

## RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

# THE LIVING DEATH OF WEST EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY?

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### Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of democratic governance in Western Europe. It argues that the undeniable decline in democratic participating processes does not constitute a threat to capitalist hegemony. Citizens and elites are withdrawing from election and parties because they are satisfied with the professionalization of politics and the entertainment content of spectator democracy. Capitalist governance is threatened by an extra systemic force in Europe and not by a decline in popular democratic participation.

### I. Democracy and Capitalism

The academic community has started a new debate. Is democracy dying or is it merely mutating thus making its burial unnecessary. In the present decade several mutated democracies have been advocated \_\_\_ Goodwin's 'Reflective Democracy' (2002), Young's 'Inclusive Democracy' (2003), Dryzek's 'Deliberative Democracy' (2002) and the World Bank 'Participating Democracy' for examples. All these seem to be responses to the gradual but inexorable growth of popular indifference to democratic process.

A common feature of these conceptual mutations is that they all justify \_\_\_ indeed celebrate \_\_\_ this popular indifference and citizen withdrawal. These writings contain no schemes for encouraging greater democratic participation or for making democratic process more meaningful for the ordinary subject of capital ('the citizen'). Quite the contrary, most contemporary theories of democracy view mass participation with disfavor. Thus both 'associative democracy' and 'participatory governance' theories lay emphasis on 'stakeholder involvement' rather than 'electoral participation'. Conventional mechanisms and modalities for sustaining and structuring mass democratic

mobilization form no part of 'reflective' and 'deliberative' democratic programmes (as developed by Dryzek and Goodwin for example). Depolitesization is seen as both inevitable and desirable by petit (2002) and Zakaria (2002) has argued that democratic renewal requires not more but less democratic participation<sup>1</sup>.

Actually existing capitalist order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need 'democracy without the demos'. More than fifty years ago the then doyen of democratic theory in America, Robert Dahl had contrasted 'Madisonian democracy' and 'popular democracy' (1956, Chapter 2)<sup>2</sup>. 'Madisonian democracy' is of course constitutional democracy. Constitutional democracy is the governance of the people for the sustenance of capitalist order. It's emphasis is on the universalization of capitalist human rights<sup>3</sup>, checks and balances on the distribution of institutional power and on ensuring the autonomous individual's and market (civil) society's dominance over the republican state structures. In other words constitutional democracy provides the political form for the rule of the law of capital<sup>4</sup>. Popular or Athenian democracy (pre Rousseauian) democracy on the other hand is not committed to the rule of the law of capital. Popular / Athenian democracy requires mass participation. It is rule by and not for (over) the people. It creates a sovereign state which may (or may not)<sup>5</sup> challenge the sovereignty of capital. Constitutional and popular democracy compliment each other as long as majoritarian decisions express the will of a formally sovereign people to subject themselves to the rule of the law of capital<sup>6</sup>. In actually existing capitalist order \_\_\_ mature, transitional and underdeveloped \_\_\_ it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain complementarity between constitutional and popular democracy as several studies have shown. (Diamond 1996).

Capitalist apologists, such as Fareed Zakaria stress that it is the constitutional rather than the popular element of democratic order which is essential for securing and sustaining the global hegemony of capital and America (1997, 27)<sup>7</sup>. Imperialism must (at least partially) de-sovereignise national parliaments to ensure universal application of capitalist law<sup>8</sup>. The World Bank's 'good governance literature' (see specially World Bank 1999) argues that in third world countries Western funded NGOs plus "impartial" courts ensuring the rule of the law of capital = democracy<sup>9</sup>. Michell Evenson has presented a roughly similar argument for insulating market governance from majoritarian (democratic) decisions in the EU (in Scott ed 2000). Thus according to World Bank and EU apologists good governance requires the colonization of the state by the universalization of market decision making practices and the necessary de-legitimation of majoritarian (popular democratic) decision making that it entails. Mark Thatcher<sup>10</sup> and Alex Sweet have argued that decision making by non majoritarian institutions enjoys greater procedural legitimacy than the decisions of West European national cabinets because decision by non majoritarian public institutions follow due process of law (of capital) and allow access to stakeholders. Thus non majoritarian institutional (market modeled) decision making provides a democratically superior alternative to partisan majoritarian decision making by cabinets. (Thatcher and Sweet, 2002)<sup>11</sup>.

## II. Western Europe's Neo Democracy

Capitalist theory thus welcomes the decoupling of constitutional and popular democracy. This decoupling has been underway in Western Europe for quite sometime. Central to this decoupling is the marginalization of the Party in all European polities<sup>12</sup>. The Party was the central construct of representative democracy in Western Europe. It was the main instrument for the legitimation of the metamorphosis of the divine right of the King into the divine right of the Citizen. The decline of the Party and the de-soverignisation of the (capitalist) Citizen are two sides of the same coin \_\_\_ at least in Western Europe. But the marginalization of parties may be necessary for the strengthening of constitutional democracy for it ensures capitalist governance that combines stakeholder participation and problem solving efficiency to never ending capital accumulation (Kohlor – Kooch 2005).

Post modern democratic theory<sup>13</sup> seeks to articulate conceptions of democratic order which (a) enable the sustained accumulation of capital for its own sake (b) has social legitimacy (c) without popular participation and external accountability.

An important index of citizen withdrawal from conventional democratic process is the continuing decline in mass party consciousness and community. In Western Europe political parties are manifestly failing to engage ordinary citizens. Party leaders are withdrawing from party life and are becoming increasingly dependent on access to non party public institution<sup>14</sup>. Western European political parties suffer from a synchronized mutual withdrawal. Ordinary members withdraw into private life and / or single issue movements and NGO networks and party leadership retreats into public beaurocracies. In this crucially important sense Lenin has been stood on his head. In post modern capitalism it is the state which captures the party and not vice versa<sup>15</sup>.

I will now present some recently calibrated trends to demonstrate the process of citizen and elite withdrawal from mass politics in the major West European countries. This withdrawal is an ongoing process. It's pace is accelerating but it will probably take two to three decades for its full realization. It is striking that virtually all indicators of mass withdrawal point in the same direction (and therefore do not contradict each other). Moreover these trends are evident in all Western European countries \_\_\_ including the USA and Japan<sup>16</sup>. I therefore claim that what we are seeing is a cross-national convergence of citizen and elite withdrawal from democratic process throughout Western Europe<sup>17</sup>.

In the post war period<sup>18</sup> electoral turnout ratios are significantly higher in Western Europe than in America. Nevertheless they declined by about 4 percent if we compare the average turnout rates during the 1960s with that of the 1980s.

During the period 1960 to 1990 the average turnout ratio declined in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK, turnout decline was thus universal throughout Western Europe during this period. During the 1990s the average turnout ratio fell by a further 5 percent, so that the aggregate decline in average turnout is almost 10 percent for the post war period<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore 11 of the 15 major West European countries recorded the lowest rate ever average turnout rates during the 1990s (Norris 2001p 17-49). During the first half of the present decade, lowest ever turnout ratios were recorded in the UK, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Austria, and Finland. (Franklin 2004). The trend towards declining turnout rates in this unidirectional and pervasive trend indicates continuing enfeeblement of the electoral process throughout Western Europe. Record turnout lows now occur with greater regularity and in a greater number of Western polities, although average turnout rates in the elections of the present decade in Western European countries still remain in the range of 70 to 75 percent typically. This deceives analysts in misreading the overwhelming evidence of accelerated citizen withdrawal from popular democratic processes in almost all West European countries.

Mair (2006) presents data to show that of the 45 elections with the three lowest turnout rates during 1950 – 2001 in the fifteen major West European countries 75.6 percent had taken place during 1990 – 2001 (and only 2.2 percent during 1960 – 1969). In 10 of the 15 Western European countries all of the lowest turnout election during the 1950 – 2001 period were held during 1990 – 2001. Although the decline in turnout rates is typically small the underlying trend is unmistakable due to the clustering of the low turnout ratios. Thus the more recent the election the higher the probability that it will result in a record low turnout rate.

Decline in popular involvement in democratic governance processes is also reflected in a broader range of electoral indicators. Voters behavior throughout Western Europe has become frivolous and capricious and elections have therefore become less predictable for long term commitment to parties is evaporating. The aggregate average electoral volatility index<sup>20</sup> increased by almost 25 percent during the 1990s in comparison to the previous decade (Mair 2005 p 427). In 11 of the 15 major West European democracies volatility was at its highest during the 1990s. moreover electoral volatility peaks are as clustered in the 1990s as are low turnout rates. More than 55 percent of the most volatile / unpredictable elections during 1950 – 2001 have taken place in the 1990s. Moreover the trend is accelerating and the number of unpredictable elections has increased in the present decade<sup>21</sup>.

Increase in electoral volatility reflects decline in party commitment. In 17 of the 19 countries for which Russell Dalton (2000) has collected data the share of voters expressing commitment to a particular party has declined in election held during the 1979 – 1999 period as has the share of those who express strong

commitment<sup>22</sup>. Split ticket voting has increased in all countries for which data is available. Voters have become election spectators making up their minds during election campaigns in response to TV commercials and increasingly unlikely to participate in political meetings and canvassing (Dalton 2000 p 50 – 55).

The fall in party membership is truly catastrophic in many Western European countries. In 2000, less than 3 percent of the electorate consisted of party members in France, UK, Germany and the Netherlands<sup>23</sup>. Membership has fallen by more than 50 percent during 1980 to 2000 in Italy, Norway, Netherlands, UK, Sweden and Germany. In France, party membership has declined by 70 percent and almost 2 million members have left the political parties. In Italy, membership withdrawal also exceeds 2 million. In the UK almost a million people have rejected party membership and even in Austria \_\_\_ which has by far the highest membership to electorate ratio in Western Europe<sup>24</sup> \_\_\_ more than half a million members have quit during 1980 to 1999. The average membership to electorate ratio in 20 West European democracies in 2001 was about 4 percent<sup>25</sup>.

Citizen withdrawal from mass democratic processes is indicated throughout Western Europe through falling turnout, higher electoral volatility and vanishing party membership. Today political life is becoming “professionalized” as economic life did throughout mature capitalism about a century ago when corporate property deconstructed private property. Today the politician is as much a professional as the investment fund manager, the corporate CEO, the banker and the footballer. Only a diminishing, miniscule minority among capitalist’s hundreds of millions of subjects in the metropolitan countries have the ability or the inclination to become political or corporate managers. For the seething millions politics is as alien, external and disenchanting an arena as investment banking \_\_\_ although the entertainment spin off of the politics industry is undeniably greater than that of the stock market. It is this entertainment potential of the politics industry which sustains audience democracy<sup>26</sup>. Political professionalism in Western Europe<sup>27</sup> is vitally sustained by the fact that the increasingly rarely participating audience nevertheless enjoys and appreciates the output of the politics industry as theatre<sup>27</sup>.

The professionalisation of politics has led to a withdrawal of capitalist political leadership from the mass arenas. The agendas of different parties are converging not just with each other but also with the agendas of army generals (every European political elite supports the war against the mujahideen though to varying degrees) the state bureaucrats, the multinationals and the financiers<sup>28</sup>. All political professionals are salesmen hawking the consensual policies of the capitalist market and state elites. They are all therefore searching for a “middle ground” in which millions of alienated isolated; disenchanting subjects of capital can converge celebrating the meaningless mass of capitalist everyday life and seeking freedom and prosperity through competition and accumulation. Party organization concentrates on mobilizing this (Negri’s) multitude and regards the

party members as dispensable. This on going process is the essence of the on going colonialisation of the party by the capitalist market and the capitalist state. Today throughout Western European and North America both opposition and ruling parties typically participate in governance perpetually. They always share power and mutually benefit from the electoral merry – go – round, for all are capital's professional political managers, parts of the same governing elite<sup>29</sup>. It is no wonder that this permanent governing elite agitate for non majoritarian, non partisan decision making systems \_\_\_ of the type advocated by Young (2002) Dryzek (2002) and Richardson (2004).

### III Subject of Capital or Subject of God?

Left wing critics routinely view the appearance of “audience democracy” and political elite professionalization as undermining the legitimacy of capitalist rule (Paby 2006 chapter 9). This reminds one of the early post war Industrial Relations literature (the writings of Fleming and Clegg) which argued that vibrant and powerful unions were necessary for the survival of capitalist order Unions have however proved to be dispensable why should political parties \_\_\_ and other manifestations of mass politics be seen as indispensable?.

During the long nineteenth century liberal capitalism thrived without popular participation<sup>30</sup> and the advocates of ‘reflective’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘deliberative’ democracies are pleading for a necessary return to the nineteenth century. It is certainly true that capitalist hegemony requires popular support for its sustenance<sup>31</sup> but it does not require popular participation in capitalist governance processes. The overwhelming majority of West Europeans are epistemologically (and not just ideologically) committed to capitalism. They accept as rational its underlying moral commitment to the supremacy of the general will which is the essential foundation of capitalist order. The general will wills the never ending expansion of the realm of freedom and progress \_\_\_ i.e. the human being's right to be an autonomous, self determined creator of the World and of his own being within it. Capitalism seeks to articulate this creed through capital accumulation which is neither Weber's “Stock of money” nor Marx's “social relation” but the ancient Christian vice of avarice and covetousness<sup>32</sup>. West European history shows that endless capitalist accumulation for its own sake is the only existing spatial and temporal route for pursuing limitless freedom and progress (human autonomy and universal domination)<sup>33</sup>.

The vast mass of West Europeans \_\_\_ both those who are withdrawing from citizenship and those who are not \_\_\_ remain committed to the Rousseauian doctrine that the will of all should not be allowed to contradict this general will<sup>34</sup>. In this fundamentally moral sense the overwhelming majority of Western European population accept capitalist rationality. They accept the view that it is irrational to question the endless expansion of the realm of freedom and progress \_\_\_ endless capital accumulation \_\_\_ as the only ultimate end in itself. In this

fundamental epistemological / moral sense the West European remains committed to the rationality and functionality of capitalist order.

His withdrawal from citizenship is a voluntary abstention. His abstention is a vote of confidence in the professional political managers who run the system. It is not an act of protest or an expression of disillusionment as the left analysts seem to believe. He enjoys the political spectacle as a spectator and disapproves of those who mess it up by their unprofessional participation and rowdy activism. That is why mass movements \_\_\_ “anti globalization”, “anti-war” \_\_\_ quickly lose their momentum and fizzle on in West European counters and long staying single issue mobilization \_\_\_ greens, feminists, nuclear disarmament groups, trade unions \_\_\_ have abandoned grandiose system wide agendas and are seeking to become part of the system by advocating modest reform proposals which can easily be accommodated within capitalist order.

A revival of participating / popular democracy through single issue movements is therefore unlikely in Western Europe. Participating democracy flourished when capital was organizing populations in the form of nations and classes (Kay and Matt 1975 p 17 – 41) and problems of capitalist justice were being addressed by aggregation Nationalist and socialist struggles against the bourgeoisie were thus “family quarrels” as John Gray calls them (1999 p 7) for both nationalism and socialism endorsed capitalism’s purpose \_\_\_ the need for the endless expansion of the realm of freedom and program \_\_\_ while questioning the bourgeoisie strategies, tactics and methods. Nationalist and socialist experiments in East Europe, East Asia and Latin America<sup>35</sup> have produced an impressive array of new instruments and techniques for reducing capitalist injustice but none have questioned the legitimacy of capitalist rationality, i.e. the moral commitment to unending expansion in the realm of freedom and progress (limitless capital accumulation) as an end in itself.

Capitalist rationality has been challenged not by socialism and nationalism<sup>36</sup> but by religion. Christianity became Europe by replacing Christian Man by Human being, religious society by civil society and theocracy by the republic<sup>37</sup>. Religious epistemology posts the supremacy of the will of God and seeks to subordinate “being in the World” to “being with God”. “The rational person is he who subordinates his being to God’s will and seeks His approval through every thought and act” (Imam Ghazali n,d p 36). Religious rationality thus explicitly rejects expansion in the realm of freedom and progress (capital accumulation) as a legitimate individual and social purpose. Capitalism is therefore fundamentally and foundationally threatened by religious revival as has often been stated by the West European leaders in their war against Islam<sup>38</sup>.

Islam has always been Europe’s ‘other’ but it has never been the ‘other’ of Christianity<sup>39</sup>. The Christian communities of West Asia, North and Central Africa and many North and South Caucasian regions voluntarily accepted Islam very swiftly en masse in the Middle Ages (Arnold 1947). Today there are rapidly

growing sizable Muslim communities in several Western countries. In several countries \_\_\_ France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands white ex Christian Muslims. \_\_\_ these communities are led by Sufi systems of training and recruitment are well entrenched in several southern and central European countries <sup>40</sup>. Madrassah education has taken root and there is no major Southern or Central European metropolis without an active madrassah presence \_\_\_ in 2005 in Vienna alone 67 children completed memorization of the Qur'an (hifz) including 12 little German speaking girls <sup>41</sup>. The flourishing of Islamic identity and Islamic community consciousness today reminds one of the spread of Christian life styles in the first century A.D.

Capitalist ideologues and policy makers are aware of the challenge posed by resurgent Islam in Europe. Millions of euros and pounds are being spent by European government and capitalist funded NGOs to private and semi private sector projects to promote subordinated to European cultures through multiculturalism.

Nationalist and socialist organizations within Muslim communities are championing, immigrant rights to counter the growth of Islamic identity consciousness in Europe. Can these attempts succeed where the Roman Empire failed? Can Islamic resurgent activism be transformed into a mere protest movement? Can the Sufi movements be aestheticised and Muslim community life become a picturesque expression of post modernist difference in France, Spain and Switzerland as that of the Inuits living in Finland and Mormons in America? The force of resurgent Islam must be neutralized and disbanded for securing constitutional democratic capitalist hegemony in West Europe and elsewhere.

### Notes

1. He makes this case with special reference to the Muslim World (2002 chapter 7).
2. For a recent exposition see Dahl (1991) p 74 – 81.
3. Specially for minorities.
4. The law of capital may be said to rule a people when that people accept that the accumulation of capital for its own sake provides the main social criteria for evaluating transactions and outcomes. Typically in society ruled by the law of capital value is ascribed to an event and outcomes by financial markets \_\_\_ the money market and the capital market (Ansari and Arshad 2006 Chapter 2).
5. I disagree with the view of those such as Maududi (1949) and Eagleton (2003) who argue that popular democracy must necessarily challenge the rule of the law of capital.
6. This is Lincoln's vision of democracy as 'rule of this people for the people by the people'.



7. Zakaria F. (1997) "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy", Foreign Affairs Vol. 76 No. 6, p 21 – 37.
8. Not only through the deployment of American and NATO occupation forces but also through the work of the WTO, the IMF, the BIS and the private sector standard setting (ISO, IAS) and rating (Jardinese, Fleming, S and P) agencies.
9. This view is comprehensively presented by the World Bank functionary Amy Chua (2003).
10. Margaret Thatcher's notoriously corrupt son.
11. All this reminds one of Rawl's seminal work (1971) which saw justice as fair procedure rather than any morally valued outcome.
12. And much more so in North America but that is another story.
13. Which has been flourishing particularly in France since the early 1990s.
14. The most obvious recent examples are Blair and Schroder both of whom shamelessly ignored the majoritarian decisions of their parties.
15. Post modern capitalist order exists in both in "underdeveloped" and in "overdeveloped" forms. In "underdeveloped" capitalist order the state is capturing the party. Thus in Turkey during 2001 – 2007 the Kemalis state has captured the ex Islamist AKD of Arzdegan and Gul.
16. Other colleagues at the Islamic Research Academy Karachi are working on America and data analysis will be presented shortly.
17. This finding is most unusual in empirical studies of political behavior. Analysts of mass political data normally expect to identify contradictory trends. Mass politics rarely moves en bloc. Moreover it is most unusual for comparative political research to identify similar trends on a broad range of indicators in several countries.
18. Most of the data relate to the period from around 1950 to about 2003.
19. Data is for 15 major West European countries \_\_ the twelve named in the paragraph plus Belgium, Netherlands and Norway \_\_\_ and is taken from Mais (2002) and Mais (2005, p 422-23).
20. Described by Paterson (2002 p 117-124).
21. Not only in Western Europe but also in America, Japan, Latin America and India.
22. This has fallen in all 19 countries within Dalton's sample.
23. In France and the UK party members constituted less than 2 percent of the electorate.
24. Almost 18 percent in 1999 down from nearly 31 percent in 1980.
25. Data in this past paragraph is from Mair (2006 Table 3 p 43).
26. The term is Mair (2006 p 44).
27. Our forth coming studies show that this is not the case in either America, Egypt or Malaysia.
28. The political capture of the UN based "peace keeping" and "development bureaucracy by America for its continuing butchery in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia could not have been possible without this elite political consensus.

29. Pitkin (2004) has described the (professional-isation) of European political parties in graphic detail.
30. Universal suffrage did not exist in any liberal democracy until the early years of the twentieth century.
31. As Gramsci recognizes.
32. Islam calls avarice “hirs” and covetousness “hasad”.
33. These arguments are presented in greater detail in Ansari (2004) where I try to show that capital is the concrete form of freedom and progress which cannot be socially / practically realized in any other form.
34. Madison and Jefferson present essentially the same view in the Federalist Papers. The purpose of the balance of powers between the “three arms of government” is to prevent the “over riding” of the general will by the will of all.
35. The programmes of Castro, Chavez, Lula and Morales.
36. In Ansari (2004 p 141-3). I argue that socialism and nationalism are as much capitalist ideologies as are liberalism and social democracy.
37. The Mutazilla attempted a similar transition in the Arab World in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century (A.D) but this attempt was defeated by Imam Ashari and Imam Ghazali (RA) see Iqbal (1946 p 24 – 29).
38. Western European capitalism need not fear a Christian revival because (a) Christianity compromised with secular political order as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century (b) Christianity was a hand in glove accomplice in the capitalist imperialist project, abetting and applauding the mass slaughter of the Red Indians and the Aborigines and the occupation of India, China and Africa (c) Modern Christianity has been subverted by a capitalist ideology, nationalism, so that Christian revival in ex soiret East Europe; as in America, is not a rejection of the capitalist way of life but an endorsement. For the America case see the Islamic Research Academy’s forthcoming study.
39. A contemporary British’s Saint Sheikh Yahya Webster argues that Islam is “the completion, the full flowering of Jesus project of universal love” (2007 p IV).
40. It is sometimes claimed that there are more dervishes in Switzerland and Spain than there are in Tunisia. This is probably an exaggregation but not a very big one and the growing importance of European groups among Sufi orders is signaled by the 2006 nomination of a white French Muslim as the Shaikh of the Darqawiya.
41. Personal communication to the another by Sheikh Ahmad Forstner, Prayer leader at the Neustiftgasse Mosque, Wien.

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