

Hannah Arendt

Thinking in Difficult Times

Week 4. Racism and Imperialism





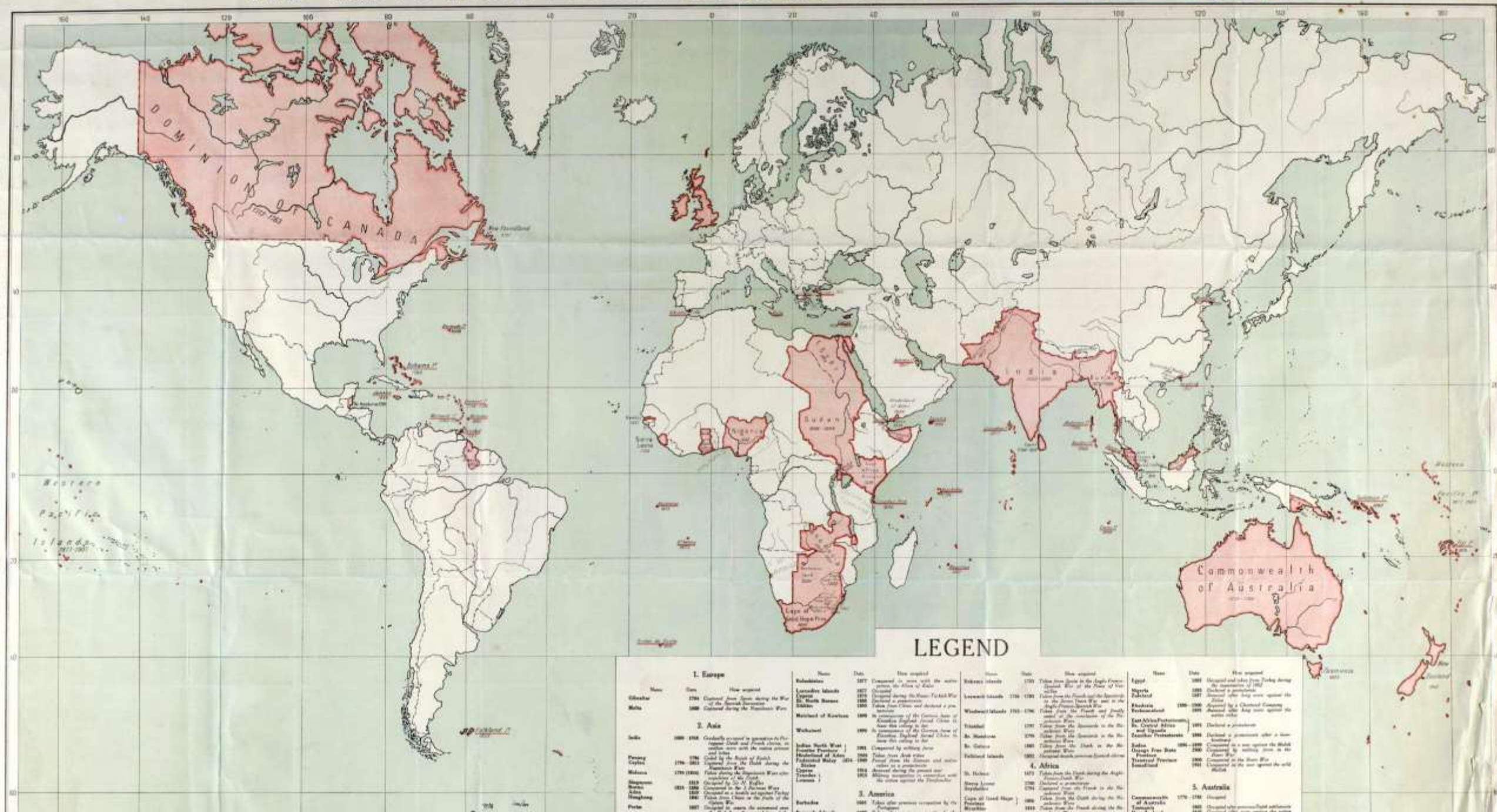
Agenda

- What is the logic of imperialism?
- How does imperialism lead to totalitarianism?
- What other factors contribute (e.g. racism, bureaucracy)?
- The role of pan-continental movements
- Evaluating imperialism



- 'Expansion is everything ... these stars ... these vast worlds which we can never reach. I would annex the planets if I could' – Cecil Rhodes
- 'it may be justifiable to consider the whole period a preparatory stage for coming catastrophe' – Hannah Arendt

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE







**African Colonies after
the Berlin Conference of 1884**



KING MALIETOA AT THE READING OF THE BERLIN TREATY.

[C17640]

Introducing Imperialism (1884-1914)

- The new crimes against humanity committed by totalitarian regimes did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but had decisive historical causes
- In Part One, Arendt explored how a late 19th century internationalist current emerged, Anti-Semitism, claiming a global Jewish conspiracy to undermine the state in France, Germany and elsewhere...
- At a time when the political power of Jews was at its lowest for a century, their wealth lacking the protection of state power
- This loss in influence reflected a decisive shift across Europe towards colonial expansion, the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie
- In Part Two, Arendt explores how ideas of unlimited expansion, scientific racism and rule by bureaucracy prefigured totalitarianism

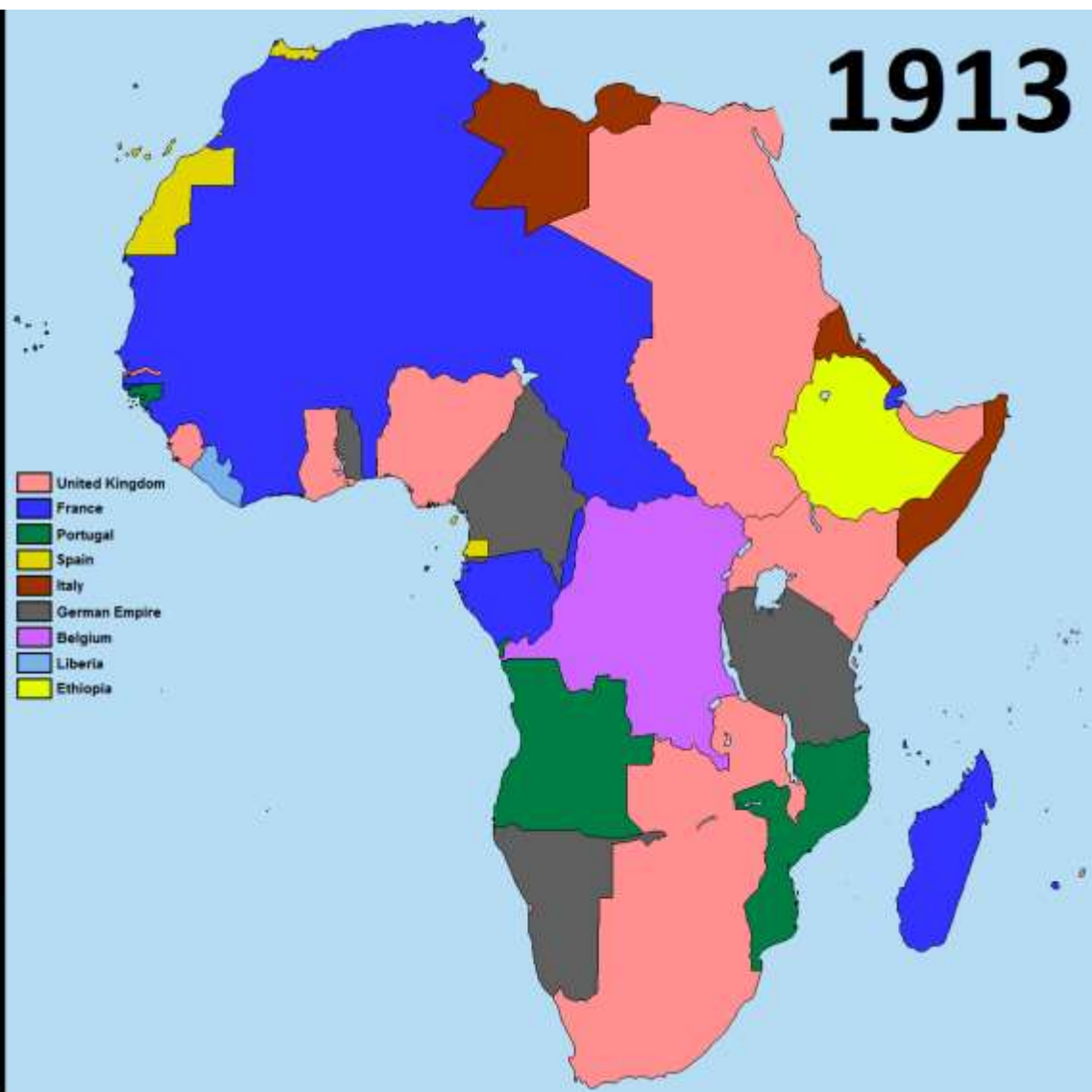
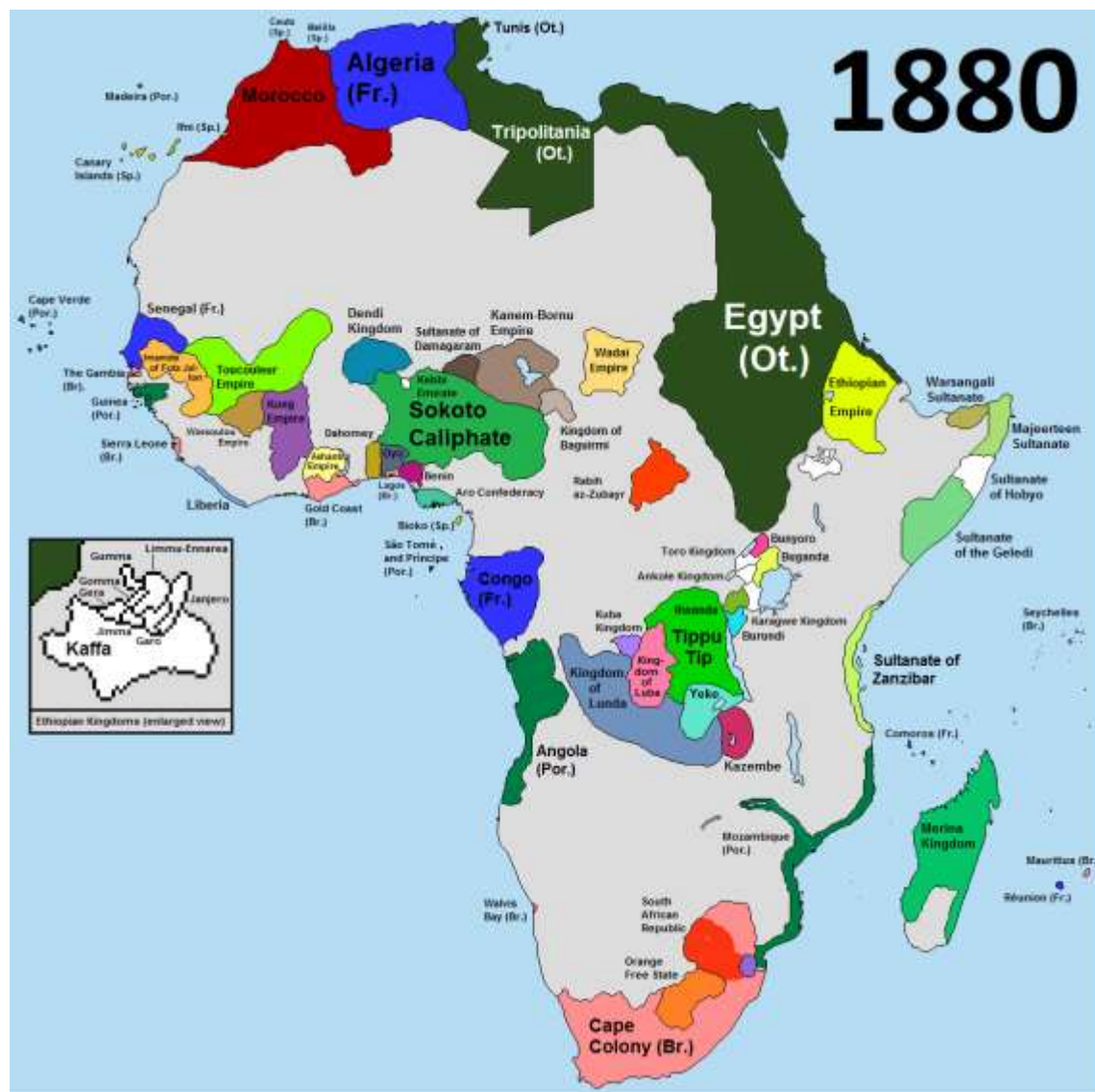
Introducing Imperialism (1884-1914)

- ‘The concept of unlimited expansion that alone can fulfill the hope for unlimited accumulation of capital, and brings about the aimless accumulation of power, makes the foundation of new political bodies—which up to the era of imperialism always had been the upshot of conquest—well-nigh impossible.’ (137)

Over to you

Referring to Chapter 5, pick a question and discuss in groups:

1. What is the 'logic' of imperialism? (106)
2. How did imperialism pose a threat to the nation-state? (112)



Introducing Imperialism (1884-1914)

- Political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, whose demand for increased wealth eventually pits their ambitions against the confines of the nation-state
- Arises from economic and political crisis in Europe, in which surplus capital (from overproduction) and surplus unemployed populations ('the mob') find an outlet overseas
- Unlike conquest, imperialism didn't extend the law or home government to the newly conquered territories
- Imperialist rule is instead between capital and the mob
- Its only logic is continual expansion, for its own sake...





Imperialism vs national conquest

- ‘They knew by instinct rather than by insight that this new expansion movement, in which "patriotism . . . is best expressed in money-making" (Huebbe-Schleiden) and the national flag is a "commercial asset" (Rhodes), could only destroy the political body of the nation-state.
- ... The nation-state, however, based upon a homogeneous population's active consent to its government ... lacked such a unifying principle and would, in the case of conquest, have to assimilate rather than to integrate, to enforce consent rather than justice, that is, to degenerate into tyranny’



‘Men have been found to resist the most powerful monarchs and to refuse to bow down before them, but few indeed have been found to resist the crowd, to stand up alone before misguided masses, to face their implacable frenzy without weapons and with folded arms to dare a no when a yes is demanded.’ - Clemenceau

The emergence of the Mob

- In late 19th century France and elsewhere, 'the mob' emerged
- Economic crises, unemployment, and social change saw many leave the stability of their former classes and fall into the faceless masses
- Isolated individuals without political representation, the mob looked to strong men to lead a movement against the status quo
- This leads to support for Anti-Semitic movements, but also provides much of the manpower for imperialist rule overseas, enthused by an emerging racism and increasingly complex imperial bureaucracies



‘The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be, before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone leaving hardly a sign—and no memories. The earth seemed unearthly...

... and the men... No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity –; like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar’
– Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*





The 'Dark Continent' – over to you

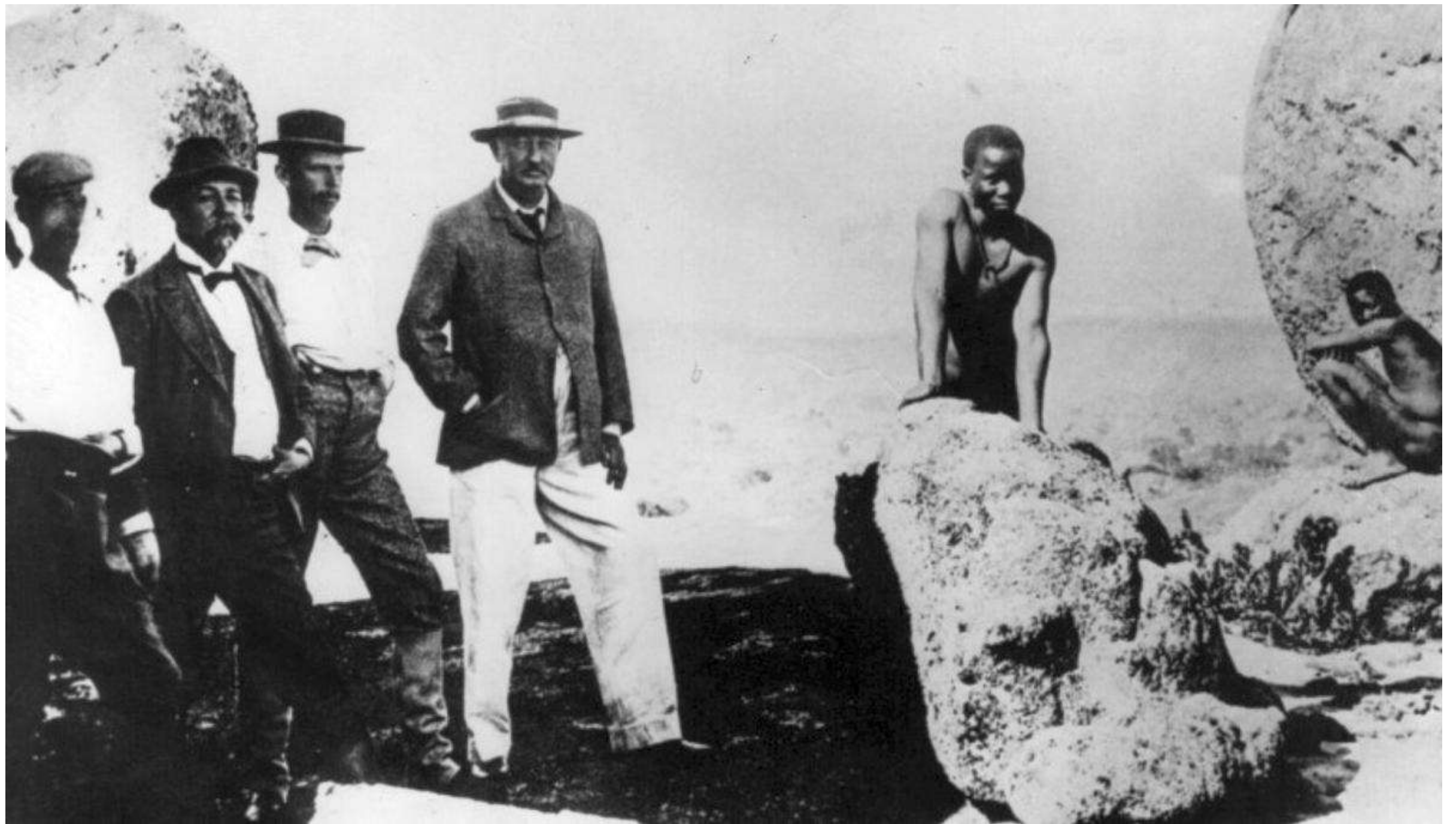
In groups again, focus on just one question now:

1. In what ways were racism and bureaucracy 'interrelated' (186) and so decisive to Western imperialism?
2. How does Arendt present and puncture the 'legend' of British imperialism and 'white man's burden' (209)?

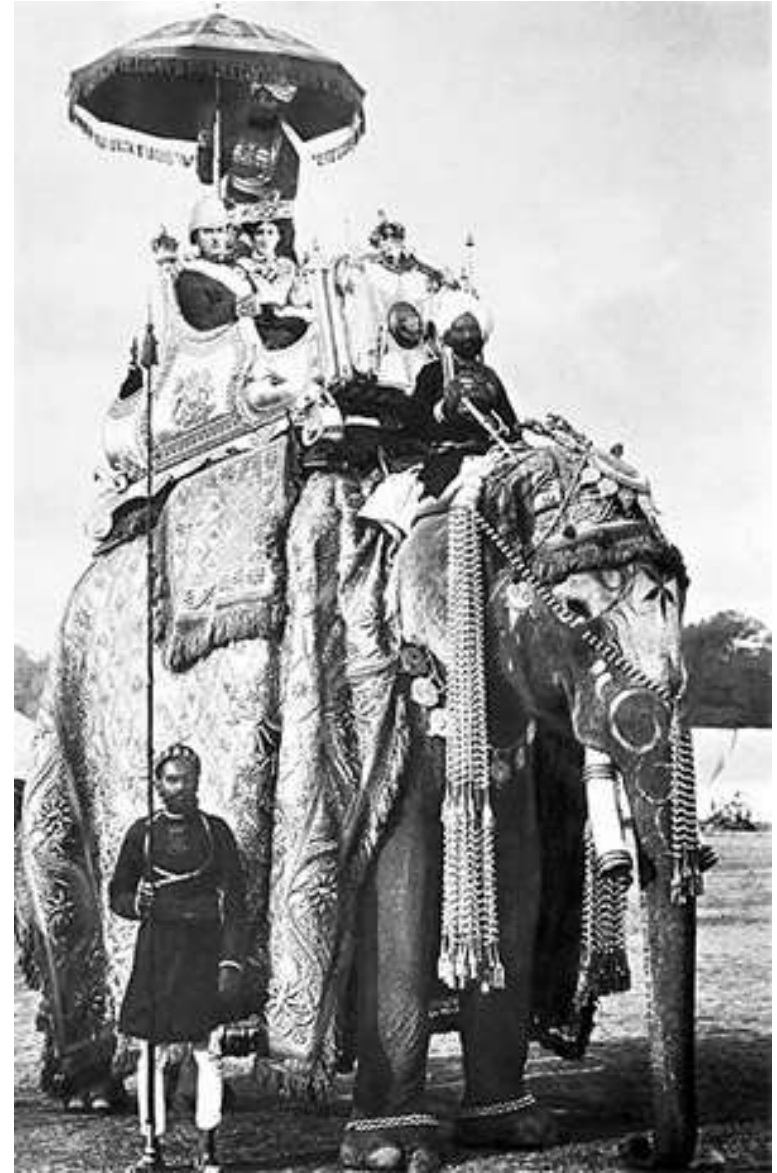


British Imperialism: Racism and Bureaucracy

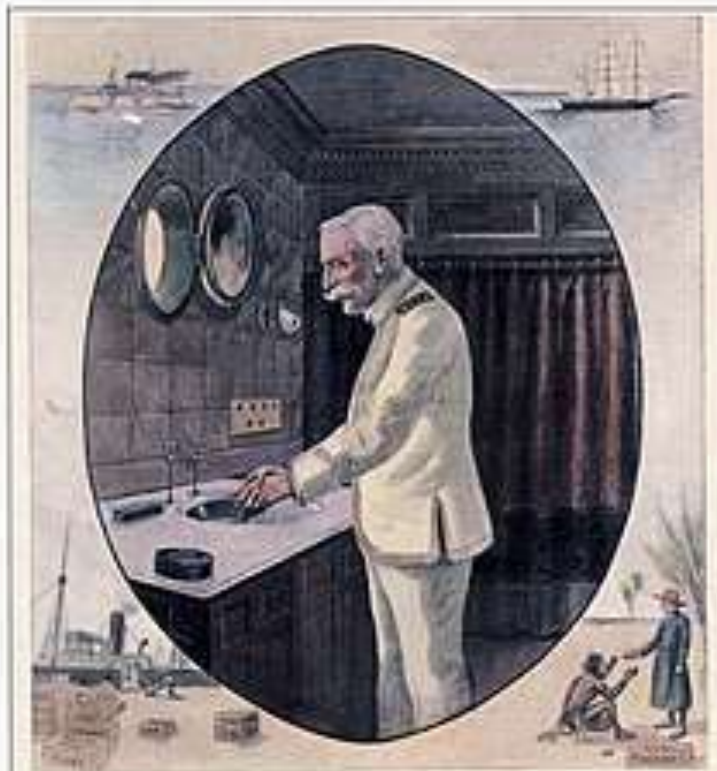
- Lord Cromer, the British Consul General and de facto ruler of Egypt, spoke of a new era of 'hybrid government', in which real rule took place through opaque bureaucracy, freed from local interference
- Bureaucracy required selflessness, competence and secrecy,
- A hidden government of experts over the inexperienced majority
- Cecil Rhodes in South Africa also esteemed secrecy, envisioned a secret racist society that would continue racist imperial expansion
- In both: a logic of endless expansion, for its own sake



‘What overcame Rhodes's monstrous innate vanity and made him discover the charms of secrecy was the same thing that overcame Cromer's innate sense of duty: the discovery of an expansion which was not driven by the specific appetite for a specific country but conceived as an endless process in which every country would serve only as stepping-stone for further expansion. In view of such a concept, the desire for glory can no longer be satisfied by the glorious triumph over a specific people for the sake of one's own people, nor can the sense of duty be fulfilled through the consciousness of specific services and the fulfillment of specific tasks.’ (215)



‘No matter what individual qualities or defects a man may have, once he has entered the maelstrom of an unending process of expansion, he will, as it were, cease to be what he was and obey the laws of the process, identify himself with anonymous forces that he is supposed to serve in order to keep the whole process in motion; he will think of himself as mere function, and eventually consider such functionality, such an incarnation of the dynamic trend, his highest possible achievement. Then, as Rhodes was insane enough to say, he could indeed “do nothing wrong, what he did became right. It was his duty to do what he wanted. He felt himself a god – nothing less.” ’ (215)



The first step towards lightening
The White Man's Burden
is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness.

Pears' Soap

is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place—it is the ideal toilet soap.

‘When the European mob discovered what a "lovely virtue" a white skin could be in Africa, when the English conqueror in India became an administrator who no longer believed in the universal validity of law, but was convinced of his own innate capacity to rule and dominate, when the dragonslayers turned into either "white men" of "higher breeds" or into bureaucrats and spies, playing the Great Game of endless ulterior motives in a endless movement; when the British Intelligence Services (especially after the First World War) began to attract England's best sons, who preferred serving mysterious forces all over the world to serving the common good of their country, 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. "Administrative massacres" were proposed by Indian bureaucrats while African officials declared that "no ethical considerations such as the rights of man will be allowed to stand in the way" of white rule.’



Boomerang effect?

- Arendt argues later that pan-continental movements – Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism – drew on the same imperial imagery, desires and disregard for law
- Bureaucracy became perfected, a ‘pseudomysticism’ in which rule is by distant, unaccountable authorities – a Kafkaesque system
- ‘they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them...because, until then, it had only been applied to non-European peoples’ (Aimé Césaire)
- Nazism was ‘a colonial system in the very heart of Europe’ (Fanon)

Next week... Totalitarianism proper

- We'll turn to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part 3: Totalitarianism
- For Arendt, the rise of Nazism and Bolshevism reflected not just economic downturns, war, or demagoguery, but the wholesale atomisation and loneliness of the modern masses
- Are we at risk of falling back into totalitarianism today?
- There are two extracts to consider:
 - Ch12, part iii) "Total Domination" (*Portable Arendt*, pp. 119-145)
 - Ch13, "Ideology and Terror" – the final part of the chapter

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