

**DEMOCRACY AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

by **Hazel Smith (ed.)**

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This edited collection promises to be an 'explanation of the contemporary global push for liberal democracy by major Western powers and international organizations'. The opening four chapters present critiques of current theorizing, the remaining six focus on regional case studies.

Hazel Smith suggests that realist, liberal, and social constructivist approaches fail to challenge 'the fundamental ontologies of international relations theorizing', mistakenly they 'conflate the practical importance of the state in modern international politics with that of its analytical significance'. In similar vein, Kimberly Hitchings develops a critique of David Held's work, drawing out that he is tied to a liberal political tradition, which underestimates the importance of contingent identities. Vivienne Jabri's critique of Jurgen Habermas' 'discourse ethics' highlights the western cultural bias that places the coherence and consistency of rational discussion above the fragmentation and uncertainty of communication through art. Stephanie Lawson points out that we can not assume cultures are homogenous entities, and

that arguments for cultural variants of democracy (including 'Western' democracy) can be harnessed by elites. The rather eclectic selection of empirical chapters focuses on Russian foreign policy, business and state elite links in Latin America, the external promotion of civil society in Central America, and the limits to democracy in Zimbabwe, the Palestinian territories and Hong Kong.

It is disappointing that none of the authors give any attention to explaining the prioritization of democracy promotion by the major Western states and international institutions. Despite their intentions, this book is a good argument for 'conflating' the practical importance of institutions with their analytical significance.