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The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order

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version of the *World Development Report on Poverty* in 2000 and the controversies around the underlying ideological stance, its attempt to combine these three dimensions of well-being was *in part* a response to an emerging consensus on a broader evaluation methodology transcending a money metric. The second omission – no less serious than the first – has to do with the author's lack of familiarity with the resurgence of academic interest in institutional change, following Douglas North's (1981) pioneering contribution. He thus pays scant attention to the proliferation of scholarly contributions during the last five years that remain sharply divided on whether institutional reforms precede or follow liberalization.[1] So whatever the form of convergence among different stakeholders and subsidiarity or congruence of democratic development to US foreign policy, it must be said that the development community remains divided on the primacy of institutions and the triggers to reform them.

In conclusion, this is an admirably rich and scholarly contribution to the new development agenda. It deserves a wide readership among development practitioners and academic scholars as it contains valuable new insights into *why* and *how* the development discourse has changed so dramatically in recent years.

Note

1. For an exposition and some new evidence, see Gaiha and Kulkarni (2005).

References

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Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 274 pp., ISBN 0231131240 (hbk), 0231504195 (electronic).

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In the words of its author, 'this book had no other ambition than to contribute to [a] democratic critique of democracy' (p. 224). This critique consists basically in

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labelling as 'ambiguous', 'ambivalent', 'paradoxical' or even 'ironical' most of the processes that caused 'democracy and human rights to have become the organizing principles of a new international order' (p. 1).

Using several case studies of institutions, scientific theories and individual actors, Guilhot traces the development of ideas about democracy and human rights in order to demonstrate that there has been a 'transformation of the nature, the form and the function of emancipatory activism' that 'corresponds to the *migration of socially progressive repertoires of collective action . . . from social movements often opposing state institutions to the most dominant state institutions themselves*' (pp. 3–4; emphasis in original). He links this transformation to processes of professionalization and technical specialization of such activism and to the creation of a global market 'developed around the profitable business of exporting democracy and the rule of law' (p. 3). Guilhot notices here an 'intrinsic ambivalence' that makes him see the actors in this field as 'double agents' (p. 11).

His emphasis is not so much on the traditional actors of civic activism, such as NGOs, but rather on more recently and increasingly involved ones such as 'think tanks, philanthropic foundations, state administrations, international organizations such as United Nations or the World Bank, private consulting firms, professional associations, activist lawyers and, last but not least, academic scholars' (p. 2). Rather than defining a judicious and systematic sample of groups to support his contentions, Guilhot simply chooses select institutions and individuals to illustrate his arguments. In fact, this book is more an ideological and denunciatory essay anchored in sociological concepts than a proper sociological enquiry.

Guilhot contends that the field of democracy promotion and human rights 'has developed as a bridge or as a common ground between progressive, internationalist areas of American politics on the one hand, and a cadre of cold war strategists on the other hand' (p. 9). The first chapter analyses the genealogy of the neoconservative branch of that convergence. He situates its origins among the European immigrants of the 1930s. Guilhot seeks to demonstrate how strongly anti-Stalinist leftists (socialists and Trotskyites) gradually moved into liberal anti-Communism and then to Reaganism. They rose to strategic institutional positions during the Cold War, mainly within cultural power, becoming, contends Guilhot, 'the very social foundation of the main anti-communist strategies articulated by the State Department and the CIA in the late 1940s' (pp. 39–40). Underlying this political and social rise was their commitment to a concept of democracy no longer conceived as the outcome of material or structural processes 'but rather [as] an *idea* that must be defended and promoted through modern means of communication and propaganda, political technologies, and cultural productions' (p. 33; emphasis in original). Later, with their support for the Vietnam War in the face of an emergent and highly critical New Left, they moved a step further into neoconservatism. At that point, the idea of democracy was then divested of its social and economic features. During the 1970s, this group retreated from state institutions and entered trade unions, policy research centres and think tanks – which mushroomed in this decade – among them the National Endowment for Democracy, which is thoroughly analysed, especially in Chapter 2. They gave research a more adversarial style and ideological combativeness and, by the 1980s, regained influence in defining public policy, introducing their 'militant, fervently internationalist

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and revolutionary political culture' into the Reagan administration (p. 67). Social sciences were important throughout this process. Guilhot analyses the role played by the concept of totalitarianism and considers, among others, the contributions of Daniel Bell, John Dewey, Paul Lazarsfeld and Seymour Martin Lipset.

An important point made in Chapter 2 is the identification of the 'tension between [this] more ideological and combative understanding of the defence of democracy, and a more legalistic one' (p. 73) that has to do mainly with the positioning of the United States in the United Nations and on the world scene. Under the Carter administration, human rights were envisaged as legal norms that should be enforced through international law, but in the Reagan administration they were dealt with under the notion of 'democracy promotion', and thereby linked to national institutions and social structures. This shift meant 'a strong moral legitimation for a policy of intervention and confrontation' (p. 79) and it cancelled 'the discrepancy between principles and interests which had always fuelled the critique of the US foreign policy' (p. 80). Guilhot points out that 'while "human rights" tended to determine a certain degree of antagonism between activist networks and the state, democracy promotion organized their convergence' (p. 80), and situates the emergence of the global market for exporting democracy in this latter context.

Chapters 3 and 4 trace the development of democratization studies. First Guilhot analyses the foundations and the role of the paradigm on development that was dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, especially area studies and comparative politics. Their aim was to inform policies of foreign aid and development assistance, but their failure was widely recognized, and led to the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the late 1960s and 1970s. Criticism came from both the South (dependency theory) and the North (Latin American studies), and from the convergence of both emerged the studies on transitions to democracy that would inform the foreign policy agenda of the late 1980s and 1990s, especially through North American foundations. One of its main features was the abandonment of a structuralist approach – which appeared as an obstacle to political action – and the adoption of theories of action stressing voluntarism and the subjective dispositions and skills of the political actors involved. Although the fact that the main promoters of this theory came from anti-imperialist activism, they managed to develop 'a conception of negotiated, orderly and, ultimately, manageable political change, kept distinct and separate from socioeconomic transformations' (p. 135) that attracted the liberal elite, who saw it as substitute for Reagan's foreign policies. Thus, this approach was successfully institutionalized in academic studies.

In Chapter 5, Guilhot analyses how the resurgence of an idealistic approach in international relations theory both impacts on and is favoured by a new convergence between academia and civic activism. Placing itself in opposition to the traditional realistic approach centred on security, power and the state, social constructivism stresses the concept of the 'transnational' and validates the viewpoints of other actors in the field. Social constructivism developed a particular interest in case studies on human rights, environmental regulation and gender movements. Guilhot argues that it produces a favourable bias towards such transnational

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movements by presenting them 'as the agents of the moralization of international life' (p. 168) and 'as the friendly, emancipatory face of globalization' (p. 174). In return, he points out, the professional reputations of the scholars involved are enhanced as well, both inside and outside academia. In reality, there is a blurred separation between these two areas because most of these scholars participate in the very networks about which they conduct research.

Finally, Chapter 6 explores how the issues of political regime and governance became important concerns of the international financial institutions. More specifically, Guilhot asks how the shift occurred within the World Bank from an agenda orientated toward 'get the prices right' (structural adjustment through monetarist macroeconomic policies) to one concerned with 'get the politics right' ('good governance' through 'promotion of political participation, transparency, accountability or the rule of law', p. 191). The concern with the alleviation of poverty, environmental and gender issues and, finally, with good governance is seen as a response to the shortcomings of the structural adjustment prescriptions and as a means to improve them. Guilhot's main argument in this chapter is that 'the fight for democratic political systems was tightly connected to the imposition of neoliberal economic orthodoxy' (p. 192).

This brief summary of the book does not address its connotative linguistic style. Guilhot's prolific (ab)use of the labels such as 'ambiguity', 'ambivalence', 'paradoxical' and 'ironical' – reinforced by the frequent use of concepts such as 'imperialism', 'colonization' and 'domination' – depreciates and disqualifies the institutions, theories and individual actors to which they refer. Notwithstanding Guilhot's occasional qualifiers ('this does not mean . . .') that are ultimately unconvincing, such terms have cynical, conspirative, manipulative or, otherwise, ingenuous connotations. In addition, they have little explicative value. They make sense only as a defence for an aprioristic, ideological and rigid framework of thought.

The accuracy of the empirical data and its analysis has already been addressed in another review of this book by Michael Allen (2005). Despite the harsh criticism levelled by Allen, which is informed by his own ideological perspective, it is worthwhile to note some points he makes, all of which are properly illustrated with empirical information:

- omission of Europe's own initiatives and participation in democracy promotion and human rights;
- lack of information about and analysis of the contents of democracy promotion and human rights activities;
- an overstatement of the link between anti-Communists, leftists of the 1930s and contemporary neoconservatism (Allen seeks to show that this link is a myth);
- the superficial and partiality of his analysis of the Congress for Cultural Freedom;
- the inadequacy of equating Reaganites with neoconservatives;
- mistakes concerning biographical information about individuals and institutions.

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One could also critically assess the timing of this edition. Although it was published in 2005, it was actually written before 11 September 2001, as the author states in a footnote, declaring that he 'did not feel the need to alter it' because the analysis 'is mostly historical' (p. 227, n. 1). However, it is impossible to read the book without referring to the present, and in some important respects this 'democratic critique of democracy' (p. 224) appears rather anachronistic, a point that is itself paradoxical and ambivalent! And yet the book has a great deal of valuable content that could be reframed and developed to make a more relevant critique.

Reference

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Raphael Cohen-Almagor, ed., *Israeli Democracy at the Crossroads*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 288 pp., ISBN 0415350239, £65.00/US$122.00.

Raphael Cohen-Almagor, ed., *Israeli Institutions at the Crossroads*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 204 pp., ISBN 0415363608, US$122.00.

keywords: citizenship ✦ democracy ✦ Israeli–Palestinian conflict ✦ Jewish state ✦ multiculturalism

Raphael Cohen-Almagor presents an informative collection of articles related to the contemporary situation of the State of Israel in these two books he has edited. The contributions in the first volume deal with Israeli societal realities as well as their implications for and challenges to democracy. The publication includes a wide selection of articles that are subdivided into general areas such as economics and media, rights and schisms, including the topics of human rights, multiculturalism, terrorism and the crucial question about the possibility of a democratic and Jewish state. The volume also contains a retrospective study on Zionism and concludes with a summary by the editor.

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