Book Review

The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy

By Michael G. Hanchard. Princeton:
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Among the social science disciplines, political science has one of the more dismal records when it comes to explaining race and racism. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, and indeed history have all done better. Only economics ranks lower on both the empirical and theoretical scales where race is concerned. Why political science has been largely incapable of tackling this momentous subject likely has to do with the field's identification with, and in many ways, its subservience to, governing and governmentality. This is an identity it shares with economics. It is notable that many political science departments designate themselves as departments of "government," and that they devote so much emphasis to political technology, although the designation of their work as social "science" is no doubt equally problematic.

To be sure, none of the social "sciences" is immune from the criticism that they unduly downgrade the importance of race. Even when a field devotes significant attention to the subject, as sociology, history, and anthropology have done, especially since the highpoint of the civil rights and anticolonialist movements in the 1960s, they still tend to treat race and racism as aberrations from what is supposedly a democratic and social scientific norm. How often have we been told that slavery is the "original sin" of US history, or that the US is "a nation of immigrants"? It is still difficult to grasp—for white people at least—that "American Negro Slavery" was naturalized and indeed blessed by the nation's founders, almost half of whom practiced it, and that the racist Alien Acts were the first measures passed by the US Congress. It is still nearly unthinkable the US "frontier," romanticized in countless movies and TV shows, was the setting for an "American Holocaust" (Stannard 1992) whose centuries-long carnage exceeded (and indeed inspired) the Nazis. The idea that race is fundamental to modernity, intimately connected to the rise of capitalism, the ascendancy of Europe, indeed the Enlightenment itself, still lies largely outside academic reckoning.

Even more remote from mainstream political science (and again, from the other social "sciences" as well), is the claim that race precedes modernity, that it

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operated in the ancient world, that it shaped Europe not only in the imperial leap that we conveniently date to the "discoveries" of Columbus, da Gama, Cabral and others, but also internally in the continent. This idea is particularly associated with Cedric Robinson, a political scientist whose critique of his field, *The Terms of Order* (2016 [1980]), is still underutilized and underappreciated, and whose *Black Marxism* (2000 [1983]) indicts Marxist theory on some of these same grounds. The idea of Europe as an internal field of race and racism can also be glimpsed in such radical classicists as Moses Finley and Frank Snowden, in the great medievalist and WWII martyr Marc Bloch, in the prodigious linguist, philologist, and Sinologist Martin Bernal, in the Jewish theologian Daniel Boyarin and the psychohistorian Sander Gilman, and in the work of Oliver C. Cox and indeed W.E.B. Du Bois.

Michael G. Hanchard's *The Spectre of Race* now takes its place in this race-critical current. Centrally oriented to the subfield of comparative politics, the book moves considerably beyond that emphasis to offer a far more comprehensive critique of the entire discipline of political science, one that encompasses political theory, area studies, international relations (see Vitalis 2015), "development" studies, and other aspects of the discipline. All of this is grounded in an extensive and in-depth assessment of the centrality of race and racism in structuring the field.

Hanchard begins with ancient Greece, where the theory and practice of democracy supposedly had its origins in the Athenian *polis* c. 600 BCE. Drawing on mainstream political theory, he demonstrates that even at this early moment, a fundamental contradiction existed between the inclusive *ethos* of democratic debate (think of Thucydides) and the exclusive *ethnos* of citizenship, which relied on concepts of Athenian autocthony that were little more than convenient myths. "Birthright citizenship," it seems, goes back a long way. In similar fashion the practice of slavery in Athens both problematized and enabled democracy, as did the institution of patriarchy. Hanchard shows that Aristotle's *Politics*, still taken to be the foundational document in the field, is beset by the contradiction of slavery: on the one hand Aristotle justifies the practice by appealing to a natural hierarchy in humankind; on the other he recognizes that enslavement is a consequence of being on the losing side of imperial struggle. When the Athenian longboats carry you off from your village in, say, Corfu or Rhodos, does your captivity demonstrate your inherent inferiority?

With this clarifying framework firmly in place, Hanchard turns to political science. He details the founding of the discipline in the work of Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892), a British historian whose work has now justifiably fallen into neglect and disrepute, but who was the first to advocate for the unified and systematic study of politics as the driving force of history. Though grounding his approach in Aristotle, Freeman argued that politics could not be reduced to philosophy but had to be approached through a systematic method that foregrounded the political institutions of the nation-state. Fatally for his legacy, Freeman's disciplinary approach also emphasized what Hanchard designates as "Euro-Aryan racialism," an explicitly stated belief in the superiority and essentiality of white political rule. A flagrant Negrophobe and anti-Semite,

Freeman also hated the Irish and the Chinese, framing his comparative politics explicitly as the political technology of imperial rule: British in the first instance, and the United States close behind. Hanchard makes extensive use of Freeman's archive at Johns Hopkins, where Freeman taught for a time, and where Woodrow Wilson obtained his Ph.D. Wilson's racism is well-known today and Freeman himself little-known, but they were both mainstream scholars, whose racial views did not stand out in their extremity; indeed their racism framed their celebratory attitude towards western and northern democracy, a sphere that only native-born whites (in the US or in Europe) could properly inhabit.

Political science was thus founded on explicit claims of a racial basis for national development. Nation-states were institutional expressions of "peoplehood," understood primarily in racial terms. This equation of government, territory, and "people" persists today, not only in political science but in the various nationalist ideologies that pervade all countries: consider your default conception of "the American people" whose implicit whiteness is now perceived as threatened by a trending demographic shift toward a "majority-minority" population. Similar processes shape other polities and ground political science around the world. Far from embodying democracy, the inclusion of "others" threatens it. Those immigrants, those dark people, those Muslims, those Jews, are seen as unqualified for voting, for citizenship, for access to the *polis*; they do not have "the right to have rights" (Arendt 1973).

Hanchard traces this logic through the development of political science in the 20th century. The major figures in the field, men (they were all men) from Charles Merriam in the 1920s to Gabriel Almond in the 1950s to Samuel P. Huntington (who died in 2008), shifted with the times. As required by a shifting milieu of governmentality, they sloughed off the explicit racism of Freeman and Wilson, developing the field in a liberal direction. Far from repudiating racial exclusion and racist hierarchy, however, liberalism perpetuated it. Huntington specialized in this: endorsing military juntas as the agencies of enlightened US empire, embracing a modern crusader mentality toward Islam, and denouncing LatinX immigrants who could never accept the "Anglo-Protestant culture," that according to him was the essence of American identity.

Hanchard, drawing on Robert Dahl, adopts the term "polyarchy" as a more accurate description than "democracy" with which to characterize the US polity —or those of the US, France, and numerous other countries. Polyarchy expresses democracy's partiality and limitations, its premises of exclusion, not inclusion. The term signalizes the existence of parallel forms of subjection: the "others" (racialized, gendered, ethnonationally distinct, etc.) are ruled differently; their rights are constrained or entirely ignored. Far from constituting an exception to democracy, however, this condition is fundamental to it. Democracy requires "othering."

After WWII, mainstream political science still worked to justify empire, ignoring or even covering up the atrocities of the British in Kenya, the French in Algeria, and the Americans in Vietnam. Conscripted ideologically in the Cold War, scholars such as Almond and Huntington worked under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council and similar academic and international

organizations to develop the "area studies" framework. They were eager to forestall anti-imperialist advances in the "underdeveloped" world. To them national liberation meant communism. Sometimes they adopted a more tutelary approach, ostensibly benevolent but still linked to the counterinsurgency agenda of the US, and sometimes they identified outright with imperialism and military rule in US client states (Huntington 1968).

A wide variety of political science subfields emerged after WWII, drawing closer, most notably, to political anthropology. Although largely oriented to the dominant (and at least implicitly racist) ideology of the Cold War, political anthropology and related approaches occasionally mounted radical challenges to imperialism and its defenders in the academy. Hanchard discusses the work of Georges Balandier (1970) and especially Basil Davidson (1992), the latter a prolific Africanist who worked closely with guerrilla leader and Marxist theorist Amilcar Cabral, and who wrote extensively on African liberation. (Davidson, a rather heroic Brit, had been a guerrilla himself; he had parachuted into Hungary during WWII and fought the Nazis in Yugoslavia, narrowly escaping death several times.) Challenges to mainstream political science also emerged from the imperial metropoles, where scholar-activists influenced by the civil rights and anti-imperialist movements in the US, Britain, and France sought to develop a "new political science" untethered from the racist commitments of empire and neocolonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. A particularly distinguished member of this group was Martin Kilson, the first black professor to receive tenure at Harvard (in 1969!).

As in the US, so too in France and the UK. Of course all these countries have their own varieties of racist culture and racist politics, so no exact parallel exists. All three countries have profound imperial histories, a fact the US prefers to deny. Hanchard notes the importance of the recently declassified "migrated archives" in the UK—the availability of British colonial documents from Africa, India, and other areas where the sun once refused to set—has made a radical anti-imperial political science possible in places like Kenya (Elkins 2005).

All three of these countries are receiving countries for immigration, but as a settler-colonial nation the US is distinct from the other two. Islamophobia and anti-semitism characterize all three, but the French arguably possess the most profound histories of these two racist practices. The French state obstinately refuses to recognize the existence of race, drawing ideologically on the 1789 revolution's heritage of universalism and support for "the rights of man"(*sic*). Although this posture impedes the production of census data, it amounts to little more than self-delusion in a country where racist state practices and structural racism are equivalent to those in every other "developed" nation.

Hanchard provides extensive case studies of these three countries, which will be useful for US readers less familiar with French and British racial history. He unearths their white and patriarchal academic practices of rationalizing imperialism until their various empires were overthrown, and then celebrating their supposed enlightened decolonization policies after those inevitable events had occurred. Nor did the fundamental importance of race diminish in the postcolonial epoch that followed. Race and racism are so fundamental to the nation-

state, so constitutive of citizenship in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, that they cannot be dispensed with. Citizenship is meaningless without the exclusion of "others"; there is a reason we label the acquisition of citizenship as "naturalization." As in the US, where slavery subsidized capital accumulation before the Civil War and Jim Crow subsidized it afterward, the British and French economies and polities can no more do without racism than they could do without labor exploitation, warfare, or other forms of modern plunder. In all three countries, immigration is the immanent consequence of imperial adventure, the "harvest of empire" (Gonzalez 2011 [2000]; Park 2018). Yet rarely do political scientists studying immigration make this connection. *Ethos* and *ethnos* continue to undo political coherence in country after country, and political science still does its best to cover up this blatant contradiction. Edward Augustus Freeman, Woodrow Wilson, and Samuel Huntington live on in contemporary work that still stumbles over the heterogeneity of peoples in all nation-states.

Come to think of it, that little hyphen in the commonsense phrase "nation-state" is called upon to do an impossible job. Political science and its avatars from Athens to Trump have been beset by their own insistence on racism and ethnonationalism as the preconditions for rule. Avowedly or not, they have insisted that if the nation cannot be unitary and homogeneous, then the state will have to be despotic. For centuries their "nation-states" have preoccupied themselves with curtailing, expelling, and denying difference in the service of some dominant group. Their politics must appeal to some myth of autocthony, of native and natural rights that their "true citizens" may enjoy but others may not. Democratic polities are not exempt. Postcolonial regimes are not exempt.

Hanchard's concluding chapter is a bold attempt to stake out the agenda for revitalizing, if not reinventing, the field of comparative politics, based on this indispensable recognition. He notes the presence of "the legacies of colonialism, racism, and imperialism *within* nation-states" (his emphasis), and points out how imperial policies have a way of coming home to the metropoles after being tried out in the colonies. Consider neoliberalism and structural adjustment in this regard.

If political science—and, I might add, the social sciences in general—are to confront "the spectre of race," they will have to ditch the nation-state as a unit of analysis. Basil Davidson forcefully made this point in his last book, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (1992).

Hanchard ends this work with a brief postscript titled "From Athens to Charlottesville" that goes beyond the field of political science, still largely immersed in trying to get that hyphen to do its job. Focusing on the resurgent racial reaction now on the rise all around the world, he argues that not only in our academic work, but also in our political lives, we must accept and embrace the heterogeneity of all societies, and reject as mythical and authoritarian any "holistic vision of a political community."

Democracy can only prevail if we can overcome the dogma that we can achieve a homogeneous polity undivided by race and ethnonationalism. Only if we can successfully challenge the equation of *ethos* and *ethnos*, which has for centuries taken shape as white supremacy (even if officially disavowed), can we

overcome the authoritarian and pseudo-democratic political systems (and political science doctrines) that rule the world. Only through embracing that challenge can we recognize our permanent political heterogeneity.

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