

Editorial

Ellen Spielmann

Arendt experts in Germany were almost stunned, or at least very surprised, when figures on academic work on Hannah Arendt in Latin America were presented at a workshop in Dresden at the end of 2023: Today, Brazil itself accounts for “660 master’s theses and 250 doctoral dissertations” on Arendt. This places the country at the forefront of the academic field.¹

This special issue deals with Hannah Arendt’s presence, impact, and reception in Latin America yesterday and today. However, it is not our intention to present an all-embracing study of Arendt in Latin America that takes a bird’s eye view of the entire continent, nor do we claim to be conducting a systematic investigation. Above all, we focus on countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, which undoubtedly play a prominent role in terms of Arendt’s presence, impact, and reception.

In particular, important contributions to Latin American Arendt research will be highlighted. After all, the third generation of Arendt studies is now presenting their findings. The issue also focuses on topics that have not been researched and considered much, if at all. In doing so, it provides insights into particular ways in which Arendt was received. This approach brings unexpected results to light. In general, it can be stated: Hannah Arendt showed little interest in Latin America (as well as in Africa, Asia or regions formerly colonised by the “West”). Recently, there have been findings that testify to some of Arendt’s direct contacts with Latin America.²

This special issue is based on an interdisciplinary humanities workshop entitled “First round – Hannah Arendt’s Reception in Latin America. Case Studies: Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Colombia”, that took place at the end of October

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- 1 Cf. Maria Cristina Müller, Hannah Arendt Dictionary, plurality and understanding, unpublished paper given at the Symposium-Workshop, First round – Hannah Arendt’s reception in Latin America. Case studies. Brazil Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Colombia, 25.-26.10.2023 (HAIT, Dresden).
 - 2 The anecdotal story of the Brazilian Arendt specialist Celso Lafer, which I had the opportunity to hear several times at academic events, is legendary. Lafer studied with Arendt at Cornell University in 1965 and “devoutly” asked his professor to translate one of her books into Portuguese and publish it in Brazil. Since Arendt – as we know: rightly so – wanted to retain control over the translation and publication, there were lengthy discussions about the project. Arendt claimed that she could “control” the potential Portuguese translation due to her knowledge of Latin. She attributed this to her months of experience in Lisbon, when she had been exposed to the Portuguese language of the authorities as well as the Portuguese of everyday life in Lisbon while she was waiting in the Portuguese port city for her departure to New York.

2023 at the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies (HAIT) at the TUD Dresden University of Technology.³ In a first round, it delivered the results of my ongoing research project “Arendt’s Presence, Impact and Reception in Latin America”, which was able to gain momentum in cooperation with Latin American colleagues after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The starting point of the project was the idea of creating a space for discussion in view of the deep crisis of democratic culture (in Brazil after the coup d’état [2016] and the election of ex-military Jair Messias Bolsonaro [2018] as president). This crisis manifested itself in the increasing proliferation of nationalist, racist, discriminatory, homophobic, and far-right discourses and actions, which continued even after the change of government through new elections.⁴ In this dilemma, a deadlock situation between neoliberalism and populism, Arendt’s thinking in Latin American countries is gaining in weight and currency. In the search for concepts for political alternatives, her works on despotism, power, ethical responsibility, human rights, and the importance of a free public political space provide orientation and offer prospective solutions, particularly in dealing with threats to democracy and the necessities of a democratic memory culture.

With its historical and contemporary questions, this special issue attempts to provide – with reference to the research project⁵ – a basis for understanding Latin America and the significance of Hannah Arendt’s presence in Latin America. The paths and course of her reception and impact are periodised and the author’s suggestions are reinterpreted. The diachronic perspective allows a connection to be established with the present and thus initiates a revision and

3 The event I organised brought together nine speakers from Latin America (Ángeles Ma. Del Rosario Pérez Bernal, María Teresa Muñoz, Ana Borges, Pádua Fernandes, Thiago Dias, Adriano Correia, Maria Cristina Müller) and seven discussants from Germany and Spain (Thomas Lindenberger, Uwe Backes, Annette Vowinckel, Wolfgang Heuer, Michael Wildt, José Maria Faraldo, Ana Maria Miranda Mora).

4 In Brazil, the social democratic politician Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva came to power in 2023; in Argentina, the neoliberal Javier Milei has been president since 2024; Colombia elected the socialist politician Gustavo Petro as head of government in 2022.

5 The focus lies on seven fields of research: 1. Hannah Arendt’s beginnings as a gifted student of the great philosophers Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger; her “input” had little or no impact on the thinking and writing of the masters; 2. the Eichmann trial and its impact in Latin America, with a focus on Argentina, 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 as a woman (academic, intellectual) in public life; 4. Arendt’s presence in Latin America in the debate on the role of the intellectual before and after the beginning of the Cuban revolution and the political crisis in the “show-case” trial against Heberto Padilla (1971) in cultural politics with a focus on Cuba and Haiti; 5. Discovery of her writings (seminar notes 1955-1968) and debate in Latin America from 1979 in Brazil to 2018 in Colombia; 6. translation policy (since 1967 in Colombia, since 1974 in Brazil); carriers of reception; systematic, unsystematic reception, mediated via USA, Germany, France; 7. Arendt today, a classic of political thought.

re-evaluation of historical-past processes. In addition, the historical cuts up to the present make it possible to include current concerns in the analysis and description. Our research questions are based on the international state-of-the-art of Hannah Arendt research. The linking of approaches from philosophy, political, social, historical, cultural, and literary studies results from the interdisciplinary object of inquiry.

It was a matter of reviewing the generalised assumption of Arendt's extensive renown, dissemination, and impact in Latin America in view of the translations of the main work into Spanish⁶ and Portuguese and lively academic activities (e. g. conferences on current issues in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Santiago de Chile). While there was a systematic and relatively early reception in Brazil and distinct academic research began there (which led to the foundation of the Hannah Arendt Center at the University of São Paulo in 2013),⁷ Arendt's reception followed its own ways in Spanish-speaking countries. In Colombia, her texts obtained a prominent status in a renowned journal at the end of the 1960s, mediated by organs of Germany's new foreign cultural policy, and in the early 1970s a specific Arendt reception reached the head of state thanks to the mentorship and mediation of a Colombian intellectual.⁸ However, in many cases, Arendt only became known at the end of the 1980s through French research (namely by the philosopher and Arendt specialist Etienne Tassin).⁹ This is especially evident in countries such as Haiti, which historically have close ties to French academic institutions and debates.

Hannah Arendt's reception¹⁰ in Latin America had not been studied until 2016;¹¹ although her presence and impact manifested itself sporadically in You-

6 Cf. José M. Faraldo, Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism and Western European (Post-) Dictatorships: The Spanish Case. In: Gerhard Besier/Katarzyna Stokłosa/Andrew Wisely (eds.), *Totalitarianism and liberty. Hannah Arendt in the 21st century*, Krakau 2008, pp. 199–208, here 205.

7 At the initiative of Celso Lafer, professor of law at the University of S. Paulo and former Arendt student in the USA, the “Norberto Bobbio Institute”, which he founded in 2005, was restructured and renamed the Hannah Arendt Center.

8 Cf. Ellen Spielmann, Hannah Arendt – a reception in Colombia succeeded in reaching top of the State in early 1980s (paper), International Conference Hannah Arendt: Challenges of Plurality, Paderborn, 13.–15.12.2018.

9 Author of the masterpiece *Le trésor perdu: Hannah Arendt: l'intelligence de l'action politique*, Paris 1999, amongst others.

10 My concept of reception is based on the “reception history” developed by the literary scholars of the Konstanz School (Hans-Robert Jauss, Hans Blumenberg, Wolfgang Iser, Renate Lachmann and others) in the 1970s. The decisive factors here are the horizon of experience and the dynamics that come into play in the relationships between author-work, text-reader, etc. The theoretical model was reconsidered and expanded in cultural studies. Stuart Hall focused on the constitutive and interconnected moments of the reception process, production, circulation and reproduction as well as consumption. Cf. Stuart Hall, *Encoding and decoding in the Media Discourse*, Stenciled paper, Nr. 5, Birmingham 1973. Based on this extended and open concept of reception, it is possible to grasp and analyse the paths of reception with their branches and twists more precisely.

Tube clips, it has not been dealt with systematically. In many countries, it also only began late, as her conception of public and political space and representation clashed with that of the left-wing avant-gardes of Latin America. They believed that the Cuban revolution was a successful model for building a socialist society. Cuba's uniqueness and special trajectory shaped the legitimisation discourse of the Latin American avant-garde, which was not weakened even by the (early) fatal autocratic mistakes of the Cuban leadership, which soon triggered profound crises. In the debate about the figure of the intellectual, dominant Marxist orientations blocked Arendt's paradigmatic role in large parts of academic life. This remained largely the case until the turn of the millennium. Since then, parallels, similarities, and overlaps with Europe and the USA have been identified with regard to Arendt's blockade and reception,¹² which are certainly due to global developments in the course of technological innovations. The unifying concern, however, is the desire not to fall back into long-outdated debates of the 1970s about Latin America's special path. The aim is to trace the specific moments of Arendt's presence, reception, and impact. There are good reasons to focus on the Caribbean, in particular Cuba and Haiti. During the workshop, the topic of "revolution" was problematised and discussed for the cases of Cuba and Haiti under the significant titles "The (late) presence of Hannah Arendt: The artist Tania Bruguera and the activist-artist group INSTAR – questioning (deconstructing) the Cuban Revolution" and "Hannah Arendt on 'revolution': The Concealment of the Haitian Revolution".¹³

The first part of the thematic issue is dedicated to Brazil. Arendt's reception started modestly in the early 1960s. But since the 1980s, Arendt has increasingly played a key role for a large part of the academic community. Today, Brazil is the only country to have a Hannah Arendt dictionary. Published in 2022, the *Dicionário Hannah Arendt*¹⁴ contains 51 articles on Arendt's main topics such as the "human condition" and crucial concepts such as "judgment". *Eduardo Jardim*, one of Brazil's leading Arendt specialists, opens the issue with the con-

11 One exception is Eduardo Jardim's article "A recepção da obra de Hannah Arendt no Brasil" (2004), which is published in this issue in an updated form. For Mexico, Dora Elvira García's article "Respecto a la recepción del pensamiento de Hannah Arendt en México" (Hannah Arendt.Net, Zeitschrift für politisches Denken, November 2013, at: <http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/303/441>; 25.3.2019), there are remarkable preliminary works that highlight important works on Arendt, refer to key topics and debates, but do not provide a systematic analysis of the reception and its intertwined paths.

12 This also applies to the periodisation, in particular to the international acknowledgement of Arendt in the course of her publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York 1963.

13 Presentations by Ellen Spielmann and Ana Isabel Borges (Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil) and Alrich Nicolas (Haitian philosopher, Haitian Ambassador to Germany from 1996 to 2005 and Foreign Minister of Haiti 2008–2009).

14 The editors are Adriano Correia, Antônio Glauton Varela Rocha, Maria Cristina Müller, Odílio Alves Aguiar, São Paulo 2022.

genial article “Hannah Arendt and us”. He refers to the decisive moment of the collective discovery of Arendt and the shared reading experiences of aspiring philosophers, historians, and students in the specific situation of emergence that Brazil was experiencing at the beginning of the 1980s in the course of civil society’s efforts towards re-democratisation. It is striking and central how Jardim works out the paradigmatic role of the cultural field in this undertaking.

In his meticulous study “Hannah Arendt’s thinking and political resistance against Brazil’s military dictatorship”, historian *Pádua Fernandes* uses archive findings to highlight how Brazilian activists from the 1970s onwards adapted Arendt’s ideas and political thinking for their political resistance against the military dictatorship (1964–1985). As some findings show, this occurred despite the Marxist-oriented and thus anti-Arendt attitude of the activists. In the period of re-democratisation, which was slowed down by many setbacks, three of Arendt’s ideas and concepts gained relevance in the justice and truth commissions: 1. her reflections on the “banality of evil”; 2. the criticism of the permanence of elements of totalitarianism in modern constitutional democracies; 3. the significance of factual truth.

The third contribution on Brazil in the thematic issue, *Thiago Dias’* “Arendt and the problem of disinformation (fake news)”, emphasises the conceptual approach of the volume, a diachronic approach to the study of Arendt’s presence and reception in Latin America. Dias presents Arendt’s concept of modern world alienation as a key to reflecting knowledgeably on “disinformation” (fake news) in the case of the recent Brazilian experience with the far-right election campaign and the government of Jair Bolsonaro (2018–2022). Dias regards Arendt’s phenomenology as a viable way of finding answers to the recent rise of the extreme right. In addition, he also recognises approaches to manage the challenge that arises today in relation to the new forms (and the fragmented spaces) of “the political” under “politics” (political action) that social media produces.

In her case study “Hannah Arendt – a reception in Colombia: setting the course for the first peace talks between the guerrillas and the state”, *Ellen Spielmann* traces how Arendt, with her republican understanding of politics, reached the top of the Colombian state government and contributed significantly to political decisions such as the opening of peace negotiations, specifically initiating the first real peace talks. The key figure in this so far completely unknown and surprising fact is the liberal Colombian intellectual Hernando Valencia Goelkel, who translated and published Arendt’s essays from the late 1960s onwards, which were particularly current in Colombia’s politically precarious situation. In the early 1980s, Valencia Goelkel worked with Arendt as a presidential advisor to define Colombia’s policy, which made intensive efforts to achieve peace on the basis of strengthening civil society.

In “Readings and Uses of Arendt in Latin America. Milestones of her Reception in Argentina, Mexico and Colombia”, *Anabella Di Pego* sets out to present and analyse the important stages and cornerstones of the extensive and complex

ways in which Arendt was received in Spanish-speaking countries, with a particular focus on Argentina. Of particular interest within the extremely insightful overview and elaboration of the decisive steps and turning points of Arendt's reception are Di Pego's small findings concerning Arendt's direct connections with Latin America. Fruitful results on the main lines in the academic field of research and in the intellectual-political culture of debate result from the comparative-contrasting approach of her analysis and presentation.

In the first chapter of her contribution ("Weaving Arendtian Thought from Mexico"), *María Teresa Muñoz* provides an informative and comprehensible account of Arendt's reception in Mexico since the 1980s, including her own work. The subtitle "A Proposal Rooted in Arendt in Light of Sara Ahmed's Feminism" is program. She takes up the neuralgic topic in the Arendt debate about the conception and status of emotions, affects, and passions, which has been on the agenda in various disciplines since the "emotional turn". Muñoz's feminist reading is moved by the ambivalences of Arendt's statements on emotions and affects, e. g., her refusal to assert emotions in the public sphere or her view that emotions and affects should not be understood as a matter for the private subject. With recourse to Sara Ahmed's thesis on emotions and intersubjectivity, Muñoz reads Arendt against the grain, argues with her against her and puts forward the following thesis: "From the Arendtian perspective, emotions that intrude into the public sphere undermine plurality, an ontological condition essential for the constitution of a common world". Muñoz's intervention from a feminist perspective is likely to provoke discussion in the ongoing, well-advanced debate.

The special issue concludes with two contributions that focus on different aspects of the Eichmann book. The first, *Ángeles Ma. del Rosario Pérez Bernal's* "Narration and Understanding in 'Eichmann in Jerusalem'. A Report on the Banality of Evil by Hannah Arendt" provides a congenial discourse analysis. Arendt's methodological approach to the Eichmann case is showcased using the most important aspects of the constitution of the report, which, according to the main concern, takes on the character of an exemplary narrative. Arendt's productive decision in favour of a decentred narrative, to move the institution of the author as a biographical figure into the background with regard to the plot, is highlighted in the reading. In analysing the narrative strategy, Pérez Bernal shows how the person of Eichmann is represented, i. e., depicted and presented, in its mediocrity and banality of evil through linguistic-rhetorical-narrative means, above all ironic allusions, metaphor, and dissonant narration.

The second contribution, *Adriano Correia's* "Obedience and Evil: Eichmann and Kant 'for the household use of the little man'", moves into the philosophical-juridical field. Correia takes Eichmann's attempt to legitimise his actions, obedience to the Nazi regime with reference to Kant's categorical imperative, as an opportunity for a detailed re-reading of the interrogation transcripts, Eichmann's statements in Argentina, and other sources. By linking the sources and thus expanding the corpus, Correia reveals the unresolved problem that drove Arendt

when she emphasises Eichmann's misunderstanding of Kant, especially the moral concept of autonomy, and elaborates on Kant's significance for the "little man", who sometimes legitimises his unconditional obedience with discipline, sometimes with conviction.