

Book reviews

The life and death of democracy is considerably more expansive than that found elsewhere. Keane strongly refutes the commonplaces that ancient democracy was an invention of ancient Athens, and that its modern successor emerged from either side of the Atlantic. Against this western-centric narrative, the author presents a more global history, illustrating how developments have appeared in many unexpected places. This broadening of the conventional story is of great value, notably showing the important role Islam has played, as well as unearthing the curious tendency for institutional innovations to emerge from the periphery. Nonetheless, at certain points Keane goes too far in countering the longstanding problem of western-centrism. In particular, insufficient consideration is given to the monumental French Revolution. It is well-traversed ground, but still remains a pivotal moment in the development of representative democracy, and since this book seeks to provide a comprehensive history, greater attention should have been given to the event. In addition to providing a far greater geographical scope, the author further unsettles received opinions by providing a drastically different historical periodization. For most observers, the prevailing form of democracy is representative in nature: it may be fraying around the edges, and undergoing some changes, but most would accept that democracy still means representative democracy. Keane thinks otherwise, even suggesting that the era of representative democracy has ended, replaced by an emergent form he terms 'monitory democracy': 'What is distinctive about this new historical type of democracy', Keane proposes, 'is the way *all fields of social and political life* come to be scrutinized, not just by the standard machinery of representative democracy but by a whole host of *non-party, extra-parliamentary* and often *unelected bodies* operating within, underneath and beyond the boundaries of territorial states' (italics in original, p. 695).

The third part of the book is devoted to considering the mutation of representative democracy into this more complex and multivalent version, monitory democracy. In making his case, Keane provides an impressive list of power-monitoring inventions, and illustrates at length the shifting nature of contemporary democratic politics. Democracy may not be quite the same beast it was half a century ago. It is less clear, however, whether all the changes Keane identifies collectively constitute something coherent enough to be considered a new kind of democracy. Indeed, one could acknowledge all the trends the author identifies, but still remain unconvinced that what one is left with is actually democracy; it could simply be a post-modern pastiche of modes of governance. Regardless, what Keane's bold account of monitory democracy provides is a valuable opening to begin discussing these issues, as part of considering the current shape and likely future of democracy. In this sense, even though *The life and death of democracy* is a history, the focus is very much on the now, and what is to come. The book is motivated by a genuine, but carefully tempered, belief in democracy—understood through the key virtue of humility—and a recognition generated by historical reflection that democracy remains something fragile, contingent and incomplete. One of the great strengths of this impressive work lies in the way history is employed to construct a compelling normative defence of democracy. In this regard, Keane even shows how writing history itself can be a democratic act. At a time when democracy's fortunes are looking unclear, *The life and death of democracy* is a powerful intervention from a considered student and supporter of democracy, one that will surely be a benchmark text for years to come.

Christopher Hobson, University of Aberystwyth, UK

Democracy kills: what's so good about the vote?. By Humphrey Hawksley. London: Macmillan. 2009. 356pp. Pb.: £12.99. ISBN 978 0 23074 408 0.

During the past decade, as 'democracy promotion' and military campaigns against enemies dubbed terrorists have gathered pace, war, violence and democracy have become fashionable publishing topics. Scholarly interest in the realist writings of Thomas Hobbes, Carl Schmitt and René Girard is flourishing. Some commentators daringly conclude that democracy is a strange impossibility because it always rests on founding acts of violence. Others insist that it has a 'dark side' (Michael Mann), or that electoral democracy sups with the devils of political violence (Paul Collier). The English journalist Humphrey Hawksley joins the chorus with the eye-catching dust jacket claim that 'democracy, far from setting us free, might actually kill us'. Drawing on data gathered by an outsourced

16

International Affairs 86: 2, 2010

© 2010 The Author(s). Journal Compilation © 2010 Blackwell Publishing Ltd/The Royal Institute of International Affairs

Governance, civil society and cultural politics

research service, Hawksley claims that since 1989 around 10 million people have died as a consequence of American, British and allied efforts to introduce 'western-style democracy'. That figure serves to underscore his arresting conclusion: 'If democracy is not implemented carefully, the process could cause the deaths of a lot of people and fail to deliver dignity and good governance'.

The conjecture is controversial. Although dodging tough questions about what democracy means—the book embraces an electoralist definition of representative democracy—Hawksley adds Realism to talk of democratization by highlighting the entanglement of democratic institutions and ideals in the facts and fantasies of violence and war. The book is a healthy corrective to evolutionist, Fukuyama-style views of democracy, those that see only its 'world-historical' tendency to spread freedom and secular, science-induced economic growth across the whole earth, as if democracy is the fulfilment of our destiny. Hawksley's description of democracy as an engine of violence is nevertheless unconvincing. The credibility problem stems partly from book marketing, and partly from faulty logic.

Hawksley is an intrepid survivor of a declining species, a brave and honest foreign reporter with a strong reputation for questioning shibboleths. It is thus a pity that the book, a set of well-written anecdotes drawn from worldwide assignments during the past two decades, is tempted for the sake of sales to sensationalize its subject. Hawksley certainly offers readers plenty of graphic field material, gathered under difficult conditions. He is in top form when summarizing encounters with political figures like Walid Jumblatt and Gregorio (Gringo) Honasan, or when describing contexts, from the Ivory Coast to Iraq and the Philippines, corrupted by armed thugs, thieving politicians, money and other commodities like drugs, cocoa and oil.

The difficulty is that the book comprises a string of connected stories in search of a single plausible plot whose shocking thesis—democracy kills—draws on faulty inductivist logic. Hawksley in effect says: if in contexts A, B, C and D efforts are made to hold fair, free and clean elections, and if in the same contexts A, B, C and D there are simultaneous outbreaks of violence that make a mockery of electoral democracy, then it follows that democracy is responsible for the injury and death produced by that violence. The inference does not follow; the logic of induction proves nothing. Several cases discussed (India and Argentina) in fact point to the opposite conclusion. What this book in fact highlights, by default, is the need for a fresh and comprehensive look at both the changing historical meaning of democracy and the exacting conditions that must obtain for transitions to democracy to be successful. The poor success record of democracy-building, especially following the intervention of local or outside military forces, does not prove that democracy is suited only to a few lucky peoples, as Hawksley implies, and comes close to saying when admiring the stable prosperity of post-democratic Singapore. The mixed success of democratization efforts—success in India, South Africa and Poland, failure in Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan—rather highlights the point that democracy flourishes only when the most stringent conditions are met.

Hawksley's random description of democracy failures jumbles together variables (elections, army factions, guerrillas, military interventions, black market transactions, ailing health services) that need to be analysed separately and with more care. What then are the vital variables for ensuring that killing does not become confused with power-sharing, constitutional democracy? Contrary to the textbooks, the experience of EU democracy promotion shows that successful democratization does not necessarily require a sovereign territorial state. Minimally, democratization requires a set of governing institutions capable of exercising authority over a given territory by extracting and distributing revenue, producing public goods and, of course, protecting citizens against violence. Democratic self-government further requires a form of 'trusteeship' managed by multilateral institutions that help produce a viable, wider regional settlement (Hawksley calls this 'mentoring', but the term is imprecise). Democracies rarely flourish on their own; successful transitions to democracy always depend on outside help. They thus depend on finding remedies for overcoming the great tension between the promise of self-government by citizens and the reality of outside interference, for instance by an invading democratic power. Since the military power to enforce submission never translates spontaneously into the power of the conquered survivors to form stable democratic governments and law-enforced civil societies, democratization further requires a clear timetable for

Book reviews

withdrawal. Also vital is the cultivation of power-monitoring mechanisms, functioning markets and other institutions of civil society. Finally, real efforts must be made by occupiers and local leaders to nurture people's trust, not just through respect for local traditions and political aspirations, but especially by encouraging local populations to speak out against those in charge of the transition, to give them a taste of their own medicine by subjecting them to the mechanisms of monitory democracy that this book—with its elections equal democracy bias—wants us to ignore.

John Keane, University of Westminster, UK, and Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, Germany

Political economy, economics and development

The idea of justice. By Amartya Sen. London: Allen Lane. 2009. 468pp. £25.00. ISBN 978 1 84614 147 8.

Against injustice: the new economics of Amartya Sen. Edited by Reiko Gotoh and Paul Dumouchel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 317pp. £55.00. ISBN 978 0 52189 959 8.

Amartya Sen's latest book rehearses an argument that has been present in his work since the 1960s, namely that the perfect must not be made the enemy of the good. Instead of searching vainly for a perfectly just society, Sen argues, which he believes has been the aim of most moral philosophers, including his close and much lamented friend John Rawls, we should be guided by a desire to make the imperfect less imperfect. Specifically, we should not allow transcendental forms of discourse to displace comparative or economic forms of reasoning; it is these which better highlight what can be done now to mitigate the injustices of illiteracy, hunger or gender discrimination.

This simple but crucially important insight is explored in *The idea of justice* in classically Senian terms. Sen generally begins his books by taking aim at competing accounts of what he wants to explore—be they of inequality, freedom or justice. His sights here are set courteously, scrupulously and yet firmly on contractarian theories of justice, or 'transcendental institutionalism'—the route from Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant through to Rawls's classic work, *A theory of justice* (Belknap, 1971). Work by Ronald Dworkin and Robert Nozick is also treated under this heading, no matter that they are strange bedfellows. Sen objects to transcendental institutionalism on two main grounds: that even reasoning and fair-minded individuals will disagree on the institutional rules that define a perfectly just society; and that a redundant search for perfection can hold back actions that will improve the capabilities of people living with injustice.

Against transcendentalism, Sen commends an intellectual tradition that includes Adam Smith, Nicolas de Condorcet, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jeremy Bentham, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. In his view this lineage provides greater traction for thinking practically about the removal of concrete injustices. (As ever, Sen is careful to distance himself both from utilitarianism and from Marxism, the latter of which has transcendental ambitions of its own.) In *The idea of justice*, Sen adds to this binary genealogy another which derives from his interests in India and South Asia. Sen invokes 'a classical distinction in Indian jurisprudence' between *niti* and *nyaya* to reinforce his central argument that agitations against injustice need not invoke an idea of perfectly just social arrangements to improve justice. He gives the example of the anti-slavery movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'The central recognition here is that the realization of justice in the sense of *nyaya* is not just a matter of judging institutions and rules [*niti*], but of judging the societies themselves'.

Thus described, the main arguments of *The idea of justice* will seem straightforward. When it comes to the manner in which Sen chooses to flesh out these arguments, however, the non-specialist reader will find more technical discussion here than in Sen's bestselling and complementary book, *Development as freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1999). The first half of *The idea of justice* reads at times like a long conversation with Sen's erstwhile colleague at Harvard, John Rawls. The book is dedicated to Rawls's memory and the tone throughout is affectionate, even reverential. Whether Rawls would be entirely pleased with the work he is made to do here, or indeed in much of Sen's recent corpus, is another issue. Sen has few problems setting aside the theories of justice generated by libertarians, utilitarians or Marxists. Rawls, though, presents him with the problem of what I would call close-