THE THEME OF CHANGE IN THE CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY[1]

Doğancan ÖZSEL*

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to clarify the role of change in the conservative thought and offer a framework for analyzing conservatism through this concept. Although some thinkers perceive conservatism and change as mutually exclusive concepts, the theme of change always appears in both conservative politics and the conservative political thought. Changes proposed by the conservatives are justified through the 'natural-artificial' dichotomy. Nevertheless, since the application of this dichotomy to the social norms is necessarily a theoretical move, there is a dilemma for the conservative mind which despises the theoretical thinking for the sake of the practical wisdom. This dilemma is unavoidable because like any other ideology, conservatism has a vision of ideal society, and ideologies are by their nature transformative, in other words, they are 'anti-conservative', in the narrow sense of the term.

Keywords: *Ideology, Conservatism, Change, Burke, Oakeshott, Huntington.*

ÖZET

MUHAFAZAKÂR İDEOLOJİDE DEĞİŞİM TEMASI

Bu makale, muhafazakâr düşüncede değişim kavramının yerini açıklığa kavuşturmayı ve değişim kavramı üzerinden muhafazakâr siyasetin okunmasını sağlayacak bir çerçeve önermeyi amaçlar. Muhafazakârlık ve değişim kavramlarının birbirlerini dışladığını ileri süren düşünürler olsa da, gerek muhafazakâr siyasette gerekse bu siyasetin düşünsel altyapısını oluşturan düşünürlerin eserlerinde bir değişim temasına her zaman rastlanır. Muhafazakârlık önerdiği toplumsal ve siyasal değişimleri 'doğal-yapay' kavram çifti üzerinden meşrulaştırır. Ancak bu ayrımın toplumsal formlara uygulanması zorunlu olarak kuramsal bir manevra olduğu için, gündelik yaşamın bilgeliğini kuramsal akla üstün tutan muhafazakâr akıl bu noktada bir çıkmaza düşmektedir. Bunun nedeni, her ideolojide olduğu gibi muhafazakârlıkta da bir ideal toplum kurgusunun olması, ideolojilerin doğaları gereği dönüştürücü olmaları, bir diğer ifadeyle kavramın dar anlamıyla anti-muhafazakâr olmalarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İdeoloji, Muhafazakârlık, Değişim, Burke, Oakeshott, Huntington.*

[1] This article presents some elaborated arguments which were initially developed in my PhD thesis.

* Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü (dogancan_ozsel@yahoo.com)

Introduction

At first sight, the relation between conservatism[2] and change is quite clear. Conservative thought, as its label hints, argues for preservation of existing socio-political, cultural, economic and normative forms. While rival schools of political thought suggest the transformation of the status quo in different directions, conservatism aims to preserve it. Michael Oakeshott (1991a: 408) argues conservatives to have "a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be". Hence, social change seems quite the opposite of what conservative politics seeks. A conservative should be the "protector" of the establishment, not the "innovator" of a new socio-political order (Johnson, 1980: 129).

Relying upon these conceptions, in *Conservatism as an Ideology*, Samuel Huntington (1957) suggests a fundamental difference between conservatism and other ideologies. Depending on the suggestion that conservatives argue for preservation of the existing social forms, Huntington argues conservatism to lack the conception of an ideal socio-political formation. For Huntington, this lack creates a fundamental distinction between all other ideologies and the conservative thought. One may discern the presence of an ideal socio-political formation in all other ideologies, and each of these ideologies strives to realize its ideal. But conservatism is non-ideational. It does not seek to transform society in order to realize a specific ideal formation (Huntington, 1957: 458-60). Many pro-conservative scholars share this general position and thinks conservatism as an anti-radical thinking to which the idea of socio-political transformation is truly alien (see O'Sullivan, 1976: 11-2; Freeman, 1980: 3; Kirk, 1987: 10; Huntington, 1957: 458-60).

Nevertheless I suspect the relation between conservative thought and the concept of change to be not that much exclusionary, and far more complex than it is generally acknowledged. Appreciating this complexity, as I explain in the last chapter of the article, may provide a further insight into the nature of the conservative thought. But before going that far, I make the case on the complexity of the relation between conservatism and change in the next chapter. Then, in the following two chapters I focus on the conservative distinction between acceptable

[2] In this essay, the term 'conservatism' is not used in a limited sense to name some particular attitudes like risk aversion, but to denote a specific tradition of modern political thought which may also promote such attitudes in politics.

and non-acceptable changes and will underline the theme of naturalness upon which that distinction relies. In the fourth chapter I argue that the utilization of this theme is undesirable as it creates a set of further problems for conservatism. And finally, in the conclusion chapter, departing from the complex and problematic relation between conservatism and theme of change, I reflect on the features of conservatism as an ideology.

Conservatism and Social Change: Attraction of the Opposite Poles

The views on conservatism which are presented in the introduction part imply that conservatism is not that much about change. It is thought to be mainly, if not purely, about conservation of the establishment. But in contrast with such conceptions, once can notice a promise for change in the discourse of many conservative parties and leaders. For instance, in the leadership of George W. Bush, republicans in USA have promoted the 'compassionate conservatism' with a quite ambitious agenda of political and social transformations. These transformations ranged from a welfare reform to promote individual responsibility, to the active promotion of traditional families and to an extensive reform program for state schools. All these transformations necessitated the federal government to be, in Bush's words, "strong and active" (quoted by Crane, 2001: 2). The neoconservatives who supported W. Bush administration also advised to re-empower the intermediary institutions against the prominence of liberalism (Halper & Clarke, 2004: 55). Nicolas Sarkozy's somewhat eclectic form of conservatism had a promise for change as well. Especially when he was first elected, Sarkozy was determined to implement a neoliberal agenda in order to significantly change the socio-economic and political formation of the French society and to "roll back the frontiers of the state" (Alexandre-Collier, 2011: 182). It is not different in the non-Western forms of conservatism. What Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Erdoğan's so-called conservative democrats' in Turkey promises is nothing short of an extensive socio-political transformation programme. As is noted in the 2023 Political Vision document of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (JDP), "[the party] has initiated the most comprehensive change and transformation campaign in Republican history and embarked on reform that has crowned our Republic as an advanced democracy" (Justice and Development Party, 2012). David Cameron provides further evidence on the presence of a theme of change in the agenda of most conservative political parties. In the 2010 annual conference of the British conservative party, Cameron proudly defined the conservatives as radicals:

> We are the radicals now, breaking apart the old system with a massive transfer of power from the state to citizens, politicians to people, government to society… [Gone will be the] the old ways of doing things: the high-spending, all-controlling, heavy-handed state… In its place will come a total transformation from unchecked individualism to national unity and purpose, from big government to the big society (quoted by Lyall, 2010).

Very recently, a similar propensity for radical change is detected by Žižek in the discourses of the Romney camp in their campaign for the presidency of the USA as well. Žižek (2012) writes that, Obama was re-elected because "[t]he majority who voted for him were put off by the radical changes advocated by the Republican market and religious fundamentalists".

It would be a mistake to think that the theme of change exists only in the discourse of modern conservative parties and leaders. Throughout the last two centuries, numerous conservatives argued for drastic social changed and implemented many socio-political and economic transformations. To take the most obvious example, Burke's Reflections suggests the French to abolish Jacobean rule and implement a different constitution (Stanlis, 1986: 101-2). Another British conservative, the 19th century Prime Minister Robert Peel not only repealed the Corn Laws but described this as "the most conservative act of his life" (quoted by Gash, 1977: 98). After nearly a century from the time of Peel, German conservatives in the Weimar were arguing to restore the virtues of the past (Muller, 1987: 19), and were feeling themselves as "too conservative to not to be radical" (Hermann, 1971: 241). In recent past, as the conservative prime minister of the post-Soviet Hungary, József Antall regarded the end of the Soviet regime as an "opportunity to restore the artificially broken continuity of national history," and "tr[ied] to implement the necessary and painful changes" (Egedy, 2011: 257).

These examples clearly depict that theme of change is, and has always been, an important element of the agenda of conservative parties and leaders. Can we see this presence as an anomaly? Can we say that these pro-change arguments do not really have a place in the conservative thought but are put forward by the politicians for pragmatic reasons? Is it because these politicians are not conservative enough? That is hardly so, because the theme of change also appears in the writings of conservative thinkers often as an approved, if not desired, phenomena.

We know that immediately after the French Revolution, the two founding fathers of conservatism hesitated before denouncing and despising the revolutionaries. Both Burke and De Maistre considered the possibility of this drastic

change to be the part of a more transcendent plan, or of a higher order (Femia, 2001: 30). De Maistre explains the revolution "as both God's justified punishment of the nation for its sins and the mysterious divine tool for the resurrection of a more profound theocratic monarchy" (quoted by Steger, 2008: 62). In his letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, Burke (1990: 136) writes that one may even think of change as the means of the conservation of the nature: "We must all obey the great law of change, it is the most powerful law of nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation". As a modern day conservative thinker, Roger Scruton (2001: 11) writes that conservatives may adopt the way of revolution in times of extremity, and names Franco and Pinochet as examples of such conservatives. Russell Kirk (1987: 472) tells us that Scruton is not an exception in twentieth century conservatives, and conservatism has always been about creating a change in society through regeneration and restoration. In a similar manner, Fung names two prominent Chinese conservative thinkers, Lianf Shuming and Zhang Junmai, and notes the presence of the theme of desirable change in their thinking. As Fung (2009: 789) puts it, "[b]oth men were 'moral innovators' spreading a message of national rebirth and renewal as a way of saving the nation and achieving modernity".

Indeed, no matter how hard some conservative thinkers try, theme of approvable and desirable change haunts back into their texts. For instance, in the first glance Oakeshottian conservatism has no place for extensive social transformations. In the opening lines of *On Being Conservative*, Oakeshott (1991a: 408) clearly puts his preference to regard conservatism not an elaborate theory but an easily discernible, pro-establishment disposition. In Oakeshott's depiction, the conservative disposition does not need an elaborate theory on the desirability of certain –ideal– social forms. It is simply being in favor of conservation of the establishment and being against its alteration. Conservative disposition flourishes out of the feeling of being attached to the establishment for its actuality rather than its favorable features:

> What is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed not on account of its connections with a remote antiquity, nor because it is recognized to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on account of its familiarity: not, *Verweiledoch, du bist so schön*, but, *Stay with me because I am attached to you* (1991a: 408).

Despite this general approach of the article, it is still possible to witness the presence of the theme of 'approved change' in the article, just a few paragraphs after the words quoted above. There, Oakeshott begins by referring conservatism as an inclination toward the familiar and stable: "To be conservative," says Oakeshott

(1991a: 408),

> is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to the utopian bliss.

Then he notes that "if the present is arid, offering little or nothing to be used or enjoyed, then this inclination will be weak or absent" (1991a: 408). And in the next sentence he raises this assertion into a new level. Here we witness the presence of the theme even in the writings of Oakeshott: "If the present is remarkably unsettled, [the conservative inclination] will display itself in a search for a firmer foothold" (1991a: 408).

As is seen, the conservatives propose or impose socio-political changes not because of their lack of conservative sensibilities. Conservative thoughts and politics always have some sort of change in its agenda. In Jan-Werner Müller's (2006: 361) words, "conservatives always arrive too late actually to conserve". But this presence of the theme of change should not lead to a quick conclusion that conservatism, which is supposedly about an attachment to the present, is an incoherent form of political thinking and is intellectually deficient. Even if conservatives nearly always have some sort of transformation in their agenda and the notion of approved change in their thinking, they justify this by proposing a distinction between acceptable and change, and degenerative or radical change. Hence, even if conservatives implement quite ambitious reforms from time to time, these reforms are argued to be fundamentally different from the changes proposed by the non-conservatives.

Acceptable and Non-Acceptable Changes

Contrary to those limiting the scope of conservative politics with a pro-establishment stance, modern conservatism welcomes a distinction between acceptable – and desirable – change, and non-acceptable change. In another part of the previously quoted document, JDP states that it "does not view conservatism as being opposed to change. Rather, it defines conservatism as being opposed to authoritarian and radical change" (Justice and Development Party, 2012). Burke (1803: 59) also writes that "state without means of change is without means of its conservation." That is why conservatives agree on the necessity of reforms from time to time, but these reforms also "ought to work with (and carefully save or even

cautiously improve) what is already there. It is about a carefully managed process of change, or, put differently, of rendering safe the change that is desirable (and, in many cases, simply inevitable)" (Müller, 2006: 362). Then, conservatives are not dogmatic enemies of change. What they cannot tolerate is only the change which alters the so-called substance of the social forms (Burke 1970b: 50), such as the reforms introduced by feminists and social reformers and supposedly "encourage chaos with their 'unnatural' reordering of roles" (Hardisty, 2001: 120). Furthermore, for conservatives, acceptable change is generally the gradual change which can be perceived within a continuum of historical development of society, while non-acceptable change is seen as a rupture in this continuum (see de Bruyn, 1996: 232-3). "The desire to conserve," says Scruton (2001: 11), "is compatible with all manner of change, provided only that change is also continuity."

But why do conservatives think the change that preserves the 'substance' or has an element of continuity to be superior to change that is perceived as a rupture in history? That is because they regard the former as natural and despise the latter as arbitrary. To put the same point in a different way, most conservative writers assume acceptable and conservative change as either the natural change, or the change which promotes the natural way of things. Indeed, following nature in social and political matters is one of the main suggestions of conservative thinkers (Wilkins, 1967: 138-9). Huntington (1957: 462) writes that when conservatives argue for aristocracy, this "does not mean the promotion of aristocracy in all times and places, but only the promotion of natural aristocracy".

While conservatives praise their own transformative schemes for being natural, they vilify non-conservative transformations for their non-naturalness and 'monstrosity'. Arguing against the abolishment of slavery, John Taylor writes that such policies would "create a body politic, as monstrous and unnatural as a mongrel half white man and half negro" (quoted by Tate, 2005: 113). And in *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians* which was delivered in the House of Commons in May of 1792 to criticize Protestant dissenters, Burke "condemn[s] the dissenters for their failure to keep to their natural place. They transcend their God-given size, their place in His creation. Their monstrosity was the defilement of nature. It was the ambition of the bourgeois radicals that he indicted" (Kramnick, 1977: 36).

> These insect reptiles, whilst they go on only caballing and toasting, only fill us with disgust; if they go above their natural size, and increase the quantity, whilst they keep the quality, of their venom, they become objects of the greatest terror. A spider in his natural size is only a spider, ugly and loathsome; and his flimsy net is only fit for catching flies. But, good God! Suppose a spider as large as an ox, and that he

> spread cables about us; all the wilds of Africa would not produce anything so dreadful.(quoted by Kramnick, 1977: 36).

Therefore, it is plausible to say that conservatives are not against socio-political change categorically. Instead, conservative thought implies a distinction between acceptable and non-acceptable changes and this distinction refers to a more subtle distinction between natural and arbitrary change (Freeden, 1996: 344).[3] Thus, conservatives are only against the socio-political, cultural and normative transformations which are supposedly arbitrary and "result from humans competing with nature" (de Bruyn, 1996: 232-3).

Change as Promoting the Natural

In this sense, conservative transformations are thought to be categorically different from the non-conservative ones. The former preserve and promote the nature of society while the latter hurt and destroy it. It is not hard to notice conservatism's organismic conception of society here. Society is perceived not as an artefact but a natural entity with an authentic nature and natural inclinations. As Ted V. McAllister states, "conservatives consider it a gross distortion of the nature of things to think of social and political institutions as being created by individuals" (McAllister, 1996: 266-7). Rather than "a mechanical aggregate," they "regard society as 'a unitary, natural growth, an organised living'" (Green, 2002: 281). This natural entity is thought to be subject to certain natural laws and possess some inherent inclinations, such as one toward harmony, stability and better social control. Nature is the "substratum of history," (Chapman, 1967: 124) and social forms are thought to emerge and transform in due course of history in accordance to these laws of nature (Schuettinger, 1970: 51).

When conservative thinkers or politicians pursue for social change, they establish a positive relation between their suggestions and the supposed nature of society through a number of possible ways. First, as in Burke's depiction of reforms, conservative transformation schemes may be argued to not to change the so-called substance of social forms while improving their peripheral features (see Burke, 1970b: 50; Tate, 2005: 239). In others, conservatives may propose extensive socio-political and legal changes only to prevent more radical changes that may possibly

[3] The natural-arbitrary dichotomy may appear in some other aspects of the conservative thought as well. For instance, John Taylor of Caroline uses it defends the interests of agriculture as the chief natural interests, and despises that of public officers' and banks' as arbitrary ones. See Tate, 2005: 40-41.

destroy the natural substance of society. Edwardian conservatives used this argument and argued "to introduce a strongly progressive fiscal structure, and redistribute wealth to the poor in the form of social reforms [as] the best way to alleviate poverty and social distress" (Green, 2002: 15). Likewise, in UK in the later part of 1970s, while pro-reform conservative constitutional theorists were proposing amendments, "what they seek in the first place [was] protection against radical social change facilitated by political practices and constitutional conventions which no longer impose much restraint on governments" (Johnson, 1980: 129). Also conservatives may defend extensive transformations in order to fix a supposedly arbitrary break caused in the past by non-conservative policies. Here, the aim of conservative change is to re-establish the natural social forms and inclinations through political means, or to recreate the status quo ante. As Blakemore (1988: 7) writes, the constitution Burke wished to substitute with the Jacobean rule was the constitution that should be in effect had the French revolutionaries not abolished it. And Cameron used the same strategy to defend his socio-cultural vision. There, while presenting "Big Society" scheme as a plausible alternative to the so-called "Big State" of the labour party, he points at the derivative effects of the latter to the natural social bonds and suggests a remake. In a speech he delivered in 2009, Cameron (2009) argues that;

> The paradox at the heart of big government is that by taking power and responsibility away from the individual, it has only served to individuate them. (…) The once natural bonds that existed between people - of duty and responsibility - have been replaced with the synthetic bonds of the state - regulation and bureaucracy.
>
> (…)
>
> Our alternative to big government is the big society. But we understand that the big society is not just going to spring to life on its own: we need strong and concerted government action to make it happen. We need to use the state to remake society.

Lastly, conservatives may argue to implement extensive socio-political, cultural and normative changes in order to substitute the process of natural social change that has never been actualized in the past for some reason. Here, what is established through conservative transformation policies is not a previously existing status quo but a new state-of-things that is regarded as the 'would-be status quo' provided that the society had been allowed to experience its natural existence and change. That was precisely the aim of the conservative governments of the old Eastern Bloc countries in the post-Soviet era. They did not simply sought to restore

the social forms of the pre-Soviet times, but tried to reshape their society in line with an imagined evolutionary path. For instance, for József Antall who was the conservative leader of post-Soviet Hungary, getting rid of communism meant not to duplicate the socio-political forms of the pre-Soviet era but the opportunity to restore the arbitrarily broken continuity of national history (Egedy, 2011: 257). In a speech in April 1992, Antall put this vision for the conservative transformation of the Hungarian society:

> Whoever says that this government or political coalition seeks to conserve or restore the past is not speaking the truth. But it is a fact, one we have never denied, that we are in favor of continuity, the continuity of values. We also contend that whatever was done violently, contrary to continuity and was forcibly torn out or blocked must be restored (quoted by Egedy, 2011: 257).

Erdoğan's conservative democrats' neo-Ottomanism, proposed as a reaction against the secular Kemalist establishment in Turkey can be seen in this light as well. These neo-Ottomanist policies create "a normative shift in defining Turkey's history, culture and identity which have been dominated by Ataturk's Kemalist legacy" (Şahin, 2011). As Mustafa Şahin (2011) puts it, "this transformation represents a 'return of the repressed.'" But in this case, the so-called Ottoman values are surely not returning as what they had been in a century before. Rather, they are 'regenerated' in the shape they would supposedly be, provided that the country has not experienced a Kemalist and authoritarian secularization and reformation phase for decades.

To sum up the point, it can be stated that theme of change is ever present in the conservative discourse and this presence is justified through the naturalness of the proposed changes. What renders these changes natural is their assumed compliance with the nature and natural inclinations of the society. As is explained in this chapter, there are four possible strategies through which the conservative case of compliance can be defended. Conservative changes may improve, preserve, establish or re-establish natural socio-political, cultural, economic and normative forms. This positive relation between conservative transformation schemes and the natural social forms differentiate the former from the non-conservative ambitions for social change.

Conservative Change: Towards the Conservative Ideal

The distinction between natural and arbitrary changes begs for a clarification. For instance, what it is that renders a change natural and another

unnatural? Can spontaneity be the answer? If so-called natural social change is distinguished from its arbitrary counterpart with the presence of an external imposer in the latter, conservative arguments for transformation becomes incomprehensible. Then, transformation projects proposed and implied by conservative politicians and justified by conservative writers would appear to be arbitrary and un-conservative. That is because any socio-political transformation *project*, either conservative or not, has an imposer by definition. Transformative policies exemplified in the second part of the article are all to be imposed by conservative political actors. If conservatives do promote natural change and if they do formulate conservative reformation projects, they must find the fundamental difference between natural and arbitrary changes in elsewhere.

Using Aristotle's typology of causes, I suggest that instead of the efficient causes, conservatives find this fundamental difference in the final cause, or telos of the two subsequent types of changes. In other words, conservatives focus on the actual content of the change instead of the spontaneity or deliberateness of its imposition. If the new status quo to be formed through the transformation scheme complies with the supposed nature or natural inclinations of the society, then it is regarded to be a natural and approved change. Such transformations, and only these, are to be imposed on societies. On the other hand, non-conservative transformation proposals are stigmatized as arbitrary since their telos contradicts the supposed nature or natural inclinations of society. Through this distinction between natural conservative changes and arbitrary non-conservative ones, conservatives see themselves as "preserv[ing] the method of nature [and] discover[ing] the order inherent in things rather than to impose an order upon them" (White, 1950: 3). But, given the conservative aversion to theoretical thinking, how can they find out the natural inclinations in a society or differentiate the natural forms from the unnatural ones? In his anthology on the conservative tradition in the European thought, Robert L. Schuettinger (1970: 26-7) provides an insight that might be valuable for us:

> It is all but meaningless to say that a conservative is someone who believes in the status quo or who favors gradual change. If this were so, doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist in some countries would be "conservatives," as would democratic socialists in Sweden as well as supporters of the free enterprise system in the United States. Obviously, such widely divergent political factions cannot be said to share a common philosophy of government, no matter how broadly defined. The term "conservative," if it is to be of any use at all, must mean someone who wishes to conserve *certain selected principles* from a particular tradition… [Emphasis added]

Here Schuettinger not only rejects the perspective that grasps conservatism as simply a defense of the status quo, but he suggests that each conservation attempt needs to be selective and must choose some principles or social forms instead of others. Then, it is necessarily a selective process to distinguish the natural social forms from arbitrary ones in the status quo and determining what is natural and what is not. That is because in each society there is a diversity of conflicting values, norms, behaviors and institutions. It is this diversity which lead to a huge literature on deviant behavior, sub-cultures, counter-cultures, ideologies and social discipline. Against this diversity in society, in order to talk about natural social inclinations and natural social forms, one must first make a selection and discern the natural forms and inclinations from the arbitrary ones. Hence, every social conservation project must be preceded by an act of choosing some social forms and inclinations, while ignoring others. Despite conservatives' general preference of the practical over the theoretical, this selection is necessarily a theoretical intervention.

I previously noted that conservative transformation schemes differ from their non-conservative rivals in the formers' compliance with the natural social norms. But if societies include arbitrary social forms and inclinations as well as natural ones, how can conservatives differentiate the two? How can they know which forms, norms, structures and institutions are natural? Following Schuettinger's words, how do they select the principles they would seek to conserve? What makes Jacobean rule, slavery or Labour's so-called Big State arbitrary, and renders Ancien Régime, abolition of slavery and Big Society natural?

I argue that conservatives lack a single clear-cut criterion that distinguishes natural and arbitrary social forms from each other. The criteria they apply can change in different issues or for different conservatives. For instance, for most of the conservatives, what renders Ancien Régime natural and Jacobean rule arbitrary is the historicity of the former and the intentionality in the formation of the latter. If these criteria would be applied to slavery, then not slavery itself but its abolition would appear to be the arbitrary practice. That is because slavery was the traditional practice of centuries and its abolition was the design of the Enlightenment thinking. Nevertheless, it is obvious that most conservatives will not accept this interpretation of slavery and its abolition. They tend to interpret slavery as an arbitrary social form that has been rightly abolished at some point in history (see Casey, 2011: 38). And the task of distinguishing natural forms from the arbitrary ones gets more complicated when we turn to the interpretation of more controversial socio-political, cultural, economic and normative forms such as welfare state or same-sex marriages. While Thatcherites despise welfare state as a monstrous creation of the

leftist social engineering ambitions and urge for its retrenchment (Dorey, 2011: 149), some others may regard it as part of the natural order in a society natural entity (van Kersbergen & Kremer, 2008: 86). Likewise, while most conservatives inclined to despise same-sex marriages as a violation of nature, Cameron's recent move for same-sex marriages can also be seen as being a legitimate variation of a natural and socially valuable interpersonal bond (see The Independent, 2012).

Hence, it is not possible to suggest a single criterion that is employed by all conservatives for all different issues. On the other hand, I do not think that conservative perception of socio-political, cultural, economic and normative forms as natural and arbitrary is totally random. Against Samuel Huntington's (1957: 458-60) well known thesis on the lack of a conservative ideal, I suggest that conservatives do have a conception of ideal state and their categorization of social forms is to a large extent determined according to the conception of this ideal. In other words the commonality between British Constitution and the abolition of slavery is that they are both part of the conservative ideal state. And the existence of contradictory interpretations on welfare state, same-sex marriages etc. is a consequence of variations in the imagination of ideal state of different conservative traditions.

Despite such variations, the outlines of the conservative ideal common in most self-described conservatives can be easily guessed. It is a socio-political system in which imperfect individuals are shaped and controlled by social institutions such as family, church or state (see Schuettinger, 1970: 15). It is nothing but traditions and other social forms which "prevent chaos and (...) provide the resources and boundaries for [people's] future activities" (Devigne, 1994: 17). A common ethical system which is mostly expressed in form of religion and common values constitutes the fabric of the public and private life (for instance, see Steger, 2008:47). Individual is seen not as an entity truly distinct from and preceding society but "an artefact, an achievement which depends upon the social life of people" (Scruton, 2001: 24). In this ideal system, the boundary between the normal and abnormal is drawn as clear as possible and individuality is mass produces with a standard set of values, norms, beliefs and behaviors. Moreover, this ideal system needs very little, if any changes, and is mostly stable. And what it promises is neither ultimate happiness nor realization of an ethical ideal. Indeed, the conservative ideal promises for a lasting order, stability, and a decent life experience for everyone.

This conservative ideal surely leaves behind a large space for customization. Indeed, this space is used by different variants of conservatism and leads the

emergence of classical, radical, Catholic, Thatcherite, neo and paleo conservatisms among many others. But also it is this common outline that renders all these as the variants of a common conservative thought.

Conclusion

In *Conservatism as an Ideology* Huntington suggests a categorical difference between conservatism and other ideologies. He suggests that conservatism lacks an ideal and it is always on the defense of the status quo. Nevertheless, when we look at the discourse of conservative politicians and the writings of conservative thinkers, it is clear that they mostly argue for change. They do not wish to preserve society in any shape, but to preserve it in a particular shape. Even if they tend to claim that they are in favor of the promotion of the nature of society and those natural forms, against the plurality of existing forms and lack of a single definite criterion to distinguish the natural from the arbitrary, the natural-arbitrary dichotomy should be seen as a discursive tool rather than a plain, objective reality. Consequently, conservatism should be seen a transformative ideology like any others. What differ conservatism from other ideologies is not the lack of an ideal but the differences in the in the conception of these ideal states. Conservative calls for change are as much genuine – or arbitrary – as that of other ideologies. If one perceives ideologies in line with Laclau (2006: 114) as attempts to close the paradigmatic borders of the political, each ideology must come with a promise for change. Otherwise they would never be *political*, in the particular sense of the word. And since the emergence of conservatism as a modern ideology in the aftermath of the French Revolution, conservatives had such a promise:

> Moreover, conservatives faced the challenge of providing their audiences with an alternative vision of how to cope with their changing world. If such a vision consisted of little more than a throwback to bygone days, it might elicit intense emotion for a brief period, but it would hardly be sustainable in the long run. In order to be successful, conservatism needed to correspond to the new imperatives and aspirations of the rising national imaginary. Maistre delivered, at least to some extent. For example, he asserted that Providence would return France to her "Christian magistracy over Europe" once the people had properly atoned for the sins committed during the revolution. (Steger, 2008: 64).

In his article noted before, Oakeshott (1991a: 408) formulates an intuitive definition of conservatism. He writes that intuitive conservatism is "a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be".

Nevertheless, it is impossible to translate such an intuitive conservatism into a political programme. Oakeshott explains how he sees the political reflection of this conservative outlook with the famous ship metaphor. In politics, he says, "men sail a boundless and bottomless sea: There is no harbor for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place not appointed destination" (Oakeshott, 1991b: 60). But in reality, ships do follow a route, albeit imperfectly, and captains always give hope to get their ship to a plausible port. If conservatism was nothing more than an intuition as defined by Oakeshott, then conservatives would fail to meet the most basic precondition of politics and would never hope to be captains of the ship. Müller (2006: 361) names such a conservatism as "aesthetic conservatism [which is] more concerned with protecting the purity of sentimental or intuitive commitments that cannot (and in a sense should not) be articulated as prescriptions which relate back to a world of political institutions and forms of political action as we have come to know them." And he notes that "this aesthetic conservatism, if it is to be consistent, goes together with political passivity". Therefore, as long as conservatism is a political ideology which operates in the political sphere to take the helm and change the ship's route towards a more appropriate direction, it can never be equalized with an intuitive pro-establishment attitude. It always includes a promise for genuine change and the realization of a conservative ideal.

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