

**Book review, provisionally accepted for publication in:
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**Milja Kurki (2012) *Democratic Futures: Re-Visioning Democracy*
Promotion. Abingdon: Routledge. 296pp, £26.99 (p/b), ISBN 978 0 415 69034 8**

The ubiquity of ‘democracy promotion’ on Western policy agendas provides the context for Milja Kurki’s timely and compelling new book. From Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya and Mali, military interventions are increasingly justified in terms of democracy ‘promotion’, ‘restoration’ or ‘support’, rendering this ‘one of the most powerful international policy dynamics in the post-Cold War era’ (p. 1). *Democratic Futures* aims to ‘go ‘behind the appearances’ of democracy support’, problematising the models of democracy that underpin policy practice in a way the positivist literature, with its ‘normatively pre-given’ concepts, cannot (p. 3).

With an analytic terrain stretching from John Locke to the Occupy movement, Kurki situates democracy promotion policies within a continuum of Western democratic discourse, practice and contestation. A conceptual matrix of ideal-typical ‘politico-economic’ visions of democracy, ranging from ‘classical liberal’ and ‘neoliberal’ to ‘radical’ and ‘global’, informs empirical analyses of democracy promotion models in practice. Discourse analysis of the policies and practices of key international actors reveals that, despite important tensions, ‘liberal democratic understandings of democracy still seem to dominate’ (p. 215). Crucially, it is argued that the ‘triumphalist’, explicit, ‘big L’ Liberalism of the 1990s has been replaced by ‘implicit’ (and often ‘fuzzy’ or internally contested) liberalisms in democracy promotion discourse.

Kurki’s critical explanation for the dominance of ‘implicit liberalism’ among democracy promoters draws productively upon Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and Foucault’s concept of governmentality. In an important sense, the book provides a useful corollary to the ‘end of ideology’ debates of the 1990s. If ‘ideology’ disappeared from view with the Berlin Wall, perhaps it found clandestine refuge in ‘democracy promotion’ discourses. It is therefore somewhat disappointing that Kurki largely eschews direct engagement with the concept of ideology here.

A cardinal achievement of *Democratic Futures* is the re-politicisation of democracy. While many have pointed to the essentially contested nature of the concept, there has seldom been so thoroughgoing an account of opposing (and overlapping) visions of democracy. *Democratic Futures* constitutes an innovative and necessary intervention in the

field of democracy promotion, denaturalising and re-politicising the terms of debate, and pointing to some interesting alternative directions. The book concludes with a series of 'policy provocations'. A refreshing antidote to the insipid 'policy recommendations' found at the end of many works of political science, this set of normative injunctions directed at key actors, from NGOs to IFIs, culminates in a general, and laudable, demand for a 'radical democratic pluralism'.

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