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## A BOOK REVIEW- IDENTITY: THE DEMAND FOR DIGNITY AND THE POLITICS OF RESENTMENT

Didem Doganyilmaz Duman\*

### ABSTRACT

With this analysis, a descriptive and a critical review regarding Francis Fukuyama's latest book entitled "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment" is provided.

### SUBJECTS:

*Dignity, Politics of Resentment, Identity, Review*

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Identity, as in modern understanding, is claimed to be evolved into its secular form and by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century most of its components have become present. If one takes into consideration its connection with politics, Francis Fukuyama states that desire for public recognition for one's inner worth is the born of identity politics (p.107). With this basis and triggering of 2016 events of Donald J. Trump's election as President of the USA and Brexit referendum, Fukuyama (2018), on his latest book entitled *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* focuses on identity politics with significant attention to current political leanings including rising populism alongside nationalism and Islamism. By emphasizing three main points (results of identity politics, its being a threat to liberal democracy and necessity of a more inclusive national identity), he provides an interdisciplinary approach originated from a philosophical

background and elaborated his arguments through social psychology within the political framework of liberal democracy.

He provides the distinction between inner and outer selves with the focus of self-esteem. He claims that “the inner-self is the basis of human dignity” (p.10) and this sense requires recognition. This is the origin of his main argument that he built upon the *thymos* as a spirited part. With the Greek origin, Fukuyama refers to *thymos* as the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity; *isothymia* as the demand to be respected on an equal basis with other people and *megalothymia* as the desire to be recognized as superior (p.xiii). As discussed in further chapters, with democratization of dignity from *megalothymia*, in other words being superior, to *isothymia* as being equal; he highlights *thymos* as the seat of today’s identity politics (p.18). The necessity of recognition is described within the debates of inner self’s acknowledgement by the public and he links the process first with Protestant components then clears a path for its secularization with enlightenment philosophers and relates the construction of modern identity with liberalism in accordance with its social and economic aspects that provide with more choices and opportunities. He elaborates this claim with an example of a man from Saxony who used to live in a village where his life was set in a homogeneous environment and moved to a city to work in a factory in further chapters. With this example referring to *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, he also explains how nationalism and religion-based politics have been awakened recently. He constructs his arguments upon individuals’ search for inner self and he argues that individuals within heterogeneous environments tend to bind to social groups and as a psychological fact, nationalism reawakens. This process of how nationalism resurfaces might be seen as a challenge to individualist progress of modern societies; however, Fukuyama emphasizes that those two were bifurcate outcomes of the politics of recognition and dignity dated back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Regarding religion -most specifically Islam-, he defines the social group with religious bound and states that nationalism and Islamism becomes species of identity politics as in primordialist approach.

There is a very significant reference that he uses by the end of Chapter 4 (p.41) where he claims that people were in demand for recognition of their political personhood during the French Revolution. With this emphasis, he forms the

background of his analysis regarding social movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which people were seeking recognition and dignity for their identity in the next chapter entitled Revolutions of Dignity. While he connects various democratic movements of the century with recognition of one's dignity, it would not be wrong to claim that it is also a clear reference to not only the new social movement theory in terms of identity basis or as in Fukuyama's words being *primed to think in identity terms* (p.107), but also the shift from class politics to identity politics.

As mentioned earlier, Fukuyama points out U.S. Presidential Elections of 2016 and Brexit Referendum as the core reasons why he focused on the subject. Alongside these two examples, he focuses on populism with the basis of identity and provides a distinctive approach by emphasizing middle/working class people, who claim themselves as left-out and at the core of national identity. By narrowing marginalized groups and with endangering free speech, identity politics became problematic since identity is interpreted in certain specific ways. Eventually, the groups who are different than the majority have gained significant attention due to increased *political correctness* that avoids people to use identity components those encourage the otherness. According to him, this is the reason why identity politics has been shifted from left-wing politics, in which it is tended to legitimize certain identities while *denigrating* others, to right-wing politics, in which middle/working class was claimed to be victimized by the national elites. Fukuyama states that Donald J. Trump has a significant contribution on this shift alongside other populist leaders. The expansive attention paid to other social groups including blacks, gays, immigrants etc., which was highlighted as positive changes for the groups in question, has brought about uneasiness amongst the social group at the core of national identity in different ways, which can be explained in terms of both symbolic and realistic threats. Eventually, the us/other dichotomy possessed and used by the right-wing populist parties and/or leaders has gained its utmost attention as it was perceived as a tool to re-gain the dignity of the masses that has once been harmed by privileges provided to *other* social groups.

Through the end of the book, Fukuyama elaborates certain aspects with the basis of different examples from the USA and Europe. As opposed to the rise of identity politics that undermines the unity of people, he suggests an inclusive national identity built around liberal and democratic values (p.128). He claims

that the traditional understanding of the national identity, which does not originate from any biological component but is socially constructed, cannot fit with different values and cultures of newcomers and is already in hostility with the left politics for being racist and intolerant. With this inclusive national identity, liberal democracies would survive with attachment of citizens to constitutional government and equality. As he discussed in detail in the last chapter entitled "What is to Be Done?", in which he makes policy recommendations, the sense of pride and patriotism would not only create the culture that democracies are in need but also unite the citizens regardless of any differences. By highlighting common language and shared commitment to common principles of government, a creedal national identity is referred to create a mutually bounded relationship so that mutual trust would avoid any kind of violence against any social groups while integrating them into the majority. Accordingly, he suggests a new agenda for Europe in terms of national identity with pan-European characteristics instead of ethno-nationalist ones alongside a shift from *jus sanguinis* to *jus soli*. For the USA, he recommends reemphasizing the very existing creedal national identity from the American Civil War.

Identity has become one of the focus points of political science since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the identity politics is mostly acknowledged as a tool for division and discrimination. However, with this work Fukuyama suggests a unifying role for identity - despite engendered problems as its consequences - through certain policies including *assimilation* of newcomers into an upper identity which consists of creedal characteristics including nationalist, patriotic and state-bounded features such as constitutionalism, rule of law and equality, instead of race, ethnicity and/or religion. He acknowledges that the identity politics would not be ceased and even though he suggests this inclusive identity as a *remedy* for current populist politics that theoretically demonstrates a very solid and clear path to *national cohesion*, it would not be wrong to claim that it will bring about certain critics with the basis of liberal theory of minority rights connoting recognition of differences as part of pluralism and multiculturalism. However, besides the critics, it is a very essential source to read in order to understand the current political environment consists of populist politics articulated with the identity politics, and to take part in further debates regarding both the issue itself and controversies that have been and will be engendered by this very book.

### DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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