Democracy is Surrender
Antipolitics as Critique of Liberal Democracy

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This article explores how state actors and ‘state philosophers’ from the latter part of the twentieth century until the present have described and reacted to what they perceive as militant challenges to the statist order. This is understood to be an antipolitical mode of argumentation because the critiques explicitly distance themselves from ordinary politics, portraying themselves as above or beyond normal politics. It is more specifically about critiques of liberal democracy for being unable to defend itself because it regards action as antithetical to talking. The article firstly outlines the core of the critique; then it turns to an empirical exploration of two different argumentative types of the critique illustrated through two different case examples: (1) securitized antipolitics: the neo-conservative argument for using force and the critique of those standing in the way of military solutions; and (2) moralized antipolitics: the idea that Islamism represents a new life threat to the West meriting a third world-war response and the critique of liberal appeasers supposedly not up to the challenge. The article concludes by summarizing the findings in the Slavoj Žižekian concept of ultrapolitics, where a militarization of politics is offered as real, hard politics but is actually a way to avoid the truly hard fact of politics: disagreement.

In June 1978 the exiled Russian poet Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn gave the commencement address at Harvard University. While the text itself, “A World Split Apart”, is one long anti-modernist cry, not to say reactionary rant, it also expresses something very interesting on the theme of this COLLeGIUM issue on the discourse of democratic failure. Western democracy, Solzhenitsyn claims, is unable to withstand the evil of Communism and the degeneracy caused by its own values. The East and the West are but two symptoms of the same materialist, godless celebration of man but while the East is gaining spiritual strength through suffering, Western man is progressively weakening through legalism, a free press, democratic politics, individual freedom, and material well-being, manifesting itself

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most prominently in a lack of will to defend itself: “A fact which cannot be disputed is the weakening of human personality in the West while in the East it has become firmer and stronger” (Solzhenitsyn 1980, 12). There is, Solzhenitsyn observes, a “decline in courage”, “a lack of manhood” causing the West to implode: “Must one point out that from ancient times a decline in courage has been considered the first symptom of the end?” (Solzhenitsyn 1980, 5 & 6). The values of the West are what doom it against forces adhering to evil: “To defend oneself, one must also be ready to die; there is little such readiness in a society raised in the cult of material well-being” (Solzhenitsyn 1980, 15).

Solzhenitsyn takes his place among the long list of thinkers who have portrayed the modern West as weak and unable to defend itself, risking its existence faced with determined, non- or anti-modern foes, if not exchanging its democratic ways for something a bit more hard and uncompromising. The fear of the inherent irresponsibility of liberal democracy when faced with existential threats have had a number of different historical expressions, most notably in the Weimar republic (which is also a constantly evoked ‘proof’), the confrontation with totalitarianism in the Second World War and the Cold War, and now in what is by some perceived as a new totalitarian threat, Islamism, which is portrayed as both an external and internal threat. The claim now is simply that the liberal democratic preference for discussion, tolerance and proceduralism exposes Western countries to an existential threat in the evident shape of terrorism and the more hidden one of a sneaking islamization. Against these threats, so the argument goes, liberal democracy doesn’t seem to have any means to defend itself on its own. It doesn’t know how to draw the line, defend the border (both the physical on the ground and the psychological in the people) and repel the threat.

We experience at present a de-democratization of Europe using economic arguments, substituting politicians for technocrats, forcing through via the EU and the IMF austerity measures in disregard of public opinion and handing over financial sovereignty to the market and financial institutions (Blyth 2013; Kuttner 2013). These developments are dependent upon a critique of democracy as being economically and morally irresponsible and it is in many ways parallel to the 1970’s claim of a governability crisis of democracies (Crozier, Huntington, Watanuki 1975), or to Fareed Zakaria’s claim of a trade-off between democracy and freedom (Zakaria 2003), criticizing democracy then and now for being too democratic to govern itself properly. These powerful discourses critical of democracy are threatening what most of us take to be important pillars of parliamentary democracy including parliamentary oversight, public debate and national sovereignty, and replaces them with threatening arguments of economic necessity in which ‘the market speaks’ (Jones 2013) and governments obey. While extremely important for our present and future predicaments, I want to focus on another set of arguments critical of democracy which are also saying that too much democracy is threatening us but which do not refer to economic essentials but to existential imperatives, not the abstract market but physical survival, not budgets and deficits but bombs and
terrorism, not the welfare state or our competitiveness but civilization and national survival, not economics but security. I want to focus on a set of critiques claiming that too much democracy is threatening our survival.

This article is about a critique of democracy coming from within democracy itself. Unlike the present EU elite critique of irresponsible economic behaviour by Southern European countries and ever louder calls for technocratic governments and non-democratic institutional arrangements and governance instruments, this article deals with an argument detectable from at least early modernity onwards which says that democracy is unable to defend itself. We focus here on the decline of courage and sacrifice that Solzhenitsyn spoke of above, and we look at arguments locating this decline within democracy itself.

In the following I’ll firstly outline the core of the crisis critique of democracy. Then I will empirically substantiate it through two different argumentative types of the critique illustrated through two different case examples: (1) securitized antipolitics: the neo-conservative argument for using force and the critique of those standing in the way of military solutions, and (2) moralized antipolitics: the idea that Islamism represents a new life threat to the West meriting a third-world-war response and the critique of liberal appeasers supposedly not up to the challenge. The two forms are not restricted to the examples explored below, neither are they limited to certain actors. They are meant as ideal type arguments offering themselves to anyone claiming to represent security. The cases have been chosen as representative of a certain kind of argumentation and are meant to be merely illustrative of versions of the general argument rather than being limited to the specifics of the situation they address. But first we need to address the core assumption behind the crisis critique of democratic irresponsibility.

I. Antipolitics or the Non-Democratic Defence of Democracies

I offer no definitions of the core concepts of ‘politics’ and ‘democracy’ because my interest is not in their ‘real’ meaning but rather in how they are used, defined and delegitimized by the actors analyzed. The concepts do however connect or relate to parliamentary practices, or perhaps we should say that the two concepts are used in the analyzed material as synonyms: Politics is democratic politics. Democracy and parliamentary politics is the problem. A ‘real politics’ and a ‘real polity’ is offered as the cure to the alleged democratic malaise and these are portrayed as antithetical to the core procedures and institutions of parliamentary democracy and ordinary public politics.

There are two basic theses in the crisis critique of the weak defensibility of liberal democracies:
(1) It is the democratic elements in democratic societies which make them weak and vulnerable. The doctrines of equality, tolerance, understanding, discussion, proceduralism, legalism weaken the defensibility of liberal democracies by institutionalizing endless talking rather than resolute action. In and of themselves democracies do not have an action theory but only doctrines for the continuation of discussion and a belief in the dissolution of all contradictions and conflicts through debate and compromise.

2) It is the non-democratic elements in democratic societies which make them strong and able to survive. The homogeneity of the people, the state of exception, the military, religion, tradition and other non-democratically organized institutions and values. The will to do what is necessary, to end talk and break rules is what sustains and safeguards democracy.

The suspicion or fear that democracy may be vulnerable when faced with non-democratic regimes or non-state challengers goes a long way back. A brief tour through the history of political thought reveals that a strong tradition exists that suspects that democracy is inadequate in a crisis situation. John Locke wrote in his Second Treatise of Government from 1690, in the chapter on the prerogative, that the sovereign is allowed “to act according to discretion, for the publick good, without the prescription of the Law, and sometimes even against it” (Locke 1988, 375). It is mainly the lawless state of the international, which necessitates this right. Adam Ferguson, although talking about rude times, says that the engagement in hostilities “inclines every people, during warlike ages, to monarchical government” (Ferguson 1995, 142); “when the political fabric was shaken or endangered, a monarchical power has been applied, like a prop, to secure the state against the rage of the tempest” (Ferguson 1995, 143).

Alexis de Tocqueville says that “external policy requires the use of almost none of the qualities that are proper to democracy, and demands, on the contrary, the development of almost all those it lacks” (Tocqueville 2000, 219), and Immanuel Kant says that when it comes to international matters, a despotic regime cannot be expected to change its form of rule, when confronted by unfriendly regimes “which, after all, is the strongest when it comes to external enemies” (Kant 1966, 234).

The international is of such a nature that the law and democratic procedure are not adequate instruments. The question of war and peace, treaties and diplomacy, has always had a status beyond ‘normal politics’ and often outside democratic accountability.

Liberal thought has often allowed for a ‘power state’ within the state, namely, a sovereign freedom of action in foreign and security policy to serve as a counter-weight to the judicially committed and talkative democracy. I want to explore a ‘power argument’ constantly resurfacing that alleges that there is a need to circumvent or bolster democracy’s soft side. What this kind of thinking basically says it that democracy cannot exist on its own, that it needs something beyond
democracy to sustain itself. It needs something un- or maybe even anti-democratic, something transcending or suspending normal politics, something subscribing to higher standards than parliamentary bickering and deal-making, something harder than compromise and dialogue, something that I shall refer to below as antipolitics.

The form of democracy critique that I’m interested in here, is the one focusing on the alleged security problems of democracy, of democracy’s inability to defend itself against existential threats. What I’m particularly interested in is how this critique depends upon a specific dichotomy between democracy’s supposedly endless chatter and constitutive indecision versus the hard realities and tough decisions of real politics. This I investigate through the concept of antipolitics, my claim being that what this dichotomy actually does, rhetorically and often also in practice, is to bypass, diminish, suspend or even abolish politics as the debate on and mediation of legitimate disagreements of public values.

For the purposes of this article, I will define antipolitics as the argument (and in that sense antipolitics is always politicized and politicizing) that parliamentary politics and democratic debate must cease, ordinary rule-bound practice must be suspended or altered, because we are in a situation of imminent and catastrophic threat; that this is the only option available and that any problematization thereof is not an insistence on debate but an amoral weakening of defence. There can be no discussion – only action. Talk is an amoral delay of the necessary, a way to avoid hard choices and brutal realities. Action and decision is the only moral position (almost whatever its content) because it faces up to the reality of things no matter how ugly they are. A distinction is made between decadence and action; decadence being the tendency of liberal democracies when not blocked or supplemented by the non-democratic in the form of religion, tradition, the military etc.; and action being the assertion of both will and values (in 2007 the German right-leaning journal Merkur published an issue called No Will to Power. Decadence [Kein Wille Zur Macht. Dekadenz]).

This also suggests that antipolitics is a highly political act framing its politics in a way meant to immunize it from the same kind of critique levelled against ordinary politics. The antipolitics of the critique is meant to elevate its own politics to a sphere beyond critique, where opposition can be portrayed as treason and where the urgency of the matter releases politics of all the usual fetters of political power. It is antipolitical in its suspension of what is generally taken to be politics, democratic expression and deliberation, but shutting down discussion is, of course, political. The important matter though, is that it presents itself as anti-political in its opposition to the endless talk of democratic politics. Through an examination of its two versions explored below, we should be able to decipher a certain kind of tough talking which displays a distinct intolerance toward (the possibility of) peaceful solutions. In that sense the analytical categories may help us see beyond the specific argument and situation of the critiques and recognize the ‘standard operating procedure’ of this kind of critique of democracy.
II. Securitized Antipolitics: American Neo-Conservatives

American neo-conservatism is among other things a plea for the use of armed force. It is motivated by what the neo-conservatives see as a weak and timid liberal globalist approach to world problems trying to solve them through negotiation and compromise rather than the projection of force (for the conservative/neo-conservative debates on the Iraq war, see Rosen 2005; Fukuyama 2006). The securitized antipolitics of the neo-conservatives is the argument that negotiation, compromise and international institutionalization doesn’t cut it in contemporary global politics and must be replaced by an American projection of global armed force. Securitized antipolitics is the claim that the situation is existential and has absolute priority over all other concerns and that extreme force is the only appropriate response to the situation.

The will to use force and the critique of those who seemingly block or limit the use of armed force is most evident in an article by the retired army officer and prolific writer Ralph Peters, “Kill Faster!” published in the New York Post in 2004. In the article Peters scolds the media who “weren’t reporting. They were taking sides. With our enemies”. The media are “sympathetic to terrorists and murderers” and has become “little more than a tool of propaganda”, a propaganda that is “increasingly, viciously, mindlessly anti-American”. The result of this liberal media self-hate is that “we lost our will to fight on” and the pressure is on to “halt combat operations, to offer the enemy a pause, to negotiate … in essence to give up”. The media blocked a war effort, for instance in the siege of Fallujah, “we could have won militarily” (Peters 2004).

Peters is expressing frustration at not being able to use the full force of the American military, at being held back by the media, international law and the politicians, at not being allowed to pursue the radical logic of military force to its conclusion. The answer to the frustrated efforts is to ‘kill faster’, that is to project the full force of American fire-power before a reaction from the liberal media can set in: “We have to speed the kill”, fight “faster at the dirty-boots level”, “We must learn to strike much faster at the ground-truth level” because once a conflict is dragged out because of misunderstood complacency on the part of the military, brought on by a terrorist-sympathetic media with no understanding of warfare, the costs will be higher and the conflict more difficult to end: “If we do not learn to kill very, very swiftly, we will continue to lose slowly” (Ibid.).

A most interesting example of killing fast or losing slowly is provided by two of the main architects behind neo-conservative foreign policy thinking, David Frum, formerly a speech writer for George W. Bush and now a right-wing commentator, and Richard Perle, chairman of the Defence Policy Board Advisory Committee 2001–2003 under George W. Bush and a member of several neo-conservative think tanks such as the Project for the New American Century. In 2003 they published An End to Evil which defended the war on Iraq and advocated regime change in Iran and Syria and a tougher stance against North Korea and most Arab nations.
Many have seen the Bush administration as only too willing to use military force but Frum and Perle depict a Washington filled with “the bad old habits of complacency and denial” making it impossible to sustain the kind of military campaign needed to win the war on terror. “Pessimism and defeatism have provided the sound track to the war on terrorism from the beginning, first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq” (Frum & Perle 2003, 4, 11).

The situation is dire. It is a new totalitarian threat on the scale of Nazism or communism: “It is victory or holocaust” (Frum & Perle 2003, 9); and has come about because of “weak-willed leaders who could not muster the nerve for decisive action”, borders that are “wide open, and even now are laxly guarded” and, of course, the inevitable cry of European degeneracy: “For years, European governments have appeased and indulged terrorism” (Frum & Perle 2003, 64, 191). An extreme dichotomy is drawn up between strong action and surrender, between those who are “fighting to win” and those who “continue to shut [their] eyes and wish [their] problems away” (Frum & Perle 2003, 9, 35). The establishment is caught up in its own narrow interests, in talking, hiding, hoping it will go away and allow us to focus on nice things while the few have realized the severity of the situation:

While our enemies plot, our allies dither and carp, and much of our own government remains ominously unready for the fight. We have much to do and scant time to do it. Yet at this dangerous moment many in the American political and media elite are losing their nerve for the fight. Perhaps it is the political cycle: For some Democrats, winning the war has become a less urgent priority than winning the next election. Perhaps it is the media, rediscovering its bias in favour of bad news and infecting the whole country with its own ingrown pessimism. Perhaps it is Congress, resenting the war’s cost and coveting the money for its own domestic spending agendas.

Or perhaps it is just fatigue … And while the American people have shouldered those realities magnificently, America’s leaders too often seem to flinch from them. Every difficulty, every casualty, every reverse seems to throw Washington D.C., into a panic – as if there had ever been a war without difficulties, without casualties, without reverses. (Frum & Perle 2003, 4)

Security is a state prerogative – and the persons described above view themselves as modern equivalents of advisors to a prince. The language of security activates the state’s most basic role as protector and thereby legitimates violence, even extreme violence. By elevating something from everyday pragmatic politics to security politics it’s dramatized as having absolute priority. As George W. Bush said at a crisis meeting of staff just after 9/11:

I want you all to understand that we’re at war and will remain at war until this is finished. Nothing else counts. Everything is at your disposal in this war. All obstacles that must be in your way are removed. All the money you will need you’ll get. This is our only agenda … I don’t care what the international lawyers say, we are going to kick some ass (quoted from Clarke 2004, 24).
This language is also activated by the neo-conservative analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, Michael Leeden, in his War Against the Terror Masters which ends by saying, “the important thing, indeed the only thing, is to win the war. There will be time enough to worry about bureaucratic wiring diagrams” (Leeden 2002, 237). He too describes it as a world war against totalitarianism – the fourth world war, the Cold War being the third – and diagnoses the cause of the present situation to “a lack of will to fight a real war against the terror masters” (Leeden 2002, xv), which is why he advocates war with Iraq, Iran, Syria and possibly Saudi Arabia. The cause of this “lack of will to fight a real war” is a liberal-democratic naïveté expressing itself in:

radical egalitarianism and our belief in the perfectibility of man. We think all people everywhere are fundamentally the same and, having turned the study of history into a hymn to the wonders of multiculturalism, we are reluctant to accept Machiavelli’s dictum that man is more inclined to do evil than to do good. Throughout this generation of political correctness, it has been singularly bad form for anyone in America to suggest that there are some truly evil people, and even some thoroughly evil regimes, whose fear and hatred of us are so intractable that “live and let live” (our mind set) will not do. It has to be “kill or be killed.” (Leeden 2002, xvii)

Once security is invoked, it is the only agenda and all else is relegated to a secondary concern (Wæver 1995). It becomes a ‘kill or be killed’ situation. The securitized discourse both necessitates and legitimizes going beyond ordinary practice. Once an issue is successfully securitized, an obligation and a right to handle the situation with extraordinary measures follows, as does an obligation and a right to transcend normal procedures and limitations in order to bring back the situation to ordinary politics.

The crisis situation is a moment of non-democracy. To insist on democratic procedure in a moment of life-threatening crisis seems inappropriate. Act now, debate later, as the first Leeden quote stated. But a situation needs to be securitized before politics and dialogue can be suspended and that move is in itself highly political and requires if not dialogue at least persuasion. This is why we see a constant invocation of the ‘terrorist threat’ and ‘new war’ images. To activate security’s priority, one has to argue that the threat is great and imminent and that the ordinary measures will not do. One needs to terrorize by referring to terrorism.

III. Moralized Antipolitics: Moral Defence of the West

In February 2002 the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher wrote, “the events of September 11 are a terrible reminder that freedom demands eternal vigilance. And for too long we have not been vigilant. We have harboured those who hated us, tolerated those who threatened us and indulged those who weakened us” (quoted from Hayward & Morrison 2002, 148). We get here in succession the
internal Muslim enemy, the external Muslim enemy and the liberals who have made both threats possible.

Thatcher’s quote is representative of today’s dominant discourse portraying the West as under siege from a new totalitarian threat, Islam or Islamism, and the internal security of Western states being undermined by liberal appeasers. The moralized antipolitics of the Islam/immigration debate is the position stating that we in Western societies are in actual fact engaged in a struggle for survival against the menacing threat of islamization. Moralized antipolitics is the argument that some values are absolute and beyond dispute, that they mustn’t be debased by being dragged into common politics, and that any debate about them is the same as undermining them (Schedler 1997, introduction; Brown, 2001, ch. 2).

Talk and understanding must cede and harsher measures against immigration must be introduced. Talk and understanding are amoral positions because they jeopardize our survival. The liberal, multicultural, cosmopolitan approach is not a political position to be debated but a treason to be exposed. The ‘softies’ invite the enemy, undermine the moral fabric of societies, block necessary measures, do everything to be a de facto fifth column of the new totalitarian enemy, Islam. The run-up to the Second World War is being replayed here, claiming that there is a threat similar to that posed by the Nazis and a class of people that are repeating Chamberlain’s appeasement strategy. Any indication of dialogue, understanding or some such policy is regarded as suicidal and amoral while Islam/immigration is being securitized, that is elevated to a domain beyond ordinary politics, beyond democratic debate, beyond ordinary legislation.

A case in point is the fast track working group initiated by the former Danish Prime Minister and now NATO general secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen to look into judges wearing religious symbols – headscarves – in court rooms. No Muslim is close to becoming a judge in Denmark but the threat of an alleged islamization of Danish juridical practice was felt to be so urgent that the working group was ordered to work fast and legislation was rushed through even at the cost of a serious dispute within the government.

This kind of rhetoric is evident in the ‘war on terror discourse’ but also in what I’ll call the ‘moral defence’ discourse of a securitized Islam/immigration debate. This is – beyond its obvious affinities to the war on terror discourse – a securitization of the inner moral fabric of the liberal-democratic state. Before engaging with the work of Samuel Huntington as the premier example of a right-wing moderate expression of this position (and Oriana Fallaci as an extreme right-wing version), I’ll analyze a self-declared “American social-democrat”, Paul Berman and his book Terror and Liberalism. The book has two themes, terrorism in the shape of radical Islam and liberalism as the position blind to the threat of terror. I’ll only concentrate on the latter which he summarizes as follows:

My purpose is to identify a rationalist naïveté that is shared by almost every part of modern liberal society … an unwillingness, sometimes an outright refusal, to accept
that, from time to time, mass political movements do get drunk on the idea of slaughter. It was a belief that, around the world, people are bound to behave in more or less reasonable ways in pursuit of normal and identifiable ways in pursuit of normal and identifiable interests ... In the United States, that belief was very nearly universal. The 9/11 attacks revealed many unexpected and astonishing truths, but surely the most astonishing of all was that, in Arlington, Virginia, the Pentagon had no plan to defend the Pentagon. Everyone, unto the chieftest of Indian chiefs, turned out to be a simpleminded rationalist, expecting the world to act in sensible ways, without mystery, self-contradiction, murk, or madness. (Berman, 2003, 152–3)

The liberal belief in rationality left the Pentagon undefended. Modern liberal society doesn't comprehend 'the other' in his barbaric irrationality and is therefore unable to defend itself. But Berman's main target is not liberal society as such but its "left liberal wing", who are, according to Berman (himself whining about being almost the only leftist supporting the Iraq war), consumed by “Vietnam fears, anti-corporate resentments, and pacific instincts” (Berman 2003, 7), rendering them unable to support any military or repressive action however needed. They are simply caught up in a myopic antipathy to anything resembling force.

He dismisses all the arguments of the anti-war movements. They are not really arguments, but expressions of psychological quirks, namely, “an unyielding faith in universal rationality … the simple-minded optimism that had blown up in the First World War, but that even so, indestructible, had lingered into the twentieth-century imagination” (Berman 2003, 125–6). These are instincts resistant to change and persuasion, they are unpolitical in the most basic sense and are therefore to be explained as pathologies rather than as policies. They are then summarily disregarded as rational arguments. No need to debate with appeasers.

As many other Americans do at present, Berman also can't help making Europe the prime example of liberal naïveté. Discussing the Yugoslav civil war and the military response from America and Western Europe, he details what may be a somewhat accurate picture of European tardiness in face of ethnic slaughter. The important thing is that this slow response becomes the truth of European liberalism as such, the inaction which reveals the basic degeneracy of Europe:

This response [to do nothing] did seem to confirm the dreary picture of modern life drawn by Nietzsche in the past and just now by Fukuyama: the comfortable burgher, blinking stupidly and wondering about dinner ... the listless response of Europeans without backbones or firm beliefs, cowardly, greedy, and self-absorbed (Berman 2003, 166).

Europe has degenerated into a hedonistic dependence on others for survival. Berman criticizes Sweden and Switzerland for their neutrality during the Second World War – “the survival of both places owed entirely to the fighting spirit of other people” (Berman 2003, 167) – and now liberal Europeans as a continent want to:
retreat to the dream of Sweden or a Switzerland – the dream of a Europe that, by laying low, will avoid attacks on itself, a heartless old Europe of the past … the Europe that has always needed to be rescued from its own manias and has lately congratulated itself on its (genuinely) superior achievements in economic equality and social welfare. (Berman 2003, 205)

Then as now we’re facing a totalitarian threat, we are “right now beset with terrorists from the Muslim totalitarian movements” and Europe is, again, laying low, letting others defend Western values and societies. But not only that, European liberalism is directly co-responsible for the upsurge of Islamic terrorism by its “wishful thinking – the kind of simpleminded faith in a rational world that, in its inability to comprehend reality, sparked the totalitarian movements in the first place” (Berman 2003, 206 & 207). What then, we may ask, is the appropriate response?

It’s the American way. Instead of turning into “a Sweden or Switzerland of North America – a virtuous country, dedicated to the charms and prosperity of its own social system, though with no ability or inclination to defend itself or anyone else”, the USA “took the notion of a liberal society and, with a few earnest twists of the screwdriver, rendered the whole concepts a little sturdier” (Berman 2003, 169). The American way is an emphasis on what is taken to be the non-liberal and non-democratic preconditions of liberal democracy. American sturdiness is precisely a refusal to succumb to a full liberalism, to trust its own values.

Elaborating on the exact meaning of this American way, Berman goes back to Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, not for its content, but for its setting: “[W]hat gave force to this argument [of freedom and democracy] was the occasion and setting of his speech. He delivered his remarks at a battlefield cemetery, dedicating the site. His speech was about death” (Berman 2003, 169–170). Death and war, celebration of sacrifice, is what makes up the American sturdiness: “He spoke about death as “the last full measure of devotion” … He was explaining that a liberal society must be, when challenged, a warlike society; or it will not endure” (Berman 2003, 170).

Starting from an America intoxicated with liberal defeatism, going to a liberal Europe incapable and unwilling to defend itself or others, we end up with a defence of infusing liberal societies with a warrior spirit. European appeasement is about the unwillingness of sacrifice, which is a degeneracy lurking within a complete liberal democracy. This is also the position of Huntington to whom we now turn.

The invocation of the ‘Muslim threat’ and ‘Western liberal complacency’ is an important topic in Samuel Huntington’s later works. In here we find the tired, old, hedonist, decadent, chattering West paralyzed by a culture of consumption, discussion and self-indulgence confronted with young, activist, puritan, expansive non-Western hordes ready for sacrifice. In his *Who are We? America’s Great Debate* from 2004, this dichotomy is described in terms of birth rates – a common topic for all Spenglerists. The recent Mexican immigrants are multiplying in America whereas native Americans don’t reproduce in sufficient numbers. American demography is shifting from the Anglo-American to the Latin-American.
For Huntington this constitutes a direct threat to the ‘We’ of America and is a sign of the decadence of Western democracies: They do not have the life-power to reproduce themselves. This kind of biological argumentation – which is also evident historically and today in much more sinister forms – is also found in his *Clash of Civilizations* from 1996 where he compares birth rates and concludes: “In the long run … Mohammed wins out … The percentage of Christians in the world peaked at about 30 percent in the 1980s, levelled off, is now declining, and will approximate about 25 percent of the world’s population in 2025” (Huntington 1996, 65–6).

Meanwhile the Muslim share of the world population is rising. Huntington even talks of a “Muslim demographic invasion” and he continues the long tradition of making fertility the marker of a collective will to life. Fluctuations in birth rates indicate the upward or downward movement of civilizations. This theme of demographic threats to a life-tired West – endlessly repeated throughout modern European history – has received new stimulants from the Islam/immigration debate in which a Muslim takeover through superior birth rates is being conjured up. In some parts of the debate, demography is being securitized. Births are weapons. The radical Italian anti-Muslim writer Oriana Fallaci wrote in 2004:

> The Politics of the Womb, that is, the strategy of exporting human beings and reproducing in abundance, has always been the most direct means for taking control of a territory, of dominating a country, of substituting a people or subjugating it … In all European mosques, the Friday prayers are accompanied by an exhortation to all Muslim women to ‘give birth to at least five children each’. Well, five children are not that few. In the case of the immigrant with two wives, the five become ten. Or at least ten. In the case of the immigrant with three wives, they become fifteen. Or at least fifteen. (quoted from Bialasiewicz 2006)

The paranoia of this quote is securitization speaking; it’s a securitization of child birth. This private act is being transformed into a collective expression of an intentional Muslim aggression, which threatens the ethnic, religious and societal integrity of the West. Besides the alleged imperialist tendency of Islam, where does Fallaci find the causes of this dangerous situation? “[In] a Europe without honour and without intellect … without dignity and without courage. A sick Europe, that has sold itself like a prostitute to the sultans and caliphs” (Ibid.). Threats are always total and here the potent threat of islamization is being met by a decadent, impotent and suicidal West, which has lost faith in itself and has sold out – sold itself like a prostitute to the over-sexualized sultans and caliphs. Back to Huntington.

Faithful to the conservative tradition, which writes negative developments into a single all-encompassing discourse of moral decline, Huntington compiles a list of signs of political, military, economic and moral decline which all point to a West which no longer believes in itself and which has therefore lost its ability to rule, dominate and in the end survive. He paints a picture of
a civilization in decline, its share of world political, economic, and military power going down relative to that of other civilizations … The West is increasingly concerned with its internal problems and needs, as it confronts slow economic growth, stagnating populations, unemployment, huge government deficits, a declining work ethic, low savings rates, and in many countries including the United States social disintegration, drugs and crime … The willingness of other societies to accept the West’s dictates or abide its sermons is rapidly evaporating, and so are the West’s self-confidence and will to dominate (Huntington 1996, 82).

These signs – or proofs – of decline actualize for Huntington the question of the seriousness of the threat from Islam but also – as the final chapter in Clash of Civilizations addresses – the question whether the West is able to halt or reverse this internal process of degeneration. And here it is most interesting that what for Huntington turns out to be the perhaps most salient obstacle to reversing of this decline – and perhaps even its cause – is what he identifies as ‘multiculturalism’:

A more immediate and dangerous challenge [than rising secularism] exists in the United States. Historically American national identity has been defined culturally by the heritage of Western civilization and politically by the principles of the American Creed on which Americans overwhelmingly agree: liberty, democracy, individualism, equality before the law, constitutionalism, private property. In the late twentieth century both components of American identity have come under concentrated and sustained onslaught from a small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists. In the name of multiculturalism they have attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings (Huntington 1996, 305).

According to Huntington, ‘multiculturalism’ attacks exactly what I initially called the non-democratic preconditions for democracy, here first and foremost ethnic homogeneity. In his book on Latin-American immigration he writes that the Latin-Americanization of the USA is caused by:

the popularity in intellectual and political circles of the doctrine of multiculturalism and diversity … the assertion of group identities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and the growing commitment of elites to cosmopolitan and transnational identities … multiculturalism is in its essence an anti-European civilization … It is basically an anti-Western ideology (Huntington 2004, xvi, 171).

And on the final pages of his book on civilizations he writes something seemingly taken straight out of one of Carl Schmitt’s books: “In an era in which peoples everywhere define themselves in cultural terms what place is there for a society without a cultural core and defined only by a political creed? Political principles are a fickle base on which to build a lasting community” (Huntington 1996, 306). In a world of non-democratic forces – or is it non-Western? – what place or possibility is there for a democracy to be a democracy? Or rather in a world of non-democratic, culturally and ethnically defined forces what place and
possibility is there for a society solely defining and grounding itself as a political community, as a democracy?

Huntington’s solution – like all the others described above – is to prioritize the non-democratic components of society, first and foremost the delimitation of the foreign and the foreigner. The line between in and out, citizen and stranger, friend and enemy is to be drawn clearly and sharply. The decisive dividing line for Huntington is not democracies versus un- or anti-democracies but one cultural community versus another where democracy is an often positive but just as often dangerous supplement to the non-democratic. Only by becoming less democratically grounded can Western democracy, and even more importantly Western civilization, survive, according to Huntington.

**IV. Ultrapolitics as Antipolitics**

Just after the 9/11 attacks journalist Judith Shulevitz wrote in the *New York Times*: “Somewhere deep in my heart, I have always longed for a catastrophe like the present one”, not, obviously, out of sadistic lust but because it creates a “collective purpose”. It sweeps away “petty political squabbling” and “enervating celebrity gossip” and reveals the true values and concerns. No more banality and chit-chat when faced with the catastrophic real (quoted from Seymor 2008, 6). This really sums up the arguments above.

In summary, the codified liberal order is not to be trusted to have the means to defend itself. War and peace, enmity and conflictuality are deemed beyond the liberal-democratic order. Ordinary politics, democratic, procedural politics is mere endless chatter and indecision. The really political is preserved in the exceptional situation, in militancy and in the borderline cases. Liberal-democratic societies preserve the political in illiberal and undemocratic forms within the liberal-democratic order, and this is what the critique keeps emphasizing: the inner life and survival of liberal democracies are dependent upon non-democratic, or perhaps even un-democratic, forces. In and of itself the liberal-democratic order has a suicidal tendency, both in the form of a deliberative degeneracy and in the form of an inability to observe and counter threats.

Man’s capacity for hatred and slaughter is emphasized whereas its tendencies for rationality and compromise is neglected or belittled. Facing up to what one claims is brutal and ugly, ‘the realism’, becomes a proof of the realist’s tragic but moral and authentic character. ‘Reality’ is brutal, man is irrational. This is the truth in the crisis critique and this gets emphasized constantly, partly to describe oneself as brave in confronting it and partly to describe the other as hopelessly naïve. Tough realism has more to do with making a distinction between oneself and the ‘do-gooders’ than about reality as such.

The ‘hard’ solutions advocated above is parasitic on a notion Stefan Breuer has given the name ‘the illusion of politics’, namely, “the conviction that this authority
[from above] must be conceived of as a sovereign subject, as caesaristic leader, as party of the new type” (Breuer 1982: 77); the illusory idea that what is needed and possible is benign rulers against whom the people then need no safeguards. But as Raymond Tallis coolly remarks “to conclude from the presumed original sinfulness of mankind that power in society should be deposited in an unaccountable elite, in leaders of great wisdom and strong will, seems at best naïve in the extreme and at worst self-contradictory” (Tallis 1997: 17).

The anti-politics of the crisis critiques, is parallel to what Slavoj Žižek, discussing the post-politics of Carl Schmitt and Jacques Ranciere, calls ultra-politics, that is, an “attempt to depoliticize the conflict by bringing it to its extreme, via the direct militarization of politics” (Žižek 1999, 29). Ultra-politics is offered as the real, hard politics but is actually a way to avoid the truly hard fact of politics: disagreement. Ultra-politics is a way to deflect or deny schisms within the body politic by fetishizing unity as the condition for existence and action. Opposite the talkative degeneracy is placed an imagery and a set of policies characterized by a “celebration of aestheticized power, haloed greatness, and political charisma” (Habermas & Haller 1994, 21–2). The end of discussion — ‘enough talk, now it’s time for action’ — also marks the limit of democratic politics. This manoeuvre draws a dividing line between the legitimate and the illegitimate, friend and enemy, by discursively outlawing dissent as suicidal naivety or as treason. Ultra-politics forces a unitary commitment on to the polity, demanding complete immersion into the fetishized nation of loyal, terrorized and, therefore, quiet citizens.

References


