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Branwen Gruffydd Jones

To cite this article: Branwen Gruffydd Jones (2016) Definitions and Categories: Epistemologies of Race and Critique, Postcolonial Studies, 19:2, 173-184, DOI: 10.1080/13688790.2016.1254014

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2016.1254014

Published online: 17 Jan 2017.

Article views: 106

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Definitions and Categories: Epistemologies of Race and Critique

BRANWEN GRUFFYDD JONES

In a recent discussion of the multiple relationships between science and colonialism, Suman Seth observed that ‘the history of almost all modern science, it has become clear, must be understood as “science in a colonial context”’.1 Similarly Palladino and Worboys noted that ‘for most of humanity, the history of science and imperialism is the history of science’.2 Much the same could be said of modern international thought. International Relations (IR) as a discipline, and the discipline’s antecedents in (Western) international thought, were born into and grew up in the context of European expansion, colonialism and imperialism. This relation between content and context was not contingent but central to the shaping of disciplinary knowledge. In this important book John Hobson documents in systematic detail the centrality of racial discourse to international thought from the mid-eighteenth century and the continuing legacy of eurocentrism underpinning much post-war IR scholarship into the twenty-first century.

The relation between the colonial and imperial context and the content of international thought frames the question of race in ways which demand critical attention to questions of method. How and in what ways does a historical analysis of racial thought matter, specifically in relation to international thought and practice? Hobson specifies the focus of his study as Western international theory between 1760 and 2010, ‘the last quarter millennium’.3 While enabling the inclusion of strands of thought across a variety of positions, this delimitation invites reflection on the periodization of racial thought, which is not straightforward. Treating ideas of race as a transhistorical phenomenon, various earlier scholars traced such ideas far back to Ancient Greece, China and elsewhere.4 Others, however, attending to both the geopolitical context and epistemological conditions of possibility of changing ideas, identify modernity as the significant context for the emergence of modern racial discourses.5 Scholars have examined how and why theories of ‘race’, in terms of an idea of distinct categories of human being, emerged from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the context of the development of new sciences and epistemological frameworks, especially natural history and anatomy, while a discourse of race centred on the body only became possible from the nineteenth century.6 Specifically with regard to IR, a strong case has been made that it is the era of European expansion and colonialism, from 1492 onwards, that must be acknowledged as the era of racialized international thought and practice.7 What matters in identifying this period is the use of various ideas which distinguish between peoples on some basis of comparison and hierarchy to legitimize differential modes of practice in relations within Europe, and between European and non-European peoples and political entities.
Siba Grovogui has argued that over this period Western thought ‘produced an ontology of difference due to race. This ontology emerged during the Renaissance, survived through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment debates on the nature of the moral order, and spanned nineteenth-century scientific racism to the present’. Accordingly, a defining early moment which might mark the opening of a new era of racialized international thought and practice was the issuing of Papal Bulls along the fifteenth century which authorized the enslavement of Africans by the Portuguese crown. The content and methods of racialized thought were certainly reconfigured through the shifts from the renaissance to the classical and modern epistemes, but the later epistemes reworked already existing strands of racialized thought, in terms of discourses comparing peoples and specifying inferiority and superiority on the basis of various criteria of difference. Those criteria of difference were reconfigured in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the basis of new methods of enquiry and underlying rules regarding authoritative knowledge and truth, new classificatory systems, new ideas about natural history, and later on the basis specifically of the body, skin colour, brain size and structure, and other corporal features. But across these eras, racialized thought always combined various criteria including comparative evaluation of culture, religion, social and political organization, language, appearance, intelligence, morals, manners, ways of life and so on. Certainly, it was in part the historical shift to new epistemologies which enabled a scientific discourse of race to be thought; it was also the broader colonial context. There is no easy and direct mapping between ideas and images articulated by philosophers, jurists, travellers, writers, scientists and artists, and the doctrines and practices of colonialism, slavery, international trade and conquest. Nevertheless we should bear in mind that the eighteenth century was simultaneously the era when the discourse of race became consolidated on new authoritative grounds; when there was ‘a tremendous increase in the slave trade and a profitable trans-Atlantic economy which involved most of the Western countries’, and when new ‘sagas of exploration’ took off.

In *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics* Hobson does not seek to account for nor even particularly to contextualize the emergence and development of international racial and eurocentric thought, however, but to reveal and document its centrality and complexity. His analysis foregrounds the diversity and disagreements within and between various strands of international, racial and imperial thought, eschewing homogenizing generalizations. Hobson urges recognition of the complexity of differing strands of racial international thought and the interests and political projects reflected and endorsed by various positions with regards to race. He underlines, for example, that there is no straightforward relation between ideas about race and positions for or against imperialism. There were racist pro-imperialists, racist anti-imperialists, anti-racist pro-imperialists and anti-racist anti-imperialists. Hobson develops a series of distinctions in order to clarify the similarities and differences across and between various thinkers, distinguishing positions which are paternalist eurocentric pro- or anti-imperialist; racist imperialist (liberal or realist); racist anti-imperialist; anti-paternalist eurocentric anti-imperialist. He also highlights differences within racial thought, for example between those who believed the characteristics and capabilities of
different races were fixed, and those who believed that such characteristics were ‘malleable’ and could evolve or improve. He distinguishes between ‘uncompromising eugenics’ and neo-Lamarckian social Darwinists, and between more and less progressive Lamarckian positions with regard to colonial policy. Hobson charts these distinctions across liberal, conservative, realist, socialist, radical and pacifist positions and traditions of thought. Thus he underlines that many left liberals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century embraced scientific racism, reminding us, for example, that pillars of the British welfare state such as John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge were members of the Eugenics Society. Among realist racist imperialists, Hobson distinguishes ‘indirect exterminists’ from ‘direct exterminists’. He demonstrates that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries arguments for or against war articulated by European and North American writers and politicians were informed by widely varying positions regarding race. Hobson exposes the racial views of figures who will be familiar to many an IR student, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, while also demonstrating the strength of racial international thought in the work of a range of other figures that few IR students would come across, precisely because of the discipline’s denial of its origins in racial thought and imperial times.

Others have also foregrounded the complexity of intellectual and political positions regarding race, slavery and colonialism. Drescher, for example, provides vivid evidence of changing and complicated positions on race, slavery and abolition held by planters, abolitionists, ethnologists and humanitarians in Britain and France from the 1780s to 1840s. It matters how we apprehend this ideational complexity, precisely because of the relationship between ideas and practice and the broader normalization of social and international orders. In his analysis of the discipline of anthropology’s constitutive ethnocentrism, Valentin Mudimbe distinguishes two dimensions:

an epistemological filiation and an ideological connection. In fact they are often complementary and inseparable. The first is a link to an episteme, that is, an intellectual atmosphere which gives to anthropology its status as discourse, its significance as a discipline, and its credibility as a science in the field of human experience. The second is an intellectual and behavioural attitude which varies among individuals. Basically this attitude is both a consequence and an expression of a complex connection between the scholar’s projection of consciousness, the scientific models of his time, and the cultural and social norms of his society.

We might think of Hobson’s project as focusing on the second of these dimensions, foregrounding and dissecting the variations of intellectual and behavioural attitude and political position within the works of numerous individual thinkers concerned with IR. In order to render manageable and bring clarity and precision to an analysis of a vast array of texts, arguments and positions over more than two centuries, Hobson develops a system of classification through which he can specify the distinguishing attributes of various positions and texts, their similarities and contrasts. What is curious is that though his own ideological connection is clear, and clearly critical, Hobson’s methodological approach seems to be situated within the epistemological filiation in which racial thought came to be constituted. That is, he employs analytical methods which, in themselves, mirror the methods central to
the consolidation of racial discourse at the beginning of the period that Hobson examines.

Hobson identifies four ‘generic variants’ of ‘Orientalist’ thought in international theory, obtained by breaking down the concept of orientalism ‘into two component parts—scientific racism and Eurocentric institutionalism—and then subdividing these categories into their imperialist and anti-imperialist components’. The distinguishing criteria of these different variants are presented in summary form in a four by four table which ‘reveals the four key dimensions of “generic” Eurocentrism that existed in the period 1760–1945’. Hobson further distinguishes ‘a large variety of positions’ within each of these four primary variants. 1945 is taken as a turning point after which the first variant of scientific racism ‘disappears from IR theory’. The post-1945 period of international theory is categorized by differentiating, within the remaining generic variant of Eurocentric institutionalism, ‘subliminal’ from ‘manifest’ Eurocentrism; and further distinguishing between orthodox or critical, and, as previously, imperialist or anti-imperialist positions. This categorization provides the over-arching framework for the organization of the book. Each chapter examines the work of a range of scholars and thinkers whose views, arguments, attitudes and positions exemplify the category specified in the chapter title—‘just enough thinkers to support my claim that in aggregate they represent one type or genre of “Eurocentrism”, but not too many that the depth of analysis is lost’—thus overall providing a complex mapping of the varieties, similarities, differences, contradictions and changes within racist and eurocentric international thought over two and a half centuries.

This method, from the vocabulary of ‘generic variants’ to the use of visual devices to bring order to the complexity of ideas, has uncanny parallels with the method of classification which emerged as a defining feature of the scientific discourse of race from the eighteenth century. While European cosmographies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries necessarily entailed some concern with identifying differences between the societies described, the role of classification took on a new importance from the eighteenth century, as ideas about race came to be reformulated on what was considered a scientific basis.

Fascination with collecting and compiling objects and knowledge had long existed within Europe, manifest in the famous ‘cabinets of curiosity’, cosmographies and encyclopaedias. The convergence of these impulses is manifest in the botanical garden, in which were contained collections of local and foreign plants, gathered from voyages of collection and exploration near and far, and which made possible the systematic study of plants by naturalists. This also, of course, brings in the colonial context: it was through voyages of exploration and colonial conquest that objects—plants, rocks, animals, people and artefacts—were brought back to nourish the curiosity, quest for knowledge and profits of European scholars, statesmen and traders. Thus the botanical garden was soon followed by the zoological collection and the museum in housing the samples, specimens and skulls upon which European knowledge across botany, zoology, anatomy, geology and anthropology was, in part, constructed. During the eighteenth century natural history, and specifically botany, emerged at the forefront of new classificatory methods in the construction of comprehensive scientific knowledge. Attempts to produce comprehensive and systematic, ordered knowledge of
the natural world entailed naming and defining types, so as to introduce order to the infinite diversity of plants and animals. Such was the life-work of the Swedish botanist Carl Linneaus, who is acknowledged as having pioneered a new method of classification. Linneaus’s system of classification and ordering, his taxonomy, was based on analysing and comparing visible aspects of natural beings, and constructed by assembling and naming the many types in an ordered hierarchy (classes, orders, genera, species and varieties) on the basis of shared or divergent visible attributes (similarities and differences).

The classification of human varieties was undertaken in the context of these developments in natural history, within botany and later anatomy. That is, the methods developed for the study of the natural world were seamlessly applied also to the classification of humans into distinct groups or varieties. Linneaus is widely acknowledged as one of the first to categorize peoples in terms of a discrete number of races, although efforts to identify distinct human groups using the terms ‘race’ and ‘species’ had been undertaken during the seventeenth century, notably by the French traveller, philosopher and physician François Bernier in his *Nouvelle division de la Terre, par les différentes Espèces ou Races d’hommes qui l’habitent* published in 1684. Linneaus was, however, the first to position humans within an overall scientific classification of animals and plants. In his major work of taxonomy *Systema Naturae* (first published 1735, with numerous subsequent editions), in which he sought to classify the whole of the natural world, Linneaus identified four varieties of human: *Europaeus albus*, *Americanus rubescens*, *Asiaticus fuscus* and *Africanus niger*.

The contemporary and subsequent elaboration of the notion of race and racial classifications within scientific and philosophical discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both drew on and reacted against the scheme and methods of Linneaus. His student Blumenbach later elaborated a scheme specifying five rather than four varieties; his rival and critic Buffon rejected the botanist’s static scheme as arbitrary and artificial, and proposed instead an understanding of racial characteristics inherited over time. Kant, Bernasconi has documented, expended considerable energy in the 1770s–1780s elaborating the concept of race and describing the characteristics of different races, and his works were very much informed by Buffon’s critique of Linneaus’s method. And if, in the nineteenth century, within racial science as such these static classificatory methods were superseded by theories of evolution underpinned by a temporal conception of change, they were employed by Victorian anthropologists and ethnologists in their constructions of taxonomies of human societies in a hierarchy of civilization, whether static or evolutionary, whether the work of physical anthropologists measuring skulls or of social anthropologists categorizing tribes and cultural systems. While methods of classification differed, they shared underlying epistemological presuppositions regarding the production of authoritative scientific knowledge. Entities were defined and distinguished on the basis of similarities and differences between visible or empirical characteristics. The relations between types were characteristically displayed or illustrated in the form of tables and diagrams; indeed Foucault has argued that the ‘centre of knowledge, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the table’.
The logic of classification was not only central to the early articulation of a scientific discourse of race, but was also integral to various modes of government which produced racialized social and international orders—as Barnor Hesse has argued, ‘epistemological racialisation’ is inherently related to ‘governmental racialisation’. Classification of people according to a racial hierarchy was integral to legal governance in the slave-based societies of the Caribbean, North and South America from the seventeenth century, the United States in the nineteenth century, and Apartheid South Africa and Australia in the twentieth century. Classification of societies and peoples on a scale of ‘civilisation’, on the basis of anthropological knowledge, was from the mid-nineteenth century integral to positivist international law regulating colonial conquest, as well as doctrines legitimizing colonial governance and dispossession.

Of course the purpose and context of classificatory analysis in racial thought, and in critical analysis of racial thought, differ radically and fundamentally. Yet there might be some unintended consequences of this analytical approach for Hobson’s project. What is gained in analytical clarity and precision perhaps comes at the expense of a clear sense of the political stakes underpinning Hobson’s critique.

Isabelle Charmantier has provided a fascinating discussion of the role of visual representation in Linnaeus’s work. She emphasizes that practices of organizing information in a visual form were central to both his method of enquiry and the presentation of his analysis. Linnaeus drew on methods acquired from his education to develop a peculiarly visual mode of thought, which constituted ‘an essential part of Linnaeus’s attempts to bring order to an ever-increasing amount of data about the natural world’. These methods derived from the Ramist ‘commonplacings’ traditions which emphasized the use of tables, diagrams and lists and the methodical ordering of copied notes to assist learning. Linnaeus used analytical and naturalistic drawings as an analytical tool to convey structural information about plants, and maps, tables and diagrams to structure both the process of analysis and the representation of large quantities of information. He sought to classify the infinite variety of beings in the natural world, and tables and diagrams enabled the summary display of these classifications. He also employed these methods to organize his study of the classifications of other naturalists, using ‘dichotomous diagrams’, a central feature of the Ramist method used widely in natural history, to summarize and organize his analysis of the works of others. These diagrams offered ‘quickly and easily understood outlines of complex subjects’, and were accompanied by ‘a concern for conciseness in vocabulary used, an emphasis on relevant differences’.

Charmantier comments that the use of these methods to facilitate the ambition of arranging complex information in a clear format on the space of a page often involved some form of ‘flattening’. His drawings ‘are often flattened; foreshortening and perspective are eschewed in preference to displaying information as plainly as possible’. Drawings, maps, tables and diagrams formed part of a visual analytical language or method, ‘flattened on the page in order to convey as much information as possible in a visually striking way’. Linnaeus’s tables were usually contained on one page or at most a double-spread, which enabled him ‘to contain the information in a restricted paper space, and to limit it to a manageable
What she refers to as the ‘alliance of a diagram and a table’ underpinned his display of information in his *Systema Naturae*:

a diagram for the main tenets—the key—and a table going into more details. … In effect, the page acts as a kind of box: the table is a contained whole, enclosed by lines and filled with boxes within boxes at every level: class, order, and finally genus.

These visual tools were also important in the actual working out of his classifications: ‘The arrangement of data into diagrams or tables helped Linnaeus to think about the relationships between genera or, at a higher level, of orders and classes, to organize them in space, and to find adequate means of classifying them.’ The written text in his books was arranged according to a methodical, spatial or visual logic, mirroring in the organization of paragraphs the structural features of the plant he was analysing.

Hobson also makes considerable use of tables and diagrams to map the complexity of the thought he addresses, clarifying his distinctions between positions with regard to similarities and differences. At times this results in a four-fold or more complex scheme, elsewhere the chronological development of different ideas are mapped. This has the effect of rendering on the same plane quite different strands of thought at different times and contexts, summarizing in a concise manner the similarities and differences between a wide array of works. The overall classificatory scheme, as described in the book’s introduction, structures the ordering of the analysis in the book’s parts, chapters and chapter sub-sections. This enables the coherent and systematic presentation and analysis of ‘a vast swathe’ of primary texts and intellectual approaches. Nevertheless, this method also carries certain risks, insofar as effects of the analytical method are imposed sometimes through and sometimes alongside and in spite of Hobson’s own discussion. The result, perhaps analogous to Charmantier’s comments on Linnaeus’s method, is a curious flattening out of the political stakes informing this project. I will try to illustrate what I mean with two examples.

In the early part of the book, readers might find surprising and perplexing some of the conclusions or evaluations made which arise from the classificatory method and the attendant strong attention to distinguishing ‘racer’ from other forms of ‘eurocentric’ thought. For example Hobson examines the works of Norman Angell, noting that despite his location within IR’s imagined genealogy at the ‘climax of liberal internationalism’, his views constituted a form of paternalist eurocentrism and progressive evolutionism which informed a qualified support for imperialism. Angell’s argument for interdependence in *The Great Illusion* (1913) referred only to the ‘civilized’ states of Europe. He supported imperial conquest and control over various non-European societies on the grounds that the civilizing mission would enable ‘race conservation’ and ‘the survival of the unfit’, arguing that the ‘inferior race’ in India ‘not only survives, but is given an extra lease of life by virtue of the conquest’. Hobson underlines that unlike some of his contemporaries Angell supported a ‘benign and peaceful imperialism’ such as that of Britain, whose methods were ‘commercial and peaceful’, in contrast to what Angell terms the military processes and methods of Spain, Portugal and France. Angell supported England’s ‘work of policing backward or disorderly
populations’ in India and elsewhere, on the grounds of the superior qualities of the English. Hobson cites the following passage from Angell’s book:

Not that Fuzzy Wuzzy is not a fine fellow. He is manly, sturdy, hardy, with a courage, and warlike qualities generally, which no European can equal. But the frail and spectacled English official is his master, and a few score of such will make themselves the masters of teeming thousands of Sudanese; the relatively unwarlike Englishman is doing the same thing all over Asia, and he is doing it simply by virtue of superior brain and character, more thought, more rationalism, more steady and controlled hard work … Force is indeed the master, but it is the force of intelligence, and rationalism.

Hobson certainly does IR a service in revealing such views held by a key figure of the discipline’s tradition of liberal internationalism. Yet according to his criteria of classification Angell represents a paternalist eurocentric institutionalism. Specifically, Hobson rejects ‘the claim that Angell’s book was racist’. An analytical and comparative classificatory method which leads to this conclusion seems difficult to comprehend. Hobson’s distinction between ‘eurocentric institutionalism’ and ‘scientific racism’ seems to restrict the identification of ‘racist’ thought strictly to ideas which upheld solely a biological or genetic view of race, including but not limited to eugenics, leaving much of what many would consider evidently racialized thought to the category of ‘eurocentric institutionalism’. It appears also that at times the use of these terms to categorize strands of thought is conflated with an assumption that to do so is to criticize, accuse or ‘smear’ a particular author with the charge of being ‘racist’. It is for this very reason that many scholars use the term racialized or racial thought in the critique of thought from previous centuries.

The later parts of the book (parts III and IV) analyse the continuing eurocentrism of international theory across several strands of the discipline in the post-1945 era up to the present. These chapters provide a detailed dissection of a succession of approaches and authors—classical realism, neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, the English school, neo-Gramscian scholarship, World Systems Theory, and finally post-1989 ‘western realism’ and ‘western liberalism’. Much of this critique is convincing, warranted and important. However, the very use of classificatory terminology and comparative method which is intended to enable important distinctions between these various works has the effect of positioning widely divergent approaches with quite different political motivations and implications on the same plane of analysis, such that it becomes quite difficult to grasp the stakes of the critique—that is, the differing stakes of the various types of problem being identified within this over-arching typology or taxonomy of eurocentric thought.

In Chapter 10 under the category of ‘Critical Subliminal Eurocentrism’ Hobson examines World Systems Theory through the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, and Neo-Gramscian thought through the work of Robert Cox, as the two main forms of neo-Marxist IR. He argues that these approaches ‘(re)appear as minor variations on a consistent anti-paternalist Eurocentric theme’. In both cases Hobson reveals forms of eurocentrism underpinning their historical analyses of the development of global capitalism, which assumes a process of endogenous development taking place within Europe and then spreading outwards to the rest of the world, and ignores or denies altogether any capacity for ‘agency’ on the part of non-
Western societies. One consequence of this, Hobson argues, is to naturalize the relations of capitalism and Western domination. Thus Cox’s work, Hobson concludes, instead of performing the work of critical theory in denaturalizing the present, actually becomes a form of ahistorical ‘problem-solving theory’ which generates ‘albeit unwittingly, a defence of the Western interest in general and the American interest in particular’. The next chapter turns to various strands of post-1989 ‘Western realism’, including the work of Samuel Huntington, Michael Ignatieff, Robert Kaplan, Niall Ferguson and others. Through detailed examination of the logic, substance and vocabulary of their works, Hobson elaborates the important argument that, for this form of ‘Western neo-imperialist international theory’, ‘non-Western polities are not recognized as sovereign if their instability poses a clear and present danger to western states’, a position which is ‘congruent with the imperialist discourse of the standard of civilization/standard of statehood’.

Thus the analysis and critique of ‘Critical Subliminal Eurocentrism’ and ‘Imperialist Eurocentrism’ in these two chapters is quite different, and matters in very different ways. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the detail in the successive sections of analysis, placing these various approaches on the same ultimate terrain of eurocentrism leaves the reader with the impression that they suffer from the same problems, all ultimately defending the interests of the West. While the racialized tone and logic of analyses of ‘failed states’ comes through clearly despite the narrow definition of ‘racism’ employed in the book, Hobson actively imposes a racialized vocabulary onto neo-Gramscian and World Systems scholarship where it does not exist. In his opening diagram of Chapter 10 and within the text, the argument that these approaches, due to their underlying eurocentrism, fetishize the agency of the West and ignore that of the rest through a subliminal three-worlds hierarchy is articulated by indicating that this reproduces categories of civilized, barbaric, savage and primitive. Here, the logic of comparison imposes a racialized terminology on the work Cox and Wallerstein which is not warranted. More generally, within this comparative classificatory method, important political distinctions between neo-Gramscian scholarship and that of advocates of neo-trusteeship seem to get lost. It is the analytical method of comparison and classification which flattens out the critique, making it difficult to grasp a sense of the very different political stakes of these approaches. The eurocentrism of progressive critical scholars on the left is a problem, but of a very different kind to that of neo-conservative scholars advocating new forms of imperial trusteeship.

*The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics* is a major piece of scholarship and an important contribution to the discipline of IR and well beyond. Hobson is right to underline the centrality, complexity and contradictions of racial discourse and eurocentrism within international thought, and the diversity of political positions correlating with distinct ideas about race or with underlying eurocentric assumptions. His book irrefutably demonstrates that racial and eurocentric thought was not merely coincidental with but constitutive of the discipline of IR. Paraphrasing Mudimbe’s comment on anthropology, Hobson confirms that racial and eurocentric discourse ‘is not, as some scholars thought, an unfortunate mishap, nor a stupid accident, but one of the major signs of possibility’ of the discipline. In addition, and inadvertently, his analysis serves to caution us to the political
effects of international thought’s methodological devices as well as its explicit content.

Notes on Contributor

Branwen Gruffydd Jones is Reader in International Relations in the School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University. She previously taught for several years in the Department of Politics, Goldsmiths, University of London. Her teaching and research focus on Africa in international relations. She is editor of Decolonizing International Relations (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). Her current project, African Anticolonialism in International Relations, examines the political thought and practice of the liberation movements of Portugal’s African colonies in the broader continental and global context of decolonization.

Notes

10 Seth, Europe’s Indians.
14 Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, p 3.
15 Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, p 3, and passim.
16 Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, p 10.
20 With regard to Linnaeus, see Patricia Fara, Sex, Botany and Empire: The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks, Allen & Unwin, 2003; more generally see Schiebinger and Swan (eds), Colonial Botany: Science,
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Siep Stuurman, ‘François Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification’, History Workshop Journal, 50, 2000, pp 1–21; Robert Bernasconi (ed), Concepts of Race in the Eighteenth Century vol. 1: Bernier. Linnaeus and Maspertius, with an introduction and editor’s notes by Robert Bernasconi, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001. I am not attempting to plot a concise history of racial thought here, still less to explain these developments, but to note the role of a system of classification as part of the early emergence of a scientific discourse of race. Doron argues that it was only with the shift from a classificatory to a genealogical style of reasoning in natural history later in the eighteen century that the concept of race became possible within natural history, thus identifying the French anatomist Buffon as having the most significant original impact on the formation of the concept of race (Claude-Olivier Doron, ‘Race and Genealogy: Buffon and the Formation of the Concept of “Race”’, Humana Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies, 22, 2012, pp 75–109). Stephen Gould considers that it was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach who ‘established the most influential of all racial classifications’; that ‘we credit Blumenbach, rather than Linnaeus, as the founder of racial classification’ (Stephen J Gould, ‘The Geometer of Race’, Discover, November, 1994, pp 65–69, pp 65–66); while Bernasconi and Lott consider that it was ‘Kant, rather than, for example, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, who was the first to develop a rigorous scientific concept of race’ (Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L Lott (eds), The Idea of Race, Hackett Publishing Company, 2000, p viii).

Bernasconi, ‘Who Invented the Concept of Race?’ p 15.


George-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, was, Andrew Curran tells us, the keeper of the Jardin du Roi, France’s main botanical garden, and as such, responsible for ‘providing an objective inventory of the king’s natural history cabinet’. Curran, The Anatomy of Blackness, p 74.


Foucault, The Order of Things, p 75.

Hesse, ‘Racialized Modernity’.


38 Charmantier, ‘Carl Linnaeus’, p 386.


41 Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, pp 12, 14.

42 Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, pp 40–41.


46 See also Hobson’s discussion of J A Hobson, in The Eurocentric Conception, pp 45–51.

47 For example: Angell, The Great Illusion, p 151, cited in Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception, p 44.