PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 17(3) 2024: 647-660
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v17i3p647

Published 15 November, 2024

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The role of right-wing think tanks in ideological hybridizations. The case of Burke Foundation

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to investigate the role of right-wing think tanks in the ideological hybridization of the conservative field, with a particular focus on the Burke Foundation, an American think tank, in shaping a "national-conservative" project. Drawing on Michael Freeden's morphological approach, this paper assumes the hypothesis that ideologies are constantly evolving and argues that this is particularly true in the current context. The neo-conservatism of the Republican Party has been destabilized by the transformation of the American neo-liberal order following the 2007/2008 financial crisis. Gary Gerstle (2022) explicitly refers to this as a crisis of the American model of neo-liberalism. Meanwhile, the rise of the first Trump presidency laid the groundwork for Reagan-era neo-conservatism to be grafted onto an ethno-nationalist ideology. Secondly, it will be argued that the revival of ideologies brings to life a revival of intellectuals as "ideology-enablers". Finally, the strengthening of national-conservatism, meant as a bridge between the "old conservatism" and the new illiberal nationalism that emerged in the populist decade, will be discussed. For this purpose, an overview will be provided of the hybrid ideological Pantheon of a think tank like the Burke Foundation.

KEYWORDS: conservatism; ideology; intellectuals; nationalism; think tank
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1. Introduction

Francis Fukuyama's popular book "The End of History and the Last Man" has turned 32 years old. Fukuyama (1992) argued that with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy — which occurred after the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union – humanity has reached "not just (…) the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama, 1992, 11)".

Over the following twenty years, democratization studies became a well-established field in both political and social sciences. A "manifesto" for that field of studies was "Journal of Democracy," a bridge between scholars and "liberal warriors" across the world. As Diamond and Plattner (1990) argue, the resurgence of democracy is partly due to the failures of rival ideologies, such as Marxism-Leninism and authoritarianism, which lacked both legitimacy and economic effectiveness. We do not know whether Fukuyama's "push" was part of that achievement, but the book has been widely regarded as a success, capturing both the academic and political 'Zeitgeist, becoming a landmark for both supporters and detractors of the "End of History's" thesis. Among his detractors were Samuel Huntington (1993), Jacques Derrida (1994), Benjamin Barber (1995) and others, all coming from widely different academic and theoretical backgrounds. All those who claimed that the 9/11 terrorist attack meant that history "returned from vacation" (Kagan 2008) criticized Fukuyama, while other scholars have criticized Fukuyama for not paying attention to systemic challenges from countries such as China and Russia (Gat 2007). Other scholars highlighted, as early as twenty years ago, the normative dimension of the concept of democracy embodied in the approach of "democratic studies" as "it fails to capture the range of meanings invested in the term democracy" (Grugel 2003, 238).

The concept of the "End of History" implied the idea of the "End of Ideology," or at least the end of a conflict between rival belief systems, as Fukuyama argued that liberalism's triumph meant that "History" — understood as the struggle between rival ideologies — had ended (Fukuyama 1989). Both historians of ideas and intellectual historians argue that Fukuyama, since the beginning of his career, was interested in ideology matters (Bessner 2023). When Fukuyama began his career as an intern at the RAND Corporation in the late 1970s, he encountered a 'realist circle' focused on power relations. Scholars such as Kenneth Waltz (Art and Waltz, 1983) and policymakers like Henry Kissinger argued that the Soviet Union was a 'normal' nation with conventional, power-driven interests. Fukuyama disagreed with this consensus. Against the above mentioned scholars, the young analyst maintained that the Soviets were actually ideological enemies of the United States who desired to remake the world according to their communist ideology. Whereas Kissinger (1969) conceived geopolitics as a great game of power and interests, Fukuyama focused on ideas. He thus spent the early years of his career analyzing Soviet efforts to create "ideological states" in places like Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. According to Fukuyama, ideology — not just power — needed to be taken seriously in international relations. Today's historians show us more clearly Francis Fukuyama's profile as a "liberal warrior" (Bessner 2023). If "ideology was largely modeled on our experiences of totalitarianism, it is unsurprising that the passing of totalitarianism was equated with the passing of ideology (Bell 1960). That such a view was itself the product of a deeply-held ideological position is also beyond doubt: a world apparently bifurcated between reason and unreason, between extremism and moderation, between freedom and oppression" (Freeden 2005, 250). From Freeden's point of view, Fukuyama's argument itself would be ideological.

The claim that ideologies have ended seems largely groundless today. In the 1990s it had quite a different echo, in part due to authors whose backgrounds were quite far from Fukuyama's, such as Slavoj Zizek (2000) and many others. Unlike Fukuyama's argument, the end of the Soviet Empire saw the resurrection of political ideologies that came out of a deep freeze, especially forms of nationalism of the Centre and of the Right,

enhanced by populism. A few years later, the continuous presence of political Islam strengthened this trend (Freeden 2005). The populist decade of the 2010's and China's systemic challenge (Rudd 2022) made this picture more vividly evident. To a certain extent, the mighty wave of populism study has brought back the question of ideology, as it continually asks whether populism is an ideology. Cas Mudde answered the question by arguing that populism is a "thin-centred ideology" (Mudde 2004), echoing a definition that Michael Freeden coined about nationalism. In Freeden's words "a thin-centred ideology is one that arbitrarily severs itself from wider ideational contexts, by the deliberate removal and replacement of concepts. The consequence is a structural inability to offer complex ranges of argument, because many chains of ideas one would normally expect to find stretching from the general and abstract to the concrete and practical, from the core to the periphery, as well as in the reverse direction, are simply absent (…). Nationalism oscillates between being a distinct thin-centred ideology and being a component of other, already existing, ideologies" (Freeden 1998, 750). Of course, this definition of nationalism can be fully understood only if we embrace Freeden's definition of ideology, as we do here, namely "a political ideology is a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions, exhibiting a recurring pattern, that competes deliberately as well as unintentionally over providing plans of action for public policy making in an attempt to justify, explain, contest, or change the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community" (Freeden 2001).

Furthermore, ideology studies have survived thanks to the efforts of some scholars, such as those who have proposed the morphological analysis to ideology (Freeden, Sargent and Stears, 2012; Freeden 2022). On the other hand, post-structuralists and post-Marxists emphasized the contingency of the political discourse and the articulatory role of ideology (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau 1996). For Laclau and Mouffe, "ideology holds disparate elements together, forming a (transitory) social identity and bestowing on society a discursive and symbolic unity to counterbalance its internal dislocations and antagonisms" (Freeden 2012, 169). These theorists argue from the general proposition that "ideology entails an attempt to decontest central political contests and relations of domination even though such attempts must, of necessity, fail" (Norval, 2012, 200). This theoretical approach never disconnects political reality from its ideological representation. At the same time, no political conflict can be "non-ideological".

The article is based on the assumption that an hegemonic crisis of the neoliberal model in its American form is underway, adhering to the perspective recently proposed by Gary Gerstle (2022). This claim will be further elaborated at the beginning of the article. Secondly, it will be argued that moments of crisis represent a window of opportunity for intellectuals as "ideology-enablers." Finally, the strengthening of national conservatism will be discussed, understood as a bridge between the "old conservatism" and the new illiberal nationalism that emerged during the populist decade. To this end, a network of conservative think tanks, such as the Edmund Burke Foundation (EBF), will be analyzed, as it is the only one so far to have brought together all the main conservative and nationalist think tanks from Western countries (Mudde 2021).

2. Ideology and the Fall of the American Neoliberal Order

This part of the article owes a substantial debt to "The Rise and the Fall of The Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era" by Gary Gerstle (2022). Many scholars have portrayed U.S. failures in managing the "Global War on Terror" during the 2000's and the 2008 financial crisis as the evidence of the crisis of both neo-liberal order (Duménil and Levy, 2011; Rodrik 2012) and American hegemony. A number of other scholars have questioned the role of the United States as an "indispensable power" and hegemonic power in the World-System (Arrighi and Silver 1999; Wallerstein 2003; Mahbubani 2008; Zakaria 2008; Acharya 2018), while other scholars have claimed a crisis of the neoliberal order as we knew it before the 2007/2008 financial crisis (Brown 2019; Saad-Filho 2021). This is a very limited list of scholars, among others,

who examine in depth the crisis of American hegemony and the neo-liberal order, and Gary Gerstle is only one among them. However, Gerstle is very useful for the purposes of this article because his book, in addition to being written after Donald Trump's first term, delves deep into the conjunction between neoliberal order and ideology on a century-long time scale.

Gary Gerstle links U.S. global hegemony with the ability of the U.S. political system to maintain a political order at the national level. His portrayal of American historical cycles should be carefully analyzed, because it allows us to place the new American national-conservatism in a long-term framework. “A political order is meant to connote a constellation of ideologies, policies and constituencies that shape American politics in ways that endure beyond the two-, four-, and six-year election cycles” (Gerstle 2022, 8). The New Deal met that definition from the 1930s to the 1970s, and neoliberalism, Gerstle (2022) asserts, did so from the 1970s to the 2010s, when it began to splinter after the war in Iraq and the economic crash of 2008. Gerstle argues that neoliberalism is based on “the belief that market forces had to be liberated from government regulatory controls that were stymieing growth, innovation, and freedom” (Gerstle 2023, 136) — in other words, the mirror image of the New Deal that came before it. A political order, Gerstle says, must have “consensus across the political spectrum” to “produce elections-proof structural realignments” (Gerstle 2023, 9).

In his reconstruction of the historical events, the fundamental requirement of this neoliberal project was the radical expansion of the “terrain of human activities subject to market principles” (Gerstle 2022, 130). Despite being a project incubated in Republican circles and launched under Ronald Reagan, its full-scale consolidation occurred under the Democratic presidency of Bill Clinton in the 1990s. The conditions for the rise of a new order had been prepared in the 1960s and ’70s, when an anti-New Deal counter-establishment began to lay the ground for a radical turn. Its “constituent parts” — “the capitalist donors, the intellectuals, the think tanks, the politicians, the media, and the personal networks linking them together” — were visible and influential well before Reagan’s election in 1980. Reagan’s predecessor, Jimmy Carter, ran on a promise to drastically reduce the number of federal agencies and tested some of the policies that these neoliberal thinkers were advocating.

To facilitate these changes and make them unassailable, key institutions were drastically reconfigured — beginning with the judiciary, with the appointments of numerous conservative, “originalist” judges (Waldman 2023). Order and stability, enforced through quasi-authoritarian tools, such as an aggressive, zero-tolerance policy against crime (Simon 2009), provided the structure within which these changes could take place. “Neoliberals,” Gerstle writes, “had long argued for the need to ringfence free markets, limiting participation to those who could handle its rigors.” (Gerstle 2022, 268), Now they also embraced a religiously imbued neo-Victorian moral code, setting themselves in opposition to the permissiveness and moral relativism of the 1960s and 1970s (Hunter 1991).

The race-biased mass incarceration of an “underclass” — regarded as unfit to handle those rigors — seemed to offer the ultimate solution, in a very Foucauldian way. In the neoliberal framework, liberation and repression, freedom and order, were deeply interdependent. Under Clinton the project was perfected. Cosmopolitanism and diversity did reverse some of the conservative neoliberal cultural trends of the previous decade, but the neoliberal order was consolidated. Further deregulation followed, from finance to telecommunication; the compromise between labor and capital collapsed; inequality skyrocketed along with an increasingly finance-centered economy; tough anti-crime legislation was passed; free trade flourished, to the detriment of workers’ rights. All of this happened on Clinton’s watch (Gerstle 2022).

But the ascent and triumph of the neoliberal order was short-lived. Some of its inner fragilities and contradictions were all too visible, as George W. Bush’s hubristic policies aggravated them and accelerated the downfall of the post-1970s order. Disastrous foreign policy choices, such as the Iraq fiasco, coupled with reckless financial deregulation and a speculative stock market bubble, intensified income inequality. These factors eroded the ideological foundations of the American neoliberal order and discredited its political promises. In 2008 the economic crash affected millions of Americans and shattered the global economy. The

ethno-nationalism of the Trump era was a response to the delegitimization of the post-1970s neoliberal order. It was just one of the many byproducts of a crisis — of democracy, globalization, cosmopolitanism — whose long shadow still hovers over the United States and the rest of the world (Gerstle 2022). In the years following the Great Crash of 2007–2008, very different groups of Americans began to transmute their economic distress into political anger and protest. Anger and protest, in combination, "profoundly convulsed American politics, fueling the rise of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, leading in 2016 to one of the more remarkable election campaigns in American history. This was the moment when America's neoliberal order began to come apart" (Gerstle 2022, 230). Following Gerstle's perspective—though this is not the appropriate venue to explore it in depth—it would be worth discussing whether this represents the end of the American model of neoliberalism, which might now take on new forms, or rather a crisis within it.

Are the cross-cutting crises of the 2000s – i.e., the military failures in the Global War On Terror and the financial crisis of 2008 – "explanatory events" (Abrams 1980) that can serve as keys to better understand the rise of Trumpian ethno-nationalism and the ideology of national-conservatism (Mudde 2021), as we use the crises of the 1970s to justify the end of the New Deal era? Whatever the answer, a window of opportunity has opened for reinventing the American Right. Nowadays, the multiple crises of the past fifteen years, such as the environmental crisis, the financial crisis, the health crisis… have created an enormous "cognitive unease" that seems to affect American and Western societies (Steger and James, 2020). U.S. think tanks have therefore become, as in other U.S. policy cycles, tools for bringing order to this "cognitive unease" (Medvetz 2012).

3. Think Tanks and the Marketplace of Ideas. From Liberal Consensus to Neo-Conservatism

The study of think tanks as a phenomenon has become increasingly consolidated over the past three decades. The foundational model originates from North America, where think tanks first emerged approximately a century ago (Smith, 1991). During the 1970s and 1980s, scholarly debates on think tanks had already navigated the traditional dichotomy between Millsian elitists and pluralists. The former, as exemplified by Dye (2000), Dhomoff (2020), and Peschek (1987), sought to empirically demonstrate that think tanks primarily function as platforms for building consensus among American ruling elites. In this view, academia, politics, and business converge around shared objectives, using think tanks as vehicles for "framing" specific policy issues with the support of the experts who shape their intellectual output. This interpretation was reinforced by Dye in the early 2000s, when he described think tanks as instruments of "top-down policymaking" (Dye, 2000).D'Albergo (2017) further characterized think tanks as providers of policy ideas and "conceptual resources" (both semantic and cognitive; see also Plehwe, 2015). This role becomes increasingly critical as decision-makers navigate the cognitive disarray inherent in complex decision-making processes, compounded by the depoliticization of policy-making, a trend marked by the diminishing political content of decision-making processes (Jessop, 2014; De Nardis, 2017).

According to the pluralists, on the contrary, a think tank is one of the multiple organizations that contribute towards defining and formulating public policies (Polsby 1984): although they are marked by functional specificity, they tend to be dispersed among the other actors and interest groups legitimately competing to influence the policymaking process. Whatever the viewpoint of American political scientists may have been in the 1970s and 1980s, it bears noting that the ecosystem of American think tanks never stopped growing. Over time, a highly articulated market took shape: nearly four hundreds institutions in Washington D.C. alone (Harris, Kosko, McGann, and Wadsworth 2021). Think tanks, then, have been described as "organizations composed of public policy experts, who usually remain on the sidelines of or outside the political arena, representative institutions, and bureaucracies […] created with the purpose of conducting research, and

producing ideas, knowledge, information, and tools aimed at orienting or influencing the decision-making process of specific public policies" (Stone 1996); defined as «public policy research institutes» (Polsby 1984); as "policy planning organization" (Peschek 1987); as a "policy elite" (Smith 1991); as "independent public policy research institutes" (Rich 2004); "hybrid interstitial agencies, engaged on the front of research, lobbying, public relations, advocacy" (Medvetz 2012).

According to pluralist theory, think tanks are among the many organizations that contribute to the formulation and definition of public policies (Polsby, 1984). Despite their functional specificity, they are often dispersed among other actors and interest groups competing legitimately to shape the policymaking process. Regardless of the perspectives held by American political scientists during the 1970s and 1980s, it is worth noting that the ecosystem of American think tanks has continued to expand. Over time, a highly complex and articulated market has emerged, comprising nearly 400 institutions in Washington, D.C. alone (Harris, Kosko, McGann, and Wadsworth, 2021). Think tanks have been described in various ways: as "organizations composed of public policy experts, who usually remain on the sidelines of or outside the political arena, representative institutions, and bureaucracies [...] created with the purpose of conducting research, and producing ideas, knowledge, information, and tools aimed at orienting or influencing the decision-making process of specific public policies" (Stone, 1996); as "public policy research institutes" (Polsby, 1984); as "policy planning organizations" (Peschek, 1987); as a "policy elite" (Smith, 1991); as "independent public policy research institutes" (Rich, 2004); and as "hybrid interstitial agencies, engaged on the front of research, lobbying, public relations, and advocacy" (Medvetz, 2012).

At the turn of the 1980s, the established "Old Guard" of Washington think tanks—long synonymous with rigorous, high-quality social research—was overshadowed by the emergence of conservative institutes founded in the 1970s, such as the Heritage Foundation. These newer organizations prioritized political outcomes and media influence over methodological sophistication. The rise of a conservative intelligentsia marked a "Copernican revolution" (Lowi 1992, 621), facilitated by Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 presidential election (Smith 1991; Rich 2004; Medvetz 2012). According to Lowi, prior to the 1980s, the Republican Party lacked prominent intellectuals. Reagan's presidency, however, changed this dynamic by integrating conservative intellectuals into his administration and providing a platform for their voices in major newspapers, magazines, and television programs. Many of these individuals were affiliated with conservative think tanks as full-time researchers. "Only fifteen years ago, 'conservative intellectual' was an oxymoron. Now it has become a major industry. In ten, twenty, thirty years from now, the birth of a conservative intelligentsia will be seen as a great contribution—perhaps the greatest contribution—of the Reagan revolution. Whatever happens to the Republican Party, conservative intellectuals will keep conservatism alive" (Lowi 1992, 642). These prophetic words were written shortly before the perceived decline of Reaganism following Bill Clinton's election in 1992. However, a decade later, with George W. Bush's victory in the 2000 election, Lowi's prediction was realized as neoconservative intellectuals returned to positions of influence, resuming the trajectory they had left behind in the early 1990s.

The so-called partisan think tanks (Smith, 1991), established in the 1970s, provide party members, mass media, and the public with staff, data, expertise, and ideologically driven policy proposals. Lowi observed that "to a certain degree, ideology has replaced organization as the glue for party unity" (Lowi, 1992, 639). Marco D'Eramo characterizes think tanks as a new type of "ideological apparatus" (Althusser, 1970), serving both traditional ideological structures and modern ones, such as mass media and social networks (D'Eramo, 2020). Similarly, Alex Callinicos, drawing on Chomsky, employed the concept of a "neo-mandarinate" to describe think tanks and neo-conservative intellectuals who supported the George W. Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11 (Callinicos, 2003). Luciano Gallino identified think tanks as "knowledge carriers," representing a novel form of "power elite" (Gallino, 2012, 100).

4. The "New Right" Think Tanks and the Edmund Burke Foundation

In the subsequent section of this article, we argue that the "cognitive unease" of the 2010s, coupled with Donald Trump's electoral victory, facilitated a convergence between the generation of Reagan-era think tanks and a new cohort of right-wing intellectuals. The neo-conservatism of the neoliberal era intersected with the ethno-nationalism of the Trump movement (Gerstle, 2022), spurred by a new cadre of Trump allies who effectively adopted Antonio Gramsci's concept of a "war of position" (Gramsci, 1951). Beginning in the 1970s, neo-conservative intellectuals waged their own Gramscian-style war against the liberal establishment—targeting institutions such as the media, universities, foundations, and mainstream think tanks, which they accused of excessive deference to leftist ideas. This ideological struggle gave rise to the neo-conservative intellectual counter-establishment (Lowi, 1992). Over the following decades, numerous right-leaning media outlets, think tanks, and affiliated institutions were established or appropriated by the emergent Reaganite New Right (Medvetz, 2012). In the 2010s, think tanks like the Claremont Institute and the Burke Foundation became key supporters of the Tea Party and the Trumpian movement. These organizations infused Gramsci-style "wars of position" with renewed content, further intensifying America's ongoing cultural battles (Hunter, 1991). Several scholars have examined the so-called "theft of Gramsci" (Pasieka, 2022) by right-wing activists, a phenomenon that is neither novel in the United States nor in Europe (Lilla, 2018). Gramsci placed significant emphasis on the pivotal role of organic intellectuals, who act as interpreters of traditions and narrators of national identity. These figures, he argued, could play a transformative role in crafting an alternative framework of ideas encompassing politics, culture, and morality (Berry and Kenny, 2012). This concept underscored the necessity of developing a comprehensive counter-hegemonic narrative, not only rooted in rigorous economic analysis and political theory but also deeply embedded in popular morality, myths, and everyday thinking (Berry and Kenny, 2012, 307).

The growing number of think tanks in the United States has given rise to a new cohort of politically motivated intellectuals associated with "national-conservative" ideologies (Struyk 2023). This relatively new group prioritizes advancing the political objectives of its sponsors over producing public policy informed by rigorous research and analysis. In some cases, the analysis is deliberately "adjusted" to align with these objectives. Struyk identifies this cohort as the New Right Think Tanks (NRTT). The primary areas of focus for the NRTT include "economic nationalism, a restrained foreign policy, limited support for the poor, restricted immigration, and family and gender issues" (Struyk 2023). One of the immediate goals of the NRTTs is to enhance the skills of party loyalists, preparing them for senior government positions in anticipation of a potential second Trump administration. These positions, numbering approximately 4,000 at the federal level, range from deputy secretary roles to deputy assistant secretary and various advisory positions. Ensuring ideologically aligned leadership in these roles would grant significant power to the secretary, enabling the comprehensive implementation of a conservative agenda over the next presidential term. As Struyk observes, "they are intent on shaping a new conservative elite and agenda" (Struyk 2023).

Struyk points out three changes in right-wing think tanks environment. The further radicalization of some major conservative think tanks of the Reagan generation, such as the Heritage Foundation; the rise out of marginality of some ultra-conservative think tanks, such as the Claremont Institute; and the establishment of new Trumpian-related think tanks, such as the America First Policy Institute, born in 2021, and the Edmund Burke Foundation, born in 2019. The Claremont Institute is based in California, And it is the only established before the Trump takeover. The Institute was founded in 1979, and in 2015 was an early defender of Donald Trump. After Joe Biden won the 2020 United States presidential election and Trump refused to concede, Claremont Institute senior fellow John Eastman aided Trump in his failed attempts to overturn the election results. The institute publications in recent years have frequently published alt-right and far-right opinion pieces. America First Policy Institute (AFPI), in his own words, is "a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan

research institute. AFPI exists to advance policies that put the American people first. Our guiding principles are liberty, free enterprise, national greatness, American military superiority, foreign-policy engagement in the American interest, and the primacy of American workers, families, and communities in all we do" (https://americafirstpolicy.com/about) The Burke Foundation, on the other hand, is the most involved in the transfer of national-conservartism ideas to other Western countries (Struyk 2023).“The Edmund Burke Foundation is a public affairs institute founded in January 2019 with the aim of strengthening the principles of national conservatism in Western and other democratic countries. The Foundation will pursue research, educational and publishing ventures directed toward this end (https://burke.foundation/)".

The board of the Edmund Burke Foundation unites hardline nationalists with the traditional Republican think tank establishment. Yoram Hazony, chairman of the Edmund Burke Foundation and president of the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem, is a central figure in shaping its ideology. His book, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018), serves as a foundational text for the “national-conservatism” doctrine of the Burke Foundation. Hazony argues that nationalism uniquely secures “the collective right of a free people to rule themselves” (Hazony, 2018, p. 32). He also contends that both Europe and the United States are afflicted by “Neo-Marxist” agitators seeking to detach Western societies from their historical roots (Hazony, 2023). Christopher DeMuth, chairman of the National Conservatism Conferences— the Foundation’s flagship initiative—is a distinguished fellow at the Hudson Institute. He previously served as president of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) from 1986 to 2008 and as the D.C. Searle Senior Fellow at AEI from 2008 to 2011. DeMuth’s leadership reinvigorated AEI, transforming it into a key resource for Republican administrations, including those of George H. Bush and George W. Bush. Beyond the National Conservatism project, the Edmund Burke Foundation has also launched the “Religious Coalitions” initiative, led by its director, Clifford Humphrey.

The National-Conservatives coalition's *Statement of Principles*, promoted by the Burke Foundation, emphasizes a deep concern for the erosion of traditional values, institutions, and freedoms that they view as foundational to the stability and identity of Western nations. It argues that the revival of independent, self-governed nations is crucial for fostering a renewed public commitment to virtues such as patriotism, courage, honor, loyalty, religious faith, wisdom, and family cohesion. These virtues are framed as indispensable for the preservation of civilization and for ensuring freedom, security, and prosperity. The statement further underscores the significance of the nation-state as a counterbalance to the global dominance of universalist ideologies, which, according to the Burke Foundation, threaten to impose a uniform, centralized order that erodes local traditions and autonomy. By advocating for a world of sovereign nations, each respecting its own unique cultural and historical identity, the Burke Foundation portrays national traditions as a bulwark against what they see as the homogenizing forces of modern globalist ambitions
(https://nationalconservatism.org/national-conservatism-a-statement-of-principles/).

The Edmund Burke Foundation's "Pantheon" comprises 85 books, with 38% exclusively focused on American politics. Some titles explore the foundations of American democracy, while others address contemporary societal "afflictions," such as *The Origins of Woke*, critiques of the "toxic war" on masculinity, calls for Black American leaders (and their white liberal sponsors) to break free from cycles of blame and victimhood, analyses of "American Tribalism," and framing the Black Lives Matter movement as Marxist. International politics constitutes 18% of the collection, though only two books focus on non-U.S. countries—Hungary and Great Britain. Notably, 10% of the titles include the terms “nation” or “nationalism.” The selection of philosophers and conservative thinkers represented in the Pantheon appears “hybrid” and somewhat incoherent. Figures such as Roger Scruton, James Burnham, Charles Murray, Henry Kissinger, Edmund Burke, Leo Strauss, John Selden, Yoram Hazony, and Rich Lowry are featured, primarily addressing overarching principles.

If we analyze national-conservatism through the lens of its intellectual framework, we can identify three core principles. First, the expression of nationalist sentiment must align with the fundamental conservative aim

of achieving "social harmony." National myths and symbols are deeply embedded in the social fabric, fostering a sense of extended kinship that often proves most resilient in times of crisis (Hazony, 2018). Second, this connection endows conservative nationalism with a distinctly nostalgic and anti-modernist character. While liberal nationalism advocates for diversity on the grounds that exposure to different ways of life enriches society, conservative nationalism adopts a more defensive stance, prioritizing the preservation of social stability and the maintenance of a cohesive, homogenous national identity. One of the members of the Burke Foundation's Pantheon, John Mitchell, argues that America's historical commitment to fostering a collective vision among its citizens is currently hindered by three major challenges, with identity politics being the most prominent. He critiques identity politics for reshaping the political landscape into a quasi-religious arena, where certain groups are scapegoated and symbolically sacrificed. According to Mitchell, the white, heterosexual male is presently the primary target of this process, but he questions who might become the next focus of societal outrage once this group is "purged." He characterizes identity politics as a form of "spiritual eugenics" that contradicts egalitarian principles, promoting the elevation of "pure" and "innocent" groups while demanding the exclusion or punishment of those deemed transgressors (Mitchell 2020).

The third and final component of conservative nationalism stems from an organic conception of society. Nations, according to this view, arise from a primordial need to form bonds with those who share common characteristics (Mylonas and Tudor, 2021). This process is seen as bottom-up, rooted in societal foundations, rather than being imposed top-down based on abstract or untested ideas. The mindset of conservative nationalism is perhaps best embodied by the French theorist Joseph de Maistre, although he is referenced in only a limited number of the works within the national-conservatism pantheon. Alongside Edmund Burke, de Maistre was a prominent figure in the counter-Enlightenment movement, which sought to defend hierarchical social structures during the French Revolution. He argued that the monarchical state represented the only truly stable form of governance and contended that the reign of terror was an inevitable outcome of Enlightenment rationalism and its rejection of Christian principles (Fisichella, 1993).The Burke Foundation's national-conservatism advocates for a global synergy between democracy, religion, and nationalism, emphasizing the pivotal role of religion in this framework. As Mudde highlights, the U.S. Christian Right has long played an influential role on the global stage, particularly in post-communist Europe. This movement has found strong allies in Russian President Vladimir Putin and, more recently, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Mudde (2021) notes that "Budapest has become the new promised land for a second strand, the so-called national-conservatism movement (…) an effort to merge the increasingly overlapping conservative and far-right ideologies into a far-right movement tailored to the cultural, economic, and political elite."

The Israeli philosopher Yoram Hazony is in charge of restoring the relationship between religion and nationalism through his own interpretation of the Old Testament. Hazony argues that nationalism is the defining issue of our time, presenting a compelling moral and historical defense of it in *The Virtue of Nationalism*. He traces the roots of modern nationalism to the Protestant embrace of the Old Testament's emphasis on national independence, which allowed English, Dutch, Scottish, and American Protestants to resist the Catholic vision of universal empire championed by the Holy Roman Empire. This Protestant-led reconfiguration of politics, Hazony contends, enabled the spread of national self-determination to diverse regions, including Poland, India, Israel, and Ethiopia. However, since the 1960s, nationalism has been increasingly challenged by globalist ideologies, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, which blame national independence for the atrocities of the two World Wars and the Holocaust. Global governance, offered as a solution, has inadvertently reignited historical tensions between nationalist and universalist visions, reminiscent of the destructive conflicts of 17th-century Europe. Hazony concludes that humanity now faces a critical decision: to embrace a world of independent nation-states or to pursue the revival of universal empire (Hazony, ii).

Finally, the Burke Foundation seeks to frame nationalism as the most authentic tradition within Anglo-American culture, distancing it from a universalist framework. According to the Burke Foundation, politics in the United States, Britain, and other Western nations have recently shifted sharply toward nationalism, emphasizing the importance of independent nation-states. This shift has unsettled many, particularly within the American conservative movement, which, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, has increasingly embraced the vision of a global "rules-based liberal order" aimed at fostering worldwide peace and prosperity, albeit at the expense of national sovereignty (Del Pero, 2017). The resurgence of nationalism has sparked what some describe as a "crisis of conservatism," unparalleled since the modern Anglo-American conservative tradition was established by figures like Russell Kirk and William Buckley in the 1950s. Central to this crisis is a fundamental question: Is the rise of American nationalism an external force threatening to displace political conservatism, or is it a vital yet overlooked component of the Anglo-American conservative tradition? For the Burke Foundation, the resurgence of nationalism represents an aspect of Anglo-American culture that is finally re-emerging as a natural ally of conservatism (https://nationalconservatism.org/about/)

5. Conclusion

Some commentators question whether an ideology identifiable as “national-conservatism” truly exists, specifically in relation to the Edmund Burke Foundation. Osita Nwanevu, for instance, describes national-conservatism as “Trumpism for Intellectuals” and little more (Nwanevu, 2019). Reporting on the inaugural National Conservatism Conference hosted by the Burke Foundation in 2019, Nwanevu highlights “an open embrace of Trump’s immigration rhetoric and policies,” along with indications that “the old conservative consensus—markets and moralism—has been broken” (Nwanevu, 2019).

Nevertheless, can national-conservatism be defined as an ideology? Possibly so, if we consider Michael Freeden’s classification of nationalism as a “thin-centered ideology” (Freeden, 1998). First, organizations such as the Edmund Burke Foundation operate at the crossroads of old and new conservatism. The label of national-conservatism provides emerging intellectuals like Yoram Hazony and others with an opportunity to negotiate a new “ideological status” with established figures of the conservative movement, such as Christopher DeMuth. This interaction bolsters the influence of rising far-right figures in mainstream media and among major donors, while enabling prominent representatives of “old conservatism” to maintain their relevance through their gatekeeping roles.

Second, this dynamic facilitates ideological hybridization, wherein established ideologies combine with newer political ideas to create novel frameworks, such as the fusion of right-wing nationalism with Reaganite conservatism. This article posits that the decline of the American neoliberal order has fostered the emergence of such ideological hybrids, including national-conservatism. While it may lack internal consistency, national-conservatism appears effective for its proponents and practitioners, who have successfully capitalized on the real or perceived crisis of neoliberalism. In many respects, national-conservatism mirrors right-wing populism, reflecting the rapid pace of public discourse shaped by media narratives. Its construction and responses are remarkably swift, making it a “fast-food ideology.”

Although this hypothesis cannot be fully elaborated here, it appears that over the past decade, right-wing think tankers and cultural influencers in both Europe and the United States have developed an interconnected “ideological eco-system.” Within this network, talk show hosts, radio personalities, think tank affiliates, social media managers, content creators, video producers, and meme-makers interact continuously and rapidly. Their collaboration is underpinned by a shared set of beliefs, ranging from interpretations of the U.S. Constitution to “anti-woke” rhetoric. A fast-food ideology like national-conservatism evolves continuously to adapt to its environment.

Think tanks are astonishing "ideological washing machines", a tool for adjustment to "the new normal" (Bradby, Krzyżanowska, Krzyżanowski, Gardell, Kallis, Krzyżanowska, Mudde, Rydgren, Wodak 2023). The scholars just mentioned argue that while crises and the "new normal" may create opportunities for radical political actions, including extremist activities, their focus is on examining what they term post-democratic action. This refers to political behavior that operates within democratic frameworks but subtly and progressively erodes core liberal democratic values by normalizing uncivil and illiberal attitudes and actions in broader sociopolitical contexts. They highlight the increasing overlap between anti-democratic and post-democratic currents, emphasizing the challenge of distinguishing between them. Consequently, they call for analyses that account for the complex and often contradictory ideological hybrids emerging across societal, political, and economic dimensions.

Quoting again from the same group of scholars, "crisis has also emerged as a profoundly discursive and narrative construct that legitimises re-definitions of social reality" (Bradby, Krzyżanowska, Krzyżanowski et. al. 2023, 419). For these authors, the concept of crisis has evolved into a distinctive type of imaginary (as discussed by Taylor, 2004) that uses narratives of past and present events to project a compelling ideological vision of the future (Wolin, 1989, 2004). This imaginary blends the "known," such as tangible or experienced crises, with the "unknown," encompassing anticipated, imagined, or discursively constructed representations of crisis. As a result, crisis-related discourses integrate both the "real" and the "projected," shaping a unique form of social and political utopia (Levitas, 2011; Graham, 2019). This dual nature makes crisis susceptible to ideological manipulation, often transforming it into a strategically crafted idea designed to serve specific political objectives (Sum and Jessop, 2013). These narratives also act as forms of "public pedagogy," influencing societal and political understanding and behavior (Graham and Dugmore, 2022). In such circumstances, think tanks are excellent vehicles for those who want to settle a new "discursive status quo". Whatever the quality of think tank's political thinking, the achievement depends on delivery.

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