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** The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael George Hanchard

The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy

(Princeton University Press, 2018, 280 Pages, Cloth \$29.95)

Hanchard's book is a detailed discussion of the concept of race and its evolution, and how it underpins the debate on citizenship and democracy. In order to understand such a concept, the author starts from a discussion of citizenship and democracy in the ancient Athens, before and after the Greco-Persian Wars. Hanchard contends that lessons from this historical *excursus* are relevant "for a better understanding of the relationship between the practice of democracy and political inequality in the contemporary world" (p. 3). The relevance of this historical analysis stems from the political continuities that Hanchard detects: "Gender, nation ethnicity, and nationality mattered in the construction of Athenians citizenship and voting rights. Citizenship, like democracy itself, was not static, but underwent permutations and transformations in moments of crisis whether in the city-states of the ancient world now associated with the West or in the nation-states of the contemporary world system" (p. 3).

For Hanchard, the main question to address and explore is "how the practice of democracy produces – is affected – by political inequality" (p. 4). At the core of political inequality there is an organised system represented by "laws, norms, and coercive sanctions that delimited or outright prohibited non-citizen populations" (p. 5). Therefore, the formal or informal procedures,

mechanisms, laws and institutions which tend to limit the political participation of some people rather than others are at the core of political inequality.

Hanchard's idea is that social inequality has political roots "insofar as exclusionary and inclusionary criteria for citizenship formation and participation inevitably emanate from the same source: state power" (p. 6). The different forms of distinction, which seem to categorise individuals in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, social status, and religion have enormously impacted the practice of democracy. Therefore, Hanchard argues "that such forms of political inequality are not anomalous features of certain Western polities, but rather are the modern manifestations of the combination of democracy, difference and inequality first invented and implemented in classical Athens" (p. 6).

The concept of race, therefore, is really prominent in Hanchard's book because it has "enabled political actors to project the need for homogeneity among a citizen populace, making race an organizing principle for governments and popular movements alike" (p. 6).

Based on methodologies and approaches of comparative politics, the book discusses the relevance of race as a tool of political inequality starting for the 19th century in

France, Britain and the United States. Chapter one focuses on the origin of comparative politics as a field of study from the 19th century, when the American scholar Freeman provided a “systematic approach to the comparative study of political institutions in the social sciences and humanities” (p. 12). As Hanchard contends, in Freeman’s view, “the idea of race was central to political life; to the formation of a polis, commonwealth, and institutions ... The power of race lay ultimately not in its biological provenance, but in commonly held beliefs and assumptions shared by groups of people who cojoin to form political communities” (p. 36).

Chapter two focuses on the evolution of comparative politics when “the race idea became the early 20th century example of a scientifically discredited assumptions that nevertheless retained popular appeal and mobilising power” (p. 41). For Western social scientists, culture “and ethnicity were the operative concepts deployed to identify potential obstacles to political modernity in Africa and Asia” (p. 13). The 20th century thus represented the turning point in comparative politics as a field of study because Western social scientists studied “political actors and institutions cross-spatially and cross-temporally” (p. 61).

Chapter three “examines the idea of difference as a form of political distinction in democratic polities, ranging from classical Athens to the contemporary period” (p. 14). This chapter is a historical *excursus* of difference, slavery, and democracy in classical Athens in order to understand the practice of democracy in contemporary world. The main argument of the chapter is that racial “and ethno-national hierarchies, once deployed in politics, have served as instruments of political inequality and exclusion in the majority of democratic polities” (p. 67).

Chapter four provides a different perspective of democracy in Britain, France, and the

United States. For Hanchard, race and ethno-racial hierarchies are of primary importance in order to understand democracy and political development. This chapter represents “a revisionist account of existing scholarship in political science, history, sociology, and anthropology” (p. 15), thus providing “evidence of how the three countries have incorporated ethno-national and racial regimes within democratic polities” (p. 16). As it results evident from Hanchard’s discussion, the political development of some of the former colonies “of the United States, Britain, and France were structured, in part, by the ongoing economic, military and institutional interventions of these major powers” (pp. 166-167).

Chapter five is the final chapter of the book in which Hanchard focuses on the “relevance of history, local knowledge, and context in the study of comparative politics and to identify several research streams that could be developed in the exploration of political phenomena relating to ethno-national and racial regimes” (p. 168). The main question that the author addresses in the chapter is “whether it is possible to maintain, in the contemporary world, democratic polities within nondemocratic societies” (p. 169).

The book contains a Postscript in which the author tends to go beyond the historical and academic interpretations of democracy and political inequality in order to provide a key to reading what happens in people’s everyday life. The Postscript is a discussion of recent events occurred after Trump’s election “and the resurgence of authoritarian populism in both the US and Europe” (p. 207). The contribution of Hanchard’s book relies on the idea that “population homogeneity, like the category of the foreigner and citizen, is a political artifact, not something we find ready-made in the world” (p. 212). This homogeneity seems “to eclipse the need for politics ... Racial, religious, and ethno-national homogeneity will somehow beget

unanimity and the obsolescence of politics” (p. 214). Hanchard’s book seems against this essentialist view and advocates the need for a more realistic approach in which it would be closer to the truth to state “that most nation-states with histories of significant immigration have selectively accepted migration flows from certain parts of the world more readily than from other parts. Some immigrant groups have been more readily integrated into national societies than others” (p. 213).

Due to the topic, its relevance and discussion of democracy, inequality, and hierarchies, Hanchard’s book is “intended for two audiences, one within the discipline of political science, and a broader audience interested in understanding the interrelationship of racism, institutions, and modern politics” (p. 1).

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