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Conservative ideology and political kitsch [*]

Abstract

Kitsch is a multifunctional phenomenon that the author of this article is trying to "pass on" from the field of aesthetic to ethical area. In that endeavor he develops theoretical assumption of Hermann Broch, at which the kitsch is intrinsic moral evil, and the producer (creator) of the kitsch is "low moral being" and "ethical outcast." This thesis is a key in consideration of the conservative ideology and political kitsch. Kitsch in politics is associated with the moral categories of truth and falsehood, in which the author of this article argues that kitsch is a deliberately designed and programmed lie. The political kitsch serves for manipulation of the masses and represents the basis of totalitarian consciousness, which is an introduction to the repression and crime.

Conservative ideology is the basis from which grow a variety of kitsch creations and phenomena, among which the political kitsch dominates. The article, inspired by Andrew Heywood, analyzes the basic categories of conservatism: tradition, human imperfection, organic society, hierarchy and authority, and property, which provides a sense of confidence and conformist security. Each of them the author is putting under a magnifying glass with which he reveals the elements of manipulation with traditional patriotic feelings. From kitsch milieu it can not be excluded Serbian society in the past and present. In the scourge of traditionalism and conservatism, ethnocentrism and ethno-nationalism, xenophobia and kitsch patriotism are the main "fences in the mind" because of which Serbian

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culture as a whole remains outside the mainstream of modernization and Europeanization.

Keywords: political kitsch, ideology, conservatism, pseudoculture, moral evil, traditionalism.

Kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians, all parties and movements.

Milan Kundera

Introduction

Politics and political practices are commonly associated with ethical principles and political kitsch can not be identified beyond the moral standards of a society. Traditionalism is an integral component of conservative ideology and practice, and this in its own way represents a lobby of political kitsch. Manipulating people's feelings is easily feasible if it sticks to tried and tested forms of abuse of tradition with a touch of folk-myths iconography. In the domain of political kitsch categories of truth and falsehood are relativized to the extreme, where the truth easily slips into a lie, and a lie with no problem gets an illusion of truth. In the social and political context, kitsch goes beyond aesthetics and artistic nice, entering the general field of ethical and representing itself as fundamentally moral evil. Conservative ideology, which is closely linked to political power, promotes a false sense of conformist security and a vulgar manipulation of traditional 'patriotic feelings. It is fraught with prejudice with which gives birth to kitsch patriotism. In a world programmed by conservative ideological matrix, it is easy to produce "fences in consciousness" that hamper any initiative and individual action, thereby opening the door of totalitarian projects of the society. In the post-socialist (the so-called transitional) period Serbia bends under the weight of traditionalization and instead of taking the path of modernization and Europeanization, it often returns to the pre-modern values (collective ownership, centralized, so-called command economy, irrationality, finding identity only through collectivity). Conservative ideology here and now makes a pact with the political kitsch.

Kitsch as a moral evil

The first association to the word "kitsch" refers to the art going sideways of authentic beauty and truth. The aesthetic components of kitsch (such as sentimentality, lascivious or banality) are present in the acts that tend to present themselves in an artistic light, but they are not the only ones. It is a known thing that kitsch parasites in the whole tissue of culture, sneaking in all spheres of society - religion and myth, family and procreation, science and knowledge, morality and behavior, tourism and sport.[2] Whit Abraham Moles the term gets the status of a universal attribute because, according to him, everything can be a carrier of kitsch "kitsch-object", "kitsch-attitude", "kitsch-relationship", "kitsch-drive", "kitsch-environment", "kitsch-style", "kitsch-era ", "kitsch-experience," "kitsch-ethics", "kitsch-man", and even "kitsch-kitsch."[3] In short, the kitsch is in most cases expressed in objects, but in fact kitsch is socially mediated relationship that by longer practicing in some people can become a way of life. In the language of modern sociology, kitsch is a product of social construction, or our perception of things, events or behaviors. Anthropological, sociological and psychological dimensions of kitsch is especially present in politics, political experience and practice. In this sense culturologist Ratko Božović clames that the politics is a birthplace of kitsch, while for the writer Milan Kundera policy is becoming the most serious competitor of art which he sees in kitsch horizon as mask of beauty.

A sociological study of the relationship between kitsch and politics can not be completed if in itself does not incorporate elements of false political morality, political propaganda and political rituals. All this with a note that the policy as an important area of social life is not kitsch by definition. It is not entirely steeped in kitsch, since as directing activity (science, art) it has the task (and power) to lead society towards progress and resolution of its contradictions. Regarding the relationship between kitsch and politics, then there is work, primarily, with the cultural dimension of political life.

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[2] See: Zoran Gluščević, *La Vie en Rose. Anthology of everyday kitsch,* Belgrade, 1990; Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch. Anthology of bad taste* Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1997; Nikola Božilović, *Kitsch culture*, Niš:Zograf, 2006.

[3] Abraham Moles, *Kitsch. The art of happiness*, Niš:Gradina, 1973. 39.

Identification of impurities of kitsch in politics assumes a general understanding of the term "kitsch" It is advisable to start with the etymology of the term and idea of this phenomenon which is in discursive terms almost uncontrollable. Word kitsch comes from at least two sources: from the English word sketch, or from the German verb etwas verkitschen. In the first case it is the sketches that should replace more expensive original paintings, while the German version translates this phrase as the collection of worthless things, that is junk. And this has an element of lies and false (style) values, so that the whole meaning of kitsch metaphorically refers to the collection of "artistic garbage".[4] Thus, it follows that kitsch was primarily related to the phenomena of artistic fields: art, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic taste as a category. However, the taste has not only an aesthetic connotation. It synthesizes the lifestyle and behavior of each individual and, as a summary of the human aesthetic being, is closely related to the totality of his existence.[5] In this sense, kitsch, which belongs to the dark side of the taste comes from the field of art (aesthetics) and extends to the human as a being (anthropology) and society as a setting in which a man establishes himself (sociology).

Kitsch is at the top of the pyramid of words related to the pseudo-culture. The Greek word pseudos (ψευδος) in our language is translated as falsehood, lies, deception. Pseudo-cultural phenomena are, therefore, only by the exterior (form) cultural, and essentially are uncultured or anti-cultural. They are ordinary substitutes, counterfeits of the originals, or imitations of imitations, when it comes to the arts, and in the other aspects are manifested as pseudo-moral, pseudo-religious, quasi-scientific and quasi-true. Because and the people who are honest and uneducated can pronounce all manner of lies, with kitsch is not about any falsehood, but only about the one which involves a conscious deception and programmed (premeditated) lie. In cultures that do not go with the times, lie becomes a legitimate means of maintaining some group in power. In this context, Mikel Dufrenne discloses the shuffle of culture. On one side of the coin is the real face of culture, embodied in the authenticity and truth, and on the other is kitsch as her back and surrogate. From Dufrenn's sentence of culture, according to which "it

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[4] Ludwig Giesz, *Phenomenology of kitsch*, Beograd:BIGZ, 1979. 23.
[5] Zoran Gluščević, quote, work, 324.

cheats because it is lying, and not because it is wrong"[6] results that kitsch is the culture of lies. Lie emitted by the kitsch-subject is an illusion or a reverse of the truth. It is placed less in the overt and direct, and more in the covert and euphemistic form. Kitsch that has enormous ideological progression is akin to the spirit of totalitarianism, and their "spiritual communion" is evident in the sphere of lies. Hence, kitsch is an ideal tool for the "parade of lies," which is based on the concealment of its true essence.[7]

Some theorists treat politics as an autonomous region, which is beyond the categories of freedom and morality, incorporating them into itself when it suits the interests of its stakeholders. Writer Vidosav Stevanović goes even further, writing that in politics there is no freedom. No, because the policy is trapped by conditions, the famous balance of power, the vagaries of time and eccentricities of people. And because of the attributes which this author gives it (dependence, subordination, self betrayal, deceit, malice, sometimes even just a "gap that rattle") turns out that the kitsch is its immanent property.[8] Bearing in mind the basic features of kitsch, for Ratko Božović "political stereotype is kitsch in its purest form." [9]

Political kitsch belongs to the ramified family of the kitsch phenomenon. It does not have much to do with art, but on the map of kitsch culture are elements that connect the arts and politics. In both spheres there is something that is inauthentic, fake, deceptive, transient, lascivious, obscene, perverse, intrusive, exclusive, imitative, banal, eccentric and sensational.[10] Aestheticization of society and politics spiced by "aesthetic populism" are not uncommon in sociology and political theory. However, political kitsch is primarily seen as evil and belongs to the sphere of ethics and moral life. Lying in politics is consciously and purposely placed in order to satisfy one's interests, personal or group. We're not talking (only) about the lies of one person, a politician, a leader. Political lies tend to turn into the ideology of the whole society or the state, so that one can speak of a kind of

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[6] Mikel Dufrenne, *Art and Politics*, Sarajevo:Svjetlost, 1982. 142.
[7]Zoran Gluščević, quote, work, 139.
[8] Vidosav Stevanović, The *Diary of Solitude (choice of fragments from 1988 to 1993),* Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2010. 601.
[9] Ratko Božović, The *Sideways of kitsch*, Nikšić: The Sociological ray, 2/2009. 11.
[10] Nikola Božilović, quote, work, p. 58–59.

"nationalization of kitsch." Vera Horvat Pintarić succinctly says: "The state of lies creates nationalized lie in the culture".[11]

For the writer Hermann Broch kitsch in art essentially represents a moral evil, and it seems that political kitsch variant is the most similar to this kind of treatment. In fact, he sees in kitsch the source of evil, and applies on it only the ethical standards. The creator of kitsch (artist, but no less politician-leader) is "ethical renegade" and a criminal who wants "radical evil." Because, according to Broch, the man who creates kitsch should be tried as a real villain, the "low ethical being."[12] About the dominance of ethical principles over the aesthetic in the field of art testifies the author himself, citing Adolf Hitler as "an unconditional supporter of kitsch" who lived for the "bloody" kitsch, and loved a "saccharine" or very sugary kitsch.[13] At the time of fascism and nazism "revolvers and torches began to be mentioned along with the culture"[14], and enjoyment in the artistic beautiful reveals the "romantic" and "gentle soul" of criminals and mass murderers. History is full of such "esthete". For example, at one time Hitler was known as the "supporter of beauty." He, as well as his historical role model Nero, was a supporter of kitsch. For these reasons Broch, in the spirit of metaphysical moralism, denied any value of aestheticism, that is the separation of "beauty" of "good" and the "truth." Such a separation, in his opinion, would be tantamount to evil and true disaster.[15]

One might observe some constants in the expression of kitsch because some properties of kitsch are valid for all areas. However, every area of social life is specific. In this sense we can talk about kitsch specifics of religion, tourism, music, architecture, sports and more. Political kitsch in many ways coincides with the others, but it is remarkable for being the most moral dimension, the one that Broch attributed to the artistic kitsch as a representative of evil. Since in the policy the emotions and archetypes are mixed with the ideas and images, performing an attack on man's total existence, Kundera combines them in the phrase the inquisition of kitsch.

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[11]Vera Horvat Pintarić, *From kitsch to eternity*, Zagreb: Circulation CDD, 1979. 103.

[12] Herman Broch, *Poetry and knowledge*, Niš: Gradina, 1979. 297.

[13] Hermann Broch, „Notes on the problem of kitsch", in: Dorfles, Gillo, Kitsch. Anthology of bad taste, Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1997. 75.

[14]Clement Greenberg, „Avant-garde and kitsch", in: Dorfles, Gillo, Kitsch. Anthology of bad taste, Zagreb: Golden marketing , 1997. 120.

[15] Sreten Petrović, *The Kitsch as Faith*, Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2006. 33.

Political production of illusion

A man's social being can not be separated from the man as a political being. On the basis of Aristotle's (Αριστοτέλης) phrases, after which the man is designated as zoon politicon we can conclude that the human being by nature is political. This statement is suggested by his famous statement that the one who can live outside of the community is either "the beast or the god."[16] A variety of ancient works of wise thinkers are devoted to politics, which speaks of its importance and the necessity for the survival of man, society and civilization. However, the sentence by which the politics is considered as man's destiny is quite ominous. It is largely the truth when you know that politics started wars, preceded the Holocaust, was setting up camp wires, making decisions about life and death.

Modern man is also a political being. He is today perhaps more than yesterday, since it was drawn into politics and when he was aware of it, and even more often when he is not. The man of today is present in politics and when he really does not need to be. He can not prevent the policy dealing with and walking into his life. This makes the escape from political life for modern man illusory. Social practice and sociological studies show that man at the present can not completely humanly confirm themselves in their daily and personal life, while remaining fully and consistently out of politics and policy in general. The truth is that man is not and can not be solely a political being, but nevertheless from the beginning he is captured in the iron grip of politics.

When asked how the kitsch found a livelihood in politics can best be answered if the policy is brought into connection with the truth and lies. The truth, according to Hannah Arendt, as seen from the perspective of politics, has a despotic character, and is therefore the most hated by tyrants. In fact, the truth has never been counted in the political virtues, and lies in politics have always been assumed as a permitted means.[17] The culmination comes at a moment when the audience (the people, the citizens) to which the lie is being refered to is forced to dismiss the difference between truth and lies, just to survive. Then from public life completely disappears factual truth and

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[16] Aristotle, *Politics*, Belgrade: Culture, 1970. 6.
[17] Hannah Arendt, *The Truth and Falsehood in Politics*, Beograd: „Filip Višnjić", 1994. 69.

falsehood gains legitimacy. It leads to the paradox that the lie becomes the truth criterion. Who is the most convincing in lies, he is the most trusted!

Any politics can not a priori be declared as dishonest, immoral and undignified. Leading the policy by democratic means, on the basis of moral principles in order to satisfy the general social interest, supports the notion that politics and as a social activity and as a profession is one of the most important social institutions. Politics is not immoral per se, but becomes immoral as it moves away from its essence and social functions, satisfying individual and special interests against the interests of the community as a whole. With this it enters the hall of kitsch. A line between kitsch and not kitsch in policy is bounded by the relationship to morality as a category of values and regulative idea. Kitsch is not even the immorality in politics that is open and overt (that is manifestly evil), but it means only that behavior which is wrapped, disguised, camouflaged, and that tends to be present in the light that does not suits its human essence. Politics which is unethical in the sense that it deceives, sow lies and manipulates people, denying them freedom and turning them into subjects of the regime, is kitsch in its essential sense. Its destructiveness is evident in the fact that, on the one hand, it destroys the meaning of life together and stops the progress, and on the other hand, encourages the individuals with the worst features: guile, hypocrisy, poltroons, wickedness, obscenity, cruelty, hatred, and the readiness of the crime.[18] These traits "decorate" authoritarian politics, promoting violence as a legitimization of evil. Privacy of the authoritarian government (as opposed to democratic politics that prefers responsibility, freedom of choice and respect for universal moral values) excludes the public, restricts the freedom and manipulates the human emotions. She uses the half-truths that are more dangerous than falsehoods, since the half-truths are blurring reality and provoking the uncertainty and fear. By manipulating the public, the policy creates an illusion of democratic life, and appearance (of beautiful, good, truth) is one of the fundamental characteristics of kitsch. By the skillful manipulation and the abuse of power, authoritarian leaders create societies of feigned modernization and facade democracy.

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[18] Čedomir Čupić , *Politics and Evil,* Nikšić: Univerzitetska riječ, 1990. 64.

Authoritarianism and monism as the rule and the arbitrary of the One are in the unbearable vicinity of Evil which is in politics manifested comprehensively, systematically and organized.

> "This evil has equally devastating effect as well as on individuals as society as a whole, except that it is by the size, the quantity and quality in the advantage over every other evil that can completely destroy not only human lives but also the entire world."[19]

In an authoritarian society comes to the identification with authority that leads to the unconditional loyalty, to the life and work of the leader. In this way the citizen puts himself under custody of leaders, and the critical public is assigned to the manipulative. Any system of government, especially one that is not democratic, is based on the use of power, and it lies in the hands of the leader. Among the other bases of power (the use of physical force, the organization of administrative control and manipulation of the material incentives), leaders (especially charismatic ones) use the symbolic base of power, relying on cultural traditions, religious beliefs, history, laws, various state emblems and all the other symbols that have the power to move people.[20] In an extreme variant, the state leader is emerging as a "superman" and with the help of diversified public administration, such as those of the Nazi era, the ideology of nat-humanity is beginning to develop. After that followed the violence that man's imagination can hardly imagine.[21] It is tragic that in totalitarian ideologies physical violence is always accompanied by as lucidly phrased by Thomas Mann, impassable fence in consciousness. They lead to the rejection of critical thinking, analysis and self-analysis.

Kitsch is not all politics, but only impolicy. It has always existed, but in terms of modern kitsch relationship, by the opinion of Gillo Dorfles it is characteristic for modern dictatorship. It is known that dictators resort to false rituals, abuse or falsification of myths and arbitrary interpretation of tradition. They manipulate the masses and, basically, express contempt for the man -

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[19] The Same, 8.
[20] Jonathan H. Turner, *Sociology*, Novi Sad, Belgrade: Mediteran Publishing, Center for Democracy, 2009. 352.
[21] Vera Horvat Pintarić, quote, work, p. 106.

do things that violate one's moral dignity. Therefore, in addition to the aesthetic perception of kitsch as a "bad taste", its sociological dimension which in kitsch sees an "ideological sabotage" should be considered. In the context of kitsch relationship as falsity and diversion breaks in and its distorted ethical position.[22]

Political kitsch as an ideological construction manifests itself in many forms, and one of its typical variants is called patriotic kitsch. Clichés of kitsch patriotism are manifested as common kitsch clichés that seem beyond all boundaries and national, that is, political color and affiliation. There is kitsch presented as a universal phenomenon, because it stems from similar causes regardless the characteristics of the environment and its local color. In the case of patriotic kitsch we have to deal with manipulation, the orchestrated and concealed abuse of patriotic feelings with the use of kitsch funds, in order to achieve narrow individual interests. With properties that are manifested at the psychological level (stereotypes, scarcity, fallacy in choice of motivation, appliances of black and white painting), kitsch patriotism becomes a social convention. It becomes a condition without which we can not, sneeking into all spheres of public and private life and becoming a kitsch product that is just waiting for the right moment to show the destructive reverse - aggressiveness, chauvinism, racism.[23]

Totalitarianism is an important feature of political kitsch in societies that require single-mindedness: one thought, one truth and one language. In practice, the totalitarians language is known as the language of generality, euphemisms, empty phrases and false compliance. Otherwise, totalitarianism is emerging as ideology and practice of broad government intervention in public, social (and sometimes personal, private) relationships of citizens. This ideology is achieved by the repressive institutional apparatus. Totalitarianism is possible in all systems of economic, political and cultural underdevelopment, and is expressed through dictatorship, absolutism, despotism, theocracy and other forms of the repressive rule.

Totalitarian consciousness is the basis of all totalitarian projects. It presents the terminological alternate of the very tribal "spirit of small-town". This spirit is identified by "loyalty to one-fidelity cheek, generalizing style as

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[22]Matei Calinescu, *Faces of modernity*, Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1977. 216.

[23] Zoran Gluščević, quote, work, p. 108–109.

pure denial of every individuality."[24] In the context of totalitarian kitsch culture and consciousness, can be constituted the notion of totalitarian kitsch. This time, with the great help of keen Milan Kundera and his "empire of the totalitarian kitsch." This realm is where the power is in the hands of one political movement. The notion of totalitarian means that everything that violates kitsch (each demonstration of individualism, every doubt, every irony) is excluded from life. From this point of view, according to the famous writer, is so called gulag something like a septic tank in which totalitarian kitsch is throwing litter. Kundera outstandingly and majestically paints the atmosphere of totalitarian kitsch, defining it as an area from which all the questions are excluded:

> "In the realm of totalitarian kitsch all the answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. It follows that the real enemy of the totalitarian kitsch is a man who asks."[25]

By Zoran Gluščević, kitsch and totalitarian consciousness have one common denominator: the manipulation and repression. Manipulation is the (un) conscious preparation, primarily psychological, for the totalitarian mind. It is a bridge to ideological indoctrination and, finally, social repression. Totalitarian consciousness, as well as kitsch, eats and rests on the one-sidedness and exclusiveness, spiritual laziness. The passive subject who did not develop in himself creative curiosity as a cultural need for all of his surroundings, is accustomed to see all with eyes of patterns and molds, imposed by others, and he just passively accepts them. Helpless before the phenomena of politics, he will not be able to receive political reality otherwise than in manipulated forms imposed by the totalitarian mind.[26]

The political life of modern society uses the kitsch in a manner that befits the (post) modern age. It is determined by a certain policy, but It also influences its aestheticization dictated by the requirements of mass culture. New, so-called spectacular politics becomes the field of launching various "images" of politicians, like creating a "brand" of some successful product.

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[24] Radomir Konstantinović, *The Philosophy of the small-town*, Belgrade: Otkrovenje, 2006. 14.

[25] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, Svjetlost , 1990. 301.

[26] Zoran Gluščević, quote, work, p. 129–130.

Ideological conflicts of political parties are increasingly reduced to the competition of different strategies of representation and self-show, which is in the care of specialized agencies of political marketing.[27] It comes to the symbiosis between market and political model of kitsch, which confirms the hypothesis that "persistent offer of kitsch is never without prospects of market success."[28]

In the so-called society of the spectacle, which is dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that once was directly lived has receded into a representation. "The spectacle is not only a collection of images, said Guy Debord and added: "It is a social relation among people mediated by images." It can not be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass media because it essentially represents "a world view that is materialized."[29] Politicians of such society are becoming hostages of relentless eyes of cameras and more than ever are trying to attract the attention of potential voters by using the outward appearance and gestures. Lie is transferred from the fields of the trivial narrative to the endless fields of visual impressions.

The role of the media, in general, from the mid nineties to the present, has highly influenced the construction of identities which are not subject only to the politicians, but the "normal" world. The time of postmodernism favored the impersonal social relations and the parallel reality of prevailing virtual communication. The individual is lost in a fragmented picture of reality and virtual reality created new features of media kitsch existence. In the intertwined of virtual and real communities kitsch will from the imitative character which it has in reality in the virtual space become banal and often aggressive. In this way it will become an essential and integral element of the new society and fragile identity.[30] Nevertheless, the kitsch culturally contributes to maintaining the status quo and prevents the deflection of political conservatism.

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[27] Branislav Stevanović, *Political and cultural interference*, Niš: Faculty of Philosophy, 2013. 208.

[28] Milan Ranković, *General sociology of art*, Belgrade: Institute for Textbooks, 1996. 230.

[29] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, Paris: Champ Libre, 1987. 8.

[30] Ivan Radojičić, " *Virtual culture and / or construction of a new kitsch identity"*, Nikšić: Sociološka luča, No. 1(2011): 61.

Detainees of the conservative conscience

Conservatism is often associated with kitsch. To answer the question whether each conservatism equals kitsch we should know what conservatism actually is. The word "conservative" has many meanings. It includes behavior that is moderate or cautious, a lifestyle that is conventional, moral stance that is conformist, and all fear of change. In cultural terms conservatism is a living creed or the worldview. Discard of the changes we refer to the verb "conserved" refers, therefore, to an individual who does not want to change anything in his life, but also the social groups that want to maintain the situation as it is at the moment.

However, every resistance to change does not always have the ideological connotation. If the conservatism consisted only of reflexive defense of the status quo, then it would be just a political position, not ideology. It becomes an ideology only when it is based on a particular set of political beliefs about human beings, their societies and the importance of a specific set of political values. In this context, conservatism becomes, like liberalism or socialism, an ideology. Just like politics, and ideology in itself can not be considered as a simple forgeries which is closely related to kitsch. However, in the definition of the concept of ideology, Karl Mannheim states that "the experience of distrust and suspicion", which is always felt as opposed to the one who thinks differently. Such fact carries moral connotations, especially when for the "holders against deception" are not taken lonely subjects, but when the source of the opponent's misrepresentation, deceit and evil - is more or less consciously - found in "some social factors."[31] Since the "conservative idea" by Mannheim is one of the four basic forms of utopian consciousness, there is a reason to ascribe to the ideology the role of guardian of the conservative thought and feeling. While in the liberal utopia there is always a relative approaching to what is "here and now" of conservatives, the "utopia is already pre-blended into existence."[32]

The central believes of conservative ideology, writes Andrew Heywood are: tradition, human imperfection, organic society, hierarchy and authority and, finally, the property, which provides a pleasant conformist

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[31] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Beograd: Nolit, 1968. 53.
[32] The Same, p. 189.

sense of trust and confidence.[33] The set of ideological components can produce a political statement and he gets a dimension of kitsch when they are collectively or individually instrumentalized and put to use of the partial or individual interests.

The reliance on tradition is unquestionable in terms of the continuity of social development, cultural progress and prosperity. Tradition gives people a sense of "rootedness" and belonging, it binds them to the past, revives a collective memory and strengthens national and cultural identity. In this sense, tradition is an expression of "the accumulated wisdom of the past." Conservatives believe that the institutions and practices of the past should be preserved for the benefit of present and future generations because they have already been "time-tested". This is in line with the notorious truth that there are more of us underground than on land, so the British writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton once wrote about the tradition as a "democracy of the dead", noting that it means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes: our ancestors.[34] In contrast to the tradition, the change is a journey into the unknown: it creates uncertainty and insecurity, thus endangering human happiness. Since they are easily promised happiness, romance and the artificial false idyll as the important features of kitsch, in those elements of the tradition, conservative politicians are finding an excellent milieu for manipulating the traditional-patriotic kitsch feelings.

From tradition is expected to conserve (protect, preserve, store) certain values that are the result of the past achievements. However, it becomes a negative conservative force in the moments when it begins to destroy the bridges towards the new and the modern. Then, the tradition as a phenomenon loses a creative dimension and turns into the traditionalism as the "bad conscience of consciousness."[35] In short, the tradition becomes an instrument of lies, fiction and deception by which the carriers of authority and power pursue their interests by talking about things and events that often did not exist. It is simply called the "invention of tradition".[36] When the past starts to construct and arrange by the imaginary and desirable model of the ruling elite, the tradition acquires the right characteristics of kitsch that in

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[33] Andrew Heywood, *Political ideologies*, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2005. 75.
[34] The Same, 76.
[35] Radomir Konstantinović, quote, work, 141.
[36] See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Beograd: XX vek, 2002; Anthony Giddens, *The Runaway World*, Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2005.

humans awakens sentimentality, nostalgia and well-known penchant for pathos. Traditional kitsch is embedded in the political conservatism because tradition serves well to the politicians as a cover, pronunciation, demagogic means of justifying their authority by which they will confirm the alleged preservation of historical continuity and identity, the supposed national size, false consistency and quasi-patriotism. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the connection of kitsch with reactionary political tendencies is natural and that it arises from the conservative and reactionary structure of kitsch.[37]

Tradition and modernity as a cultural phenomenon are destined to live side by side. The character of the society, and the social elite, decides which of them will have an advantage. So, even when those cultural forms are mutually contradictory, it happens that they simultaneously reside in the same social context. Tradition and modernity do not exclude one another in each case, but as a rule, the old one is always surpassed by the new one. In a word, it is not true that only what is new ("advanced opinion") has a chance to survive, and that everything else is gradually dying out, but it is certainly true that the older, pursued by the new, must be transformed.[38] Also, tradition and modernization in practice are often complementary phenomena.

> „The stereotypical notions that speak about the alleged static nature of traditional and continuous dynamics of modern societies are mostly inaccurate. Modern societes, beyond any doubt, are absolutely devoid of all forms of traditional thinking, even as traditional societies are not anti-modern without the rest. And more than that, modernization may possibly affect the renewal of some traditional forms of culture, no less than some traditional content and symbols can be used to support the modernization".[39]

New cultural movements can be restorative in comparison to the past, while at the same time some cultural forms associated with tradition, can exist as an expression of the most constant component of society. The conflict of these different forms can lead to different outcomes in relation to whether the prevailing are the "advanced" forms over the traditional or the

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[37]Cf. Zoran Gluščević, quote, work, 130.
[38] Karl Mannheim, quote. work, 188.
[39] Nikola Božilović, „*Cultural memory and the challenges of modernization",* Beograd:Socijalna misao, No.2(2012):118.

first ones over the others, or else in both are occurring processes of mutual adjustment.[40] That is why it is the best way of preserving cultural persistence to find a measure of preserving the old and not breaking down the bridges to the new one. In that sense the British conservatism, for example, really relies on ideas of Edmund Burke, who, instead of the blind resistance to change, advocated a prudent willingness "to change in order to preserve."[41] Single argument, the glorification of tradition leads directly into the kitsch, like all modernist trends which are not an expression of the company also end up in the kitsch utopia. Therefore, the best policy is to take a position of so-called political realism. It is based on facts, and not on possible structures and ideas - it relies on the tried and proven solutions. Political realists seek support of traditional institutions that do not come in conflict with the existing reality, that do not compromise and do not hinder life. As a tradition needs to be adapted to modern conditions, the new should not unconditionally be accepted, but, if possible, it should be compatible with the traditional. Thus, in the political realist is maintained the survived past in the present, and the newly present.[42]

On the scale of human imperfection conservative ideology, according to Heywood, is just behind the tradition. According to conservatives, to which is better "to do nothing" than "something to do", human beings are seen as morally imperfect, selfish and greedy. Therefore, people will turn away from crime just by law that will be strictly applied. Crime is not a product of inequality in society, but the basic human instincts. From there comes a conservative preference for strong government and "rigid" regimes of penal policy. For conservatives, the role of law is not to support the freedom, but to preserve the order.[43] Such rigid and bizarre ideas stem from a conservative foundation in tradition. Excessive moderation, caution and rejection of each risk prevents the expression of individuality, creativity and hampers the initiative. Conservative view gives a consenting to a living in a swamp. There is no ripple that could condition the change of any kind. Since the individuality, creativity and initiative, together with (creative) risks are underlying determinants of freedom, in the society by measure of

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[40] Franco Crespi, *The sociology of culture*, Zagreb: Politička kultura, 2006. 152.
[41] Andrew Heywood, quote, work, 72.
[42] Čedomir Čupić, quote, work, 102–103.
[43] Andrew Heywood, op. cit. 78.

conservatives there is no room for any change, let alone reform or revolution. Such conformist life is full of illusion and false security, which together creates the conditions for the realization of the right kitsch existence.

Unlike liberals, traditional conservatives are advocates of the organic society. This understanding of the society again is related to the unsafe human nature, which has a desperate need of belonging to a community. One can not be separated from the society, that is to say from family, friends, colleagues , communities, until the nation. Traditional conservatives understand society as a living being, organism, and within the organism, the whole is more than its individual parts. The use of "organic metaphor" and a mechanical understanding of the society are formed from the institutionalist and functionalist perspective, in which there is no space for the elements of human spirituality as an inspiration or imagination. It turns out that the society is a natural occurrence and that is dominated by the laws that are predestined. The past has determined the present and the future, and these human characteristics, by the conservatives, are not necessary. In the "organic society" people are in the realm of the traditionally programmed life.

Since they believe that inequality is inevitable organic component of the organic society, and not merely a consequence of individual differences, conservatives traditionally believe that the society is by nature hierarchically structured. Because of the organicism and belief in hierarchy, traditional conservatives have a strong tendency towards paternalism (acting on the "fatherly way") and the faith in authority (government in schools, in the workplace, in society as a whole). They argue for a common culture and support national values as a pledge of patriotism and identity, while, on the other hand, they are the opponents of cultural pluralism.[44] In short, this view restricts freedom and contributes to the "infantilisation" of the society. In our case, it has all the features of the kitsch understanding and explanation, since it is based on egalitarianism, it parasites on the anti-intellectualism, contains an anti-urban component, demands blind obedience, legitimize mediocrity and rejects diversity.

Relationship to the property of traditional conservatives is not different from their relationship to the tradition, man, society and authority.

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[44] The same, 83–84.

Property, according to them, is "earned", as for those who are working hard. Therefore, in general, in the content of conservative ideology is embedded the belief in savings, which is a virtue in itself. Of course, individual rights are weighted according to the interests of society and the nation.[45] Dedicated work and wealth gained from work are virtues and, as is well known, they are embedded in the code of ethics of the Protestant religion in which the work and the acquisition of wealth have an important role in validating the man in society and before God.[46] In interpreting by the Conservatives, however, it has a different connotation and, when combined with the traditionalist understanding of human nature, organic society, hierarchy and authority, the whole story gets a dimension of kitsch patriotism and paternalism, nationalism and authoritarianism.

Sociologists and political scientists think about the fate of conservatism in the XXI century. They wonder how conservatism can remain relevant in the post-socialist era aka the postmodern era. In addition to the undoubted differences, there is something that is common to traditional conservatism and postmodernism: both directions advocates believe that the truth is essentially partial and local. However, it is clear that the coming of the postmodern era is threatening to undermine the very basis of the traditional or organic conservatism.[47] If we know that postmodernism, among other things, relativizes and calls into question all the values (aesthetic, ethical, political, ideological, and others), the question is whether it stays beyond every kitsch position. More specifically, does it ever take any position? It seems that there is a vacuum, and it is a good base for all sorts of kitsch creations.

Kitsch in our backyard

Kitsch everywhere, kitsch in every age, but also kitsch here and now. There are cultural universals, and hence there are kitsch constants, however, each kitsch takes on local, national color. The fact that Serbia of XXI century is in pre-modern stage of development in itself speaks of the country that is

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[45] The same, 85.
[46] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Novi Sad: Mediteran Publishing, 2011.
[47] Andrew Heywood, op. cit. 107.

on the half way, of Serbia, which is "neither here nor there." The views of its citizens on the most important social issues are often diametrically opposed. Their attitude towards the European Union is characteristic. The majority of Serbia is for joining that community, but ... In Serbia, every step towards a new begins with the abstention "but": "We would go in Europe, but under our conditions." It can even be cute as a kind of mantra, but it is worrisome in the sense that Serbia in everything always stops halfway. Because of it we say that she is "neither fish nor a girl." Someone will ask, so where is the kitsch there? Kitsch is precisely in such a position that, as a rule, is the one that shows indecision, non-persistence, volatility and fickleness, in the concrete case of the "national character." This ratio indicates the heaviness and weariness of spirit, its bluntness and general mental confusion. Serbia always stops halfway and remains hesitant when faced life's crossroads. Today it is the intersection of two lines: one showing Europe's direction, and the other path leads to the darkness, to the medieval monastic silence. Which realm should we choose?

Most worrying is the fact that the modernization of Serbia stretches over the last two centuries, and at the same time it is still not finished - Serbia did not stop shoulder to shoulder with the most developed European countries. It looks amazing (the sensationalism is an important feature of kitsch - prim. N.B.), but doubts and misunderstandings of the culture today are almost the same and break around the same issues as a hundred years or more ago. Today's situation in the world ("Zeitgeist") shows that the world is changing incredibly quickly, so in the composition of the train of globalization can jump only those who have a clear goal and the plans of development. Serbia does not fall into such. In it is, for example, still endlessly talked about Kosovo as the "cradle of Serbs", which is an ordinary mantra or half-truth. That phrase has entered the collective memory of the people from whose mind can not get it even the real facts of life. With people who are repeatedly stumbling over the same stone (10 percent of highly educated) you can get lost battles (from the one in Kosovo in 1389. until the last one, with NATO 1999). As evidence for the victory in the "wars in which we did not participate," we found a saving formula in the phrase "moral victory." It has always been the guarantor of our would-be big successes, winning card from which all of our defeats turned into victory.

In the post-socialist era Serbia has experienced, like many countries in the world, a strong return to traditional values and re-mythologizing. Under the burden of traditionalization she turned to the past and chose to live in it. Binding with the past necessarily leads to the formation of small-town spirit of traditionalism and myths and the restore of the premodern values. Designing a modern democratic transformation of society gives way to "Retraditionalization of the perspectives" in the name of national autonomy and sovereignty, the monarchy is being popularized,the trend of Clericalisation and secularization of society are being supported, marginalizing the importance of individual civil rights and liberties.[48] The relevance of historical myths is certainly not only a feature of Serbian culture since it is evident in all the countries of South Eastern Europe. That is why with the population of these geopolitical regions spread ahistorical way of thinking, in which the time is not seen as linear, but as a liminal. Thus, the passage of time is divided on the basis of important events (such as in Serbia, for example, the Battle of Kosovo in 1389), and specifically performance of historical events has a subordinate role. Taking folk tradition as the basis of the interpretation of history, government policy coalesce with the national traditions and the mythical view of the world.[49] This leads to isolation, with masochistic behavior that is incomprehensible, to "the rest of the world."

The smallest danger threatens Serbia from kitsch items - lovely souvenirs and gadgets, garden gnomes, kitsch images from glass-shearing shops or heartbreaking TV soap operas. It is dangerous that the whole country is on (sick to death) pedestal of the kitsch culture that provides a cancerous metastasis to the entire social body. Do not forget that Abraham Moles once wrote that kitsch is not a thing but a relationship between people and things. It follows that the meaning of kitsch is found primarily in people. From their twisted relationships are reflected the kitsch objects, and even life itself as kitsch. One country is in a state of impasse when kitsch becomes its way of life in everyday life.[50] Irresponsible populist policies allowed for kitsch to enter a big way into Serbia. Kitsch is too long corroding the Serbian culture like weeds, and in recent decades it has almost become her

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[48] Zagorka Golubović, *My horizons, I think, act, exist,* Beograd: Žene u crnom, Centar za ženske studije i Džender istraživanje, 2012. 99.

[49] Klaus Roth, *From Socialism to the European Union*, Beograd: XX vek, 2012. 119–120.

[50] Nikola Božilović, *Kitsch culture*, Niš: Zograf, 2006. 22.

trademark. The Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić about it pronounced a great idea, exemplary to the current situation: "In every country there are weeds, but only in Serbia, the weeds are being watered."

There are many examples of relatively recent past from which emerges a traditional spiritual matrix that produces resistance to the modernization of Serbian society. A typical example is the case of the Belgrade sewage from the late nineteenth century. It was discussed 35 years before it even started to be built, while people were dying as a result of poor hygiene. Similar things were happening with electrification, water supply, and the introduction of trams in the capital, which is the paradigm of the overall modernization of Serbia.[51] If there had been more daring, spiritual curiosity and initiative, the modernization of the country would not have been met with so many obstacles.

Today, Serbia is a secular state with a republican system of government. However, its political leadership is joined in the "holy trinity" which consists of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister (including the government and parliament) and the Serbian Orthodox Church (sic). This church is preoccupied with more mundane (profane) than sacred (religious) activities, because they supposedly care about the health of the nation and the state. Serbian society is filled with many paradoxes: officially are celebrated both state and church holidays, the state symbols carry in the most cases monarchist symbols, the Republic has its heir to the throne, although, of course, there is no king nor the throne and so on.

In connection with the post-monarchist frenzy, there is another political paradox of the Republic of Serbia. It is to a "smart world" incomprehensible and, by all accounts, a false nostalgia for the former Serbian kings and their families. In recent years, have been (post) buried the remains of the kings, queens and their offsprings, even with the opposition of some members of the family. The remains of distinguished ancestors died abroad are extracted from their graves and, by order of the Serbian state and political elite, are transferred to Serbia. It would not be wrong if the ceremony does not take the form of a spectacle in which there is a lot of incoherence and bad taste. In Serbia, on the Oplenac (in the presence of the senior government officials, diplomats, Bishops and "The advisory body of

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[51]Dubravka Stojanović, *Behind the curtain. Essays in the social history of Serbia 1890 – 1914*, Beograd: Udruženje za socijalnu istoriju, 2013. 8.

the Crown") is organized the "multiple" state funeral with all the features of the funeral kitsch, including the elements of "touching banality" and "banal tenderness."[52] All this is accompanied by a dishonest and narcissistic parade of feelings of the yesterday sworn anti-monarchists. Funerals with carnival features are unnecessary luxury in a country that faces enormous difficulties (economic, social and cultural) . The festival of self-representational acting instincts and the expression of necrophagous passions talk about traditionalist kitsch nostalgia inappropriate to the time and space. In these cases it is not about the genuine compassion and respect for the dead, but about the glorification of the past that in every way wants to be presented in much better and more honorable light than it really was. "Light" past appears as a replacement or substitute for a bleak present and the uncertain future. Political and religious kitsch in this case find a common inspiration, are combined in one place. In both is present the "sacrifice of veracity for the sake of attractiveness", while the truth, which is fraught with internal contradictions gets "fatal taste of saccharin."[53] These antinomies are typical of conservative (antimodern) society that wanders in a fog of political kitsch.

Political life in Serbia now and then is poisoned by the above-mentioned elements of conservative ideology. In addition to traditionalism, society in our region was understood as an organic creation, and obedience to authority was a trait that was implied. Political life was (and still is) extremely intimate because the political parties, and even the whole country, see themselves as part of the familial nucleus. Serbian society has always been overloaded with politics and political passions, so that the cultural climate at the beginning of the twentieth century was not so different from the one today:

> "The understanding of the parties as the extended family, and the party leader as a father and the reduction of the internal relations to personal preferences led to the fact that all of a public space became saturated with personal relationships,while the political principles were superseded by a passionate love-hate relationships, which were hindering the work of state institutions putting personal interests above the public. "[54]

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[52] Zoran Gluščević, op, cit, 73.
[53] The same, 100–101.
[54] Dubravka Stojanović, cit, op, p. 121.

The wars that have engulfed the SFR Yugoslavia in the nineties of the past century have even more in Serbs intensified feelings of exclusivity, content and self-sufficiency. They inflamed sentiments, which have grown in nationalism, chauvinism and ethnophiletism. The way of life was filled with national egoism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious intolerance, violation of rights of the minorities (Roma, LGBT population), and generally the disregard of any differences. Life has moved into the world of illusion, deception, lies and half-truths.

Society affected with kitsch is full of paradoxes. In Serbia, people were living completely outside the reality of the modern world, the myths of the past have become the only reality. In the world or the "kingdom of heaven" constructed of "lying and liars"[55] was believed in divine salvation and heaven righteousness and salvation was looked for in leaders who were worshiped as idols. In a society that is in a state of anomie, there is only room for demimonde. In it, writer Stevanović discovers a "new type, mutant." It is made of thieves who claim to be leaders of nations and saviors of the homeland, the only true Serbs. "Thieves enthusiasts, altruistic thieves, thieves of St. Sava and Nikola thieves. In short, the thieves patriots." [56] "The duty patriots" consider themselves the holders of the Orthodox faith, which are, from the need to disconnect from the rest of the Christian world, called St. Sava. For them, the believers of other colours are all squadron heretics, pagans or devil's servants. In such a headless society conservatism might be the only ideology, if it ever existed, and political kitsch crept into every pore of the system. Here is the original literary and picturesque view of the structure of the Serbian society, from the pen of a writer who experienced the cruelty of the government on his own skin:

> "It is a communism without Marxist basis, chauvinism that imposes itself as a framework of the new ideology, the Orthodox Church, which has happily remained in practice without the basis of religion, the police which grows with the will of semi-dictators, army that is crumbling from within, the bureaucracy that erodes country, a country that openly starts a war against its own people that it does not resist, the opposition that defends the attitude of the position, the

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[55] Danilo Kiš, *Encyclopedia of the Dead*, Beograd: BIGZ, 1994. 19.
[56] Vidosav Stevanović, cit, op, 322.

intelligence that finally submitted itself to the sealed spirit, the workers who do not want to work and the farmers who are happy because of the uncultivated land and ruined crops."[57]

A time of war, economic crisis and poverty are creating and spiritual poverty that remains decades after the cessation of the war. Sociologists often refer to a common place, in which the revolution can be made in a few days, the institutions renewed for a few weeks, and the awareness of people can not be changed for several decades. So it is with Serbia. After a mighty struggle there comes a time of peace, but a way of life does not change overnight. Only the roles, and their holders are changed. Instead of war profiteers, on the new social kitsch stage enter "anti-war profiteers" autocratic rule is replaced by a "democratic", autocracy that is arbitrary, institutions exist only on paper, and decisions are made in the kitchen of parties. At the same time, fiction is preferable to the reality that is difficult and reluctantly accepted. In the Serbian variants, this means that, for example, Kosovo remains in Serbia, although Serbia there has no grain of legitimate authority. On the other hand, is created the myth of Serbia as the "Balkan leader," although it is ruled by unprecedented poverty and unemployment, flourishing of the bribery and corruption, and organized crime flourishes in conjunction with quasi-managerialism. Inventing of the enemy remains the Serbian specialty, which comes very handy as a cover for the weakness of the regime. The enemy is indispensable as a simulant of constant danger. It is being built into the system as a "cohesive force".[58] Imaginary enemy in this way becomes a real threat, and political manipulation shows that its resources are inexhaustible. New real-politics based on political pragmatism is required in such circumstances, but the question remains whether it can cope with society steeped in filthy lies and self-deception (society trash). Kitsch has the strength and durability which is difficult to handle, and its fickleness and adaptability of every political and social system can envy and ingenious chameleon.

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[57] The same, 569–570.
[58] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Sarajevo: „Veselin Masleša" , 1968. 64.

Conclusion

Freedom and morality are, by definition, the most important attributes of the policy. However, if the freedom of the concrete political practice is prevented or impeded, and moral conduct in terms of honesty and accountability disqualified, then it comes to the political illusion that seeks to mask the truth, blur reality and meet the particular interests of individuals or groups in power. In the absence of a genuine culture flourishes pseudoculture, false and spurious. It is an ideal base for a flourishing of pseudo-political phenomena and the development of the authoritarian societies.

Conservative ideology, embodied in the "false consciousness" and false political morality, aided by the political propaganda with appropriate rituals, opens the door to political kitsch, which easily covers the whole society. In a culture of lies policy is an area that produces a conscious deception and a premeditated lie. This policy manages to survive thanks to attributes such as primitivism, aggressiveness, lasciviousness, vulgarity, sensationalism, perversity, exclusivity and banality. In the atmosphere of the pseudoculture kitsch easily finds the refuge in politics - the truth ceases to be a political virtue, and a lie becomes legitimate, permissible, even desirable asset.

The authoritarian policy is the essential holder of the conservative ideology and totalitarian consciousness. It promotes violence by legitimating immorality and evil. Deleterious effects of such a policy is contained in the fact that it creates the illusion of democracy and freedom, but in fact it hampers the basic civil rights and stifles the individual freedom. This policy is based on obedience to the life and work of leaders, and its basic methods are manipulation and repression. Among its many features, the reliance on tradition is one of the key levers of conservative ideology. Here tradition is not understood in the broadest sense (as the preservation of the cultural heritage of the past), but it is simply the misuse of people's traditional feelings. Authoritarian undemocratic societes are the holders of the myth awareness and traditionalism as negative variant of tradition. Holders of the power can block changes, enhance confidence in social progress through rational planning and present a distorted picture of modernization. In

political practice is not rare that leaders are inventing tradition, they instrumentalize it and place it at the service of satisfying their own interests.

Previously told with a simple deduction can easily be applied to a culture of Serbian society, to its modernization that after two centuries has not yet been completed. Political life of the Serbian society, today as earlier, is characterized by traditional conservatism and the obedience to authority. Political parties are essential carriers of human destinies, and institutions are a dead letter. Due to the long-standing resistance to changes, with strong processes of the retraditionalization, remythologization and Clericalisation, Serbia can not successfully be integrated into the community of the European democratic societies. Conservative ideology moved into all aspects of social life, and the life of "ordinary" people moved from grim reality into a world of deception, illusion and pink lies.

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