

First round - Hannah Arendt's Reception in Latin America. Case Studies: Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Colombia

Caetano Borges

Doctoral student in visual arts, faculty PPGArtes/ Universidade Federal Minas Gerais, Brazil

On 25-26 October, 2023 the Hannah Arendt Institute of Totalitarianism Studies (HAIT) at Dresden University hosted 'First round - Hannah Arendt's Reception in Latin America. Case Studies: Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Colombia'. First round was an interdisciplinary humanities Symposium-Workshop on themes not yet explored and studied giving insights on particular ways of Arendt's reception and crucial contributions of Latin American researches to Arendt-Studies.

Organized by Dr. Ellen Spielmann, affiliated Scholar at the (HAIT), the Symposium-Workshop researches on "Hannah Arendt's Presence, impact, reception in Latin America yesterday and today". It brought together nine speakers from Latin America and seven discussants from Germany and Spain in a hybrid format, combining a transatlantic zoom meeting with in person participation at the HAIT.

In the "Kick-Off" Spielmann explained the starting point of the project: provide a space for discussion facing the deep crisis of contemporary democratic culture, concerning in particular Brazil after the Coup d'état (2016) and the election of the Brazilian Trump, the ex-military Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2018). Within this context Arendt's political thinking and theoretical concepts became crucial as she opted for a diachronic perspective allowing to establish a connection to the present and thus a revision and reassessment of historical processes of the past. The main topics of the project are:

1. Hannah Arendt *beginnings* as a student of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger and how her input is reflected little or not at all in the thinking and writing of the masters.
2. The Eichmann trial and its effects in Latin America with a focus on Argentine
 - a. Report in The New Yorker ("A Reporter at Large: Eichmann in Jerusalem" February-March 1963) and the public debate.
 - b. The Banality of Evil (Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, New York 1963).
3. Hannah Arendt's presence in Latin America in the debate about the role of the intellectual before and after the beginning of the Cuban revolution and the crisis of 1971 in cultural policy (the "Padilla Affair") with Focus on Cuba and Haiti.



4. Translation policy (from 1967 in Colombia, from 1974 in Brazil and Mexico), protagonists of reception, systematic/unsystematic reception mediated via the USA, Germany, France.

The first panel was dedicated to Brazil. Arendt's reception started on a small scale in the early 1960s, because her writings had been blocked in the 1970s. This is due to the intellectual's political thinking of the vanguard holding strong ties to the project of Cuban revolution. But since the 1990s Arendt increasingly plays a paradigmatic role for a large part of the academic community. Today, Brazil has "660 Master's dissertations and 250 PhD thesis defended on Arendt", as Maria Cristina Müller (Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Brazil) informs at the forefront of academic degrees. Brazil is also the only country that owns a Hannah Arendt Dictionary, published in 2022. The *Dicionário Hannah Arendt*, (organized by Adriano Correia, Antônio Glauton Varela Rocha, Maria Cristina Müller, Odílio Alves Aguiar) contains 51 articles on Arendt's key issues as "Human condition" and key concepts as "judging".

The panelist Thiago Dias (Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil) presents Arendt's notion of world alienation as clue to reflect on "Disinformation" (fake news) in the case of the recent Brazilian experience in the far-right election campaign and government of Jair Bolsonaro. Pádua Fernandes (Institute for Research on Rights and Social Movements, São Paulo) shows in archival findings how Brazilian militants adopted Arendt's ideas and political thinking since the 1970s for their political resistance against the military dictatorship (1964-1985). He states: "1. the reflections on the 'banality of evil'; 2. the criticism of the presence of elements of totalitarianism in contemporary constitutional democracies; 3. the importance of factual truth". This also applies to the present days, through justice and truth commissions as well movements for memory who have been working since 2012.

Professor Wolfgang Heuer, specially invited to join the panel, the historians Prof. Thomas Lindenberger, director of the HAIT; Prof. Annette Vowinckel, ZZP Potsdam; Prof. Michael Wildt, HU-Berlin; Prof. José Maria Faraldo, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain and the political scientist Prof. Uwe Backes, HAIT, who are not very familiar with Brazil. This deepened the already innovative results and insights presented by directing specific questions to the panelists and the discussants ensuring a vivid and exciting discussion and transatlantic exchange.

The issue of "Revolution" in the case of Haiti and Cuba was the focus of the 2nd and 3rd panel of day 1. The Haitian philosopher Dr. Alrich Nicolas (former ambassador to Germany, and former foreign minister of Haiti, today Professor of Economics at the University of Haiti in Port-au-Prince), who could not join the event, presented the paper, "Hannah Arendt 'On Revolution': *Silencing the Haitian Revolution*". He addressed a very current issue providing a deconstructivist reading of Arendt's philosophical and political discourse on revolution. Nicolas stated that Arendt in her book *On Revolution* (as part of a trilogy including *The Condition of Modern Man* and *The Cause of Culture*) "hardly hides its partisan intentions in the double epistemological context of its publication: that of the Cold War and that of the rise of the spirit of revolution in colonized countries". Nicolas goes beyond positions taken in recent debate about Arendt among the Cold War

liberals, as his intention is to “bear witness to the abundance of works on the Haitian revolution, which reveal Arendt's ‘On revolution’ as the latest avatar of a philosophical tradition”.

Ellen Spielmann (HAIT) and Ana Isabel Borges (Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil), analyze the Cuban art work exhibited at the Documenta in Kassel (2022) in their presentation: “The (late) Presence of Hannah Arendt: The artist Tania Bruguera and the Activism-Art Group INSTAR - Questioning (De-constructing) the Cuban Revolution”. INSTAR also presented Arendt's “The origins of Totalitarianism” for the very first time in 2015 through the performance (a collective reading marathon). In Documenta 2022 the collective questioned and dismantled the past revolutionary experiences in Cuba, today's narratives on the revolution and everyday life as well as the discourse and the politics of the regime. Arendt's definitions of revolution developed in “On Revolution” play a crucial role for the art work of INSTAR as the panelists demonstrated on chosen objects and serial artifacts composing Bruguera's artistic installation. One can state one message as Spielmann puts it: “the Cuban revolution is by no means a well succeeded project”.

The special case of Arendt's reception in Colombia was addressed by Spielmann in the evening lecture: “Hannah Arendt – a reception in Colombia: Setting the course for the first Peace-Talk between the Guerilla and the State”. It reconstructs the reception of Arendt's work, which succeeded in reaching the very top of state politics in the early 1980s. This was done, as Spielmann explains, by the representative of her political theory: the Colombian intellectual Hernando Valencia Goelkel, who became chief advisor of President Belisario Betancur (1982-86). Being the first reader of Hannah Arendt in Colombia, Valencia Goelkel was responsible for the translations of her work, published since 1967 in the “Journal of Western Culture”, *Eco* in Bogotá. The Journal was a Colombian-German project, financed by the Association Inter Nations of the Government of West-Germany thought as an Organization of Public Relations due to new cultural policy established for the new period of Cold War, namely the construction of the Wall in Berlin in 1961 and the Eichmann-trial in Jerusalem in 1963. Under advice of Valencia Goelkel, the pioneer in the history of Arendt's reception in Colombia, president Betancur undertook the first attempt of peace talks with the FARC Guerilla in order to establish a peace agreement. As Spielmann stated, Arendt's “Comprehension and Politics”, “this piece of political philosophy” served as “a good government manual” for State politics opening a new space for political negotiation.

On day 2, the focus was on Arendt's reception in Mexico and “A new round in the Eichmann debate?” Supported by Ana María Miranda Mora (HAIT) chairing the first panel, Professor Mayte Muñoz Sánchez (Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México, Mexico) in her contribution, “Weaving the Arendtian thought from Mexico: The irruption of emotion in reflective judgment” gave light to critical reflection and application of Arendt's concept of emotion, which, as Muñoz stated, “did not allow her to see the political potential of the affections”. Putting Arendt in dialogue with the contemporary feminist theory, namely Sara Ahmed's book, *The cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), Muñoz offers us “a characterization of emotion that emphasizes their cultural, social, and political nature” allowing us “to give emotions back their place in political life”.

“The Eichmann-Debate”, as ever-present issue, was raised in the second panel by Professor Adriano Correia (Universidade Federal de Goiás, Brazil), author of the book *The Eichmann Case: Hannah Arendt and the legal controversies over the trial* (2022). In “Hannah Arendt on Eichmann's Kant: obedience and evil” Correia examined first Eichmann's discourse glorifying “obedience as supreme virtue” and claiming “the company of Kant to justify his devotion to Nazi regime” and second Arendt's counterargument, indicating Eichmann's misunderstanding of Kant in particular his notion of autonomy. As Correia stated, “Arendt reflects on the importance of a version of Kant for common man, in Eichmann's words, for the justification of his ‘obedience of corpses’.” What is at stake are the implications of Arendt's controversial characterization of Eichmann “for understanding of an evil that does not correspond to falling into temptation”. Second panelist, Rosario Pérez Bernal (Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México) presented in “Hannah Arendt: Writing, Narration, and Radical Good” a concise reading of the Eichmann report referring also to *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewess*. In her comparative/contrasting approach and deconstructive method Pérez Bernal by examining Arendt's writing and her narrative discourse showed how Arendt succeeded in “a form of expression that is not only critical, but also anti-totalitarian, non-closing, facing the despotic temptation of instituting a one-dimensional truth”.

As a result of the symposium-workshop HAIT will publish a volume on “Hannah Arendt in Latin America” in the Journal “Totalitarianism and Democracy” in 2024 organized by Ellen Spielmann.