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Introduction: Interrogating Democracy in World Politics

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Democracy, as an ideal and a form of government, occupies a privileged position in world politics. In this collection, we aim to place both conventional understandings of democracy and its privilege under suspicion. This interrogation is important for understanding what democracy means beyond the nation-state and evaluating the historical narratives of progress that sustain these meanings. The goal of this introduction is to provide a framework for the multiple lines of questioning that are opened up in the chapters that follow. To do this we examine the privilege associated with democracy across multiple sites of world politics, drawing out three key assumptions. As we discuss these assumptions about democracy in world politics, we elaborate on the diverse ways that the contributions to this book challenge them.

While the book is separated into historical and conceptual sections, reflecting different approaches to the topic, these different methods of interrogation share the goal of unsettling the assumptions supporting the privileged place of democracy in world politics – this provides a multi-dimensional critique that is radical but plural, revealing linkages, discrepancies and surprises, rather than leading to a single line of critique.

In an earlier period of world politics, suspicion was cast upon the very idea that democracy was important in such matters – either in relation to domestic government or the structure of international politics. A historical shift is evident across a range of issues in world politics. The democratic peace theory has a central place in International Relations (IR)¹, which gives democratic forms of government causal

force in preventing wars. This builds upon a long-standing line of thought that accords pacific and moral virtues to democratic government. Related to this has been the infusion of a commitment to democracy into practices of development assistance and state building, as well as the rise of a global apparatus of democracy promotion. These developments reflect not only the empirical claims regarding democracy's relation to peace and prosperity, but also a wider commitment to the universal moral value of democracy. The human rights regime defends the civil and political rights that are the corner stone of the liberal democratic tradition, the discourse around the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) links sovereign legitimacy to a state's accountability to its citizens, and the fight to develop global governance through an international rule of law depends upon the presumed universality of democracy as a political good. This moral commitment to democracy culminates in the ideas of global civil society and cosmopolitan politics, which seek to use democracy to reform the international order directly. While these developments do not form a cohesive program of thought, they do point to the privileged place democracy has in world politics.

Determining exactly how and why democracy became such a central concept in world politics is probably impossible. Undoubtedly, it has to do with the political dominance of liberal democratic powers, which in turn established a liberal international order that has defined world politics in the last century and the early part of our current one (Ikenberry 2009). Interesting as these debates may or may not be, our central concern is with the assumptions that give the discursive victory of democracy such seeming stability. A large choir sings the praises of democracy, but the simple force of the melody cannot cover the dissonance and tension, which calls out for acknowledgement if not resolution.

The privilege of democracy is made possible both by the histories we construct of its development and the conventional meanings that define an essentially contested concept. For this reason, our interrogation of the privilege of democracy proceeds on both historical and conceptual lines. The first section of the book focuses on the historical development of democracy and contests familiar narratives of progressive reform, essential linkages to liberal capitalism, the desirability of a democratic international order and the necessity of the national state as the key site of democracy. What emerges is a more ambiguous history that undermines many assumptions. The second section focuses on the meaning of democracy and undoes the necessary ties made between national citizenship and democracy, questions the universal moral value of democracy, and reconfigures the linkages between democratic government and peaceful world politics. To organize the diverse interrogations presented here, which pursue contrasting lines of critique in different domains of world politics, we focus on three key assumptions upon which democracy's privilege rests. First, we examine the assumption that democracy reduces violent conflict and supports peace and stability. Second, we question the belief in historical progress within societies that culminates in a liberal democratic capitalist state. Finally, we analyze the presumptions regarding democratic membership at various levels, looking to national citizens, cosmopolitan individuals and states as problematic democratic subjects.

Violence and Stability

Perhaps what has contributed the most to establishing democracy as a universal good in world politics has been the idea that it is associated with peace and stability. This is a tradition of thought going back, at least, to Paine and Kant, and the latter's essay

Toward Perpetual Peace from 1795 (Kant 1983). It became a real force in world politics when American president, Woodrow Wilson, made it a central element of his foreign policy in the final stages of WWI - so much so that today the terms democracy promotion and Wilsonianism are often used interchangeably. However, if we look for the more recent causes of why the idea has risen to such prominence, it seems that the explanation is to be found in the work carried out by predominantly American IR scholars in the 1970s and 1980s on what came to be known as the 'Democratic Peace Thesis', namely the empirical proposition that democratic states do not go to war against each other. This research prompted Jack Levy to state in 1989 what had in effect become the consensus view in large parts of academia: that the 'absence of war between democratic states comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations.' (Levy 1989: 270)

The year 1989 is important because it also signified the end of the Cold War, the start of an era of US dominance in world politics and - as we shall touch upon in the section on 'Historical Progress' below - the disappearance, in the view of some observers, of any systemic competitors to the liberal-capitalist-*democratic* way of life. The resulting material and ideological hegemony of the US was what allowed the first president Bush to proclaim a 'New World Order,' president Clinton to follow this lead with his national security strategy of 'Engagement and Enlargement' and the second president Bush to embark on a full-scale military campaign in the name of democracy (and the eradication of WMDs), 'Iraqi Freedom,' which had as its ultimate goal the democratisation of the entire Middle East, and perhaps, the world. As he expressed it in his state of the union address in 2003 in the run-up to the invasion:

Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity.

(Bush 2003)

Or as he put it to the troops at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, in 2006:

History has taught us democracies don't war. Democracies -- you don't run for office in a democracy and say, please vote for me, I promise you war.

(Laughter.) You run for office in democracies, and say, vote for me, I'll represent your interests; vote for me, I'll help your young girls go to school, or the health care you get improved [sic].

(Bush, 2006)

There are many different explanations in the academic literature for why democracies do not go to war – Bush's assertion that it is due to the check placed on decision-makers by the electorate, is only one of them.² However, the quote above, and numerous statements by his predecessors, is testimony to the fact that the democratic peace idea had successfully transplanted itself from academia to the real world of international politics.

Meanwhile, in the 1990s, and especially the 2000s, a number of academics started to question the idea of an unambiguous correlation between peace and democracy. In articles and a recent book, Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder (1995, 2001 and 2005) have studied the propensity of democratizing states to go to war, showing that

they are just as, if not more, belligerent as non-democracies. If there is such a thing as the democratic peace, it only exists between so-called mature democracies. Amy Chua (2003) has developed a similarly critical argument in her US national bestseller *World on Fire*. Her key thesis is that exporting free-market democracy to countries with a market-dominant minority consistently leads to ethnic violence, when the newly enfranchised majority elects to possess what they believe is rightfully theirs to take. Finally, Roland Paris (2004), in the book *At War's End*, argues that prevailing peace-building strategies, based on comprehensive political and economic liberalization, need to be rethought because they simply do not produce the positive outcomes originally ascribed to them.

However - and this is our key point - none of these authors question the fundamental value of democracy and whether it is *intrinsically* associated with peace and stability. Paris is especially clear on this:

The purpose of this book, however, is not to reject the Wilsonian peacebuilding strategy in its entirety, but to expose the weaknesses of the naive version of Wilsonianism that informed the missions of the 1990s. Indeed, I shall argue that peacebuilders should preserve the broad goal of converting war-shattered states into liberal market democracies, because well-established liberal market democracies tend to be peaceful in both their domestic affairs and their relations with other states. The challenge, however, is to devise methods of achieving this Wilsonian goal without endangering the very peace that the liberalization process is supposed to consolidate.

(Paris 2004: 7)

Rather, what they do is to question elements of the process of transition to democracy and whether these are associated or not with stability. The assumption is still that democracy constitutes the ideal, and most peaceful, way of life - if it is properly realized. In Amy Chua's words, 'the best political hope for these countries lies in some form of democracy' (Chua 2003: 263). This is not to give the impression that the contributions to this volume develop an anti-democratic programme, but to say that they do interrogate whether the idea of democracy is peaceful as such - both historically and conceptually. The result is a very different, and much more cautious, perspective on the presumed benefits of the democratic ideal.

Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf spearhead this charge with a provocative essay on the emergence of modern international relations and the nation-state; exposing how both were partial expressions of the democratic principle, and their relationship to mass warfare. As they state at the start of the piece:

Our purpose in this essay is to show how emerging ideas of democratic self-government did not, and could not, lead to the republican millennium - a new epoch of peace and prosperity - that revolutionaries once anticipated and peace theorists still await. To the contrary, democratization enabled the governments of modern nation-states to expand the coercive capacity of states in pursuit of interests they defined as vital for their nations' well-being. By doing so, democratization played an important part in unleashing 'the dogs of war'.

(Onuf and Onuf, this volume: [page])

Ian Clark is less blunt in his chapter titled ‘Democracy in International Society.’ He does not tie democracy directly to conflict, but he does suggest that democracy’s manifestation in international society, in world politics, often appears as a form of exclusion when that society has traditionally been based on inclusion and pluralism. He traces this phenomenon through to contemporary proposals for establishing a league of democracies, enjoying special rights and duties, and the resistance to this, by states not sharing in these values. Chantal Mouffe brings this point home in her essay ‘Democracy in a Multipolar World,’ in which she argues that this exclusion – politics in its *antagonistic* form – is likely to lead to violent confrontation. As a remedy to this, she defends an *agonistic* approach to democratic politics that treats other cultures and ways of organizing political life as not intrinsically illegitimate. Her point is not that this will remove conflict, but merely that it will make it less likely and less uncompromising.

In their respective contributions, Christopher Hobson and Sandra Halperin offer analyses of democracy’s relationship to liberalism and capitalism. Seeing that ‘liberal’ has almost become synonymous with ‘democratic’ in today’s world (note the quote by Bush above), Hobson’s argument, that most liberals in an earlier period of history were deeply suspicious of the democratic ideal, urges us to pause and reflect. Liberals tended to share in the general opinion that democracy was ‘a dangerous and unstable form of rule which inevitably led to anarchy or despotism’ (Hobson, this volume, [page]). Similarly, Halperin unsettles the orthodox narrative of how free-market capitalism and open societies are stepping-stones for the consolidation of democratic regimes. She reverses this causal link, and argues that it was in fact the mobilisation

of primarily working-people for WWI that led to democracy, embedded free-market economies and expanded political liberties. It was the threat of popular revolution that made the bourgeois classes compromise and give in to worker demands in these areas.

Further developing the destabilising role of democracy, in their chapter, ‘Mobilising (Global) Democracy: A Political Reading of Mobility between Universal Rights and the Mob,’ Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans explore the democratic role of the mobile masses as agents of change that challenge established authority and structures. This challenge is not only domestic, as Halperin’s piece documents, but global.

Aradau and Huysmans political reading of mobility challenges the internationalist and cosmopolitan aspirations for a formalized and stable democratic politics by recapturing the disruptive elements of democratic mass participation.

Taken together, the contributions to this volume thus provide a much more comprehensive and multifaceted perspective on the value of democracy for peace and stability in world politics. They challenge one of the key arguments made for democracy promotion and interventionary politics in world politics, moving beyond the more limited focus on problems of transition that currently occupies much of the literature.

History and Progress

The ways in which we understand the history of democracy fundamentally shape how we understand both its present and its future, which seems obvious but is often ignored, despite the reality that our historical understandings strongly limit the political possibilities that are considered legitimate across a wide range of states and

other political communities today. The political force of these limits today is, in no small part, premised on the ideas both that it promotes peace and stability, as discussed above, and that it represents a historically advanced and stable form of government. Any critical interrogation of the meanings of democracy and democratic politics today must also interrogate and unsettle the dominant stories that are told about its emergence and apparent victories in the past.

The rapid ascendance to international prominence of Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis (1989) for example did not so much reflect a considered turn in the academy towards a neo-Hegelian theory of History and a Nietzschean reading of man's nihilistic condition in modernity. More simply it told the History of democracy in a way that a particular and powerful post-Cold War audience in the United States wanted to hear, and consequently provided an intellectual justification for the resurgent liberal thinking and policy-making that were pursued through the 1990s and 2000s that was expressed forcefully but conceptually ambiguous. Its central contention – that the marriage of capitalism, liberalism and democracy expressed in the State represented the end of man's struggle for political recognition – was one eagerly seized upon, unsurprisingly, by supporters of American power to give their agenda momentum. What was startling and compelling about Fukuyama's argument was not simply that it endorsed the stability and supremacy of the American form of political community, but that the elimination of alternatives was a property of the Historical process itself, giving it not a parochial but universal significance.

Whilst it may have been the neoconservative movement that took with most alacrity to Fukuyama's predictive claims and critique of political realism, a more minimalist

version of the claim that capitalism, liberalism and democracy were stable, historically self-reinforcing and normatively desirable had long been broadly accepted across the mainstream of Western academic literature on world politics. The argument that liberal democracy was ‘the only game in town’ was popular amongst even those that had reservations about the obvious desirability of this powerful consensus (Cox 1998). The globalisation literature, both critical and supportive, that emerged from the early 1990s onwards also tended to view the growth of capitalism, liberalism and democracy as mutually reinforcing historical trajectories which were now, for various reasons accelerating and spreading at an exponential rate, as well as in ways which were making the territorial organisation of politics less primary in world politics (Scholte 2000).

The presumed historical naturalness of the relationship between capitalism, political liberalism and democracy in particular had informed US and Western European foreign policies both during and after the Cold War, that worked on the assumption that democracy in the rest of the world would emerge and eventually be consolidated through the process of further political and economic liberalisation and integration into multilateral and capitalist international institutions, as had seemed to happen with Europe and Japan. After the end of the Cold War, it became even easier to implicate the specific attributes of liberal democracy with inclusion into global capitalism under the more general developmental, technical rubric of ‘good governance’ (Williams and Young, 1994), a principle which continues to animate many forms of co-operation and intervention with formerly colonised countries.

This strategy for democracy promotion considered elements such as performance legitimacy (Huntington 1996), the growth of a middle class (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), and the socialization of elites as key factors in the emergence of democracy, all of which were compatible with the increasing influence of a market economy and liberal political values. For political scientists such as Huntington, the use of a liberal procedural version of democracy as the basis for analysis had the further benefit allowing for comparison and evaluation from afar. As Skinner (1973) argued with regard to Dahl, however, the result of naturalising a very particular view of democracy with a view to its observability and processual character was a necessarily conservative ideological move couched in the language of 'neutral' inquiry.

It is against this background assumption of the naturalness of the relationship between capitalism, liberalism and democracy that apparent 'puzzles' in the study of world politics have emerged over the last two decades. Why did some states have only 'incomplete' transitions to democracy? Why were there 'reversals' in democratisation? How can we account for the spread of illiberal democracies? How has China managed not to democratise given its economic liberalisation? The structure of these questions reveals the deep way in which historical assumptions about the force and inevitability of this triadic relationship have dominated thinking about democracy.

Alternative, dissident literatures on democracy arose however, particularly out of historical and sociological approaches to the question of democracy, consideration of which was for a long time excluded from the dominant paradigms which sought to understand world politics, despite the attempts of some to bring them into the study of

world politics (Halliday 1987; Rosenberg 2001). Core contributions to this included literatures on contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001), structural violence and needs frustration (Galtung 1969; Burton 1990), and social conflict (Mann 1999). Whilst these mostly focused on the relationship between democracy, politics and violence as expressions of modernity, they also offered some intellectual resources and inspiration for re-thinking the assumed historical relationship between democracy, liberalism and capitalism within and between states, the task taken up by the contributors in this volume.

In her chapter exploring the rise of democracy in two paradigmatic cases, Sassen argues that historically the industrialising classes, associated with the rise of the liberal rights-bearing subject of politics, pushed for the institutionalisation in law of a deeply unequal relationship between capital and labour, whereby the rights of capital to continue production systematically trumped claims made by workers for autonomy, better pay demands and working conditions. The ongoing inequalities of power and opportunity within liberal democracies, where all citizens are formally equal, relate specifically to the efforts during the evolution of capitalist liberal democracy to protect capital. This put restrictions on the kind of democracy that could be envisaged both at the time and in the present day. This argument complements that of Halperin's chapter, which argues that the aspects of mass participation in European democracies did not emerge as the gifts of a progressive liberalism, but rather were the somewhat inadvertent result of the working class being substantively mobilised for the purpose of industrial warfare and as a result improving their economic and political power. This created a platform from which various rights could be claimed. These chapters suggest that the assumption that the growth of capitalism and the ideal of the liberal

subject were historically drivers of democracy is a deeply flawed one; indeed, the message seems to be that capitalist economic structures and the rapid development of property rights suppressed or at least did not encourage full and equal participation in the democracies that eventually emerged. This is a key argument particularly in terms of the contemporary attempts to link the promotion of capitalist growth automatically with the concept of democracy in 'transition' countries – the cautionary tale is that the concepts may well conflict, and indeed that the politics of emerging class interests condition the nature of the political settlement achieved in the name of democracy.

Key to all of these chapters is the conviction that historically democracy has primarily implied *struggle* and the making of substantive claims for the redistribution of power and legitimacy in a political system. Onuf and Onuf argue, reading the events through Tocqueville, that the emergence of democracy in America was only contingently associated with constitutional politics and liberal restraints on government. Rather, it gathered its force from the imaginary of a democratic nation, which itself was created through the processes of Revolution and War. This made it a force that could be highly destructive when challenged and one not tempered by various anti-democratic constraints, as the Civil War demonstrated.

The historical fear of being overwhelmed by the force of democratic struggle also comes across clearly in Hobson's piece which historicises the concept of democracy, and in particular the various ways in which it was perceived to conflict with and threaten established values of liberalism. By re-focusing our historical gaze on the rise of democracy as an embedded form of political struggle that produces its own momentum and force, the idea that democratisation can be brought about through

mechanisms of internationally-sponsored good governance is brought into question. More fundamentally, the question is raised as to whether the dominant contemporary conceptions of ‘democracy’ that inform world politics – that is, the equation with contested periodic elections and the rule of law – ultimately neuter the historically radical political potential of democracy to challenge distributions of power and legitimacy through the struggle for substantive rights and recognition beyond those offered by liberal capitalism.

Membership and the Democratic Subject

Because membership in a democratic polity is in theory maximally inclusive, the question of membership in such political community is inherently controversial. By enabling claims to political power based on equal rather hierarchical status, democratic government generates social instability not as a simple historical fact, but as part of the inherent logic of the idea. For this reason discourses about stability and progress that surround our contemporary understanding of democracy are fundamental to its prestige. Yet, these assumptions also depend upon a further one, that the privileged subject of democracy, “the people”, is a coherent and identifiable political subject. Despite the invitation of universal participation, exclusions and limitations of membership undermine democratic openness, making it much easier for powerful political actors to take up the participatory mantle despite the persistence of hierarchy in the social order.

Aristotle grasped this tension and his rejection of democracy reflects this; it was not enough to limit democratic membership to citizens (already an exclusive category), it was necessary that political power be limited to the most virtuous in an ideal state (Aristotle 1996: Books III and IV). Closer to our own time and reflecting an early

recognition of the linkage between domestic and international politics, Kant insisted that democratic participation be strictly limited by a rightful republican constitution and that each state be maintained as an independent body (Kant 1989). For Kant, the democratic subject was necessarily constrained by law and represented, rather than actually present, in political institutions. Yet, an important link was created between the people governed by a rightful constitution, as an expression of their rational autonomy, which in turn justified the independence of states, limiting republican government to the domestic sphere and making the international a distinct political space. In many ways this understanding of democratic membership and the political subjects of “the people” and “the state” are preserved today, as are Kant’s reliance upon claims regarding the pacific nature of democratic government progressively realised.

The democratic citizen, as the individual rights-holder of liberal theory, bound in common cause with the nation, is assumed to be distinctly rational, opposed to wasteful and destructive wars, interested in prosperity and peace and able to hold the power of the state to account. Literature on the democratic peace is populated with such characters, assumed to be an adequate stand-in for actual citizens (Doyle 1986). Where membership in the nation is linked with less desirable results the democratic subject is seen as distracted and deluded by the forces of nationalism and ethnic identity, which prevent the realisation of democracy (Snyder 2000). Where deeper social ties of democratic politics are acknowledged, such that the character of the citizen is given context and history, national identity is tamed and made to serve the peace and prosperity promised by participatory government. The people become a social body linked by common cause, shared history and cultural identity and their

power an expression of a general will.³ This common identity is seen as vital to progress and development, as is exemplified again and again in literature on state building and development where ethnic, religious and tribal conflict undermines the democratic collective identity necessary to the modern nation-state, which is taken to be the proper end of political development, the final embodiment of moral and stable government.

The democratic state in the international realm receives further privilege in liberal internationalist thought. Taking inspiration from Kant's dreams of a perpetual peace, liberal thinking has assigned self-determination moral and political power, which gives virtuous and powerful democratic states distinct privilege in world politics (Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006). These liberal hopes gave birth first to the League of Nations, and then the United Nations – though in a conflicted form, as principles of sovereign equality sit uneasily with standards of legitimate government based on liberal democratic standards within the UN charter and through later developments. This democratic privilege justifies projects of intervention, development, state-building and human rights protection, which in turn attempt to replicate democratic subjects – citizens, peoples and nation-states – bringing political life to a harmonious resolution within and without state boundaries. The recent debates over R2P bring this into focus as the document is claimed to add no new responsibility to the UN charter while also clearly making states responsible to their people. While the privilege accorded to liberal democratic powers and the faith of internationalists in the power of multilateral institutions is often critiqued, these criticisms are rarely articulated in terms the assumptions about democratic politics upon which they are based. Individual citizens are not actual parties to a contract, the people are never a given

social identity and the state is not unambiguously the only or best space for democracy – but to admit these facts puts the privilege accorded to “the people” within the state, as well as the “nation-state” as their representative, into question.

Liberal cosmopolitans expose a tension in democratic thought by playing upon an important dissonance hidden in this harmonious score. If the individual’s moral rights justify democratic government, how is the exclusion of national democracy legitimate? Especially in our contemporary age when the forces that affect individuals extend beyond the confines of the national-state, it seems that democratic subjects and membership are evolving beyond nationalist and statist frames, or so cosmopolitans argue (Archibugi 2008). While cosmopolitanism remains a critical position, it has achieved a degree of dominance that warrants critical interrogation. This is all the more important because much cosmopolitan thinking depends upon questionable assumptions that there is a universal democratic subject, the rights bearing individual, who is located, ultimately, in the political community of humanity. Both the universal citizen and the community of humanity are contested ideas that are all too often overwhelmed by the chorus of democracy’s praises. David Held, in his chapter, reprises his influential defence of cosmopolitanism by challenging fundamental assumptions about the necessity of the state both in protecting individuals and enabling their political participation. While many of the chapters in this volume are critical of elements of Held’s position, they share common ground on contesting fundamental assumptions of citizens, peoples and nation-states.

Chantal Mouffe provides a model for an alternative international politics, which has affinities with traditional pluralist international thinking but is a distinctive conclusion

that advocates an agonistic understanding of democracy in world politics – moving beyond mere tolerance of different internal orders within states, which essentially drains international politics of ethical content, she encourages an agonistic democratic political orientation based in mutual respect through contestation. Following a related line of questioning Onuf and Onuf charge the democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries with fomenting a tempestuous and violent international politics caused by the inherent instability of democratic subjects. Citizenship, the people and the counters of the nation-state are ambiguous and open to change in a democracy and failing to recognize that volatility is a political risk. For this reason they are critical of cosmopolitan thinkers who attempt to expand democracy without acknowledging that popular politics are almost never the rational and moral affair cosmopolitans predict. Likewise, Sassen looks to the historical emergence of democratic citizenship to reveal the revolutionary tendencies of democratic participation. Her chapter traces the formation of the legal subject in early democracies, highlighting that the initial democratic subject is much more a liberal bourgeoisie subject – a property owner, whose rights to ownership and contract are vital protections – than an equal democratic subject. She illustrates this point by highlighting the way in which the labouring class was disadvantaged by the construction of legal subjects in early democratic states.

Further, Aradau and Huysmans argue that the mobility of the masses, of the mob, was as important to the development of democracy as the establishment of a universal rights bearing subject. The mob not only provides one of the key bases for the development of democracy by disrupting the political order before it can be tamed and institutionalised as “the people” or “the nation”, but today the mobility of

democratic masses retains its political force. The illegal movement of migrants and their attempts to exert democratic rights undermine the idea that the nation-state is natural or constant. In his chapter, Daniel Bray also undermines the territorial assumptions of democratic politics, but without resorting to conventional cosmopolitan strategies that presuppose a universal form of political community based on one's humanity. Instead, drawing on pragmatic philosophy, he points toward the development of democratic publics around particular issues and problems in world politics that either cannot be contained within state border or by their nature exceed them. He looks at the way global responses to environmental crises generate concrete sites of democratic politics that are not tied to either the territorial state or a national identity. Finally, David Chandler provides a troubling critique of cosmopolitan approaches to democracy. In his chapter he faults both liberal and poststructuralist forms of cosmopolitanism for severing the democratic subject from any site of politics. While it might be the case that the assumed universality of the rights bearing democratic subject is false and that the territorial state cannot effectively respond to social forces that shape contemporary life, the cosmopolitan response, Chandler suggests, is an evasion of the real question of what form and in what space will democratic politics take place if not within the sovereign state.

Conclusion

This critical project begins from the premise that ideas of democracy are not singular or simple, a prospect that does not sit comfortably with the contemporary role of democracy as a widely-spread political currency that is exchanged for the political legitimacy to intervene, authorise, rule, excuse and defer in its name. Collectively, the pieces in the volume seek to show that the place and role of democracy in world

politics is contingent, unstable and historically fragile, emerging through political struggle and disturbing the boundaries of world politics itself. As we have argued in this introduction, democracy and its emergence is both conceptually and historically associated with tumult and instability as well as peace, and has been suppressed by as well as survived alongside capitalism and liberalism, as its force and meaning have changed over time. Looking at the horizons of contemporary world politics, the new potential subjects of democracy – the agonistic mobs – emerge as simultaneously emancipatory and threatening in their demands, and the promises of progress and peace that were held out centuries ago look increasingly chimerical. Yet, it is this very instability and elusiveness that maintains democracy’s perennial promise – that it may yet renew itself as a dynamic discourse of empowerment for the many and not the few. Through unsettling the ways in which power has appropriated the history and ideals of this agenda, we may yet be able to imagine alternatives.

¹ We use the standard upper cases to denote the discipline as opposed to its subject matter.

² Paradoxically, the war on terror was a key element in Bush’s successful reelection campaign, suggesting that sometimes you can in fact be elected on the ‘promise of war’.

³ A contemporary example of this line of thinking is found in Walzer (1983).