

Discrimination As a Form of Political Exclusion: An Analysis from Arendtian Theory in Contemporary Times

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ABSTRACT:

This article derives from a doctoral thesis in philosophy titled “Discrimination as a Form of Political Exclusion: A Critical Reading from Hannah Arendt and Other Contemporary Approaches.” It analyzes discrimination not merely as a social problem or a violation of rights, but as a structural mechanism of political exclusion. Through an exhaustive review of Hannah Arendt’s works and a critical reading, it is argued that discrimination operates through the denial of human plurality, expelling subjects and various groups from the public sphere and depriving them of their capacity to participate within it. In this sense, the German-Jewish philosopher, in her works *The Human Condition* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, posits that human beings appear before others through action and speech, revealing their uniqueness, which is essential for interaction in a shared space, thereby establishing their individual revelation in the collective space and asserting their political condition.

In this regard, plurality, from the Arendtian perspective, is essential to human existence and to the shared world. It serves as a stage where human beings can appear through speech and action. Therefore, denying plurality instigates discrimination and annuls the political space, as it homogenizes human beings, resulting in the loss of collective identity. Discrimination becomes institutionalized through the creation of “superfluous” or stateless individuals, stripping them of all political, social, and human belonging.

The article argues that democracies are currently being eroded, as states perpetuate discrimination under naturalized forms such as structural racism, sexism, aporophobia, and xenophobia. Authors such as Judith Butler, Martha Nussbaum, and Zygmunt Bauman demonstrate that structural inequality and the exclusion of vulnerable groups (migrants, indigenous and Afro-descendant

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communities, sexual dissidents) weaken democracy. Furthermore, when societies rise up against these acts, it is often viewed as a threat, as it denies the right to be recognized as a political subject.

It should be noted that discrimination is a global phenomenon that deprives subjects of their political condition. The political and social challenge is to restore the common world through the defense of human dignity, plurality, and the right to political participation. It is imperative that democracies recognize the "other" to prevent fear and exclusion from continuing to serve as instruments of domination..

Keywords: discrimination, exclusion, common world, plurality, political condition.

Introduction

Discrimination throughout history has become one of the most persistent social and political phenomena in humanity. Apparently, it is understood as an act of violation of rights, the political dimension allows us to account for a structural mechanism of exclusion that is determined by the nullity of the participation of subjects within public life. In this sense, discrimination denies the recognition and political action of those who are considered "others", who do not fit within established parameters.

In this way, Hannah Arendt, in addition to developing the defense of the human condition against totalitarian regimes, offers a theoretical arsenal which allows us to understand how the processes of political exclusion are based on domination, dehumanization and loss of the common world. Although Arendt did not explicitly develop discrimination in her theory, the analyses of the totalitarian regime, the human condition and, in turn, the figure of the stateless person, allow us to unveil discrimination as a form of denial of human plurality and the expulsion of subjects from the public sphere.

The German Jewish philosopher warns in her works that politics can only exist, where subjects appear through word and action. Therefore, when a group is discriminated against because of ethnic, economic, cultural, religious, sexual or gender conditions, it is deprived of the possibility of acting politically within the community. Human discrimination is assumed as a practice of political exclusion, which strips them of recognition and belonging.

Research Method

The research "*Discrimination as a form of political exclusion: a critical reading from Hannah Arendt and other contemporary approaches*" is based on the philosophical theory of the German-Jewish author, in which from the comprehensive critical analysis of her works the origin of Totalitarianism and the human condition. The method that guides it is the hermeneutical-critical, whose postulates are based on Hans-Georg Gadamer, who illustrates how a conception that transcends textual interpretation is developed, towards a theory of knowledge. The author, - Gadamer - maintains that "understanding a tradition requires without doubt a historical horizon" (1999, 375). which implies that the analysis is based on the search for meaning based on the dialogue with the philosophical tradition of Hannah Arendt.

The study is qualitative, documentary, addressing the two works of Arendt already mentioned – the Origin of Totalitarianism and the Human Condition – which from the comprehensive and critical academic performance made it possible to unveil and analyze discrimination, thus recognizing contemporary authors such as Martha Nussbaum, Judith Butler and Kimberlé Crenshaw whose postulates integrate with Arendt's theory allowing to expand the understanding of discrimination in relation to the world of today.

Findings:

Contemporary societies naturalized forms of exclusion, which are represented through acts such as racism, xenophobia, classism, aporophobia and other

forms of structural inequality.

Currently, not only in Colombia, but in the different countries of the world, migratory crises, forced displacements, armed conflicts and global economic dynamics are increasing, hence the increase in invisible subjects in political participation. Deepening discrimination from Arendt's thought allows us to understand that exclusion is political and human nullity.

The article intends to develop an analysis of discrimination as a form of political exclusion from the perspective of Hannah Arendt, involving authors such as Judith Butler, Martha Nussbaum, Seyla Benhabib and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who broaden their understanding of discriminatory practices in today's democracies, evidencing the need to recover plurality and participation as essential foundations of democratic life.

For the philosopher Hannah Arendt, she argues that politics represents the space where men meet and act in common. In the work *The Human Condition*, Arendt (2023) argues that action and the word are fundamental in political life, since it is in this space where individuality is revealed to a collective. On the other hand, he warns that plurality is an essential condition of human existence, hence politics is part of plurality, since subjects interact in a shared space. In addition, he warns that, when plurality is denied, politics, thus appearing domination, characterized by homogenized subjects, who have a loss of identity. Discrimination represents a denial of human plurality. In this way, discrimination breaks the principle of political equality.

This is how Arendt warns that the loss of participation in the common world also implies the loss of political humanity. The author discusses how the regimes stripped men of their citizenship and legal recognition, turning them into superfluous beings, stateless, and moreover, expelled from all political communities, deprived of rights.

In this sense, discrimination represented in groups excluded from political participation, destroying the space of the common world.

Discrimination is defined, then, as a set of practices that highlight the differences marketed by hierarchies between humans, denying recognition and

participation. According to Arendt's theory, political exclusion occurs when some groups are deprived of the public sphere. Discrimination limits rights, it also reduces the capacity for action and participation. In the words of Obando A 2020

"Terror is preserved with excessive cruelty, from different methods of

violence (physical, racial, symbolic, linguistic, psychic), which are exercised in concentration and extermination camps, turning human beings into unworthy (that is, without a relationship of belonging or participation in a shared world)"p 27

In contemporary society, discrimination operates in naturalized ways. Structural racism, which restricts their political representation and access to spaces for participation. Similarly, sexism limits women's participation in political arenas.

Discrimination is also expressed, with acts of cruelty that have profoundly marked different parts of the world. In the United States, for example, racial violence against the migrant population has evidenced the persistence of racism, accentuating aporophobia within institutions. An example of this is the Black Lives Matter movement, denoting racial discrimination continues to limit the political and human recognition of millions of people.

Likewise, in European countries (Italy, Germany, France) xenophobic discourses are on the rise, increasing practices of social and political exclusion. Discrimination accounts for making foreigners visible as a threat to national stability. In Arendtian terms, these dynamics of subjects excluded from the common world deprive participation in the public sphere. Arendt consists of demonstrating how totalitarian regimes transformed discrimination into state policy. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, anti-Semitism and imperialism are analyzed as historical antecedents of modern forms of total domination.

Nazism, for example, constructed exclusion based on racial and biological criteria. The Jews became absolute enemies and progressively deprived of citizenship, rights and human recognition. Discrimination ceased to be a social prejudice to be institutionalized through laws of systematic violence. Concentration camps are the extreme degree of dehumanization, where individuals are reduced to

biological existence. This is how discrimination worked and functions as an instrument of political domination. The author demonstrates that the loss of political rights constitutes the first step towards the absolute negation of humanity. This is how Lenis Castaño mentions it, taking up Arendt: "The experience of her crimes showed that everything is possible and that the human condition itself, along with the notion of evil, can become banal." 2008. p 30

Thus, Zygmunt Bauman expands on these events, pointing to the Holocaust as a consequence of bureaucratic and technological modernity. In *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), he also argues that modern rationality made it possible to efficiently organize massive processes of extermination. Likewise, cruelty is taken up as an extreme expression of discrimination, observed in historical and contemporary scenarios.

The Rwandan genocide in 1994, which evidenced the extermination of almost a million people in the Tutsi population. Thus, the systematic persecution against the Rohingya population in Myanmar who internationally denounced a form of ethnic cleansing based on religious and cultural discrimination.

In the Middle East, in the Gaza Strip and other Palestinian territories, systematic violence, humanitarian blockades and forced displacement reflect political exclusion and dehumanization. Institutionalized practices of discrimination through discourses of security and political dominance that reduce the human condition. Colombia, not being immune to this discrimination, is marked by massacres derived from the armed conflict, where populations were considered disposable within socio-political dynamics. Events such as the Bojayá massacre show the dehumanization of the community generated by illegal armed groups, generating death, displacement and political exclusion. Bawman supports it from "Today, inequality is worsening following its own logic and its own rhythm. It does not need any other external help, stimulus, pressure or impulse. This new inequality has created two worlds, with little or no meeting point or communication between them" 2014. P86

Likewise, indigenous people are involved in these

acts of violence, generating not only territorial displacement but also cultural discrimination and violation of their ancestral ways of life, as is the case of indigenous communities such as the Wayúu, the Embera and the Nasa were confronted as well as excluded, they also faced conditions of poverty, reflecting state abandonment.

The domination exercised by the totalitarian movement, in addition to forcing man into a state of isolation, also destroys private life, eliminating the capacity for one's own life, causing a loneliness that does not allow him the experience of belonging to the world. Obando A, 2024 p 75

The acts of cruelty in Colombia and in different countries show that discrimination is not an isolated phenomenon, but a historical structure of domination that produces exclusion, suffering and dehumanization. From the Arendtian perspective, these realities show a great fragility of the common world, and a the need to reconstruct democratic scenarios based on plurality, human dignity and collective participation.

It should be noted that discrimination has historically operated as an instrument of colonization and imperial expansion. For decades, numerous groups have been subjected to discourses of civilization and progress, in which economic exploitation and cultural domination are justified. This is how European and American expansion established practices of racial segregation and systematic violence against peoples considered inferior. Arendt identifies this fact as the emergence of totalitarianism, dynamics that naturalized domination and exclusion as an act of the denial of political recognition.

The human being loses the meaning of existence in the midst of domination where he is subjected by a totalitarian regime, since this system places the subject in a place of isolation, where silencing annuls any possibility of encounter. Men assume acts of individual and collective indifference that assures them as superfluous men, being part of the purpose of social annihilation. Obando A 2024 p 52

It is also necessary to question political and media discourses that promote fear towards certain social groups. The construction of the "other" as a threat has historically been used to justify violence and

exclusion. In the words of Obando, 2024 "This is the condition by which man is not only identified in abandonment in his private life but also in social and political abandonment, marking the damage of man in the public sphere, annulling participation" p 78

Consequently, challenging discrimination requires strengthening policies aimed at recognition, inclusion and social justice from the recognition of the right, based on the defense of human rights, and for this it is necessary to make structural transformations in democratic participation.

Discussion

Discrimination as a form of political exclusion: analysis from Arendtian theory allows us to realize that this is a global phenomenon, which goes beyond a social practice of inequality, which derives from the deprivation of rights.

On the other hand, discrimination from the social and political acts that govern today's "democracies" accounts for the denial of human plurality as life stories that present migrants, religious minorities, and vulnerable groups from the unequal distribution of public resources between regions and communities. As well as practices that disproportionately affect certain racial and/or social groups. The use of stereotypes to justify inequalities or exclusions; Becoming a radical threat against the very essence of the political, Arendt defines it as a sine qua non condition for that space of appearance that is the public sphere" (2023, 193).

Therefore, the practices developed by the different states are assumed as the attempt to eliminate plurality, being equivalent to the abolition of the public sphere itself. This is how to deny this plurality means to deprive the human being of his capacity to appear in the world as a political subject, reducing him to a mere biological existence, to what she describes as devoid of meaning and recognition.

Discrimination, in this context, is a structural mechanism that lays the foundations for political exclusion. Arendt, in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, explains how totalitarian regimes transform individuals into "superfluous", stripping them of all belonging and of any space of appearance. An example of this is in Colombia that, during the armed conflict, peasants, indigenous people, and

communities in general were displaced from their places by armed groups, being dispossessed not only of land, but also of their effective capacity for political participation and social recognition. Assuming themselves as a group without rights.

This is how political exclusion is made visible not only with the loss of formal rights, but also with the annihilation of the human condition in its public dimension. Discrimination represents the step towards that exclusion: making the other invisible, expelling them from the common space. Making him a prisoner.

Going through the historical events of the twentieth century, they corroborate this logic of domination, from racial discrimination, which has become state policy, in which exclusion was legitimized and prepares the ground for systematic violence. Similarly, the Stalinist purges demonstrated how stigmatization and suspicion are transformed into mechanisms of political elimination. In Latin America, the military dictatorships of the twentieth century replicated this logic: ideological and social discrimination turned into political exclusion, and translated into systematic violence against opponents, minorities and entire communities. History reveals that discrimination, when institutionalized, becomes a device of annihilation, generating the destruction of the political condition of the human being.

The extermination of the Patriotic Union during the 1980s and 1990s, in Colombia, a manifestation of this logic. Its militants were stigmatized as collaborators of the insurgency, which favored their democratic exclusion and justified acts of violence against them. Thousands of sympathizers of the ideology were displaced, assassinated or disappeared, including presidential candidates, social leaders, mayors. Discrimination that operated as a mechanism of political exclusion that denied a sector of society its right to participate in public life. Political prejudices derive forms of annihilation that destroy plurality, and with it democracy, even violating the rights of men, annulling participation in the political community.

In short, examining current realities from Arendt's theory shows that discrimination takes more subtle, although devastating, forms. If in the last century

political exclusion was manifested through concentration camps, ideological purges and military dictatorships, today it is manifested in dynamics that seem normalized: the marginalization of migrants, the precariousness of informal workers, the invisibilization of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, the stigmatization of sexual dissidence and the criminalization of social protest. These practices, although presented as legal or justified in the name of security and order, reproduce the same logic that annihilates plurality and reduces the human being to a mere biological existence.

The invisibilization of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities shows the continuity of colonial structures of discrimination. Although these communities are recognized in official discourses, in political and economic practice they are marginalized. Exclusion manifests itself through lack of representation, denial of their territories, and systematic violence against their leaders. Ignoring the existence of these communities is tantamount to denying politics itself. In this context, ethnic discrimination represents a form of political exclusion that perpetuates the symbolic and material annihilation of entire peoples, evidencing that plurality continues to be an unresolved challenge in our democracies.

The stigmatization of sexual dissidence illustrates how discrimination adapts to contemporary discourses. Despite advances in civil rights, political exclusion persists in the form of symbolic violence, hate speech, and restrictive policies. Depriving sexual dissidents of spaces for action is tantamount to denying them political freedom. In this case, discrimination is not limited to the private sphere, but translates into exclusion from public space, the invisibilization of voices and the denial of plurality. Politics, by not recognizing these differences, becomes a mechanism of homogenization that destroys the richness of the human.

The criminalization of social protest represents one of the most alarming manifestations of political exclusion in today's democracies. Protest, understood as a form of collective action, is considered a threat to the established order. Criminalizing protest implies annihilating power in its deepest sense, replacing it with the violence

exercised by the State. Discrimination against those who demonstrate is not only of a legal nature, but also political: they are deprived of the right to be recognized as collective subjects, they are reduced to being considered enemies of the system and they are excluded from the public space. Democracy, by repressing protest, betrays itself, since it denies the plurality that is its foundation.

The relevance of Arendt's thought, therefore, is reaffirmed in its ability to illuminate these contemporary realities. Discrimination, in its various forms, continues to be a radical threat to plurality and freedom. Political exclusion is not a phenomenon of the past, but a current dynamic that erodes democracy and destroys the human condition. The task that is presented is to resist these logics, restore plurality and reopen spaces for action. Political philosophy, in this context, is not limited to interpreting the world, but is transformed into a transformative praxis: a call to defend humanity against discrimination and exclusion.

In the same way, politics, transformed into technical management or a struggle for quotas of power, loses its character as a common space and becomes an area where exclusion is normalised, naturalised and validated. In this context, discrimination is not an anomaly, but an indication of the structural crisis of contemporary democracy. In other words, the persistence of discrimination reveals deep gaps in the exercise of democracy. Moreover, the marginalization of migrants represents one of the clearest examples of this crisis. On several continents, human mobility has been turned into a security issue, obscuring the political dimension of those seeking asylum or better living conditions. Millions of men are reduced to statistics, stripped of voice and recognition in the countries that host them, being stripped of the sense of belonging, transformed into superfluous beings, being managed, but not recognized. Political exclusion manifests itself in having rights, in the impossibility of appearing as political subjects. In summary, the development of the research "*Discrimination as a form of political exclusion: analysis from the Arendtian theory*", it is possible to analyze the conditions of social and political events from the postulates of the author, which provides a broad theoretical device, finding, on the one hand,

discrimination understood as a form of political exclusion that puts the human condition at risk. On the other hand, it makes visible the warnings against acts that threaten the loss of democracy, and in tension the nullity of the recognition of plurality, endangering freedom.

From this philosophical and political perspective, Hannah Arendt's theory constitutes a fundamental perspective to understand the challenges of nations. This revision from the context and the text is approached rigorously, seeking to acquire a human and social commitment to face the threats that threaten the plural recognition, the silenced voice of men, which have historically been regulated in political decision-making spaces, with the purpose of repairing participation, so that the world resists discrimination, being the necessary condition for freedom to materialize in the world. Consequently, with what the German-Jewish author proposes, politics finds its *raison d'être* in freedom and in the human capacity to act together, creating spaces where diversity can manifest itself without fear of exclusion and violence.

Conclusions

Discrimination represents a form of political exclusion that denies certain subjects the possibility of participating fully in the construction of the common world. Hannah Arendt poses it as a

discrimination that implies the denial of human plurality and the destruction of the political space where men participate and appear through word and action.

The contributions of contemporary authors account for the structural inequalities that significantly affect the different social groups, accentuating discrimination and exclusion, and, in order to overcome it, it is necessary to recover the sense of plurality from the recognition of the other, with essential foundations of democracy. Guarantee rights in and for human recognition.

Finally, Arendt, in her works, reaffirms and calls for the defense of human dignity through the promotion of political spaces. Only in this way will it be possible to restore the common world and strengthen truly participatory democracies.

Note:

This Article is the product of the joint work of the GEIEP Research Group of UNIMINUTO and Epimelia of UPB, within the framework of the research internship carried out by student Cecilia Yohana Rodríguez Mayoral, a doctoral student in philosophy at UPB. Medellín, where partial results of her thesis entitled "Discrimination as a form of political exclusion: Analysis from Arendtian theory in contemporary times" are published.

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