

Arendt and Critical Theory Today

2nd Istanbul Critical Theory Conference –

in Exile at the Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg*

13-15 July 2017

Hannah Arendt's political thought has been a source of controversy as much as it has inspired scholarly work in numerous directions. Some of the controversy is sparked by Arendt's ambiguous relation to Frankfurt School thinkers. Her personal friendship with Walter Benjamin does not lead to an indiscriminate acceptance of Benjamin's theses; her personal dislike of Theodor W. Adorno does not drive an unbridgeable gap between certain aspects of their theories. It would not be wrong to assume, with Margaret Canovan, that Arendt's entire oeuvre springs from the urge to understand total domination, a feat that inevitably crosses her path with that of the first generation of Critical Theorists, although the latter refrained from using the term "totalitarian" to qualify both Nazism and Stalinism. Similarities and differences in Arendt's and the first generation of Critical Theorists' understanding of fascism are further reflected in their observations and research on authoritarianism and the banality of evil. Despite her polemic against Marx, Arendt insistently pursues Marxist topoi such as imperialism, revolution, and laboring society. And despite her fascination with the American Revolution, she is fiercely critical of the state as an administrative apparatus and of law as a pre-political instance that tends to supplant collective action. In short, Arendt's uneasy relationship to Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud and Heidegger hint at how some of her reflections might overlap with those of the Frankfurt School.

This conference aims to go beyond conventional approaches to Arendt's political thought in view of extracting, from her unwritten dialogue with the Frankfurt School, the possibility of understanding the world we live in today. We therefore encourage creative appropriations of both Arendt and Critical Theory. Beyond scholastic exercises focusing on the particularities of each thinker, we hope to generate a debate on the significance of this encounter for grasping the "burden of our time."

Taken as a canon, the Frankfurt School sets a blueprint for critique, but developments across the globe leave progressive circles, some of which have been influenced by the first generation of Frankfurt School writers, rather baffled. Something is perhaps rotten in the idea of law, as Walter Benjamin avows, with the category of identity, as Adorno criticises, but maybe also in the concepts of human rights and equality, as Arendt was prone to argue. Humanitarian ideals do not seem to resist the onslaught of nationalism, racism, mediocracy, and fear. A century after the collapse of Europe's representative systems in the wake of World War I, authoritarianisms and fascisms are once again on the rise as surrogate revolutionary movements. Is this the dialectics of Enlightenment being played out anew? What do Arendt and Critical Theory have to offer in view of coming to terms with our predicament, as well as of ways to overcome it?

With these questions in mind, we invite a wide range of papers that combine or address aspects of Arendt's political thought, themes developed by first and later generations of the Frankfurt School, reflections on what is in store for us in the world we live in, and ideas on how social and political critique should be carried out today. This CFP additionally welcomes papers on critical receptions of Arendt and Critical Theory in political contexts other than the North.

Interested scholars are invited to address the following broad topics:

Law and violence
Fascism, Stalinism, Totalitarianism
Authoritarianism and the Banality of Evil
Exile and statelessness
Civil disobedience, revolt, revolution
Consumer society and culture industry
Selfhood, action and labor
Lying, deception, and manipulation
Theory and Practice of Critique

Keynote Speakers:

Jay M. Bernstein (The New School for Social Research), Zeynep Gambetti (Boğaziçi University Istanbul), Lars Rensmann (University of Groningen), N. N.

The conference language will be English. We invite interested scholars at all career levels to send proposals (maximum 400 words) to: criticaltheoryistanbul@gmail.com. **Deadline: 31 March 2017.**

Organizing Chairs:

Philip Hogh (Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg)
Zeynep Gambetti, (Boğaziçi University Istanbul)
Volkan Cidam (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul)
Gaye İlhan-Demiryol (Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul)
Julia König (Goethe University, Frankfurt)

This conference is organized with support by the Hannah Arendt Center and the Adorno Research Center at Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg.

*** Note: This conference is a follow-up to the first one on “Adorno and Politics” organized in Istanbul at Bogazici University in June 2016. Owing to the political atmosphere currently reigning in Turkey, we are obliged to displace it to Oldenburg, as a “critical theory conference in exile” of sorts.**



Bogazici University
Political Science and International Relations

