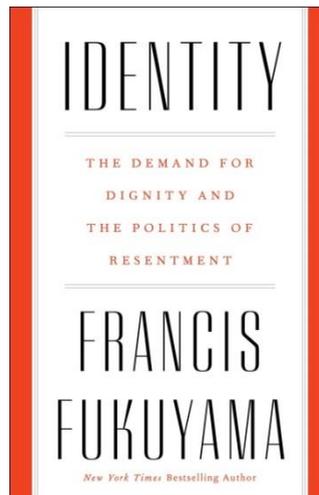


BOOK REVIEW: IDENTITY: THE DEMAND FOR DIGNITY AND THE POLITICS OF RESENTMENT



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Identity is an urgent and necessary book—a sharp warning that unless we forge a universal understanding of human dignity, we will doom ourselves to continuing conflict. In 2014, Francis Fukuyama wrote that American institutions were in decay, as the state was progressively captured by powerful interest groups. Two years later, his predictions were borne out by the rise to power of a series of political outsiders whose economic nationalism and authoritarian tendencies threatened to destabilize the entire international order. These populist nationalists seek direct charismatic connection to “the people,” who are usually defined in narrow identity terms that offer an irresistible call to an in-group and exclude large parts of the population as a whole. Demand for recognition of one’s identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is going on in world politics today. The universal recognition on which liberal democracy is based has been increasingly challenged by narrower forms of recognition based on nation, religion, sect, race, ethnicity, or gender, which have resulted in anti-immigrant populism, the upsurge of politicized Islam, the fractious “identity liberalism” of college campuses, and the emergence of white nationalism. Populist nationalism, said to be rooted in economic motivation, actually springs from the demand for recognition and therefore cannot simply be satisfied by economic means. The demand for identity cannot be transcended; we must begin to shape identity in a way that supports rather than undermines democracy.

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Structure

This book is a succinct analysis of what is going on with the middle class in many democracies and in the pseudo-democracies like Russia. It is a work on a capital topic because nowadays we see the rise of far-right wingers with Nazis symbols even in places like Russia. Indeed, a fascist type of nationalism is in effect in several Western societies for many reasons and it could be a serious threat to our psychological and social well-being. There is a phenomenon of violence in those nationalistic political movements. Racism, the little brother of nationalism, is a growing sentiment and attitude in many democratic societies. Multiculturalism is a threat for the ultranationalists because it is the ideal political philosophy for the pluralistic members of a given society; it allows the democratic citizens to envision an egalitarian society and to develop an egalitarian behavior among themselves. Pluralism is the socle of a contemporary society that respects people from the four corners of the world. However, this view is not accepted by all. Some promote assimilation others believe in integration, which are not the same. Francis Fukuyama is an ardent promoter of assimilationist approach. That is why I reacted negatively to certain aspects of his book, which is essentially excellent.

Content

To begin with, at his preface and introduction parts, Fukuyama, whom is an American, speaks about the phenomenon of Donald Trump and the rise of right-wing populism in the USA. But for him, it is not “an” American movement. It is a world movement. There is a clear fascist movement that is evolving in several societies. With Donald Trump, there is also Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Rodrigo Duterte, and Jaroslav Kaczynski. What these men have in common is their claim that democracy does not work. Nevertheless, in a world that people have become more educated and more aware of what is going on, it seems that the same people have chosen democracy as a political system. Effectively, in 1970, there were 35 democracies and in 2000, it had reached the number of 120 democracies. So why is there a rise of ultranationalists in many democratic societies? Firstly, decolonization has allowed the international world to have new producers with new merchantmen. We all know who the great winner at this game is: China. The companies that were producing have left North America and Western Europe to Asia and sometimes South America. The main consequence -for the nation-states that have seen companies leaving to establish themselves overseas- is the anxiety of an exceptionally good existence that became a horrific one. For instance, in the USA, with less job for the middle class, it also meant less money and fewer opportunities. Often, these middle class folks, more or less understand the impact of globalization

on them, and, they develop an attitude of resentment, firstly, towards their political elite which is considered to be selfish; then, towards the immigrants that are doing the jobs that they do not want to do; and finally, against nations that may be economically successful. In Russia, Putin has tried to reinvigorate the nation financially and militarily. Russia wants to become the superpower that it once was.

The basis of that Russian political agenda is the money from gas and oil that they have within their own border. About other fascist tendencies governments, they are simply trying to gain a financial place for themselves. To invigorate their nationals, they are providing them with ultranationalist discourses such as trying to negate their historical racism towards a group: a good example here is Poland and its citizens, and their racist views and acts against their Jewish community before the German invasion of 1939. Overall, for Fukuyama this is the era of "dignity politics"! Good jobs are not there anymore and, it is threatening because it is the maker of status and it buys respect. Money makes you feel like to be someone. The middle class citizens wants to be recognized by others in their society; they are afraid of being socially marginalized; they despised the new incomers, the new citizens because they know that they might be better than them at surviving at that new society. They envy them a lot because they see them working hard and growing well financially. The new incomers often come with another culture or religion, so they look like they will not assimilate. These differences are matter of resentment too. My hypothesis here is the fact that the Westerners like to claim that they have abandoned the state of being tribal; but my enduring claim is the fact that, the sociopolitical sentiment and ideology of tribalism have never been abandoned by the Westerners. What has changed is the political identity. Human beings, people, citizens, and nationals love to be part of some "clan". That is partly why they like nationalism because it tells them that they are special for just being born in a certain society...?

Globalization or international capitalism is one of the topics of Fukuyama. Of course, any social political movement has always an economic origin. Since the end of WWII, the entire world has economically improved. Many among the ex-colonized nations have become economic competitors. That is why Fukuyama has written that India and China have created huge middle classes, which tend to educate itself too. Manufacturing has left Europe and North America to East Asia and to low labor-cost nations. In several societies, but not only in the Western world, masculine workers saw the incoming of new workers: women, low-skilled workers, and the smart machine. In addition to this, the Western elite does not seem to be preoccupied with the economic realities of their citizens. About this claim, that is what Fukuyama wrote: "..., elite policies produced huge recession, high levels of unemployment, and falling incomes for millions of ordinary workers around the world.

Since the United States and the EU were the leading exemplars, these crises have damaged the reputation of liberal democracy as a whole". Still in the same order of things, we can even say that the rise of Islamic terrorist ideology comes from that same globalization process. In the Muslim countries too, the middle class is looking for ways to earn their life with decency. Muslims are very tired of seeing their own elites living well because they are impeccably serving the Westerners; the simple citizens are asking what is in there for themselves? The quest for dignity is often determined by the way of living. The primary question here is economical. What could be the best social system for us to live in? The Westerners thought that everything in the world belong to them and to confirm that, all the Third World countries were speaking either English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. The world was Eurocentric. Obviously, it is not like that anymore. The Westerners are facing a decline; and this is at the same time economic and political. The economic world is not only the businesses of the Western world.

The workers of the emerging nation-states want to live well too. They are aspiring to great things like their counterpart in the Western world. The colonized like the workers of Europe and North America wants his dignity to be respected. For Fukuyama, this is a fact that even his favorite philosopher has stated in the eighteenth century. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) believed, according to Fukuyama, that the struggle for recognition was the ultimate drive of human history. In other words, for Hegel, the French Revolution was a quest for human dignity. The poor workers wanted his freedom to be embodied in rights and laws. In continuity with this thinking, Fukuyama has a chapter entitled "Revolution of Dignity". Fukuyama reminds us of the Arab Spring as an expression of the resentment and the humiliation of the masses of simple men and women that are afflicted by their own economic and political elite. As a Hegelian, Fukuyama cannot despise Karl Marx (1818-1883); we know he does not! The points that I want to make here is Marx was a Hegelian and he believed like Hegel that History is the history of the masses. This is the main aspect of Modernity: in fact, let us remind ourselves that this period is founded on Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Audience

By reading this work of Fukuyama, we understand that this intellectual is a partisan of Modernity. He clearly appreciates the authors of Renaissance and Enlightenment. And he refers to religious histories and to theologians. No doubt, he is an excellent Western social scientist. What he has noticed is that dignity for your identity can be obtained by two means: religion and nationalism. He is right on this,

religious or the national discourses can be used to help the people to self-identify with one of the two, and to make it afterwards the foundation of their sociopolitical identity. Both are identity vectors that are being used on the political scenery, and both may dynamize the political drive of those who self-identified to one of them. There is an identity that could be both, religious and national: to be a Jew is technically to be a believer, a practitioner of Judaism, but it can also be a cultural and sociopolitical identity. Ernst Bloch (1880-1959) was an atheist but he would always claim his Jewish identity. The end of the Cold War has brought new tensions on the world stage. With the Liberalists and the Communists agenda, everything seemed to be clear. You were part of either one or you could be neutral like India. Since 1990, things have become unclear. Capitalism became the way of the world and with that came the smart machines.

Therefore, modernization process through globalization has affected many traditional agrarian societies. They had to modernize every aspects of their life, which did not come without a social clash... They even had to face a world that was now undefined. As well, it had become a pluralistic world. That multicultural world, with its pluralistic agenda, has not being welcomed since it meant a loss of financial power for several nation-states. In reaction to these realities that people cannot control, our two "fanatics", the ultranationalists and the "religious fundamentalists", are trying to explain why people feel lonely and confused, and at the end, both are offering a "victimization" discourse to those who are listening to them. Their blaming game is the predicament to their ideological quest for "social dignity". Obviously, their quest is very "restrictive" because it is not about all human beings; it is about their particular national or religious group.

Several chapters of the book consist of talking about the Euro-American middle class in the American democracy. Dealing with globalization is one aspect of the analysis but the other aspect is multiculturalism: the Euro-American males is being socially challenges by all the minorities, the majorities of women and by those who are more educated than they are. They understand that the survival fights in their society is far from being easy. Their alliance with the Republican Party and their superb leader Donald Trump is not surprising. Previously we spoke about tribalism; this is what is going on with Euro-America. Their tribal type of nationalism does not consider everyone as being an American, even if you are a citizenship born in the country. Plainly, White America considers itself the real "Americans". What is threatening that mentality is the American historiography and the pluralism of the American society. In effect, USA is a multicultural nation-state. However, for the Euro-American ultranationalists, this is unacceptable. They would like to live in an all "white" society. These folks would like to live in a

homogeneous society, not being homogenized within the pluralism of the current US society.

As well, they want their specific selves to be recognized and celebrated. In the American society, their nationalism is not welcome because it is the foundation of their genocidal policies against the Amerindians, and, the original justifications of slavery and Segregation. What these Euro-Americans are promoting is ethno-nationalism. Fukuyama explained that ideology as a type of identity that may persecute people that are not part of the promoted group and these latter, could commit acts of violence against those who do not belong to them. Ethno-nationalism rests on the concept of race, nationalism, racism and exclusivism. Fukuyama does not reject nationalism; what he rejects is ethno-nationalism because it could be aggressive and intolerant towards different ethnic groups and those who promote a socially liberal ethics.

Future

Fukuyama thinks that an inclusive nationalism is positive for a nation. Hence, he wrote: firstly, it is good for physical security; secondly, it is important for the maintaining of a good and efficient government on power; thirdly, it could be very useful for the national economic development; fourthly, nationalism is a mean to promote a wide radius of trust. Trust acts like lubricant that facilitates both economic exchange and political participation; fifthly, to protect the national members, the society, against the growth of economic inequalities; and sixthly, nationalism must help the citizens and those about to become citizens to make possible democracy itself. There is no mistake on this since every nation-state that exists has a national discourse.

The weakness of Francis Fukuyama, the Nippon American, is when he defends Huntington who defends hardly the Wasp culture in the USA. The same culture that killed legions of non-Wasps. Samuel Huntington is an ultranationalist political scientist from Harvard University; so, for Fukuyama to defend this right wing intellectual it is because he shares his political weltanschauung. Is Fukuyama a right-winger and an apostle of Waspism? No surprised that he wants to assimilate the newcomers. Dear Dr. Fukuyama, can you be more assimilated than a Black American, whom, four hundred years later, is still suffering from the racism of those who have assimilated him? Fukuyama wrote at page 166 of his book: "We need to promote creedal national identities built around the foundational ideas of modern liberal democracy and, use public policies to deliberately assimilate newcomers to

those identities". Fukuyama, are the Amerindians, the first inhabitants of USA, assimilated enough for you? Why are you writing about assimilation when we know it has not been true to everyone in the USA? What we know is the fact that ethno-nationalism still prevails in the USA! Has he denounced the ultranationalist for their outdated ethno-nationalism? Clearly, Fukuyama promotes assimilationist policies. He repeats himself by writing these words: "strategies for better assimilating immigrants to a country's creedal identity".

We read Samuel Huntington and we could say that he was an ultranationalist. But, Fukuyama sounds like a racist to us. At page 171, he wrote: "Poorly assimilated immigrants are a drag on the state and in some cases constitute dangerous security threats". He is against multilingual and multicultural programs in the high school educational curriculum. He even criticizes New York City on this. Yet, he is not a racist...? Fukuyama he is not a social problem solver. He is even less a politician. The beauty of Fukuyama is that he understands what the problem in the USA and other countries is, when it comes to deal with different ethnic groups. He wrote that, "it has been harder to create broad working-class coalitions to fight for the redistribution because the higher-status identity groups did not want to make common cause with those below them, and vice versa". He finished with vice versa. So, "those below" do not want to be in a good and healthy relationship with those who lead the society? That is where I have a problem with Fukuyama. How can he blame those below those on power? Is he blaming the Amerindians of the USA for their precarious social situation in that nation-state? Inevitably, the chapters on assimilationist views have diminished the value of this book. Francis Fukuyama is a very Eurocentric thinker. May be Fukuyama should be more concerned with post-colonial studies in his political writings.