masculinity encourages them to compensate and reclaim their power by using force and violence.⁵⁸ In this instance, male-incited violence hides behind the façade of masculine traits that are accepted as the normal development of men. I contend that Arendt's critique of violence opens possible theoretical pathways where the normalization of hegemonic masculinity and, by extension, violence against women can be circumvented. This will be discussed in the next section.

ARENDT'S RELEVANCE TO HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

This part of the paper is intended to highlight the significant implications of Arendt's discourse on violence vis-a-vis hegemonic masculinity. As is well known, Arendt excelled in re-examining traditions that are widely accepted. This allowed her to see traditional notions in a new light and disclose their embedded problems. Similarly, we can use her insights as helpful tools to analyze longstanding notions that are not usually questioned to gain a deeper understanding of their potential problems and, maybe, eventually formulate solutions to them. These philosophical notions when applied to something as pervasive as hegemonic masculinity may challenge problematic social constructs that lead to actual suffering and violence to women. To flesh out the parallelisms between Arendt's notion of violence and the role of hegemonic masculinity in violence against women, I shall go back to the contentions she made about violence, particularly focusing on the first two. These are: 1) violence is not always an irrational act; and 2) violence is not the same as power.

The first contention challenges the widespread belief that violence is an inevitable part of human relations and that it is something natural or normal in human relations. One form of violence that Arendt mentioned

⁵⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, 222.

was “aggressiveness” which some scientific research on animals posit as driven by instinct or part of the nature of animals.⁵⁹ Just like what was mentioned earlier, Arendt asserts that violence, even in terms of aggressiveness, must not be deemed as something natural and normal in human relations.⁶⁰ When we accept that violence is instinctual and natural, violent actions, movements, and propagandas will be normalized. It will be hard to demand accountability from tyrants, perpetrators, and enablers if we see their violent actions to be expressions of an inner nature. Furthermore, it dismisses circumstances wherein violence is done through a rational decision.⁶¹

Arendt's deconstruction of the “violence as natural” contention seems to be echoed by various feminist thinkers that attempt to challenge male incited violence. The feminist literature is replete with arguments that subvert the faulty assumption that masculinity is determined biologically. In a nutshell, biological determinism asserts that the normal development of males gears towards masculinity while for females it is towards femininity.⁶² This is problematized by a lot of feminist thinkers who argue that masculinity and femininity are not actually natural or part of the normal development of a person, but something that is socially constructed and imposed by what they refer to as gender norms.⁶³ One prominent thinker that addresses this issue is the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir discussed how a child's upbringing differs depending on their gender. Based on their upbringing, an adolescent male considers it normal to be exposed to violence; while for an adolescent female, violence is renounced.⁶⁴ Beauvoir argues that masculine behavior potentially erupts in violence. The usual games,

⁵⁹ Arendt, *On Violence*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶² Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 133.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House Inc., 2010), 343.

hobbies, and sports that males are encouraged to perform are usually in line with violence. It is as if masculine behaviors arise concomitantly with violence. Luce Irigaray, despite having different philosophical endeavors from Beauvoir, shares the same argument: masculinity expects men to have a potential for violence.⁶⁵ This form of violence is what Irigaray is trying to challenge. Society is not neutral or undifferentiated, especially where sex is concerned. There is a need to identify the problem of *othering* for women especially when there is a potential for violence. To put it simply, gender norms frame masculinity and femininity as natural parts of being a male or female. But, for Irigaray, what many fail to realize is that these are not rooted based on one's sex but on how they associate sex with these societal expectations and norms. bell hooks poses a different take on the question of sex. She pointed out that the masculine tendency towards violence can also be expressed by women.⁶⁶ hooks identified this need to exercise masculinity by either male or female, usually through violence, to assert dominance. She further adds that many women have the tendency to tolerate male-incited violence because it is accepted as a normal part of gender difference.⁶⁷ Hooks referred to this as *patriarchal* masculinity wherein acting out violently is normalized "because it is the easiest, cheapest way to declare one's 'manhood,'" she wrote.⁶⁸ Hence, strict conformity to masculinity inevitably makes violence perceived as a natural part of it.

In the second contention, Arendt argues that power is often exercised with violence, evidently portrayed by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. In this sense, power is executed as *power over others*. This is also the case in most instances when males are believed to be more powerful than women based on their physiological differences.

⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 136.

⁶⁶ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 57.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

Beauvoir argues that the physiological difference between males and females is not tantamount to males being more powerful than females.⁶⁹ In other words, physical male-incited violence is not proof that males are more powerful than females. Therefore, it is important that masculine behaviors, especially when it gears toward violence, must be evaluated to highlight that they are not the same as power. On a similar note, Iris Marion-Young traces the problem to the normativity of heterosexuality and masculinity's hierarchical dominance across various domains.⁷⁰ Marion-Young argues that institutionalized and organized violence must be critically analyzed especially when some institutions are usually associated with maleness or masculinity. She further argues that these institutions, like the military and the police force, consisted primarily of men with women as their subordinates. It is important to note that gender plays a role in social structures.⁷¹ Marion-Young argues that these social structures have implications on violence, power, and prestige. The same argument is offered by bell hooks in which she claims that domination and power are attributed to the execution of masculinity.⁷² Because of how much gender norms dissuade men to be emotional, according to hooks, men are most of the time compelled to express themselves through violent means.⁷³ This is why, for hooks, one of the most rampant cases of violence against women is found in domestic setups, particularly from their intimate partners. From this perspective, when men feel weak and powerless, they usually resort to violence as a final attempt to prove their masculinity.

Additionally, Tracey Nicholls also argues that the traditional imposition of gender norms, of the binary of man and woman, significantly maintains gender hierarchy. Nicholls likened these

⁶⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 344.

⁷⁰ Iris Marion-Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like A Girl!" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² hooks, *The Will to Change*, 70.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

traditional views to how males and females are represented in fairy tales and novels. Men in fairy tales, for instance, are often depicted as a man or a prince who will rescue a damsel in distress.⁷⁴ In these narratives, men are depicted as powerful, and women are depicted as subservient and powerless. They reinforce the traditional patriarchal social conditioning wherein people were raised to believe that men are entitled to women's bodies, women's attention, and women's respect.⁷⁵ For Nicholls, this contributes in reinforcing rape culture. One of the reasons why there is a thin line between rape and consensual intercourse is the cultural assumption that masculine behaviors tend to be aggressive and feminine behaviors tend to be submissive.⁷⁶ This only shows that rape culture is a manifestation of cultural violence emulsified by gender norms. Nicholls further explained how rape culture is rooted in the commodification of women's bodies and the normalization of masculinity steeped in conquest and control:

Rape culture ... as casual, pervasive commodification of women's bodies and relentless normalising of a masculinity steeped in conquest and control—depends on policings of masculinity and femininity that, like rape culture itself, are both manifestations of cultural violence ... What I am analysing ... are the pernicious effects of rigid commitments to traditional views of manhood and womanhood that cast men as owners or caretakers of women and as 'mini-sovereigns,' rulers over 'their' families and households, and cast women as vessels of care and procreation. Traditional and prescriptive, they condition those raised with them to accept as natural and

⁷⁴ Tracey Nicholls, *Dismantling Rape Culture: The Peacebuilding Power of 'Me Too'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ For this discussion, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

unchangeable the idea that men ought to have power over women, and they give legitimacy to the kinds of social relations that characterise rape culture.⁷⁷

This is why there is a widespread practice of victim blaming or putting the fault on the victims instead of on the perpetrators. Sexual harassment is believed to have occurred because of the victim's behavior, demeanor, or what they wore. It can come from other people and can even be internalized by the victims themselves. It is alarming when victim blaming becomes a reality to justify and defend male-incited violence against women. Since perpetrators are steeped in hegemonic masculine traits, women are the ones who must make an extra effort to protect themselves.⁷⁸ This does not put any accountability on perpetrators of sexual harassment and enables perpetrators to be socially accepted and something that we should just live with.⁷⁹

Arendt can help us understand why violence is permitted for men in the defense of exercising their masculinity. To see this, we must revisit how Arendt distinguishes violence from power. As discussed in the first section, violence is an outcome of inequality. Violence emerges when a person or a group of people needs to prove that they have power *over* other people. This is only possible when there is a hierarchy between their relationships. In hierarchical relations, violence is deemed to be a natural part of it, and it comes in the form of disciplinary action. For instance, domestic violence is often justified as the dominant husband exercising his power over his subservient wife. This predicament is deemed to be a normal and inevitable part of a traditional marriage.⁸⁰ Masculinity and

⁷⁷ Nicholls, *Dismantling Rape Culture*, 67.

⁷⁸ Mythili Rajiva, "A Comparative Analysis of White and Indigenous Girls' Perspectives on Sexual Violence, Toxic Masculinity and Rape Culture," in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 36:6 (2021), 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ For this discussion, see Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

masculine dominance is socially legitimated and that makes violent practices such as domestic violence considered a natural exercise. Echoing the claims of various feminists, it is necessary to denaturalize this assumption, and we must recognize that masculinity is not natural but a historically and socially constructed male behavior.⁸¹ To this end, masculine dominance and the violence that ensues from it are unnatural for everyone.

Arendt's political thought can help show that hegemonic masculinity is not an isolated matter. Hegemonic masculinity is present historically, economically, culturally, and politically. According to Connell, we cannot understand the connection between masculinity and violence at a personal level without understanding that it also has a global connection.⁸² In a traditional sense, a man is masculine if he is in power *over* something or someone. Most of the time, a man is masculine if he is in power over women and some men. This is also present in the social structure of some societies. The public realm possesses a male centric view. It is traditionally believed that men have natural power and strength over women and minorities in the public sphere. For Arendt, this happens because we often confuse power with vigor which is why violence is often (mis)perceived as an execution of power.⁸³ It was emphasized earlier that, for Arendt, the power of the people is not reliant on violence; the power of the people relies on speech and action.⁸⁴ Violence is just an act to instill fear; it is not a concept that will allow people to speak and be heard. As Arendt wrote,

Still it must be admitted that it is particularly tempting to think of power in terms of command and obedience, and hence to equate power with violence, in a discussion of

⁸¹ Santos, et al., "Masculinity in Pandemic Times," 3.

⁸² Connell, *Masculinities*, 186.

⁸³ Arendt, *On Violence*, 47.

⁸⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200.

what actually is only one of power's special cases namely, the power of government. Since in foreign relations as well as domestic affairs violence appears as a last resort to keep the power structure intact against individual challengers—the foreign enemy, the native criminal it looks indeed as though violence were the prerequisite of power and power nothing but a facade, the velvet glove which either conceals the iron hand or will turn out to belong to a paper tiger. On closer inspection, though, this notion loses much of its plausibility. For our purpose, the gap between theory and reality is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of revolution.⁸⁵

The relationship between violence and power, and how violent actions are sometimes justified as an outcome of power being exercised, is one of the reasons why Arendt's efforts to differentiate and re-define the two concepts is relevant in trying to understand the problem that lies within hegemonic masculinity and violence against women. Arendt notes that violence is traditionally considered as a mark of tyranny and the last and most shameful resource used in the relationship between nation and/or domestic life.⁸⁶ It is important to understand that violence is not similar to power, and it will never be an instrument someone can wield to be powerful.

CONCLUSION

Both feminist thinkers and Arendt are important in the discussion related to hegemonic masculinity and violence against women. Again, violence for Arendt is not always irrational, not natural, and never a substitute for power. Arendt also emphasized the need to recalibrate other forms of

⁸⁵ Arendt, *On Violence*, 47.

⁸⁶ Santos, et al., "Masculinity in Pandemic Times," 7.

violence that still exist and persist both in the private and public realms. More than the violence present in politics, we must also be aware of and criticize other forms of violence such as violence against women. Violence is not always obvious, it may hide behind the façade of a misconstrued notion of power, it may force itself in societies as a normal part of it. This is why Arendt highlights the importance of iterating some notions in order to clarify the problems, if any, that lies in them.

Arendt saw how power is confused with violence. In this sense, we can rightly say that masculinity has a lot of attributes and features but being violent is clearly not a natural part of it. Violence against women as instigated by hegemonic masculinity must not be perceived as a natural occurrence. Arendt insists that we must seek to know the meanings of the world and not be limited by how it is traditionally presented to us. In this case, analyzing the notion of masculinity allows us to see that it must be grounded more humanely and less oppressively.

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