Human rights and democracy promotion: reflections on the contestation in, and the politico-economic dynamics of, rights promotion

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Abstract

This short contribution seeks to engender better understandings of the role of human rights advocacy as part of democracy promotion. The two agendas have been seen as conjoined and harmonious by most aid donors; yet interestingly, and perceptively, some commentators have recently criticised the notion that they are agendas that are straight-forwardly compatible or coherent. I examine here the plausibility and the consequences of the claim that the two

agendas share a more complex and contradictory relationship than is often assumed. Specifically, I seek to highlight the importance of paying attention to the possibility that rights themselves are inherently 'contradictory' in nature and that therein lies their contribution to the democratisation agenda. Indeed, the provocative aim of this article is, by drawing on Samuel Bowles's and Herbert Gintis's view of rights claims as 'clashing' and 'politico-economically' grounded, to argue for a more politicised and openly contradiction-seeking (rather than 'technical' and 'coherent') approach to rights and democracy promotion. I advance this (theoretically motivated but practically consequential) argument specifically in the context EU's human rights and democracy promotion policies, although the theoretical claims advanced here arguably apply beyond the actions of this specific actor.

Introduction

Human rights have been on the agenda of most major western states since the early 1990s. The rise of human rights values in aid policies and international organisations' activities in recent decades has been well documented by a number of commentators in international studies, development studies and international law.[1] A broad consensus, it is argued, now exists on the value and content of human rights promotion and many donor states take human rights promotion to be central to their development and good governance agenda. Yet, what is less often noted is that human rights policies have been closely associated with another agenda in most donors' frameworks: their policies have also made reference to democracy

promotion and assistance aims. The US was the first to launch the democracy promotion agenda as a key part of its foreign policy strategy but, since the mid-1990s, many others have followed its lead. Notably, during the last decade especially, the EU has been seeking to carve out distinct room for itself in this policy field. Other international organisations, such as the UN, and a multiplicity of NGO actors have also sought a role for themselves in the expanding democracy promotion industry, which has been seen as a field of action closely associated with, but yet in key aspects distinct, from human rights advocacy. Indeed, the democracy promotion field has gained greater confidence in recent years as there have been increasing calls for donors to put the 'D' back into their 'governance, human rights and democracy' aid work.[2]

This piece seeks to examine the curious, and rather more complex than expected, interaction between the democracy promotion and human rights agendas. The article has a two-fold aim. First, it seeks to engender a better understanding of the role of human rights promotion as part of democracy promotion. The two agendas have been seen as conjoined by most major actors, yet some commentators within the donor community as well as within recipient states have criticised the notion that they are agendas that are easily compatible. I examine here the plausibility and meaning of this latter claim. Second, it is the aim here to engender a better understanding of what human rights promotion means for how we understand democracy promotion practice. It has recently been claimed that two distinct perspectives – narrow 'political' and wider 'developmental' – perspectives can be taken on democracy promotion in the community of experts.[3] I seek here to understand what the role of human rights promotion is in shaping these two perspectives.

I analyse both of the above questions with very specific analytical framework in mind. It is an analytical framework that places emphasis specifically on the 'politico-economic underpinnings' of human rights and democracy promotion. Often these agendas are understood as purely 'political' – a trend which takes its lead from the tendency to conform to a liberal framework of thought in understanding the content of both rights and democracy. Here the self-evidence of such an understanding is challenged; the aim, instead, is to explicitly reveal the underlying politico-economic underpinnings of the human rights and democracy aid policies. In so doing, I adopt an understanding of models of democracy as 'politico-economic' in nature, and specifically analyse them in relation to the position on the relationship of rights and democracy developed by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis.[4] Drawing on their work on rights and democracy, it is argued here that 'clashes of rights' provides a central aspect to the idea of democracy and its politico-economic foundations. Far from liberal rights being central to democratisation, it is the clashes of rights which is considered central to democratisation. This argument, if plausible, has consequences for the kinds of rights democracy promoters advance and see as compatible with democracy enhancement. Democracy promotion agencies, such as the EU, tend to see all rights promotion as contributing towards the agenda of 'liberal democracy'. I argue here that depending on how democracy and rights are conceptualised, and how their politico-economic context is understood, we gain a wildly differing set of perspectives on human rights and democracy promotion. We can see that far from advocating a consistent model, the democracy promoters, inadvertently in part, advocate clashing sets of rights.

This is an interesting insight which can be read in either a positive or a negative way. It can be read positively in the sense that we can come to acknowledge that dealing with clashing rights has always been at the heart of democratisation and is a source of the radical potential

of democracy to change societies and their socio-economic inequalities.[5] Yet, it can also be read in a negative sense: it could be argued that in democracy promotion discourse and practice at present this radical potential of clashing sets of rights is by and large ignored, instrumentalised, and de-radicalised because of the calls for 'consistency' of and 'depoliticised' conception of rights. I examine rights and democracy promotion here in the context of EU democracy promotion to clarify these trends. It is argued that in current democracy promotion by the EU a rather conservative set of understandings of rights and their role in politico-economic struggles dominates, although much potential also exists in developing these agendas in the direction of more pluralistic, contested and politico-economically radical rights and hence democracy promotion agendas.

Human rights and democracy promotion

The close connection between human rights and democracy promotion has been explicit in democracy promoters' methods and strategies for some time now. In the EU for example human rights are intricately tied to democracy promotion and the two are seen as complementing each other. As the EU's latest statement on democracy support reveals: it is the objective of the EU 'to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'.[6] This is because 'democracy, democratic governance, development and respect for all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social – are interdependent and mutually reinforcing'.[7] While the specific inter-relations between these terms are not specified, the close interconnections are noted in all key documents and have been embedded in the structure of democracy promotion. Thus, the EU's civil society support instrument, the European Instrument for

Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) for example, ties together into a common theme the human rights and the democracy promotion agendas.[8]

Yet, understandings of the relationship between human rights and democracy promotion are not as consensual and easy as their conjoined treatment in democracy promotion policy agendas would seem to imply. Some actors in the target states and some amongst the development community have argued that democracy promotion is not implied by human rights promotion and that the two need not and perhaps should not 'go together' quite so self-evidently as is often argued.[9] Thus, some argue that democracy promotion is a much more extensive, and intensive, form of intervention in countries than human rights promotion. Changing the structures of states is not necessarily implied by respect for human rights and should not be justified in the name of human rights. Others point out that human rights commitments which are so strongly legalised provide more solid basis for reform commitments. Some argue that partly for these reasons human rights promotion should not be tied so closely to democracy promotion: we need to avoid this agenda becoming disreputable alongside the democracy promotion agenda, now experiencing a 'backlash'.[10] However, there are those who argue that democracy promotion may in fact be a safer and cleaner agenda than that of human rights promotion: if promoted in a minimal fashion, it is about facilitation of human rights promotion from the ground up and in a way that does not expose western actors to criticisms of imperialism in terms of conceptions of values and rights. If the democracy promotion agenda has been criticised, so has the human rights agenda: the Asian rights debate for example demonstrated that other conceptual tools, among them democracy, may be more conducive to consensual and dialogical interaction with some target countries and populations than the highly loaded and western-associated language of 'rights'.

Most of these arguments for the separation of human rights and democracy agendas are, if you like, 'PR-related' in nature: they are about ensuring that one or the other of the agendas remains intact. Although some have suggested that there may be reasons to reconsider whether these agendas are mutually supporting, few clear attempts have been made to analytically and causally separate these two forms of value-promotion. They are still – whether rejected or not – predominantly considered complementary – even if, for practical purposes, are often not promoted together or even to the same extent.

In this article, I will offer some reflections on the connections between these two agendas: I support the view that as agendas they are in some regards complementary as practiced; yet, I also argue that the role of human rights in democratisation must be revisited in order to provoke much needed debate about what is meant by 'democracy' in democracy promotion. I argue then that it is not enough to simply 'put the D back in the democracy and human rights support', as the European Union officials for example have recognised, but that we must also think about what is meant by the D in democracy and human rights support.

I wish here to connect the theme of human rights promotion to two-fold questions: first, what kinds of rights are being promoted and, second, in conjunction with what kind of democracy? Considerable debates have taken place in the human rights community and academia over what kind of rights should be promoted. Many critics of the human rights agenda accused the human rights promoters for promoting liberal procedural and culturally biased individual and 'negative' rights. Positive economic social and communitarian rights, it was argued, have been sidelined in the human rights promotion agenda. This criticism has been about for some time and has been taken seriously by human rights promoters, who now explicitly make the

effort to mention that they promote a variety of different rights, both positive and negative, political and economic.[11]

Yet, interestingly, this debate has not been connected with an associated debate as to what kind of democracy is being promoted. Classically, and quite contrary to the debates on the meaning of human rights, the meaning of democracy has not been under fire so much amongst the democracy promotion community. The emphasis placed on ownership of development policy has of course necessitated that democracy promoters recognise that 'there is no single model of democracy'.[12] Yet, they have also conceded in the same breath that despite this 'democracies share certain common features'[13] and that the core aspects of democracy include human rights and fundamental freedoms and non-discrimination, and that democratic governance structures, conceived of by and large in relation to the idea of 'liberal democracy' and rule of law, can ensure the protection of these rights. A liberal democratic consensus model then has dominated in the democracy promotion agenda; explicitly and implicitly.[14]

Yet, recently some interesting interventions have been made with regard to how democracy should be conceived. Thomas Carothers has interestingly argued that two broad 'conceptions' of democracy can be deciphered in democracy promotion: political and developmental.[15] The first of these conceives of democracy in a narrow sense, the second in a wider 'politico-economic' sense. He argues that different groups of people in the development and democracy promotion scene have preferred different views on which kind of democracy to promote, and that such divisions overlap the usual 'geographic' attempts to define specific 'models' of American or European democracy promotion.

This attempt to delve into conceptions of democracy is interesting, for it arguably, provides an interesting bridge between debates in the human rights community over the extent of rights promoted and the inevitable, yet rarely had, debate amongst democracy promoters as to what is meant by democracy. Carothers implies that those that opt for developmental model work with a broader conception of rights than those that promote the narrower political model. Carothers thus connects human rights and democracy promotion agendas and the conceptions of democracy and rights within them.

But Carothers makes surprisingly little of the interesting inter-linkages he is pointing to. Indeed, notably, he does not delve into the question: what kinds of democracy are tied with what kinds of conceptions of rights, and what does this mean for democracy promotion? Do more holistic models that promote wider conceptions of rights challenge, or in fact, contradict the narrower models of democracy and the kinds of rights they promote? In fact, are the kinds of rights, and hence the kinds of democracy, promoted by different actors/sectors/instruments compatible with each other at all, or do they merely represent different variations of an essential liberal democratic set of consensual ideals? I wish here to delve into the questions of conceptions of rights and democracy that Carothers's intervention raises. I seek to do so by developing an integrated politico-economic conception of democracy; which moreover ties the idea of rights into it.

Towards a politico-economic analysis of rights

There has been a tendency both in the human rights and the democracy promotion community to analyse and treat these agendas as 'essentially political' in nature, as concerning primarily the nature of political or civil rights as well as political and civil society

structure of the state. Yet, the democracy promotion discourse, especially when tied to the human rights discourse, also reveals 'slippages' towards a more politico-economic set of concerns. The concern with inequality and poverty as hindrances to exercise of rights and democracy is one example. Yet, there has been little concerted effort to integrate such an understanding with a politico-economic understanding of the working of democracy or rights.

This is an interesting development vis a vis democratic and political theory, where, despite the dominance of liberal theories, which separate the political and economic from each other, alternative politico-economic readings of democracy and rights have also been openly discussed. Thus, social democratic, reform liberal, and participatory democratic theorists for example, have all openly acknowledged the role of economic and politico-economic concerns in how they conceive of democracy and rights.[16] Not only are economic and social rights seen as crucial for democracy, but democracy is conceived to consist of a system which controls the role of market vis a vis the rights and democratic autonomy of individuals. Models of democracy for these authors are 'politico-economic' models of democracy. Keeping this in mind is important for our current analytical set of puzzles. This is because such perspectives allow us to see both democracy and human rights promotion as part of a bigger scheme and set of conditions in society and societal interactions. They are not just abstract rights or political structures, but embedded in complex social, political and economic sets of relations – reflecting also the interests, ideologies and power positions of actors in society.[17]

What is particularly important about such a move is that it forces us to think more carefully about the inter-relationships between rights and democracy, and specifically about the changing forms of interaction between these notions in different 'politico-economic models of democracy'. Instead of there being a single understanding about their inter-relationship, we

come to see that there are various theoretical lenses through which their interconnections can be conceived. Thus, for example, we have to remember that a liberal understanding emphasises liberal 'individual' rights over majoritarian and communal rights. It also emphasises negative freedom to engage in open economy over positive rights to be supported in one's actions within the economy. Social democratic and reform liberal conceptions of rights emphasise rights of liberty and freedom, albeit conceived somewhat differently leading to differing emphasis being placed on the role of common interest and regulation of the market in the interest of defence of the rights of particular communities. Socialist conceptions emphasise in turn an even heavier commitment to positive rights: instead of looking for a balance of liberal and social rights, as the social democrats and reform liberals do, the socialists place emphasis on priority of social rights over individual rights. Participatory democrats on the other hand emphasise the right as well as reality of participation, challenging the narrow conceptions of negative 'right' to participate in elections, with a broader conception of 'right to participate' as involving participation in communal decisions for example at the workplace.

Instead of exploring all these conceptions here in detail, I want to explore further one particularly interesting view of the interconnections of rights and democracy, that expressed by Bowles and Gintis (1986). What makes their view interesting for us is that a) they explicitly bring rights and democracy together within a politico-economic framework, and b) they develop a model of interconnections between notions, which is persuasive, both historically and theoretically.

Bowles and Gintis argue against classical liberal conceptions of democracy, which have classically been the ones to emphasise the role of rights as a key constituent of democracy.

They do so because they perceive liberal conceptions of rights and democracy to be inadequate in taking account of the social context of the exercise of rights, and indeed of the central role that rights claims have had in the development of democracy. Bowles and Gintis argue that rights are indeed central to democracy, but for very different reasons vis a vis the views held by classical liberals. Rights, they argue, are not merely tools for the individuals to defend their own interests against the state. Nor are they necessarily complementary. One of the core aspects of democratic governance is, for Bowles and Gintis, that rights agendas can be indeterminate in important respects, and crucially have become more than instrumental tools for the protection of individuals: they have developed socially and politically in diverse sets of directions having been adopted by diverse sets of social and political actors in the defence of their widely different socio-economic and political agendas. [18]

The rights agendas, even the 'personal rights agenda' with its origins deep in liberal ideals, have, in historical struggles and specific social contexts, developed away from the classical defence of 'liberal economic and political rights' towards the defence of diverse sets of rights claims, some of which clash with classical liberal ideas of rights, notably the idea of right to property and limited notions of suffrage rights. Radical social movements have taken on the rights language and have twisted it to suit their own needs, thus radicalising the political and social significance of the language of rights, and shaping crucially the content of what counts as rights.

Herein lies the significance of rights for Bowles and Gintis: 'the… indeterminacy concerning the range of application of particular rights has allowed conflicting parties to adapt contrasting conceptions of rights to their diverse political aims'.[19] This development has brought out the inherent sets of clashes even in classical liberal rights (for example, between

property and personal rights) and has shown the idealistic nature of the idea of 'harmony of rights' at the centre of liberal world view. At the same time, concrete historical developments and struggles, Bowles and Gintis point out, has extended the range of application of rights beyond liberal language and worldview. In so doing rights have come to challenge, rather than protect, the liberal world view: indeed, as Bowles and Gintis powerfully proclaim: 'not socialism, but the full extension of personal rights has been the fundamental threat facing the capitalist order in the liberal context'[20]. They go on to document the ways in which radical and not so radical social movements have contested and negotiated rights throughout 19th and 20th century and how these claims lie behind many of the crucial developments and adaptations of liberal democracy to social democratic ideals, racial equality and gender equality.

The key thing that arises from this account for our purposes is the notion of clashes of rights. Instead of assuming rights to be complementary, as classical liberals have, Bowles and Gintis point out that rights are in fact not just potentially but historically contested and fought over and inherently internally contradictory. What is significant about rights for democracy is *not that they are complementary, but rather they are contradictory*. Clashes of rights lies behind the development of democracy and politico-economically more responsive forms of social democracy: both socially radical actors have fought for their cause through rights agendas, as have liberal and conservative actors in denying such radical interpretations of rights.

It is also important to note that, for Bowles and Gintis, the economy is where key claims are contested and the 'erosion of the post-World War II Keynesian accommodation seems likely to intensify the collision of rights'.[21] It is especially rights of property and citizenship/participation which clash in the economic sphere, and it is the clash between these

rights that has engendered some of the most crucial developments in the development of democracy in 20th century, for example the rise of the social democratic welfare state.[22] The economy then, far from being apolitical, or sphere of mere negative rights (to participate in free economy), as many liberals have argued, is in fact the centre ground for clashes and fights over rights.

But what does this view of rights as: a) contested; b) as a key aspect of democratic development; and c) as key to economic interaction, mean for our interest in debates on rights and democracy in democracy promotion? I argue that it provokes us to reconsider some important aspects of the current practice of democracy and human rights promotion, which at the moment are not only not receiving adequate attention, but are being actively disregarded or sidelined.

Reconsidering and repoliticising rights in democracy promotion

I argue here that four key points arise from the analysis here for our current understanding of human rights and democracy promotion. I place these in the context of EU democracy promotion, although their consequences beyond the EU should also be considered.

I argue that, first, we need to reassess the role of depoliticised, instrumental and technical forms of human rights and democracy promotion. Second, I argue that we need to note the internal links between rights and democracy promotion, but also need more subtle understandings (than offered by the EU's internal discourse) of the reasons for their

interconnection. Third, I argue that we need to assess the consequences of the contested nature of rights claims and what this means for the clashes and contradictions of rights agendas between donors and recipients, and amongst donors and recipients respectively. Fourth, I argue that we need to take far more seriously the role of human rights and democracy promotion in terms of its economic effects; in terms of its partially hidden role in facilitating economic as well as political development. Consideration of these points leads me to my conclusions, in which I argue that we need to consider the balance of 'conservative' and 'radical' rights promotion.

Rethinking depoliticised agendas

One of the interesting developments in human rights and democracy promotion in the EU context, but also arguably beyond the EU, has been the de-politicisation of this normative 'value promotion' agenda. As value promoters argue, democracy and human rights are now universal rights and normatively uncontested. This statement goes along with the acceptance of the view that human rights and democracy promotion is now by and large a technical or instrumental policy agenda.[23] Its normative aims are universal and the justifications for it are perceived as uncontested. As interviews with EU commission actors but also NGO actors attest, there is no perceived need to 'politicise' debates on democracy or human rights.[24] Indeed, as Council of the European Union recently stated 'there is no need to renegotiate existing norms, values and central principles as to what constitutes the building blocks of democracy, nor to set out new policies'.[25] Key emphasis should instead be on 'improvement in how existing EU policies are implemented, and that they should be applied more consistently and effectively in order to work better together as mutually enhancing parts of a

coherent whole'.[26] In short, the aims are now 'problem-solving' rather than 'critical'; practical and instrumental, rather than foundational and normative and political.

One of the key aspects about such a take on democracy promotion is that it clashes fundamentally with the conception of rights Bowles and Gintis, and indeed most democratic theorists, have advocated for some time. They have perceived rights at the heart of the development of democratic learning and participation; as a key site for the identity construction of new agents and indeed as the key context for the political clashes between political actors, a context where the leftists challenged the conservatives, the feminists the leftists and the participatory democrats all of the above. What Bowles and Gintis's reading of rights reminds us of is the importance of avoiding the technical, instrumental and technocratic pulls in the treatment of the rights and democracy promotion agenda. In the view of their framework, the human rights and democracy promotion agenda should be seen as a constantly evolving and politically open and indeterminate, rather than one-dimensional, essentially fixed, depoliticised policy agenda. From such point of view democracy promotion and human rights agendas should be conceived as deeply ingrained in political and normative debates about what constitutes 'the good life' and debates between different approaches to perceiving the 'good life'. Hence, balances of rights and the resultant debates on the meaning of democracy should be seen as central to democracy and human rights aid, rather than something that has already been 'solved' and then in need of 'promotion'. The key aspect of rights from this perspective is precisely that they are political and normative in nature, rather than technical, instrumental or fixed in their content.

Human rights and democracy promotion

Bowles and Gintis also prompt us to more clearly think about the role of human rights and rights promotion in general in relation to democracy promotion. As we have seen above, various conceptions have been set out by activists and development experts, yet clear conception of the links between these agendas have not been expressed. Most democracy promoters' stand is that democracy and human rights are complementary agendas: that human rights contribute to development of democratic controls over the state, and democracy to emergence of a vibrant human rights culture. Both agendas moreover, contribute to poverty reduction, alleviation of inequality and achievement of Millennium Development Goals.[27]

What the account here suggests is that the link between democracy and rights is indeed close, as is argued, but also more complex and interesting than is often accepted. Indeed, the account here suggests that democracy and rights agendas are connected, not because both necessarily support a liberal democratic conception of the world, where individual's rights are the key base for democratic controls over a potentially dangerous state. Rather democracy and rights are connected because rights, and fights about them, constitute the key dynamic in the development of the idea of democracy. Democratic challenges and democratic adaptations in modern societies have taken place as a result of contestation over rights; not as a result of people coming to agree on importance of certain types of rights, but because of widening contestation about what constitute crucial rights!

The EU and other democracy promoters fail, in their harmony-emphasising discourse of rights, to address this issue, and the kinds of controversies and uncertainties it creates for democracy and rights promotion. It is not necessarily the case that all human rights and

democracy promotion move in the direction of a liberal polity, or that the result is a harmonious polity where all political, social and economic rights are respected equally. Clashes over rights may be the outcome of promotion of holistic sets of rights.

Contestation over rights and democracy

This leads us to our next point, which is that rights and democracy are both, in the view developed here, contested concepts. It is the clashes of rights and attached contestedness over democratic ideals that provides the key dynamic in democratisation and democratic adaptation of western states. This means that the aims of democracy promotion or human rights promotion should not be so much an agreement on rights as development of contested debates over rights. This is an unusual way to think of human rights and democracy promotion – for it is often the dissemination of the consensus over these rights that is thought of as central to human rights and democracy promotion, not disagreement over their meaning and constitution!

Indeed, human rights and democracy promoters have had particular troubles in dealing with the question of contested nature of rights. This is because their policy frameworks seem to assume as a matter of course that rights are in harmonious interaction with each other – that they are mutually complementary and re-enforcing. Bowles and Gintis provoke us to consider the opposite case: that, in fact, rights agendas are fundamentally and irreducibly contradictory and non-harmonious. They clash and contradict each other, sometimes irreducibly and violently, rather than conforming to a linear liberal view of mutually re-enforcing circle of happiness. Right of property for example can clash powerfully with right for equal right for participation or even right to life. Bowles and Gintis remind us not to assume harmony of

rights, just as we shouldn't expect the harmony of interests between different political actors positioned differently in society and its power structures.

The other thing to note about this contestation is that it forces us to note that democracy promoters may not, even when they promote rights, promote complementary rights. Thus, the clashes of rights may become evident not only in interaction with others but within the organisation's own aims. While human rights and democracy promoters promote plenty of different kinds of rights – liberal and social, positive and negative, social and economic – it is often not acknowledged that these rights promoted can be in sharp contradistinction with each other. In their call for consistency and effectiveness it is sometimes difficult for democracy promoters to deal with the internal contested of the rights they promote – or their consequences for the contradictions that may arise in their own policies. Thus, while the EU may promote social democracy among civil society actors on one hand, it may promote liberal conception of property rights in its rule of law programmes. The rights claims that these involve differ and clash fundamentally – and may not then add up to a consistent – liberal democratic or otherwise – human rights and democracy promotion agenda. As will be seen, this may not be a problem as such, but it is noteworthy considering the obsession – somewhat foolish and unrealistic obsession – that promoters have with questions of coherence and consistency.[28]

Human rights and democracy promotion as capitalist market promotion

A further crucial aspect of the account here is that it emphasises the economic importance of human rights and democracy promotion. Often these agendas are treated as independent of

economic aspects of societal development, or at best, as tangentially and supportively linked to capitalist development. The view here challenges this notion. The account here emphasises that the promotion of democracy and human rights involve, as an integral aspect of them, consideration in one form or another of politico-economic issues, concerns, ideologies or interest. Rights issue and democracy as a development have, as Bowles and Gintis and many democratic theorists remind us, always been 'politico-economic' in nature: they have involved and continue to involve decisions on how economy should be controlled through democratic means and what kinds of socio-economic rights count as crucial for democracy.

Human rights and democracy promotion then are not just narrowly 'political' or institutional in nature then: they involve claims and fights over socio-economic foundations: that is where their power and dynamism have historically arisen from. Clashes of rights claims between those that defend property rights and those that defend participatory claims clash. The EU, alongside other democracy promoters, has to realise this: not only can the EU promote clashing sets of rights – as in its advancement of property rights contrary to participatory rights in its development and trade agenda – but whatever kinds of rights claims it promotes, these can also be quite rightly, justly and legitimately be contested by their recipients or targets. Indeed, it is precisely such politico-economic contestation of EU's trade agenda that lies behind the contestation over what involves the right kind of participation in trade talks with the EU.[29]

Deradicalised rights promotion, reradicalised rights promotion

Finally, the account here forces us to consider seriously the question of what kinds of rights human rights and democracy promoters promote; what kind of views of rights they deem central. This has consequences for target populations and for democracy and human rights supporters themselves. One of the key issues to ask here is whether the kinds of rights that are promoted are conservative rather than radical in nature. This question is related to, but does not correspond to the Asian values kind of contestation. To ask whether the EU, for example, promotes radicalised or potentially radicalising rights claims is different from asking whether it promotes western claims. This way to go is a more useful one for it replaces the debate away from the relativistic vs universalist categories so prevalent just a few years ago. It is a question which asks us to consider not whether democracy and human rights supporters are western-centric or imperialist but rather whether they are willing to consider the radicalising consequences of encouraging certain types of rights claims.

This is an interesting debate to consider, for example, when it comes to EU democracy promotion. This democracy promotion actor is arguably involved in civil society support for various human rights and democracy promotion agents, including anti-torture activists, educators and trade unionists. But is the EU willing to consider its own activities as supporting of radical social movements in these contexts: is it willing to support trade unions which challenge deeply the classical liberal rights agenda or wish to radicalise the democratic controls a state holds over the economy? Arguably, in such instances conservative rather than radicalised tendencies seem to win out in EU democracy promotion – or at least the assumption seems to be that the rights claims of trade unions shouldn'y clash with EU's underlying liberal values of rights. The kinds of commitments that the EU asks for its promotees to stand by necessitate, it seems, that these actors accept rather than contest the fundamental rights and freedoms that the EU promotes – from rights of individuals to those

of minorities. There is only so far then that the EU's radicalising conceptions of rights can go – however holistic the view of rights rhetorically is. There is only so much realised contestation and clashing taking place then within the human rights and democracy promotion framework of the EU.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that human rights and democracy promotion are complementary agendas and that in their promotion a developmental perspective, which conceives of rights in a holistic rather than narrow sense, is winning out.[30] This has meant the opening up for discussion of various sets of rights – from political to economic, from negative to positive. What has this meant for democracy promotion? It has entailed the opening up of and the blurring of boundaries of human rights and democracy promotion agendas. Yet it has not brought about detailed or analytically in-depth interrogations of the relationship between these agendas.

It has been the aim of this piece to bring some analytical nuance and provocative questioning into the debates on human rights and democracy promotion. The aim here specifically has been to challenge classical simplistic 'complementary' and non-politico-economic understandings of human rights and democracy by analysing both rights and democracy from a politico-economic perspective. Both rights and democracy are seen as crucial reflections of politico-economic relations, positions and interests of actors and are crucially seen as contested rather than consensual 'harmonious' notions. Such a notion has important implications for how we consider human rights and democracy promotion. We are prompted

not only to repoliticise and consider within a wider scheme or context these agendas, but also crucially are forced to consider just how well democracy or human rights supporters take account of clashes of rights.

It is argued here that despite their seemingly radical self-conception, human rights and democracy promoters actually work within an overly harmony-assuming de-politicised and de-economised view of human rights and democracy promotion. While they promote plenty of different kinds of rights – positive and holistic as well as negative and narrow – the internal contested of these rights is not dealt with, nor the politics of the contestation between them. This is, however, where the politics and radical potential of human rights and democracy lie, if we are to believe Bowles and Gintis. It follows that far from advancing radical agendas it seems that as it stands human rights and democracy promoters tend to, despite the radical potential of their rights agendas, promote rather conservative and delimited agendas, moreover, failing to perceive, or even fearing, the radical potential of human rights contestation when released in its full capacity. Limitations still inhere in the conceptual framework of human rights and democracy promotion, although they are not the kinds of limitations often raised by critics of western agenda. These limitations are less about universalism and more about depoliticisiation, less about lack of rights and democracy promotion and more about not realising or enabling the more radical and contested aspects that might unfold as their consequence. There are understandable limitations. Yet we should not assume either too much or too little of rights and democracy promoters. Much unrecognised potential for democratisation, for politicisation, for contestation exists in this agenda, even within the existing framework - although as things stand much of this still remains just that, potential.

[1] See for example T Risse, S C Ropp and K Sikkink, eds., *The Power of human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, Cambridge: CUP, 1999. K Sellars, *The Rise and Rise of Human Rights*, London: Sutton, 2002. M Keck and K Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998. A Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

[2] Interview with a European Commission Official A, January 19th 2011, Brussels.

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