INTRODUCTION

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One hundred years after her birth, Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) scarcely needs the usual sort of introduction, since her work has become so well known of late. Much of it has at least. The point of this collection is to foreground aspects of her work, especially drawn from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which bear on imperialism, slavery, race, and genocide but have been neglected in the general revival of interest in Arendt.

There are several ways to characterize the new perspective on Arendt that we are trying to develop. First, we want to shift attention away from Arendt the political philosopher and towards Arendt the historical thinker. Seen in this light, she used the momentous historical events of her time to think through the nature of history, the philosophical and anthropological implications of violence, the emergence of modern imperialism and colonial domination, the relationship of racism and genocide to the European nation-state, and even of evil as an historical phenomenon. This also means that the focus of her work and the focus on her work moves to the historical interaction between Europe and the non-European world, particularly Africa. Thus, for instance, we are less interested in rehearsing the question as to whether Arendt was correct (historically or politically) to characterize both Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union as "totalitarian" regimes and more concerned to explore the importance of the mutual interaction of Europe—and not just Germany—with the colonized parts of the globe.[1] Moreover, as Richard Shorten's essay in this collection suggests, Arendt's introduction of imperialism into the equation made the question of comparability between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union much more complicated than it had been earlier. Finally, several of the essays reflect on the degree to which the disturbing history of Europe's relationship with the non-European world forces us to reexamine both Arendt's thought and its relationship to other thinkers, some already commonly linked to her (Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Heidegger) and some not (Levinas, Foucault, and Agamben).

Another way to understand our intentions for this volume is to note the various disciplines and approaches represented here. Above all, we consider our volume a contribution to "Arendt Studies," since it is her work that provides our focus and our point of departure. Yet, several of the essays here, for example Tony Barta's on Darwin and Marx, could certainly be read as straightforward contributions to European intellectual history or the history of ideas. Still others straddle the line between intellectual history and political, cultural, and social history (European and African, past and contemporary). Arendt's influence on interdisciplinary fields such as African Studies and Postcolonial Studies is (surprisingly) important and is discussed in the essays by Robert Bernasconi, Kathryn Gines, and Christopher Lee. Indeed, *Origins* has recently been described as one of the "constitutive books of postcolonial studies," while the editors of a canonical collection devoted to the intellectual origins of postcolonial theory recognized Arendt's importance for that newly emerging field of study nearly two decades ago.[2] Finally, Genocide Studies also takes Arendt's *Origins* as seminal, particularly for its focus on the premonitory historical role that European imperialism played in genocide on European soil and the value that Arendt's book still possesses, as Dan Stone makes clear in his contribution, for understanding the burden of our time, as well as hers.

Our hope is that this volume of essays will help stimulate the vital work of uncovering the "contributions" that European imperialism made to the horrifically costly civil war that decimated Europe between 1914 and 1945, and which permanently distorted the lives of non-European peoples to this day. Since the original motive for putting together this collection was to expose—and investigate—the "subterranean stream" that linked imperialism in Asia and Africa with the emergence of genocidal, totalitarian regimes in Europe, we want to spend most of this Introduction discussing the history, critique, and future viability of what has become known as Arendt's "boomerang" thesis.

The Boomerang Thesis

The Origins of Totalitarianism was among the first works to claim that European theories of racial and cultural superiority and their totalitarian consequences were in part created by economic expansion into, and exploitation of, much of Asia and Africa, as well as the establishment of white settler colonies around the globe. Indeed, the expansionist impulse of the nineteenth century, Arendt suggested, outstripped the economic motivations that originally gave rise to it. This European experience in the colonies, which was fed by and bred a psychology of domination, had far-reaching effects back in Europe. Racist theories and non-democratic political assumptions (rule by decree and enforcement by bureaucracy) and particular practices (forced population transfers, protogenocidal massacres, and a profound heedlessness about human life) fed back into European (and Western hemispheric) political and intellectual cultures. For instance, colonial powers tested the early use of aerial bombardment upon subject populations in their colonies, while Hitler was a great admirer of the British Empire, and Nazi Germany formulated its racial laws of 1935 using the example of the South in the United States. The result was a strengthening of authoritarian modes of political rule, along with something approaching an addiction to racial thinking and augmentation of racist ideologies in Europe, particularly after the early 1880s. Moreover, the ideology of imperial grandeur and/or mission helped mask class and ideological fissures in various European societies.[3]

As a way of characterizing the dynamic link between empire and European heartland, Arendt suggested the phrase "boomerang effect(s)."[4] Near the end of chapter 7 of *Origins,* she writes that the boomerang effect of the imperial experience created a situation in which "the stage seemed to be set for all possible horrors. Lying under anybody's nose were many of the elements which gathered together could create a totalitarian government on the basis of racism."[5] Specifically, she makes some (underdeveloped) claims about the German version of the boomerang effect: "African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite."[6] Overall, then, Arendt contended that imperialism and colonialism played a crucial role in creating the conditions of possibility for totalitarianism in Europe.

Yet three qualifications need to be stated at the outset by way of forestalling misunderstandings of Arendt's claims in this area. First, "Imperialism," as she designated part II of *Origins,* was by no means the only "element" that contributed to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and the Soviet Union. In fact, she rejected the notion that there was any single cause of totalitarianism; rather, a variety of forces and factors "crystallized" into the phenomenon itself. In addition, to identify elements of the future totalitarian systems as already present in the colonial setting—e.g. forced population transfers or planned massacres, even genocide—was not to claim that the colonial political and social order, say, in German Southwest Africa (or anywhere else) was already totalitarian in nature. Second, Arendt always insisted that the totalitarian temptation had been a European, and not just a German, phenomenon. Thus her "boomerang" thesis suggests that the effects of racial imperialism were felt throughout European thought and culture, politics and society, and not just in Germany. It is important to note as well that she also took into account an ideology of "continental imperialism," which had particular impact in Central Europe and Russia where the influence of overseas European imperialism was scarcely felt.[7] Third, although her insight about the boomerang effect was a brilliantly provocative one, it was, as Tony Barta's essay in this volume suggests, seriously underdeveloped in *Origins* and elsewhere in her work. In retrospect, it is best considered, we would suggest, as a "research hypothesis" rather than a fully proven historical claim.

Remarkably, no other postwar white European analyst of totalitarianism or fascism besides Arendt incorporated the European imperial experience into his or her analysis of totalitarianism. Aside from France where, as Ned Curthoys's essay makes clear, an important debate took place among European intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, along with intellectuals from North Africa such as Albert Memmi and Martinique's Frantz Fanon about colonialism in general and the Algerian War in particular, intellectuals on the left were surprisingly reticent about the causes or effects of the colonial experience and its racial and ethnic dimensions after World War II. In retrospect, one could be forgiven for thinking that the second age of imperialism and colonialism (culminating in the late nineteenth century) and then totalitarianism were, as Robert J. C. Young notes, "a unique aberration, a dark perversion of western rationalism or a particular effect of German culture"[8] rather than a direct outgrowth of factors and forces at work all across Europe.

Specifically, no debate about colonialism such as raged among French intellectuals in the 1950s seems to have dominated public discourse in Great Britain, Belgium, or Holland, not to mention Germany, after World War II. Certainly, anti-colonialism scarcely figured in the considerations of white American intellectuals: indeed, white conservative intellectuals voiced more opposition to decolonization in Africa than liberal or left-wing intellectuals voiced their active support for desegregation in the South or for independent governments in Africa and Asia. But, as Robert Bernasconi emphasizes in his contribution to this volume, black diasporic intellectuals such as America's W. E. B. Du Bois and Martinique's Aimé Césaire assumed that the links between colonialism and fascism, colonial racism in Black Africa and racism in metropolitan Europe and the United States were all too obvious. Overall, for such intellectuals, as for many French intellectuals on the left, fascism was "European colonialism brought home."[9]

Though Arendt's position was close to that of the francophone intellectuals, it did not exactly duplicate theirs. First, she thought that European racism and anti-Semitism were the result of a specific concatenation of historical factors rather than an inevitable outcome of European racism, capitalism, or imperialism. According to her overly optimistic understanding of the Western tradition, totalitarianism, including genocide, was foreign to the thinking of its canonical thinkers and texts. In this sense it was a "subterranean stream," an aberration or a "break" from mainstream Western thought, a position she later partially retracted when she realized the totalitarian potential of Marxism, which *was* a product of mainstream Western thought. But, as already mentioned, she certainly agreed that totalitarianism and racism/anti-Semitism was a European rather than just a German phenomena.

Yet, it is strange that the "boomerang" thesis has been relatively neglected in the critical literature dealing with Arendt until the last decade or so. When it was mentioned, it was only in passing and then quickly dismissed as unproved or an exaggeration or both. Besides that, *Origins* was increasingly neglected after the 1960s. For many historians and political scientists, especially those on the left, *Origins* came to seem an outdated Cold War tract, although not without its own brilliance. They thus failed to appreciate the way it transcended both a rightist-conservative explanation via totalitarianism, or a leftist-progressive-"third-world-ist" explanation via fascism, of Nazi-inspired genocide. Very few managed to mention Arendt without the reader having the sense that they were cursing under their breath. At best, they damned with faint praise: her work, however "brilliant," was overwrought and historically misjudged. To be sure, the controversy surrounding Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) put her in the spotlight. For a time, historians of what was increasingly called "the Holocaust" took her indictment of Jewish leadership in Poland and Eastern Europe as a starting point, though hardly ever as the final word, for how the Final Solution had been planned and implemented. But in general the Imperialism section of *Origins* simply did not figure very prominently in the criticism of Arendt as it began emerging in the 1970s, in the histories of Nazi Germany, or of colonialism itself.

Interestingly, early studies in the 1950s of the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe used imperialism as an explanatory framework, and much of it is still cited regularly by scholars who work on the topic. Indeed, Germany's *Drang nach Osten* was, and is, frequently compared to, say, the expansion of settlers across the North American continent.[10] But most of this work was written without reference to Arendt at all. If even historians who wrote on the subject of German imperialism and its relation to Nazism—as was the case with Woodruff D. Smith later on[11]—could do so without reference to Arendt, it is hardly surprising that there is very little to be said about the reception of her ideas on imperialism in general by historians from the 1950s to the end of the Cold War. (The major exception is the book *The Rulers of German Africa* by L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, which linked Arendt's thesis to the work of the German historian of South West Africa, Helmut Bley, and we will return to it shortly.) Still, the historiographical situation was no different from what one finds in other disciplines in this regard.[12] By and large, while political scientists objected to Arendt's thesis concerning the connections between imperialism and totalitarianism, historians tended to dismiss it without much further ado.

By the time of her death in 1975, Hannah Arendt was not seen as the historical analyst of totalitarianism at all, but as a normative theorist of politics, action, and participatory freedom, of the public-private (in Arendt's terms, the political-social) question, and of the problem of political judgment. These crucial issues for political philosophy were raised in particular in her works *The Human Condition* (1958) and to a lesser degree *On Revolution* (1963). To be sure *On Revolution* had a strong historical dimension and addressed, among other things, the contrasting historical and political meanings of the American and French Revolutions. Still, most political theorists and historians of political thought tended to slight *On Revolution* as providing only a (shaky) historical exemplification of Arendt's political ideas. Most historians of America paid little attention to the book, even though its central concern with participatory freedom dovetailed quite neatly with, even anticipated, the rediscovery of republicanism in the historiography of early American political thought in the 1960s and 1970s.[13] At best, there were two Arendts—one, the historically oriented theorist of political culture in the tradition of Montesquieu, Burke, and Tocqueville, as Steven Douglas Maloney discusses here, and, second, the pure political theorist/ phenomenologist of political speech and action. Symptomatically, historian Stephen J. Whitfield was to assert in *Into the Dark* (1980) that after *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt's work was marked by a "loss of interest in modern tyranny so decisive that genuine disjunctions emerged, contradictions that could not easily be reconciled." Arendt the historical thinker now took a back seat to Arendt the political theorist.[14]

In retrospect, however, the neglect of the historical dimension in Arendt's work (and indeed of her life) was bound to end. The publication of Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography of Arendt in 1982 called attention to her personal relationship with Martin Heidegger, which in turn raised important questions about their philosophical connection, as well about the philosophical relationship with her other mentor, Karl Jaspers. Thus Arendt's personal life and her intellectual-philosophical sources gradually emerged as objects of scholarly inquiry in the 1990s. For the first time, she seemed to acquire an actual personal and intellectual history, whereas before she had been defined by her post-War prominence among New York intellectuals or was seen as a quite creative, if idiosyncratic, political philosopher, perhaps best located, for want of any other labels, in the tradition of civic humanism/republicanism.

Even more important was Margaret Canovan's archive-based study of Arendt in 1992, which revealed just how important *Origins* had been for the entire body of her thought. With this, Canovan cast considerable doubt on the idea that there were "two" Arendts. Though in her first book on Arendt in 1974, Canovan had written that, "It is as a thinker rather than as an historian that Hannah Arendt has a claim to fame,"[15] her later study portrayed a more historically sensitive Arendt by asserting that "her theory of action, like the rest of her political thought, is rooted in her response to totalitarianism and is not an exercise in nostalgia for the Greek polis."[16] Thus, not only were there no longer two Arendts, she was now a modernist thinker rather than the antimodernist champion of the "tyranny of Greece over Germany."[17]

Thirdly, the post-1960s emergence of issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender, along with the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe and the reemergence of civil society there, also focused attention on new aspects of Arendt's thought. Since 1990 volumes have appeared exploring the implications of her thought for feminism and women's studies and for the American civil rights movement, along with biographical profiles linking her with Simone Weil and Rosa Luxemburg, not to mention several volumes of her correspondence with a variety of figures including her husband Heinrich Blücher, novelist and essayist, Mary McCarthy, and, of course, Heidegger. Moreover, the emergence of Postcolonial Studies has meant that the implications of Arendt's work for the former Third World have been (re)discovered. Paul Gilroy's *Between Camps* (2000) and *After Empire* (2004) refer to her boomerang thesis several times, while the essays of Kathryn

Gines and Christopher Lee in this volume make clear her influence on academic work in African Studies. Thus we now have a more worldly and more widely relevant Arendt than would have been thought possible earlier.

Overall, Arendt studies are now in the midst of an "historical turn" that we hope this volume will further encourage. With respect to the Holocaust, one scholar writes, perhaps over optimistically, that, "Historians now seem to agree that German colonial practice, including the colonial wars in Africa and the increased organizing of German society by racial categories, prefigured National Socialism in complex ways."[18] For instance, Helmut W. Smith has detected a future-oriented, racially inflected conservatism and liberalism in the *Reichstag* debates over South West Africa, while Elisa von Joeden-Forgey's essay in this collection analyzes the public debate in Germany about the anthropological and political status of the indigenous peoples of Germany's African colonies, and Isabel Hull has also analyzed the German military's role in the genocide against the Herero and Nama in Southwest Africa.[19] Closely focussed studies such as these give the Arendt thesis a much needed specificity and confirm what she only gestured toward. Indeed, the wave of interest in German colonial history, especially as written by cultural and literary historians, can reasonably be seen as a direct result of the return to fashion of Arendt's ideas as set out in her "big book."

A more interesting question concerns when and if historians of the British Empire will begin to confront the Arendtian claim that the effects of the British Empire, too, helped pave the way for continental European fascism and subtly, but seriously, affected British politics and culture. As Robert Bernasconi reminds us in his essay in this volume, Arendt treated British colonialism rather gently in *Origins,* despite the fact that she ascribes some of the most blatant imperial ideological fantasies to men such as Cecil Rhodes who were instrumental in its establishment and maintenance. Recent studies of the dark side of the British Empire, especially in Kenya, do not seem to have registered either with the scholarly or wider cultural *Zeitgeist* in the same way as have studies of German colonialism.[20] Some historians still contend that Arendt merely claimed that Nazism was prefigured in colonialism and fail to notice the long sections in *Origins* on race-thinking, where she emphasizes the interplay between the intellectual "baggage" that was taken to the colonies and the ways it was transformed under the experience of imperialism.

Still, her influence is beginning to seep in. For instance, the title of Enzo Traverso's *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (2003) certainly reveals an Arendtian inspiration. Traverso makes good on the allusion to Arendt by providing a causal background to European fascism in extra-European imperialism, and thus targets interpretations of fascism (such as Sternhell's and Mosse's) that are entirely Europe-focused.[21] Besides the specific thesis of books such as Traverso's, her claims have proven as relevant to understanding genocides in non-European contexts as they have in explaining the Holocaust or the Gulag. A recent issue of the journal *Patterns of Prejudice* devoted to "colonial genocide" drew its inspiration from Arendt's ideas, and essays explored genocide in Haiti and Australia, as well as in the context of German South West Africa and the Third Reich.[22] In his articles, "The birth of the *Ostland* out of the spirit of colonialism" and "Colonialism and the Holocaust," Jürgen Zimmerer, one of the leading historians of the Herero genocide in German Southwest Africa, convincingly shows that there are continuities of ideology and practice between the German-perpetrated genocide of the Hereros in 1904–1905 in what is now Namibia and the Holocaust. Similarly, A. Dirk Moses argues in several important articles that, on many levels, there are meaningful comparisons to be drawn between the Holocaust and the earlier genocide of Australian Aborigines. In other words, the current thrust of comparative genocide scholarship is to show that "Holocaust" is not a separate category from "genocide" but that the Holocaust was an extreme variant of genocide, while the concept of totalitarianism largely disappears as a concern. There are, this scholarship indicates, many aspects of the Holocaust that are akin to earlier colonial genocides or genocidal massacres; indeed it is unlikely that the Holocaust could have taken place without the precedent of colonial massacres.

In this work, the ghost of Arendt hovers quite clearly in the background, though never entirely easily. Arendt herself wrote of the Nazi crimes that the "moral point of this matter is never reached by calling what happened by the name of 'genocide' or by counting the many millions of victims: exterminations of whole peoples had happened before in antiquity, as well as in modern colonization."[23] The result is to complicate today's appeal to her as the inspiration for the theoretical framework that links colonial genocide and the Holocaust, although naturally it neither invalidates it nor automatically leads one to call into question the connection between colonialism and Nazism.

It is important to note, therefore, that scholars of genocide do not simply turn the earlier criticisms of Arendt on their heads. Rather than uncritically advocating the notion that colonial genocide holds the key to understanding the Holocaust, they are careful to note where the similarities end. Thus Zimmerer writes:

> With its central concepts of "race" and "space," the Nazi policy of expansion and annihilation stood firmly in the tradition of European colonialism, a tradition also recognizable in the Nazi genocides. Yet, it would be wrong to see the Third Reich's murderous policies in the East merely as a copy of the conquests of the Americas, Australia, or Southern Africa; they constituted instead an extremely radicalized variant. Particularly with regard to its readiness to wipe out whole peoples, European colonialism stood at the beginning of a development of particular notions of space and race that found its culmination in the "hunger plan" of 1941, the genocidal massacres in the context of combating partisans, and the utilization of gas for organized suffocation.[24]

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that much contemporary genocide scholarship focuses on the Holocaust as its point of comparison. For it was the Holocaust—though not yet known by that name—that drove Arendt to undertake her research, much in the same vein as that of Raphaël Lemkin, the 'father' of the UN Genocide Convention (1948), whose work was largely inspired by the experience of the Jews during World War II.[25] After several decades of intensive research on the Holocaust in isolation, the wheel has now turned full circle, and a broader framework—one initially formulated by Arendt—is now being proposed and implemented.

The Boomerang Thesis and its Critics

How does Arendt's boomerang thesis look after over half a century? As already indicated in the previous section, extended discussions of the boomerang thesis have been surprisingly few, despite the fact that Arendt devoted just over 200 pages to "Imperialism" (Part II) in *Origins.* Perhaps because it is the most historically detailed section of the book, it has not caught the fancy of political theorists. Yet, the person who has devoted perhaps most attention to it has been an historian of political thought, Margaret Canovan, whose extended engagement with the Arendt thesis came in her first book on Arendt in 1974. There she noted that the Imperialism section contains "some of the most brilliant and at the same time some of the most questionable of her ideas"[26] and thus hints at the reason why many analysts of Arendt have shied away from confronting the boomerang thesis. [27]

One of the most extensive and searching examinations of the Arendt thesis in regards to Germany came from L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan in their *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884–1914* (1977). Although they began by admitting that "Arendt's interpretation has some merit,"[28] they spent most of their time disabusing readers of any such notion. Colonialism, they contended, was relatively short-lived and had little influence on German politics or thought. There had been a variety of ideologies and justifications for colonialism at play in Germany from the late nineteenth century on; but neither the ideology of National Socialism nor Hitler himself was particularly concerned with overseas colonialism. In particular, *Der Führer* was much more concerned with conquering and resettling the lands to the east of the Fatherland, especially in the Soviet Union. Expansionist though Nazi ideology may have been, its motive force was a *Drang nach Osten,* not *nach Süden.* Nor did the colonial experience or the structure of society in German colonies particularly mirror the fascist model of an organic society. Generally, Gann and Duignan also insisted that "World War I not the colonial experience"[29] was crucial for the development of a totalitarian Germany. Finally, German behavior as colonialists was no worse than that of the Australians in Tasmania, the Americans toward the Native Americans, or the Hausa toward the Ibo in Nigeria; yet in none of those countries did a totalitarian movement develop. Gann and Duignan concluded with a moralistic flourish by charging that "to confuse" Nazi totalitarianism with "colonial rule—German or non-German"—is to "subtly excuse the evil of Nazi tyranny."[30]

After the 1960s, numerous symposia and collections of essays on Arendt's work appeared, especially important being those published by *Social Research,* the inhouse journal of the New School for Social Research in New York, and *Salmagundi.*[31]

But of greatest interest was the emergence in the 1980s of a new type of criticism directed at Arendt's work on imperialism in Africa. Shiraz Dossa's landmark 1980 essay, "Human Status and Politics: Hannah Arendt on the Holocaust," shifted the focus from the effects of the imperial experience on European political cultures to Arendt's own perspective on sub-Saharan Africans as reflected in the language with which she described the indigenous populations. According to Dossa, there was an "ethnocentric strain" in her characterizations of Africans that echoed rather than distanced itself from the mentality of the white Europeans who conquered central and southern Africa. Arendt, according to Dossa, presents the African as a "natural man" and thus "the 'inhumanity' of blacks is self-evident."[32] But his powerful indictment of Arendt's Eurocentrism was challenged by George Kateb's penetrating two pages "On Racism in Africa" in his 1983 study of Arendt. According to Kateb, Arendt had dared risk a "reconstruction of experience"[33] of the Boers in Africa and her methodological "generosity"[34] had only made it seem as though she shared the racial attitudes she imputed to the Boers. Kateb also suggested, somewhat cryptically, that Arendt's discussion of the "pathologies of racism and imperialism" actually "contains more than it needs," as though she had deployed too many types of explanation for what happened in Europe.[35] Thus, though Dossa and Kateb differed on just how to characterize Arendt's rhetoric of description, they obviously agreed that Arendt's own racial views added a problematic element to the whole debate about the boomerang thesis.

The 1990s finally saw the boomerang thesis and Arendt's own attitudes toward Africans discussed with increasing frequency in the Arendt literature itself. In his 1994 essay "Is Totalitarianism a New Phenomenon?," John Stanley suggested that the Zulu chieftain, Shaka, whom Arendt had briefly mentioned in *Origins,* came close to meeting the criteria she set for a totalitarian leader, despite her claim that totalitarianism was a distinctly modern phenomena. Stanley notes that the Zulu king had murdered thousands, maybe millions, and exerted his sway with a totalistic fervor. In fact, Dossa had already questioned Arendt's characterization of totalitarianism as an exclusively modern phenomenon when he pointed out that genocide was, by her own admission, frequently found in the ancient world.[36] In 1995, Anne Norton joined Dossa as one of Arendt's sternest critics. In a wide ranging essay that linked Arendt's hostile attitude toward Black militancy in the 1960s with her writing about Africa, Norton echoed Dossa's hostile reaction to Arendt's "voicing" of Boer racial views as though they were her own and charged that she "left the African silent."[37] By way of generally agreeing with Dossa and Norton, Hannah F. Pitkin noted in her 1998 study of Arendt that she "simply shares the European prejudice against so-called primitive cultures as somehow less cultured or more natural—in a pejorative sense—than the European."[38] Though the note was a way of generally agreeing with Dossa and Norton, ironically it illuminated the point to which Arendt had herself called attention during World War II—the threat to the concept of human equality that would arise when Europeans came into contact with non-European cultures.[39]

In perhaps the most philosophically wide-ranging book on Arendt in the 1990s, Seyla Benhabib devoted several pages to Arendt's thesis about the origins of European racism in Africa and the way it constituted a "threat to the limits of

European identity and civilization."[40] But she took Norton to task for imposing a particular version of American race relations on an African situation totally alien to it, while demanding that Arendt bring the same attitude to bear on both. But Benhabib returned to the boomerang thesis by suggesting that Arendt had failed to "translate the insight into a causal or genetic account."[41] Since then, the problematic matter of Arendt's racial attitudes has been explored in numerous studies, including ones by the authors of this Introduction and several contributors to this volume, especially Kathryn Gines and Robert Bernasconi.[42]

Still, the community of Arendt scholars remained divided on the issue. In the 2002 issue of *Social Research* devoted to *Origins* on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, Jerome Kohn, the editor of several volumes of Arendt's essays and Director of the Arendt Center at the New School for Social Research, devoted several pages to the influence of Joseph Conrad on Arendt's conception of Africa. The essay very importantly noted, against the standard misreadings by political theorists and historians, that Arendt was "not saying that racism or any other element of totalitarianism *caused* the regimes of Hitler or Stalin, but rather that those hidden elements, which include anti-Semitism, … crystallized in the movements from which those regimes arose."[43] Yet, just preceding that valuable clarification, Kohn writes that Conrad's Kurz was the "real 'heart of darkness,' rather than the *uncivilized* [my italics] but not inhuman darkness of Africa."[44] With this "uncivilized wbut not inhuman darkness," Kohn's characterization of sub-Saharan Africans was no less problematic than Arendt's. As far as any reader could tell, neither Arendt nor Kohn had studied the history or anthropology (not to mention the art history) of sub-Saharan Africa in order to arrive at the view that the Africans encountered by Europeans in central or southern Africa were "uncivilized"—whatever that might mean.

From Debate to Research Program

It is not our intention to settle the debate over Arendt's boomerang thesis or her racial attitudes once and for all, but to allow contemporary scholars from various fields to expand on Arendt's thesis specifically and, more generally, to explore the relevance of her work for an understanding of the history of our time. Still, it might be helpful to summarize the main criticisms of Arendt on this issue and offer the briefest of responses. For this we will refer most often to Margaret Canovan's analysis of the boomerang thesis in her 1974 study of Arendt, since among Arendt scholars, she confronted it earlier and more systematically than anyone else.

The first issue has to do with the importance of imperialism and colonialism in the emergence of totalitarianism and mass murder in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Canovan, the "quasi-causal link between imperialism and Nazism is plausibly made through Pan-Germanism"; but it is much more difficult to link Pan-Slavism and Stalinism.[45] She goes on to point out that the history of state bureaucracy, the use of secret police, and the proliferation of ethnic and racial prejudice in, say, the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires scarcely needed reenforcement by the European experience in Africa and Asia.[46] This was another way of saying in specific terms what George Kateb later suggested: perhaps Arendt did not need Africa to explain European totalitarianism and thus had violated the historian's version of Ockham's razor. Defenders of the boomerang thesis might make a concession (and distinction) here to the effect that German expansion into Central and Eastern Europe, along with expansionist impulses of other nationalist movements in the interwar years, did not need the African experience to explain "continental imperialism" in their part of Europe, but the boomerang thesis still had importance for Western Europe, especially Belgium and the Netherlands, along with Germany, Britain, and France.

A similar argument might be made about the importance of color-coded racism in the spread of ethnic animosity and above all of anti-Semitism in Europe. It is not clear to what degree and in what ways that anti-Semitism was given a genocidal impetus by the experience of Germans—or Europeans—in Africa. It would be surprising if one type of prejudice did not reenforce the other. On the other hand, anti-Semitism and color-coded racism do not generally have the same aetiology, dynamic, or goals historically, particularly when the experience of the United States is factored in. Historically, for instance, Arthur de Gobineau, one of the founders of European racism, was in close touch with the so-called "American School" of ethnology in mid-nineteenth century America where the object of intellectual address was color-based racism.[47] Still, in Western Europe, endemic religious and social anti-Semitism, under the force of secularization, was relatively easily racialized, though there was nothing inevitable about the transformation. In *Origins* Arendt stresses the differences between religious and biological anti-Semitism but is of little help in deciding the degree to which racism from the colonies joined, or remained separate from, European anti-Semitism of whatever sort.

Second, along with others, Canovan suggested that Arendt's claim about the destructive effects of racism and bureaucracy on the various European nation-states was misdirected: "But what national states," asks Canovan," were in fact destroyed by imperialism?"[48] Put more specifically, why and how were the two largest colonial powers—Britain and France—able to preserve their democratic institutions and political cultures at home during the imperial era and afterwards, if imperialism had such a disastrous boomerang effect? Conversely, neither Italy nor Germany, the two most prominent fascist powers, was a major player in the "scramble for Africa," though both had participated in it to a degree.

In certain ways, this is one of the strongest criticisms of the Arendt thesis. Yet there is also something about it that suggests a narrowness, a certain tone-deafness to the arguments about the corrupting effects of colonialism and imperialism on supposedly democratic European and American regimes. Even after World War II, the Algerian War almost brought down the French Republic and civil liberties in Britain were significantly curtailed by the post–1972 "troubles" in Northern Ireland. One could also argue that the fact that Britain and France did not develop large fascist movements, much less totalitarian governments, actually underlines Arendt's point about the lack of historical inevitability to the emergence of totalitarianism or genocide. Those who press this argument seem to reason that, because totalitarian or genocidal movements did not develop in Britain and France but did in Germany, the colonial experience, racist ideologies, and techniques of imperial rule were of little significance in shaping any of these political cultures. But this "everywhere or nowhere"/"everything or nothing" argument is a fallacious one. On this issue, Arendt is the better "conventional" historian, since she persistently argued against inevitability and for the particularity of causal sequences according to the particular context.

There are other aspects of the Arendt thesis in relation to the liberal democracies that need further exploration. A more general understanding of the boomerang thesis would also dictate further interest in the effects of colonialism and imperialism on the intellectual, literary, and cultural traditions of the colonizing countries. In this volume, Robert Eaglestone explores the way German children's stories reflected the German experience in Southwest Africa, and certainly Britain has a strong tradition of fiction dealing with the colonial experience, a point that Edward Said made most extensively in his *Culture and Imperialism,* whose focus was "the role of culture in the modern imperial experience."[49] Certainly a major strand of the literature of the United States from Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville through Mark Twain and W.E. B. Du Bois to William Faulkner, and including Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and much of modern writing coming out of Latin America have explored the pervasive impact of the history of slavery and racism on national consciousness. Indeed, in these areas, literary scholars and students of postcolonialism are far ahead of the historians and political scientists. Overall, it only stands to reason that if the colonial experience has been such a strong explicit and implicit influence on European thought and culture, it must have also had similarly pervasive effects on its political culture and institutions, along with the structure and essence of academic disciplines.

The relative claims of the human sciences and literature are also reflected in a closely related line of criticism of Arendt. Canovan, Dossa, Benhabib and others also criticize Arendt for having failed to provide satisfactory evidence to underpin plausible or creative arguments; instead, she relied on intuitions and hunches. For instance, Arendt's discussion of the morally vertiginous European confrontation with Africa seems to have been largely shaped by Conrad's fictional vision in *Heart of Darkness.* Indeed, her research notes include the cryptic sentence: "Conrad's Kurtz inspite [sic] of being a fiction [sic] has become a reality in the Nazi character."[50] Of course, Arendt's hunches and intuitions should be developed or rejected based on further investigation. Her strongest defenders can hardly deny that her boomerang thesis is underdeveloped, but this is just the point of having historians—to follow up on other people's intuitions.

Canovan also raised a shrewd, epistemological point when she referred to Arendt's deep ambivalence, or lack of clarity, about what she was trying to do in *The Origins of Totalitarianism:* "the last thing she wished to do was to produce a chain of causes that would seem to show that totalitarianism was inevitable."[51] It would have been convenient for us had she committed herself to some form of causal explanation recognizable to professional historians (in the Anglo-American tradition). The problem is that she tended to identify causal language, including that of historians, with the language of the natural sciences implying determinism and inevitability. As a result the nature of her claim about the relationship between imperialism and totalitarianism never quite came into focus. At times, she seems to be arguing for a certain evidentiary underdetermination: no one thing, or series of things, could adequately explain the emergence of totalitarianism in Europe. Yet, Gann and Duignan and others go to the other extreme and sound as though Arendt must have intended a tight, one-to-one, causal connection between the African experience and the European result, and then criticize her for not producing it.

Finally, the criticisms of Arendt's own rhetoric of description and moral standpoint vis-à-vis the people of sub-Saharan Africa seem to us justified by and large. But though this issue has come to dominate the discussion whenever Arendt's boomerang thesis is raised, it is important not to see them as inextricably yoked together. One can accept the broad claims of the boomerang thesis and still call attention to the dubious nature of Arendt's language of description. Put more abstractly, the question might be raised as to whether her ethnocentric cultural anthropology discredits her philosophical anthropology, that is, her account of the human condition of plurality and political being in the world. Did her emphasis upon human plurality and difference too easily give way to a tendency to reify cultural pluralism and differences? The essays by Eaglestone and Stone in this volume explore the issue of how to relate a cultural understanding and philosophical understanding of human "being." How much did her shock at the way the camp inmates had been shorn of culture and thus had *become* scarcely human feed back into her depiction of Africans as hardly possessing the rudimentary forms and institutions of human culture? Finally, we need to ask whether Arendt was exceptional in her views about African culture or whether those views were shared by some, even most, of her contemporaries. In other words, we need much more work on the context which shaped Arendt's views on race and culture.

Overall, then, we assume in this volume that Arendt's work in the areas of the nation, race, genocide, slavery, and imperialism focuses on three separate, though obviously related, matters. The first concerns the destructive effects of imperialism and colonialism on the established liberal political-legal institutions and normative political values of European nation-states, which eventually led to the rise of totalitarian regimes in Germany and the Soviet Union. There is still much work to be done, but we think the essays collected here are valuable in their own right and will stimulate further work. The contributions of Maurice Stoetzler and Vlasta Jalušič, for example, make clear the contemporary relevance of the nation/state dichotomy, whether in nineteenth century France or late-twentieth-century Yugoslavia. Second, her thesis suggested, rather than convincingly demonstrated, that the experience of imperial rule and the construction of racism in the colonies played a part in creating the conditions for the emergence of a totalitarian regime in Germany and thus paved the way for the Holocaust. Much important historical work has been, and is being done, on the specific case of Germany. By and large, her suggestions and intuitions are in the process of being confirmed. Third, and more subtly, Arendt's thesis suggested that the emergence of imperial-colonial Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century must have profoundly affected European intellectual and cultural traditions, its self-image and identity, and its intellectual traditions in short, medium, and long range terms. Notions of racial and cultural superiority not only were widespread within Europe up to World War II but have been also since then. No one "gets over" colonialism and imperialism easily, if at all, whether they be the colonizers or the colonized. Indeed, the ease with which victims become executioners is testimony to this fact. For this reason, we want to emphasize Arendt's relevance for understanding the history and politics of our time as well as of the past, and for the non-European as well as the European world. There is a line running through the phenomena that Arendt perceived and began to bring to light. In this book, we seek to make it plainly visible.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Anson Rabinbach, "Moments of Totalitarianism," *History and Theory* 45, no. 2 (2006): 72–100. However valuable his essay is otherwise, Rabinbach nowhere mentions Arendt's "boomerang" thesis and in fact only mentions Arendt once in his review essay.
2. Pascal Grosse, "From Colonialism to National Socialism to Postcolonialism: Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,*" *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 35–52; Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, "Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory,* ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), 7.
3. See Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York, 2003), 19; Dan Stone, "Britannia Waives the Rules: British Imperialism and Holocaust Memory," in *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London, 2006), 174–195; Stefan Kuehl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National Socialism* (New York, 1994); Giuseppe Finaldi, "European Empire and the Making of the Modern World: Recent Books and Old Arguments," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 2 (2005): 248–50.
4. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 2nd ed. (Cleveland, 1958), 206, 223.
5. Ibid., 221.
6. Ibid., 206.
7. Ibid., chapter 8.
8. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York and London, 1990), 125.
9. Ibid., 8. See also Richard H. King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals, 1945–1970* (Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., 2004).
10. Indeed, the work of Robert Lewis Koehl and Alexander Dallin is remarkably valuable even after half a century. See Robert Lewis Koehl, "A Prelude to Hitler's Greater Germany," *American Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (1953): 43–65; idem. "Colonialism Inside Germany: 1886–1918," *Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 3 (1953): 255–272; idem., *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population*

Policy 1939–1945: A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom (Cambridge, 1957); Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945* (London, 1957).

11. His standard work, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (New York, 1986), is written without reference to Arendt.
12. For a rare, brief discussion, see Hugh Ridley, "Colonial Society and European Totalitarianism," *Journal of European Studies* 3, no. 2 (1973): 147–159. For a book that has an Arendtian feel to it, since it links colonial genocide to the Holocaust, but only mentions her in the foreword, see Sven Lindqvist, *"Exterminate All the Brutes"* (London, 1997).
13. In his landmark study of the tradition of civic humanism, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1973), J. G. A. Pocock acknowledged Arendt's influence (516, 550).
14. Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia, PA., 1980), 134. More recently, David Scott has compared C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) with Arendt's *On Revolution,* but also criticized Arendt for having "forgotten" the other eighteenth century New World revolution, the Haitian revolution. See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham and London, 2004), 217–8.
15. Margaret Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (New York, 1974), 50.
16. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, UK, 1992), 2.
17. Elizabeth Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Boston, 1958[1935]). Butler's seldom read book now desperately needs bringing up to date and amending to include German-Jewish culture and thought. For a recent effort to do something like that, see Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton, 1996).
18. Uta G. Poiger, "Imperialism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Germany," *History & Memory* 17, nos. 1 and 2 (2005): 122.
19. See Helmut Walser Smith, "The Talk of Genocide, the Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on Debates in the German Reichstag Concerning Southwest Africa, 1904–14," in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy,* ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop(Ann Arbor, 1998), 107–23; and also Isabel V. Hull, "Military Culture and the Production of 'Final Solutions' in the Colonies: The Example of Wilhelminian Germany," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective,* ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (New York, 2003), 141–62.
20. See, for instance, Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London, 2005) and David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005). See also Stone, "Britannia Waives the Rules," 174–195.
21. Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York, 2003); Ze'ev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, 1995); George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York, 1999).
22. *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (2005). Also published in book form as A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, eds., *Colonialism and Genocide* (London and New York, 2007).
23. Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," in *Responsibility and Judgment,* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York, 2003), 42.
24. A. Dirk Moses, "An Antipodean Genocide? The Origins of the Genocidal Moment in the Colonization of Australia," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000): 89–106; "Coming to Terms with Genocidal Pasts in Comparative Perspective: Germany and Australia," *Aboriginal History* 25 (2001): 91–115; "The Holocaust and Genocide," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust,* ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke and New York, 2004), 533–55; "Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History," in *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History,* ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York, 2004), 3–48; Jürgen Zimmerer, "Colonialism and the Holocaust: Towards an Archaeology of Genocide," in *Genocide and Settler Society,* ed. Moses, 67.
25. Dan Stone, "Raphael Lemkin on the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 4 (2005): 539–550. See also Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide* (Basingstoke and New York, forthcoming 2008) for detailed discussions.

26. Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt,* 30.
27. Strangely, Stephen J. Whitfield's *Into the Dark,* perhaps the most historically informed and intricate of the full-length studies of Arendt, and one of the most acute in its criticism, hardly mentioned imperialism, Africa, or racism (as opposed to anti-Semitism).
28. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa, 1884–1914* (Stanford,1977), 226.
29. Ibid., 237.
30. Ibid., 238.
31. The contributors to Melvyn Hill's 1979 collection of essays, compiled from a conference on Arendt in Toronto, were largely silent on the importance of Africa or racism in the context of imperialism's role in the emergence of totalitarianism, except for a brief mention by Bernard Crick in his essay on *Origins.* A 1989 collection of essays on Arendt compiled by Australia-based scholars devoted a bit of attention to racism and imperialism but not a lot, even though the collection included a section on "Feminism" and also one on "Jewish Identity and conscience." See Melvyn A. Hill, ed., *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (New York, 1979) and Gisela T. Kaplan and Clive S. Kessler, eds., *Hannah Arendt: Thinking, Judging, Freedom* (Sidney, 1989).
32. Shiraz Dossa, "Human Status and Politics: Hannah Arendt on the Holocaust," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 13, 2 (1980): 320–1.
33. George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Oxford, 1983), 61–3.
34. Ibid., 57.
35. Ibid., 52, 56.
36. John Stanley, "Is Totalitarianism a New Phenomenon?," in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays,* ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany, 1994), 1–40; Dossa, "Human Status," 317.
37. Anne Norton, "Heart of Darkness: Africa and African Americans in the Writings of Hannah Arendt," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt,* ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, 1995), 253.
38. Hannah F. Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago, 1993), 293, note 16,.
39. See Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility"(1945), in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954* (New York, 1994), 131.
40. Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, 1999), 83.
41. Ibid., 86.
42. Dan Stone, "Ontology or Bureaucracy? Hannah Arendt's Early Interpretations of The Holocaust," in *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London, 2006), 53–69; King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals,* 115–9.
43. Jerome Kohn, "Arendt's Concept and Description of Totalitarianism," *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (2002): 626.
44. Ibid., 626.
45. Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt,* 38.
46. Ibid., 44.
47. See James W. Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven, 1997) for an account of Gobineau's links both with Alexis de Tocqueville and American racial theorists of the mid-nineteenth century.
48. Ibid., 42.
49. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), 3.
50. Letter to Mary Underwood, Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Container 16, 4.
51. Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt,* 44.