

## 20. The Insidious Nature of ‘Democracy Promotion’: The Case of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy

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*The Arab Spring and other popular protests around the world have shown us that the desire for fairer and more democratic societies is a universal one. It is fundamental that organisations like the Westminster Foundation for Democracy continue to provide support to embed democratic standards and practices, in response to the needs and demands of people around the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Labour Party

*We’re standing with dissidents and exiles against oppressive regimes, because we know that the dissidents of today will be the democratic leaders of tomorrow.*

George W. Bush,  
Remarks to the National Endowment for Democracy, October 6,  
2005.<sup>2</sup>

At the height of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East the UK government was already instigating its political and “strategic response”<sup>3</sup> to the changing political landscape of the region, readying itself to intervene and mould the political structures that would arise from the turmoil. The Arab Partnership was launched on 8 February

2011; it is a multimillion pound venture claiming to support “those in the region that want to put the building blocks of a more open, free societies, underpinned by vibrant economies, in place”,<sup>4</sup> and focusing on “political participation, rule of law, corruption, public voice, youth employability, [and] private sector development”.<sup>5</sup> As this article will argue, it provides a prime example of the thinly-veiled neo-colonialist practices of so-called ‘democracy promotion’. Faced with a protean and unpredictable social rebellion in oil-rich areas, the UK government, among others, is jumping upon the dismantling of the authoritarian power structures in these countries as an opportunity to shape their replacements, and to counter the threat of the formation of any political groups or blocs of power that might resist integration into the neoliberal economy and refuse corporate access to the area’s land, labour and resources. Or as the FCO puts it, to establish “[p]olitically and economically open and inclusive societies”<sup>6</sup> in the region. This intervention consists of both economic and political elements, the Arab Partnership Participation Fund (APPF) and the Arab Partnership Economic Facility (APEF). The APPF is led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and aims at “political reform” including “not just free and fair elections, but stronger parliaments, media and judiciaries”.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile the aim of the APEF, led by the Department for International Development (DfID), is to bring “expert advice on economic reform”, by which they mean International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank, experts in the imposition of macro-economic policies which will aid economic liberalisation and corporate access.<sup>8</sup> This new advice is provided in order to, “support economic reform and to build more inclusive, vibrant and internationally integrated economies”.<sup>9</sup> This twin strategy to open up and dominate the economies of this region, and to ensure that the domestic political and social structures will provide internal stability for these economic reforms demonstrates the geostrategic need to mould evolving governments, misleadingly called ‘democracy promotion’ in order to sustain today’s crisis-ridden neoliberal economy. Through a close examination of one ‘democracy promotion’ organisation, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), (which is one of the organisations tasked with undertaking the FCO’s Arab Partnership) this article will explore the relationship between economic and political co-option and the aim of control in countries seen as fertile for the economic and political rule of neoliberal capital. What will be revealed is the attempt to use ‘democracy promotion’ as a rhetorical device to facilitate the exertion of power and influence over putatively sovereign states.

## 'Democracy Promotion'

'Democracy promotion' comprises the complex series of initiatives by governmental, intra-governmental or semi-private or private organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to influence, mould and direct political, economic and social change in ostensibly independent countries, in order to insulate the penetration of international capital in countries of geostrategic interest. (See also Berger Chapters 18 and 19.) The 'democracy' promoted by these organisations, is best characterised, following Robinson, as *polyarchy*, or "low-intensity democracy", a system in which "a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections carefully managed by competing elites."<sup>10</sup> Such limited democracy has proved very successful in suppressing more organic, autonomous popular politics and containing resistance to the capitalist system in the West, and it is via these political foundations that the same model is now being exported. (Fisher, Chapter 2 and Barker, Chapter 11.) However, as market dominance intensifies, restructuring societies at the centre and periphery of capital accumulation, widening the gulf between rich and poor, both between and within countries, accelerating privatisations and enclosures of the few remaining commons, and causing environmental and agricultural catastrophes, political instability is sure to increase. Efforts to build consent for these policies, both in terms of the politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats implementing them, and civil society and the general public acquiescing to them, acquire increasing importance to the maintenance of the neoliberal capitalist order. (See also Whyte, Chapter 3 and Robinson, Chapter 4.)

Since the early 1980s, the militaristic, coercive foreign policy of states such as the United States and Great Britain has been reinforced and complemented by the promotion of this empty form of democracy. While, of course, force and co-option have always been used in tandem, and direct coercion is clearly still a vital weapon of foreign policy - with ideological justifications such as humanitarianism now often aiding their legitimation - the use of 'democracy promotion' as a rhetorical device to mould the political structures of targeted countries has emerged as the political counterpart to neoliberalism, with the two in tandem enabling material and ideological social control. Rather than directly and covertly manipulating the political leaders and elites from above via military interventions, assassinations and coups to produce a regime which will adhere to transnational and corporate interests, as the

CIA did in Chile, Iran, Nicaragua and elsewhere, the preferred strategy is now to mould political systems, civil society organisations and political parties from below, in the name of 'democracy promotion'. (See also Fisher, Chapter 2, and Berger, Chapter 18.) This aims to hardwire the same result into their political landscapes under the cover of democracy. The intensified focus on civil society - i.e. social and political formations outside of the direct purview of the state such as churches, political parties, trades unions, NGOs, social movements and so on - is hardly surprising given their ability to channel popular opinion and political activity. The results of such interventions can be seen most visibly in the so-called colour revolutions of former Soviet countries.<sup>11</sup>

Today, a vast array of 'democracy promotion' organisations have emerged, primarily from North America and Europe, and operate all over the world. The most famous are the US-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Freedom House but others include government and intra-government institutions such as USAID, DfID and the United Nations Development Program. (See also Berger, Chapter 18.) This article will investigate one, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), that has so far received very little critical scrutiny, but which is integral to the UK government's attempts to use 'democracy promotion' as a foreign policy weapon. It is hard to ascertain how its programmes are received, and how much it influences the political and cultural identities and practices in their target countries; what we can do is examine the programmes' intentions, and the ways in which they try to mask their political agendas.

There is not space here to examine precisely the motivations of the individuals involved in the agencies, or whether they understand their work as explicitly aiming to protect the capitalist system. Doubtless many do sincerely believe, for pragmatic and ideological reasons, in the merits of representative democracy, and in global capitalism. Here the focus is not on such complicated issues of agency, but on the outcomes of the work of 'democracy promotion' organisations, whether or not they reflect deliberate intentions or are the result of more structural forces in which they are embedded, and which they support. I would also stress that I do not wish to criticise those in intervened countries who engage with such 'democracy promotion' agencies, for whom the offers of funding even with such an unequal power dynamic are often difficult to resist, and who, in any case, may still be able to use this funding to their own ends, subverting those of the 'democracy promotion' organisations.

## The Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Like most other European ‘democracy promotion’ organisations, the WFD was a governmental response to the break up of the Soviet Union, in order to establish influence over the newly opened economies of Eastern and Central Europe. (See also Berger, Chapter 18.) It was established in 1992 by the FCO, modelled upon the far larger NED, which was founded in 1983.<sup>12</sup> It has since broadened its focus from the former Soviet states to include East and West Africa, the Middle East and to a lesser but growing extent Asia (currently Bangladesh and Pakistan).<sup>13</sup> Its work is divided into two main areas: firstly, its own ‘parliamentary strengthening’ programmes, in which the WFD fund carefully selected and closely monitored national and international civil society organisations; and secondly, ‘political party development programmes’ which provides ideological and political support, including trainings and exchange visits, via British political parties, to political parties in the WFD’s target countries. In addition, the WFD is the lead partner in The Westminster Consortium (TWC) through which “leading experts in the fields of parliamentary practice, financial oversight and communications”<sup>14</sup> build capacity in the parliamentary process and management. The democracy training provided derives from the participants’ experience of the British political system, the cultural caché of which is very much part of the WFD’s marketing strategy. In this way the WFD essentially aim to export some of the practices and processes of the British parliamentary system, the “Westminster model”, as the epitome of a truly democratic system, across the world.<sup>15</sup>

The WFD’s work is conducted within a paternalistic narrative of the ‘transition to democracy’ in which infantilised ‘transition’ countries require expert advice to learn about and adopt the undisputed benefits of Western democratic culture. For instance, in reference to countries in the Middle East and North Africa the WFD’s 2011-12 Business Plan insist that “the role of political parties in parliament and their representation in the public sphere is weak... Political parties tend to lack internal democratic procedures and do not work on the basis of clear and developed party platforms... The wider public do not tend to understand the roles and responsibilities of political parties”.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Business Plan asserts that “in Africa... There is rarely a strong ideological divide between the parties, instead power tends to be concentrated in individuals and in support of individual ethnicities”.<sup>17</sup> Thus via direct support to civil society and parliamentary bodies, and through facilitating the support of UK political parties, the WFD

interventions echo Britain's imperial 'civilising' mission and achieve inherently ideological influence over the kinds of politics that arise in the 'emerging democracies' of strategic interest to the British Government, militating against the unpredictable and uncontrollable outcomes of popular politics which genuine democracy - in which there would be universal political freedoms and access to decision-making processes - might bring. The colonial language may have been toned down, but the attempts to control the politics of other countries remain current.

### Who's Pulling the WFD's Strings?

The dominance of the UK government's strategic interests in the WFD's operations is achieved through close ties between the WFD and the FCO. Although apparently "independent from government and operat[ing] at arms length from the FCO"<sup>18</sup> the WFD must account to Parliament for its expenditure and its priorities, and objectives must "contribute to the delivery of the Government's strategic international goals".<sup>19</sup> To that end the WFD must agree its corporate plan and strategy with the FCO, "to ensure that it complements [its] overall objectives and priorities".<sup>20</sup> This consultation also extends into the more day-to-day running of the WFD. For instance, a meeting of the board of governors held in late January 2010, at which FCO staff members were in attendance, praised the "newly established arrangements for consulting and collating comments from FCO and others". Such 'consultation' aids the political deployment of the WFD in areas of strategic concern for the UK government, as this meeting demonstrates in acknowledging the "close alignment of WFD programmes with FCO and DfID priority countries" and agreeing to an extension of the WFD's "geographical reach" on the proviso that it remained "within the framework of a clear strategy and agreed criteria".<sup>21</sup> This kind of strategic thinking was encouraged in the WFD, as the meeting noted that the "WFD needed a 'political horizon scanning' capability that would raise its awareness of political change and provide sound intelligence on which to act".<sup>22</sup> The FCO are also consulted over specific project proposals. For example, a meeting of the 'Programmes and Projects Committee' in January 2010 noted that the "revised project/programme templates... now incorporate FO [Foreign Office] comments in the bids" while Chief Executive Linda Duffield, whose previous work had included several ambassadorial positions at the FCO, was minuted to encourage "Parties and HOPs [Heads of Programmes] to

consult with FCO and Embassies at draft stage”.<sup>23</sup>

Duffield is far from the only WFD staff member with close links to the British government. In fact, according to its constitution, all fourteen members of its Board of Governors must be appointed by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with eight of them nominated by the Westminster parties with which the WFD works. In addition, its nine patrons are the Speaker of the House of Commons and the leaders of the main political parties in Westminster, currently David Cameron (the Conservatives), Ed Miliband (Labour), Nick Clegg (the Liberal Democrats), Alasdair McDonnell (the Social and Democratic Labour Party), Alex Salmond (Scottish National Party), Peter Robinson (Democratic Unionist Party), Ieuan Wyn Jones (Plaid Cymru), Tom Elliot (Ulster Unionist Party) and Caroline Lucas (the Green Party).

Such close ties are not openly admitted to however, ensuring that the UK government can hide behind the ostensible independence of the WFD in the pursuit of its political objectives. As the FCO admit, the WFD was established “to allow the FCO to support democratic political party development overseas and parliamentary strengthening without direct involvement”.<sup>24</sup> The WFD’s Annual Report is more candid: “WFD offers the FCO and HMG... a focus on political work which the FCO or the Government could not or would not wish to undertake directly: developing political parties and democratic institutions... where engaging directly with new/emerging political and civic groups and free media is politically sensitive, and where direct British government support could be interpreted as foreign interference.”<sup>25</sup>

An FCO commissioned 2010 WFD review, authored by Global Partners & Associates, another UK-based ‘democracy promotion’ organisation, highlights the highly partisan nature of the WFD’s party support work: “the purpose of party support - strictly defined - is not to show demonstrable improvements in the functioning of democracy.”<sup>26</sup> Instead they note that party support “was part of the original rationale around which WFD was build, in that it allows the parties to engage in activity that would be impossible for the FCO to undertake” and which they praise as “the strength of the model”.<sup>27</sup> This work involves an “overtly political set of activities, designed to help their ideological counterparts in other countries”<sup>28</sup> and “facilitates access to, and influence over parties in developing democracies”, supporting the “UK government’s diplomatic objectives by providing insights and access to parties that may form the government in priority countries in the future.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the WFD clearly provides an important service for the UK government in providing intelligence about emerging political forces and helping to shape them. “It’s difficult to put a value on this sort of

soft power” as one interviewee for the Review remarked.<sup>30</sup> Peter Burnell, an UK-based academic tasked with writing up a WFD-organised conference, candidly stated, “trying to promote democracy is necessarily a political act.”<sup>31</sup>

## Where and How the WFD Operates

When and where the WFD chooses to operate strongly attests to the political nature of its work. For instance, given the UK’s “vested economic interests in Eastern Europe, [and] future partners in the European Union”,<sup>32</sup> it is unsurprising to find that the WFD are still active in the former Soviet states in Central and Eastern Europe, where it first began to operate. Similarly, today the WFD has been quick to capitalise on the “new opportunities for engagement” provided by the “Arab Spring [which] has seen democracy taking root in many countries in the Middle East”.<sup>33</sup> Predictably, the people of such a geostrategically important, oil-rich area will not be left to choose their own political directions without interference from state and corporate interests. Before the uprisings, the WFD’s work in Egypt had operated with caution; in 2009 they noted an “Absent [sic] of change in the ‘rules of the game’ allowing foreign bodies to openly assist political parties” and recommending that the programme “should... abstain from any activities related to supporting candidates in local or national elections, directly or indirectly” and should instead focus on providing support within the parliamentary system.<sup>34</sup> And while Mubarak’s regime remained obligingly faithful to neoliberalism such political inference was not seen as such a priority. All this changed following Mubarak’s deposition however: initially wrong-footed, organisations like the WFD are now crucial in the imperial powers’ attempts to recapture effective political influence, through the manipulation of governments and civil society. In 2012 the WFD opportunistically launched a new programme to “support the new Parliament” including “induction training for MPs” and regional projects on “enhancing public policy”.<sup>35</sup> As Chief Executive, Linda Duffield, hopes, “The technical training that we can deliver, and the opportunity to share experiences with members of the UK Parliament, should help give the People’s Assembly the tools it needs to fulfil its role in Egypt’s democratic transition.”<sup>36</sup>

The WFD’s ‘support’ involves intervention in the policy-making process of ostensibly sovereign states, influencing and shaping their society, economy and culture. However, the WFD is far less explicit in its



promotion of specific market reforms than the US equivalent organisations.<sup>37</sup> It is nonetheless possible to see the WFD's influence over economic matters, such as the fact that their 'democracy strengthening' work includes advice on budget writing. The WFD's *Corporate Plan 2011-15* describes its work on financial oversight as focusing on "strengthening parliament's authority and ability to agree national spending priorities" which clearly has a very prescriptive role to "ensure that specific policy areas are being funded adequately to meet policy objectives, and conduct budgetary and expenditure oversight".<sup>38</sup> This demonstrates the WFD's intention to influence key decision-making concerning government spending. The WFD also actively attempts to influence policy-making more generally. For instance, the 2011 programmes in the Middle East and North Africa involve training "Researchers, activists and experts from Tunisia and Egypt... to write policy analysis and recommendations"<sup>39</sup> and developing a "guidebook on best practice in policy making".<sup>40</sup>

Policy 'support' given, coordinated or funded by the WFD can concern extremely contentious questions. In Uganda, where an estimated 3.5 billion barrels of oil reserves are located,<sup>41</sup> the WFD and the Westminster Consortium have been engaged in providing "constructive input" regarding the writing of new legislation relating to the Ugandan oil industry. However, this input seems to be very focused on the notoriously corporate-friendly form of oil contract which facilitate the de-facto privatisation of national oil reserves, called Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs). For instance, the agenda of a workshop which was held on 10-12 January 2012 indicates that the session concerning "Legal frameworks for achieving parliamentary oversight" was to detail "Legislation Treaties, Contracts between host government and private enterprises with focus on PSAs".<sup>42</sup> In addition, each of the three 'notable' action points or recommendations arising from this workshop concerned the implementation of PSAs.<sup>43</sup> The role of the WFD here, amongst other agencies and NGOs, is evidently to normalise the inevitability of PSAs, in light of the shock expressed by many Ugandan civil society organisations as to the degree of corporate power and freedom the contracts offered. In doing so, they serve to "dampen any political aspirations to fundamentally change the deals or even, as many were calling for in 2009, altering them so, say Murchison Park [a national park and potential site of a new oil well] is not drilled."<sup>44</sup>

The inherent bias towards economic liberalisation can be seen in the WFD's support for the accession of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia to the EU. Their programme in Macedonia was initiated following the European Commission's statement that the country was

insufficiently “compatible with EU norms and regulations” and so the goal of “[a]chieving successful multiparty dialogue, in the context of the EU Accession Partnership” became the “foundation of the Macedonia programme.”<sup>45</sup> The WFD therefore seems engaged in facilitating Macedonia’s fulfilment of the EU’s Accession requirements which include such economic reforms as the “implementation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement” and “strengthening... the functioning of the market economy”.<sup>46</sup> Thus here we have the WFD acting to facilitate market liberalisation policies in order to pave the way for Macedonia’s political and economic decision-making to be placed in the undemocratic hands of the EU, rather in the ‘democratic’ parliament the WFD purports to support.

‘Support’ to encourage specific policy decisions is undertaken even when faced with local political resistance. The Westminster Consortium Annual Report cites “Lack of political will for reform” as an “External Risk” of “Medium” probability and impact to their project. As a “Mitigation Measure” the Consortium suggests that they “[b]uild a good relationship with parliamentary leadership and continue to encourage reform”.<sup>47</sup> This potential for resistance is well acknowledged by the WFD, who have tricks up their sleeve in order to legitimate their hoped for reforms, and to insulate them from the wider public, which is only symbolically ‘consulted’ at election times.

## The WFD and Civil Society

In keeping with the tradition of ‘democracy promotion’, a major part of the WFD’s work involves the training and cultivation of civil society. Like many other such organisations the WFD devotes considerable attention to political parties. Moulding non-state actors, who both provide the appearance of public engagement and construct policy, is crucial to influencing a government’s decision-making and maintaining the illusion of democracy, and thus political stability. As the WFD former Chief Executive, David French, writes, “Parties are the bridge between government and society, both in the ways they translate society’s demands into political ideas and programmes, and in the way they hold government to account on society’s behalf.”<sup>48</sup>

The WFD’s political party development programmes are undeniably partisan and ideologically motivated, based around such themes as “Message and policy development”; “Development of party campaigning and communications”; “campaigning and election strategies” and

strengthening parties' "political and ideological identity" and "ability to communicate with the electorate",<sup>49</sup> all of which present ample opportunity directly to shape the identities, ideologies and activities of local political parties, as well as to impart ideologically motivated 'truths' about the nature, role and functioning of Westminster-style 'democracy'. Further, supporting only those parties built on Westminster models, helps to confer legitimacy upon liberal, capitalist parties, and suggests the illegitimacy of others who deviate from this norm. Operating within a neo-colonial power dynamic, organisations like the WFD, and the Westminster political parties they coordinate, operate with superior financial and political resources than can be deployed by ideologically different political groupings who might be aiming at political influence. The result is that the successful parties and the 'democratic' structures of target countries are likely to owe more to whatever interests, foreign or local, interests deploy the greatest resources than to the wishes of their own constituents.

In addition to the skills trainings and technical advice, the three main Westminster parties attempt to mould the ideological make-ups of the parties they work with, while conveying an image of their work as non-ideological or 'technical', which is the preferred term. The British Conservative Party runs programmes in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Africa and South Asia, much of which seems to focus on developing parties' ideological identities. In addition to the more standard party building, campaign and communications and policy development programmes, "[t]here is also, however, now an emphasis on the internal ideological consolidation of the party"<sup>50</sup> which, in keeping with the narrative of target countries' ineluctable transition to Westminster-inspired 'democracy' "emphasise the importance of Conservative principles and values as an alternative to identification with a leadership figure or national tradition".<sup>51</sup> The wish to support particular policies in opposition to others less favourable to transnational corporate investment and deregulation is evident: for instance, the Conservatives aim to aid "the development of a viable opposition to the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, which has a clear policy programme and can draw support from across Montenegro".<sup>52</sup> That these interventions' real aim is to engender a stable social order, in which few challenges to the neoliberal status quo are permitted is demonstrated by the claim that this ideological tutelage is "a necessary process if the political spectrum in these countries is to stabilise", a statement which is then given the thin veil of 'democratic' legitimacy: "and voters are to be given a real choice", albeit only between Westminster modelled parties.<sup>53</sup>

The British Labour Party also attempts to ideologically mould the political parties it trains. In Eastern Europe it was observed that “[s]ocial democracy is weak” and so a “week long academy for young people” which “focused heavily on the ideology, principles and values” of “social democrats” was organised.<sup>54</sup> The Liberal Democrats aim to do the same, for instance, their support to the political parties within the Africa Liberal Network directly influences their manifestos to ensure that they are “founded on liberal ideas”, which they justify by claiming that it “provided the electorate with greater choice”.<sup>55</sup> Although they provide greater legitimacy, by imparting political training indirectly via the Westminster model the WFD risk diluting their main objectives. However, in case the individual MPs deviate from the WFD-defined rubrics the WFD have recommended that they be “carefully selected and adequately briefed” and given a “guidance note to help frame discussions”.<sup>56</sup> Such political party work has grand, strategic ambitions. The Liberal Democrats hope that the “strategic impact” of their work with the Africa Liberal Network will be “the development of liberal democracy in Africa”,<sup>57</sup> while the Conservatives intend “that the strategic impact of these projects [in Ghana, Uganda, Côte D’Ivoire, Liberia, and Kenya] will be to establish ideologically well defined and structurally sustainable centre-right political parties”.<sup>58</sup>

The WFD does not limit its engagement with civil society to political parties. Wider civil society, which has at least the potential to remain outside established parliamentary structures, constitutes a crucial battleground, in which ‘democracy promoters’ around the world are determined to gain a dominant position, in order to win vital legitimacy and authority. If successfully influenced, co-opted or controlled, civil society organisations can provide a veneer of democracy while in fact remaining more responsive to interests other than of the local population, and malleable to their foreign donors through their close relationships with and ideological allegiances to them. NGOs especially, are traditionally deployed within established political structures to effect and sanction policy changes, obviating the need to engage with the wider populace. Further, civil society groups that are incorporated into these ‘democratic’ structures are rendered largely unable to offer structural critiques of the system they are now a part of, and so can channel public debate away from such critiques, redirecting or neutering people’s disaffection. Such groups can thus act more as a buffer to protect powerful interests from the threat of broader popular participation, than as the buffer protecting the public from the abuses of power that they are frequently portrayed as being by the media and the ‘democracy promotion’ industry.

There is consequently a strong emphasis in WFD materials on encouraging these civil society groups, often foreign sponsored and/or trained, to put their energies into engaging with parliamentary decision-making. In this way, decisions made by those in power can seem to be subject to or even the product of public engagement, when in reality the public are represented by a select number of groups which have usually been heavily influenced by corporate-NGO methodology and foreign interests. It also ensures that the issues focused on are limited to very specific policies and reformist proposals, and take place in the rarefied and carefully circumscribed world of parliament, which does not readily allow for wider questions on who has the right to resources in a particular place, or how such decisions get made collectively and fairly. The Westminster Consortium, for instance, seeks to address “how opportunities are can be [sic] created within parliament to enable better CSO [civil society organisation] access to committees and members” and “looks at building evidence and advocacy skills needed to lobby and communicate their policy positions professionally”.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the Annual Report boasts about the WFD’s success in “[d]eveloping the capacity of civil society organisations to produce evidence-based research to influence policy making in Ukraine”<sup>60</sup> and in “establishing close relations with parliamentarians and civil organisations” in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>61</sup> Not all civil society organisations are encouraged to have their capacities enhanced however. While the Evaluation of the Egypt programme June 2006–March 2009 recommends publicising “Opportunities for organisations (primarily civil society ones) to participate in, and compete for, implementation of activities supporting the programme” it suggests making such opportunities available only for “a limited number, say 7-15, NGOs and other relevant entities” who “should be identified and shortlisted for solicitation”.<sup>62</sup> Thus the support and training provided by the WFD is not available to all, but only to a chosen, presumably fairly receptive few.

A particular focus for the WFD, as with most ‘democracy promotion’ organisations, is on women and youth movements. William Robinson suggests an ulterior motive in such apparent progressiveness may lie in the fact that such groups, are likely to have more grievances against the established local political structures over which power and influence is being sought, and therefore be receptive to ‘democracy promotion’, as well as being necessary to co-opt. This is corroborated by one specialist who observed that: “The youth of a growing population may very well play a major role in pressing for change. They are among those who are actually disproportionately disadvantaged they have less at stake in the existing structure of authority, more idealism, more impatience”.<sup>63</sup>

'Democracy promotion' organisations may thus find it easier to build trust with and co-opt such disaffected groups, from which to leverage influence over protean political movements and systems.

The WFD is also involved in the establishment and training of educational and advisory bodies, through which they can channel their supposedly neutral expertise at arm's length, and thereby extend this expertise to other groups, organisations and bodies. In May 2011 the WFD launched a parliamentary think-tank in Iraq, called the Iraqi House of Expertise, to "provide specialist advice in parliamentary affairs and public policies to Iraqi MPs"; advice has consisted of "Policy recommendations in four sectors (education, health, gender and transparency)... to better inform policy discussions".<sup>64</sup> The WFD have also engaged University institutions in their attempts to influence both the teaching of students and the advice given to governments. In 2008, in partnership with the Arab Forum of Alternatives, the WFD organised a six-month project to train a pool of Iraqi university lecturers, which encouraged them to become more engaged with the Iraqi Parliament. The final report of the programme indicates that participants were provided with "tools to play to role of consultancy" through workshops covering such matters as "[e]lectoral laws... [n]egotiation skills, lobbying" and "policy recommendation writing" and listed as an achievement in the enhancement of "professors' interaction with legislators" and enabling them "to influence the legislative policies in the Iraq Parliament".<sup>65</sup> The academics were also given trainings on topics such as "parliamentarian systems... electoral laws and it's [sic] international standards" both of which illustrate the standardised, Western version of 'democracy' promoted by the WFD as if a neutral training exercise.<sup>66</sup> The programme certainly addresses some very un-neutral topics, such as "[t]he Constitution; the Petroleum oil law; the project of the US military troops deal".<sup>67</sup>

Another concern of WFD programmes is training and developing links with local journalists, in an attempt to influence how events and issues are reported. Journalism is seen as crucial to "informing and manipulating public opinion, educating a mass public, influencing the culture of a general population"; it thus can make a "major contribution to the shifts in power and social relations in an intervened country, to the relationships between leaders and masses and between parties and social groups, and to the political behaviour in general of the population."<sup>68</sup> Emphasis on media training is typical in 'democracy promotion' organisations. The WFD organises several trainings for journalists in which they promote a kind of false objectivity of the UK media that disguises the fact that certain ideologies, favourable to elites,

are honoured while other are suppressed. (See also Cromwell and Edwards, Chapter 5.) The TWC's "Guide to Reporting Parliament", written by Thomson Reuters Foundation, declares that journalists must "strive for total impartiality" and stay "strictly neutral" even if this means disregarding their own opinions: "Some journalists have strong political views, which they need to suppress if they are giving a balanced report".<sup>69</sup> The Guidebook also cautioned journalists: "Politicians, particularly in coalition governments, are frequently required to modify or even drop policies according to changing circumstances. By concentrating on such shifts, reporters risk losing sight of the real issues".<sup>70</sup> This clearly demonstrates the WFD's promotion of both the fallacy of objectivity and the bias towards those in power in journalistic practice. As the Guide states, "the media has a vital role... in telling the politicians what ordinary people want or do not want".<sup>71</sup> According to this, it is the role of the media to articulate the needs and wants of the public to the politicians, who claim to represent them. This explains why control and influence of the media is so important to the 'democracy' the WFD seeks to promote.

When successfully de-fanged and incorporated into the parliamentary system where fundamental challenges are not permitted, civil society can act as shock-absorbers - absorbing social pressures from below and ensuring they do not reach, in any substantive form, the power structures above. Meanwhile, other social formations ostensibly separate from the state, such as media and research institutions, are also cultivated by the WFD, in order to ensure their participation and endorsement, active or tacit of the market 'democracy' they promote.

### **The WFD's Role in Achieving Hegemonic Control**

The WFD is also active in networking, both among other international 'democracy promotion' organisations, and between the government and state officials and civil society organisations and individuals it trains. Networking has both practical and normative impacts upon their work, establishing "regular opportunities for a wide range of officials in government and international organisations to interact with democracy activists"<sup>72</sup> and establishing momentum, respectability and legitimacy to the work of 'democracy promotion'. For instance, their endorsement and funding will often unlock funding from other similar organisations, which "leverage each other and other groups... in growing efforts to collaborate and make progress in the spread of democracy."<sup>73</sup> The WFD's

Evaluation of its Business Plan for 2010-11 recommends "exploring new partnerships and investing in new relationships to enable WFD to be a leader in the democracy assistance field".<sup>74</sup> How to network is also part of the WFD's training programmes: the programme to train Iraqi lecturers dedicated a day to "networking experiences, strategies and mechanisms" in order to better link "this group to Organisations who are running parliamentary strengthening programmes in Iraq".<sup>75</sup>

The coordination and networking of the 'democracy promotion' industry ensures that its impact is not limited to the particular target countries. More generally, it helps to create powerful norms and standards which can define democracy in ways which open the doors to transnational corporate power and neoliberal ideals and practice. The cumulative effect of the programmes is to normalise the limited democracy they promote, and their proliferation adds to the apparent legitimacy and neutrality of their ventures. They thus provide considerable weight to an ideological hegemony supporting a 'democracy' which limits popular participation to within the parameters set by carefully managed electoral politics and fosters neoliberal economic policies. Any challenge to this dogma is deemed irrational. It is symptomatic of neoliberal hegemony that such efforts must be undertaken to ensure that this is accepted as the right option among both the public and dominant elites, particularly given the rise of public disorder and opposition in the wake of the financial crisis and the intrinsic incapacity of neoliberal policies to do anything but exacerbate the ecological crisis.

In many respects it is hard to miss the neocolonial impetus of 'democracy promotion' interventions, such as those of the WFD detailed here. Economic, political, and social norms of the global north can be cultivated and disseminated through many routes, to be internalised and normalised by the target populations, devaluing and delegitimising all others, and ensuring they all become bound into the logic, ideals and practice of neoliberal capitalism. The WFD represents one route, to mould the political and business culture in its target countries, and to normalise procedures and practices of representative democracy - in particular among politicians, political parties, civil society and the media. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o wrote of this process in relation to the role of culture in the subjugation of the colonised but his insights are useful here in relation to the promotion of a political culture as a form of subjugation: he writes that colonialism's "most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and



their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relation to others." <sup>76</sup> By intervening with putatively neutral and beneficial training, capacity building, and technical assistance 'democracy promotion' organisations like the WFD aim to secure neocolonial influence over the political culture of target countries and over the ways their populations conceive of their political agency, their relationship within and without the global system, and of what kinds of political decision-making processes and decisions are conceivable. In this way 'democracy promotion' aims to engender a situation in which target populations internalise this Western-derived liberal definition and practice of representative, market 'democracy', and discipline *themselves* to make decisions, adopt policies and work within political systems that work in consonance with and are conditioned, if not determined, by global corporations, international financial institutions and ultimately the neoliberal hegemonic order. As we've seen, options such as nationalisation of natural assets such as oil, or refusal to join the EU, are likely to be off-limits, regardless of public opinion. This way, ideas and rules are internalised, reducing the need to resort to coercive means to secure obedience, and thus providing more effective, and legitimate, protection for the capitalist social order from political unrest.

However, of course the use of coercion remains very much a part of neoliberal disciplinary practices. Indeed soft and hard power are difficult to extricate, as the latter is used as a threat if the terms of the former are not met. Yet these connections are often missed when examining 'democracy promotion', which so often is taken at face value as unquestionably beneficial, and entirely separate from coercive mechanisms of social control. Overt 'democracy promotion' programmes, conducted openly, and often highlighting their supposedly neutral aims, hide their agendas in plain sight. This has enabled neocolonial powers such as the US and the UK in many instances to rely upon less repressive mechanisms to engineer general consent via 'democracy promotion', rather than coercion. Soft power has not replaced hard power: the war on Iraq for example was a brutally coercive attempt to install a client regime, made up of Iraqi exiles, close to the US political establishment. Nor is it at all clear that 'democracy promotion' will retain the status it currently occupies as the current crisis of neoliberalism deepens and coercive mechanisms become increasingly utilised. (See also Whyte, Chapter 3 and Robinson, Chapter 4.) However, it is also true that in the wake of the failure swiftly to impose a client government on Iraq, 'democracy promotion' is now a predominant

method to build in Iraq a pliant economic and political system whose markets and especially its oil will be open to transnational capital. Thus, while the attempts to spread and deepen neoliberal practices worldwide still rely heavily on coercion, a strategic deployment of a discourse and practice of 'democracy', as a supposedly neutral, beneficial intervention, has been developed to mask the same political, geo-strategic and economic objectives that motivated the covert and militaristic ventures.

The 'democracy' that is promoted does not receive the same degree of public scrutiny and condemnation as the military ventures, yet this serves to disguise a crucial part of the weaponry of North American and European governments and their fundamental support of neoliberal global capitalism. For organisations like the WFD directly intervene in policy-making and governmental structures, ideologically mould and train political parties, cultivate civil society organisations who will respect and engage with this limited democracy, and through networking among and between foundations and governmental and civil society actors normalise 'democratic' standards that facilitate the penetration of global capital across the world, the suppression of mass popular participation in the political decision-making process, and thus the foreclosing of the development of truly participatory democracies. 'Democracy promotion' organisations represent a subtle yet crucial means of accommodating other countries to the needs and ideals of global capitalism. It is only by examining them, including relatively small ones like the WFD, and seeing behind the language of neutrality to reveal their deeply ideological and undemocratic objectives, that we can fully discern the crucial mechanisms through which neoliberal capitalist norms and aims have been engineered, embraced, and embedded throughout the world.

## Notes

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  - 3 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Arab Partnership: Leading the UK Government's strategic response to the Arab Spring'.

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- 12 The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is a Non-Departmental Public Body and a private company limited by guarantee with no share capital. It is funded each year by a FCO core grant-in-aid, which for both 2011-12 and 2012-13 was of £3.5 million, an increase of 3.1% on 2010-11. The FCO has indicated that it intends this figure to remain level for 2013-14 and 2014-15. In addition, the WFD receives further funding from FCO Embassies which in 2011-12 amounted to £602,033 (an increase of £420,142 on 2010-11); and in 2012-13 the WFD received a new Accountable Grant from the FCO of £2 million. The WFD also receives funding from the DfID to run a £1 million programme in Bangladesh and a five year contract worth £5 million to manage The Westminster Consortium as part of the DfID's Global Transparency Fund. In 2011 the WFD won its first grant from the European Union, £200,000 for a parliamentary strengthening programme in Lebanon. In 2012-13 this grant increased to £610,000. In 2011-12 the British Council granted the WFD £90,000. The WFD's overall funding has increased from £5.89m in 2011-12 to £8.07m in 2012-13. See Westminster Foundation for

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 <<http://www.wfd.org/upload/docs/HC%20478.pdf>>; Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 'Annual Report and Accounts 2010/11', p. 26.  
 <<http://www.wfd.org/upload/docs/TSO%20WFD%20FY%202011%20Report%20and%20Accounts%2018%20July%202011%20FINAL%20-%20web%20accessible%20version.pdf>>; Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 'Business Plan 2012-13', p.19.  
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- 13 During 2012-15 the WFD is planning to work in the following countries and regions: Democratic Republic of Congo, East Africa Legislative Assembly, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Western Balkans, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Middle East and North Africa in relation to women's leadership and policy development. See Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 'Annual Report and Accounts 2011/12', p.10.<<http://www.wfd.org/upload/docs/HC%20478.pdf>>
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 <<http://www.wfd.org/upload/docs/TWC%20Ukraine%20prospectus%20V8F%20visual.pdf>> The organisations that make up The Westminster Consortium are: The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch, House of Commons Overseas Office, International Bar Association, National Audit Office, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and the University of Essex Centre for Democratic Governance.
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- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 6.
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<sup>72</sup> Scott and Walters, 'Supporting the Wave', p. 241.

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