Politics of Identity

Exploring the relevance and salience of identity as a political concept within contemporary American politics

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Abstract

This thesis examines how politics became identity and how politicized identities are shaping contemporary American politics. Identity as a political concept in the Western sphere evolved by virtue of our human thymotic desire to be recognized and dignified by other people. Identity as a political phenomenon rests on the belief of individuals and their surrounding society that there exists a true inner self in all of us that is both entitled to and worthy of recognition and dignity. The struggle to have that true inner self recognized was inaugurated by Martin Luther's reconnaissance of the inner chambers of the self and moved to the social and political sphere through the works of among others Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. Identity politics is the collectivized and organized endeavor of groups, bound together by their social identity. It is a political strategy that aims to improve and widen the circle of groups enjoying social justice. However, identity politics' contemporary characteristics are negating its initial aims by demanding recognition and dignity based on restrictive and ascriptive traits.

This thesis aims to converge *Social Identity Theory*, *Intergroup Emotion Theory*, and *Moral Foundation Theory* to examine how and why the politics of identity is such a salient concept in contemporary American politics. This will build a structural framework were the relevance of the politics of identity will be discussed in relation to contemporary American politics and the political rise of Donald Trump.

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1. Introduction

Have I read too many dystopian novels? Have I spent too much time watching tv-shows presenting dark and gloomy predictions of the future? Or perhaps, has the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus sparked existential angst I did not know I possessed? Whatever it is, I cannot escape the feeling that we went too far and imagined too much. It feels as though we move on backward, while we are simultaneously catapulted forward into the great unknown without any traceable trajectory. It is like we devolve and evolve concurrently. Left in a void of hopelessness and confusion, yet all-knowing and enlightened. Nothing is true or untrue, nothing is known or unknown, technology is both the solution and the problem, and God is dead, but still somehow alive. How does one navigate in a world like that? How does one make sense of a world that seemingly does not make sense of itself? We turn towards familiar and primal points of orientation and meaning. We find our tribe. The people who are like us. We create groups with collectivized identities that work both as a repellent against the confusing cyclone that the world sometimes can be and as an echo-chamber for our meanings and beliefs. In an increasingly globalized world, we create our own local lifestyle cocoons. As long as you and your like-minded individuals are doing okay, does it really matter that the U.S finds itself in an escalating trade war with China and that Britain is leaving the European Union? That authoritarian leaders make a comeback in Eastern Europe. Or that Artificial Intelligence in the not so distant future may replace the entire working-class in the developed world. Does it matter to you? Or to be more specific, should it matter to you?

In a global and complex world, group belonging becomes pivotal for one's meanings, values, morality, identity, and political belief. Identity groups with their politics of identity and politicized identities are an increasingly powerful force of change and opposition to change. Identity politics is the lens through which most social issues are now seen across the ideological spectrum as well as the focal point of American politics. One can argue that it is impossible to understand the current political landscape and issues in the United States without understanding the politics of identity and where it stems from.

Why does this thesis examine societal and political changes within the U.S. through the lens of identity, or, more specifically, the politics of identity? I propose that it reveals something fundamental about the social, cultural, and political reality which we have constructed and desperately try to position ourselves and others in. Identity is the basis upon which we construct our human lives. Identity is the framework of who we believe we are in relation to others, as well as ourselves. It manipulates the answers to the questions of "who am I" and "who are we" and why it matters that we are who we are and that I am who I am. It is grounded in the biographical narrative of ourselves and is both the question and answer to our life story. It is who we are and who we want and aspire to be, the main plot in the story we tell others about ourselves and the protagonist (and quite often the antagonist) in the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. It justifies our actions and inactions. Explain our shortcomings and strengths, guides our behavior, and constitutes our worldview and moral beliefs.

Strongly identifying with a group and its collective identity has become a way to confront the ministry of alienation that goes by the name of globalization. The politics of identity is a strong force of political mobilization along the whole political axis in contemporary American politics. However, there is an inherent enigmatic nature to the phenomenon that needs investigation. It has become paradoxical, as its initial aim is to secure equal recognition and dignity for everyone, but its contemporary characteristics are undermining its original aim by promoting restrictive and exclusive identities based on nationality, regionality, ethnicity, religion, and race. This unfortunate development of identity politics becomes increasingly evident in the United States as a wider circle of strongly identified groups deploy it as a political tactic when voicing their concerns about the direction the country is heading.

The rise of the politics of identity expose the central problem facing all liberal democratic societies in the 21st century, the insurmountable task to cater to the recognition and dignity of all its citizens not just in theory but in practice. With a social and political system built on the notion *Out of Many, One*, the politics of identity is becoming a vexing problem for the cradle of liberal democracy because contemporary characteristics of identity politics demand recognition and dignity on the basis of distinctiveness and not sameness. The problem with distinctiveness, as history has brutally shown us, is that it can easily morph into a sense of superiority. Sociopolitical

developments in America over the last decades have seen the resurgence of the desire to be recognized as superior, or *megalothymia* as coined by Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2018).

In my exploration of identity politics and its relation to present-day American politics, I will give a review of the western historical notion of identity. In short, how identity went from a reconnaissance of the inner chambers of the self to constituting special interests for a wide range of social groups. To elucidate the relevance of this development to contemporary American politics, a review of different theories that I propose induce the politics of identity will be presented. Both reviews will make up the backbone of my analysis, where I explore how the politics of identity and its politicized identities shape contemporary American politics. The analysis chapter will bring awareness to aspects that created a vacancy for the rise of a political figure such as Donald Trump before a closer look is given to the politics of identity deployed by Trump himself.

1.1 Research Question

This thesis aims to investigate how and why the politics of identity is such a salient and divisive concept in contemporary American politics. By using Moral Foundation Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Intergroup Emotion Theory, this thesis attempts to draw on and combine multiple aspects of morality and identity in its exploration. Based on the aims of the thesis, I have formulated the following research question:

How did politics become identity, and how are politicized identities shaping contemporary American politics?

Before we turn our attention to what the theories are proposing, we need to embark on a historical and philosophical journey about the Western notion of identity. However, before we set sail, we need to load our ship with some definitions of the central terms I employ in this thesis.

1.2 Definition of terms

I acknowledge that the historical width and the theoretical span set forth by the inquiry of this thesis is ample. Perhaps too ample, some would say, for a simple teacher-student with an astonishing accumulated ECT credit in English of 140. Why take the easy route when the hard route is obviously more exciting. However, to put some boundaries on this thesis, and to avoid too much confusion, the definitions of the terms and concepts that drive this thesis forward will be stated. Sometimes forward will feel like circles or even backward, but I promise these motions serve a purpose. Let us start with the most prominent concept, identity. Despite the concept of identity being abstractly (and arguably ostentatiously) discussed in the introduction, a clear definition was not given.

Identity is defined and understood in two ways in this thesis, one individualized sense of identity and one collectivized understanding of identity. I.e., individual identity and group identity. Group identity "refers to people's identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong, the meaning that they give to these social groups and categories, and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that result from identifying with them" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 3). Throughout this thesis group identity and social identity will be used interchangeably. Individual identity "refers to aspects of self-definition at the level of the individual person which may include goals, values and beliefs, religious beliefs and spiritual beliefs, standards for behavior and decision-making, self-esteem and self-evaluation, desired, feared, and expected future selves and one's overall life story" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 3). Various visionary's life stories are essential to the development of the Western canon of identity, and group identity is key to a comprehension of the contemporary salience of identity to present-day American politics. Converging the two definitions would put you in the vicinity of another vital concept, namely the politics of identity.

A politics of identity? Identity politics? The politics of identity? Or just politics of identity? Which one is it? After reading extensively about identity and politics for some time now, it is tempting to use the indefinite article *a* when describing the relationship between identity and politics. The deeper one dives into the matter, the more fitting Kwame Anthony Appiah's statement, "I am never quite sure what people mean when they talk about identity politics" (Appiah, 2006, 15) become. Using *a* politics of identity to describe phenomena relating to

identity politics would pay tribute to the increasing non-specific usage and non-particular context of the term. However this will not be done.

The definite article *the* is going to be attached to politics of identity throughout this thesis, thus signifying that the politics of identity specifies a certain form of politics or relates to particular sociopolitical contexts where identity or identities are of special importance and relevance. Less obscurely, the politics of identity refers to "the deployment of the category identity as a tool to frame political claims, promote political ideologies, or to simulate and orientate social and political action, usually in a larger context of inequality or injustice and with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness and belonging and gaining power and recognition" (Neofotistos, 2013). Just to be clear, the politics of identity will be used interchangeably with identity politics. Whenever contemporary is attached to identity politics, it serves the purpose of showing a historic break with previous notions of the politics of identity or identity politics. Specifically, to distinguish it from the identity politics of the 1960s. Contemporary identity politics refers to the new movement that started to unfold in the early 1970s that emphasized group distinctiveness often at the expense of wider cohesive national American identity.

Is it a temporal term? An outmoded term? An exhausted term? The corresponding chronological answers to these three questions would be yes, but no, followed by a no, but yes, and an obnoxious yes, but live with it. Whether one approves of it or not, identity politics is an indispensable facet of contemporary American political discourse. Acknowledging that the use of *contemporary* may admit to its temporality, that some might *not approve* of it indicates that it might be an outmoded term and that it is an *indispensable facet* point in directions of exhaustion, but this is the ambiguous reality of the term identity politics. Adding to the ambiguity are all the different ways which we might speak of identity politics. In his article *The Politics of Identity* (2006) Appiah exemplifies seven different ways; (1) as a political conflict about who's in and who's out, (2) identities can be mobilized by politicians, (3) distinct identities are treated differently by states, (4) as a way for people to pursue a politics of recognition, (5) norms of identification can be enforced by social micropolitics, (6) there are inherently political identities like party identification, and (7) social groups can mobilize to respond collectively to all of the above (Appiah, 2006, 22). Throughout this thesis, considerations will be given to aspects of all seven ways of talking about identity politics.

In 21st century American politics, two correlating phenomena to the politics of identity are social polarization and social sorting. Social polarization is understood as "an increasing social distance between Democrats and Republicans" (Mason, 2018, 17). The reason why social polarization is used instead of the more traditional political polarization is that the former revolves around people's feelings of social attachment to a group of others, while the latter is often limited to individual policy attitudes, excluding group attachments (Mason, 2018, 17). Hence, social polarization has more of an explanatory potential to the politics of identity, as it emphasizes the importance of social attachments to groups that generate social identities, which in their turn "generate distinct psychological and behavioral outcomes" (Mason, 2018, 23). Central features of social polarization are partisan prejudice, political action, and emotional reactivity (Mason, 2018, 23). Attention will be returned to these aspects in the theory chapter. Another aspect correlating to the politics of identity is social sorting, which "involves an increasing social homogeneity within each party, such that religious, racial, and ideological divides tend to line up along partisan lines" (Mason, 2018, 18). The merger of social polarization and social sorting within a political context where groups perceive themselves to be in a struggle over power can result in the politicization of collective identities.

Politicized collective identities rest on the foundation of a shared collective identity that is engaged in a power struggle within a larger social context. Followingly, "members of a particular group is politicized to the extent that those group members (self-)consciously engage in a power struggle on behalf of their group" (Simon & Klandermans, 2001, 324). What tends to initiate this process is the "awareness of shared grievances" that an external enemy is blamed for and that "claims for compensation are leveled against" (Simon & Klandermans, 2001, 324). Surrounding this process is a wider societal context that is both affected by and affects this power struggle, which in turn "implies the acknowledgment of the role of third parties such as the general public or authorities that politicized group members should try to control, influence, or otherwise enlist for their collective interests" (Simon & Klandermans, 2001, 324). Underlying the power struggle between politicized collective identities are different perceptions of what constitutes a valid moral belief system.

The different moral foundations to which it is possible to build an understanding of morality upon will be discussed further in the theory chapter, but the definition of morality will be given here. It

is a functionalist and descriptive definition taken from Jonathan Haidt's book *The Righteous Mind* (2013) and perceives morality as "interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible" (Haidt, 2013, 314). Within these moral systems, individuals strive to uphold a sense of dignity through various arenas of recognition. The recognition of dignity is found in the part of the soul called *thymos* and is of central importance to this thesis. Thymos is the desire to be recognized by others, "either as *isothymia*, recognition as equal in dignity to others, or *megalothymia*, recognition as superior" (Fukuyama, 2018, 81). Thymos is the catalyst for the philosophical history of identity in the West brought forth in this thesis, and the microcosm of contemporary identity politics in the United States. How this came to be is a long story.

2. History of Identity

2.1 Outline

One way of looking at history is to view it as a narrative of the different stages of human freedom. More metaphorically we can perceive history as a play where the central theme is the struggle for recognition where the different acts portray "world-historical events that were in the process of bringing about the final, full stage of history and human freedom" (Little, 2017). A philosopher who believed that history possessed directionality was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In his early *Jena* writings, Hegel proposes a trajectorial philosophy of history (Honneth, 2005, 33), that is history as a process "moving towards a specific condition" (Little, 2017). This process, according to Hegel, ultimately leads to the universal recognition of every human being "acquired and maintained intersubjectively, through being granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes" (Honneth, 2005, xi). In his book *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (2018), Francis Fukuyama uses Hegel's philosophy of history as a backdrop for his discussion on how restrictive forms of recognition based on ascriptive identities such as nationality, religion, race, and ethnicity challenge this condition.

By deploying Hegel's overarching idea, Fukuyama constructs a cogent interpretation of the West's philosophical history of the concept of identity. So compelling indeed, that Fukuyama's account serves as the main source for the history chapter. I have contemplated a range of alternative sources but always found myself returning to his historical account. Per contra, no one is perfect, and Fukuyama oversimplifies and undercuts a great deal of Hegel's philosophical project, which is why his account will be supplemented by Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (2005). Additionally, I propose that Fukuyama's claim that identity politics, as practiced on the Left, has stimulated the rise of identity politics on the Right (Fukuyama, 2018, 118) is inaccurate. That something evokes reactions, is not the same as it being a causal explanation. Identity politics as currently practiced on the political Right, have roots that stretch back further than opposition to political correctness and must be seen in relation to conservative

beliefs such as preserving status quo and upholding fixed social hierarchies. I will address this aspect further in the analysis chapter through Corey Robin's book, *The Reactionary Mind* (2018).

Like Hegel, this thesis examines history in trajectorial manner. However, instead of looking at world-historical events, a review of influential historical philosophers' ideas and how they shaped and paved they way for the modern understanding of identity as a political concept is examined. How these ideas relate to the contemporary understanding of the politics of identity in American politics will be further examined in the analysis chapter. The context of the different thinkers will always be kept in mind, because as Fukuyama so eloquently puts it, "ideas shaped the material world, and the material world created conditions for the spread of certain ideas" (Fukuyama, 2018, 36). In Martin Luther's time, it was the printing press and in Donald Trump's day and age, it is the internet, more specifically, Twitter.

2.2 The Bipartite Soul < The Tripartite Soul

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates introduces a new word, *spirit*, in relation to the story of Leontius and how he gave into his cravings of looking at a pile of corpses (Fukuyama, 2018, 16). Spirit is, at best, a mediocre translation of the Greek word *thymos*. Thymos refers "to the part of the soul that is the seat of this anger against oneself" (Fukuyama, 2018, 17) and, more importantly, the part that craves recognition of our worth. Socrates argues that this part of the soul is independent of desire and reason. Unfortunately, Socrates's third part of the soul was forgotten and neglected, perhaps simply overlooked, when Classical political philosophy theoretically transformed into modern social theory through the writings of, among others, Niccolò Machiavelli (Honneth, 2005, 8). Departing radically and unceremoniously from traditional philosophical anthropology, Machiavelli introduced the conception of humans as egocentric beings only acting in their self-interest (Honneth, 2005, 8). With a socio-ontological foundation that predicts a permanent state of hostile competition between subjects in place, Thomas Hobbes, some 120 years later, went on to scientifically 'prove' Machiavelli's hypothesis.

In light of the historical and political experience of the development of the modern state apparatus, expansion of trade, the model of the natural sciences as a result of Galileo's successful research methodology and Descartes's epistemology, Hobbes was backed and supported in his

theoretical endeavors (Honneth, 2005, 9). Machiavelli's everyday observations forming his uncritical methodologically presupposition about human nature assumed the form of scientific assertions about the singular nature of human beings through Hobbes (Honneth, 2005, 9). This atomistic philosophical anthropology has dominated, and unfortunately still dominates, Western intellectual thought. The conception that desire, self-interest, and the struggle for self-preservation, combined with infallible confidence and belief in reason as the guiding virtue, has been upheld as the prevailing explanation of the complex facets of human behavior and motivation in the Western sphere.

Just a quick detour to the contemporary world of politics. If we were to believe that reason and self-interest guide most of our choices one would assume that white rural working-class people in the Midwest and the South, struggling economically, facing increasing levels of unemployment and lacking basic health insurance in the face of a growing opioid crisis would have endorsed Hillary Clinton in 2016 U.S. presidential election. After all, her campaign promised affordable health care for all ("Health Care," n.d.); taking on this epidemic once and for all (speaking of the opioid crisis)("Addiction and Substance Use," n.d.); increase the federal minimum wage and strengthening and protecting America's workforce through labor unions ("Labor and Workers' Rights," n.d.). All policies which, on paper, would greatly benefit the rural working-class of America. Similarly, reason was what the *Remain* side appealed to in the 2016 Brexit Referendum in Britain. Staying in the union is the reasonable thing to do. As far as self-interest goes in the referendum, people who voted to leave, in theory and practice, voted against their economic self-interest as leaving would see a drop in the national economy and concordantly personal economy. Reason was deployed as the logos, pathos, and ethos of both sets of campaigns. The appeal to self-preservation was evident in both campaigns. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that neither of these two campaigns were successful in their venture.

Both sets of campaigns borrow from the notion found in modern economic models that human beings always try to maximize their utility, we are individuals who use our formidable cognitive abilities to benefit our self-interest (Fukuyama, 2018, 12). In other words, we are Homo economicus, and our actions explained by rational choice theory. The fallacy of these models, economic man, and both campaigns is that human beings also seek, indeed crave, "positive judgments about their worth or dignity" (Fukuyama, 2018, 18). We want to be recognized,

something that has gone unrecognized by prominent economic theories and theorists for decades, but was understood by Socrates and his contemporaries two millennia's ago (Fukuyama, 2018, 18). To be fair, the prominent and influential Adam Smith, especially in his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790), did go on in lengths about alternative motivations inducing our behavior and actions, but it was for some reason left out of the collective memory.

Our soul is not bipartite, it is tripartite, consisting of *epithumia* (desire), *logos* (reason) and *thymos* (need for recognition) and we WEIRD (western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic) humans and our liberal democratic doctrines have a tendency to put too much emphasis on and confidence in *logos* (Haidt, 2013, 112-114). According to Fukuyama, the third part of the soul, thymos, is also the seat of today's identity politics (Fukuyama, 2018, 18). The politics of identity and the role of thymos in it will be revisited. For now, though, thymos will function as the launching pad for one of the key aspects of identity, namely that we as human beings crave positive recognition of our character. Judgments about our worth or dignity can come from within, as in the case of self-loathing, but in most cases, they are made by other people in our surrounding society. When people receive positive judgment, they feel proud, when they do not receive it, they can either feel anger, when they think they are being undervalued or shame, when they realize that they have not lived up to other people's standards (Fukuyama, 2018, 18). The resentful feeling that arises out of realizing that one is prevented by social structures to live up to one's own and, more importantly, God's standards, were further explored by the Augustinian friar Martin Luther. In his anguish, he would bring about ideas that would change the world forever.

2.3 A Political Philosophical History of Identity

Martin Luther's ideas can be summed up by the following statements: the inside is at odds with the outside, and there is a need to valorize the inner self over the external sinful social being. Luther developed these ideas in his opposition to the customs, beliefs, and social hierarchy of the catholic church. A more precise formulation of his ideas would be that the personal faith is at odds with the current customs and social hierarchy of the catholic church, and there should be a greater emphasis on the personal and inner spiritual faith than on the outer bodily and sinful being. His ideas brought about the Reformation and "a whole series of social changes in which

the individual believer was prioritized over prevailing social structures" (Fukuyama, 2018, 27). The bedrocks of the modern sense of identity were laid when individuals came "to believe that they have a true or authentic identity hiding within themselves that is somehow at odds with the role they are assigned by their surrounding society" (Fukuyama, 2018, 25) and Luther was the first to express this disjunction[1].

A central question that needs to be asked before we embark further into the evolution of the concept of identity is one that historians have asked themselves since the dawn of modernization. Are monumental social changes the product of material forces as Marx argued, or are they driven by ideas as Max Weber contended. According to Fukuyama, "both positions capture part of the truth, because causality moves in both directions at once" (Fukuyama, 2018, 28). Material conditions and ideas work in concert as Fukuyama further explains, "[m]aterial conditions obviously shape people's receptivity to certain ideas. But ideas have their own inner logic, and without the cognitive framing they provide, people will interpret their material conditions differently" (Fukuyama, 2018, 28). If we are to understand the evolution of the concept of identity, we need to acknowledge this dialectic nature between ideas and material conditions that brought the question of "who am I?" and "why does that matter politically?" to the forefront of our conscious minds.

In his agonizing quest of trying to understand himself, Luther expressed the depth and many layers of the self that can only be exposed through private introspection (Fukuyama, 2018, 28). Although this can be argued to be the key assumption central to the question of identity, Martin Luther stands far from contemporary understandings of identity. Luther's inner self was just concerned with one dimension; "faith, and the acceptance of God's grace" (Fukuyama, 2018, 29). This one dimension also neglects that this inner self seeks public recognition. Luther was concerned with the private relationship between man and God and not between man and man in the public and social sphere. His deeply Christian worldview constituted the foundation of all his thoughts and ideas about the struggles of the inner self versus the outer social being. He did, however, establish the distinction between an exterior social outside and personal interior inside. Thus, the gates were open to more secular philosophers that rejected Luther's religious paradigm

[1] It is a mildly inaccurate statement that Luther was the first to express this disjunction as Augustin did express similar thoughts in his book *Confessions*. Nonetheless, Luther's writings devalued social institutions and caused massive upheavals in a way that Augustin's writings did not (Fukuyama, 2018, 28).

but were still interested in the neglect of the true inner self by the surrounding society. Strolling through those gates came Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau's literary work span from themes surrounding democracy, human rights, communism, anthropology, and environmentalism. Regardless of width and variation, a reoccurring theme in his writings explores what he believed to be the "natural goodness of the inner self" (Fukuyama, 2018, 30). In opposition to the original sin that the Christian doctrine had emphasized and established, Rousseau believed that the first human being was not sinful. According to Rousseau, the source of human unhappiness starts with the discovery of society. More precisely, he emphasized, "the ability to compare, and to evaluate, other human beings as the fountainhead of human unhappiness" (Fukuyama, 2018, 30). With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Rousseau was wrong in his assertion that the first human beings were primordially individualistic and did not compare and evaluate each other. Comparison and evaluation of others are encoded in our DNA as a means of enhancing our survival (Haidt, 2013). Nonetheless, the commercial society that Rousseau points his finger at is widely different from the one that existed in traditional hunter-gatherer societies. Rousseau portrays society as equally oppressive to that of the catholic church in Luther's writings.

Commercial societies "with its mass of rules, relationships, injunctions and customs" is depicted "as an obstacle to the realization of human potential and hence human happiness" (Fukuyama, 2018, 32) by Rousseau. Out of the ability to compare and to evaluate one another grew an idea of esteem, which soon each man claimed, and to refuse it to another man was a dangerous path to walk. This is a crucial shift for human development, according to Rousseau. He "denounces the shift from *amour de soi* (love of self) to *amour proper* (self-love or vanity); simple self-interest is transmuted into feelings of pride and the desire for social recognition" (Fukuyama, 2018, 30). What Rousseau taps into here is the subjective foundation of our modern culture, where we believe ourselves to be creatures possessing different layers of depth, without an interventionist deity in the picture. This a crucial steppingstone to the modern idea of identity.

It was no coincidence that a line was drawn between the inner and the outer self between the Reformation and the French Revolution. European society at that time was going through profound economic and social changes. Europe was heading for modernization and with it a break with traditional agrarian societies characterized by a fixed social hierarchy and fixed

characteristics of the inner self. The invention of the printing press, a commercial revolution that expanded trade vastly, and the growth of cities all contributed to demolishing the well-established social hierarchies that had dominated Europe for centuries (Fukuyama, 2018, 35-36). Freedom of choice and opportunities found its way to people who played their cards right and “the question of "Who am I?" suddenly became more relevant" (Fukuyama, 2018, 36). The interiority that Luther opened was secularized, generalized, and personalized by Rousseau (Fukuyama, 2018, 33), and two other famous western philosophers would embark on a mission to universalize it. Enter Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Albeit both Hegel and Kant put forth the maxim that recognition of one's dignity can and should be universalized, they differed in their view of how this could be attained and their normative ideal of a society. They both agreed that human beings have moral agency, that we can make moral judgments about right and wrong, which serves as the foundation for our claim to a recognition of our dignity. Kant as reiterated by Fukuyama believed that "human dignity revolves around human will, that human beings are genuine agents or uncaused causes"(Fukuyama, 2018, 39). Drawing on Hegel's original idea, Honneth argues that this is an overly 'thin' character of moral theory based on individualistic presuppositions and a transcendental concept of practical reason where all subjects exist isolated from each other (Honneth, 2005, 12). It is too far away from empirical reality and a victim of atomistic presuppositions, because "ethical acts cannot be thought of except as resulting from the exercise of reason, purified of all of the empirical inclinations and needs of human nature" (Honneth, 2005, 12). Hence, a community of human beings becomes a cluster of single objects, a unified many of sort and not an ethical unity (Honneth, 2005, 12). Hegel sought out to theoretically explicating just such an ethical totality by drawing on an intersubjective theory about the self (Honneth, 2005, 12).

In that theory, human beings are constituted through their relations of recognition with others, not through some transcendental concept of practical reason, and that a society's ethical development is progressing via a historical struggle for recognition. Struggle for recognition combined with a broadening and universalization of dignity turns the private quest for self into a political project (Fukuyama, 2018, 37). That private quest can emerge into collective action focused on expanding social patterns of recognition if forms of exclusion, insult, and degradation are shared by a larger collective of people whose traditional way of life are under attack or have seen their lives become

intolerable. The struggle for recognition and dignity became democratized through the ideas and works of Hegel and gave rise to political movements and revolutions that sought to materialize this dignity into laws that protected individuals' rights. Identity as a concept on the political battlefield is now taking on the silhouette of the modern version of the politics of identity

Both Kant and Hegel established the axiom that dignity of the inner self is conferred upon an individual's moral freedom, that all human beings share this moral freedom and the demand that this free inner self ought to be recognized (Fukuyama, 2018, 40). True and real recognition of one's dignity was far from being universalized in Kant's and Hegel's day and age, but the strong sentiment that there exists a free inner self in all of us that should be allowed to be recognized is conceived. The birth of this idea, aligned with the distinction between an outer self and inner self in which we have come to favor the inner self, lays the groundwork for contemporary identity politics and recognition. In essence, the struggle for recognition is the struggle for one's particularity, or identity if you like, to be intersubjectively recognized, legally respected, and socially accepted. Charles Taylor, quoted in Joel Anderson's translator's introduction of Honneth's book, emphasizes that "[d]ue recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Honneth, 2005, x). What constitutes due recognition in relation to an individual's identity has been a source of much debate. Some argued that each individual's autonomy, individuality, and particularity was at the root of one's identity and source of dignity, and hence needed to be recognized. Others argued that one's identity and right to dignity grew out of a sense of duty to more collective forces such as one's religion, nation, region, and class and that these likewise needed to be recognized. Both explanations capture parts of the truth because, as already mentioned, causality can move in two directions at the same time. However, the split diverged the evolutionary path of the politics of identity down two different roads.

Liberty is "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life" according to Justice Anthony Kennedy in the 1992 U.S. Supreme court decision Planned Parenthood v. Casey ("Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833 (1992)," n.d.). Kennedy's statement sums up the main ideas of the camp that demands the recognition of the dignity of individuals. This statement can be traced back to ideas in Friedrich Nietzsche's literature. He explores the realm of human autonomy interconnected with "God's death" and the breakdown in belief. It is essential to start with the individualistic camp

because it birthed the demand for the recognition of collectives. The death of God is fundamental in this process because of the shared moral horizon religion provided for people. Nietzsche was perhaps a bit trigger happy when he declared God to be deceased given the upsurge of religious extremism in recent times, but these must be considered exceptions to the widespread secularization that was and still is taking place in the Western world[2].

Nevertheless, these extremist groups are modern manifestations that embody key features of the confusing moral void that was left behind after God 'died'. "Nietzsche celebrated God's death" and was quick to remind us that this "expanded the scope of human autonomy"(Fukuyama, 2018, 54). He emphasized the fact that we no longer depended on some divine power for laws and morals and puts us in the position of creating these laws ourselves (Fukuyama, 2018, 54). Idealistic as he was, Nietzsche perhaps overestimated the capability of humans to provide a shared moral horizon for themselves and neglected the social cohesion that Christianity provided for most European communities at that time.

Christianity provided people with a shared moral compass and out of that moral compass grew shared moral values that constructed a platform for cooperation. Nietzsche's celebration of human autonomy and expressive individualism does not take this into account. People contrive their true inner self on the basis of who they are to other people. Most people are not Rousseau's solitary dreamer or a "Nietzschean superman seeking to revalue all values" (Fukuyama, 2018, 56), what often constitutes our inner self is dependent upon our relationship with others. As Fukuyama further states, we conform to norms because we are intensely social creatures, and our emotional inclinations want us to conform to our surroundings (Fukuyama, 2018, 56). The vast majority of people in the world are guided by the principle of Ubuntu – "I am because you are, since you are therefore I am" (Eze, 2013, 671)- whether they admit it or not. Nonetheless, the ideas brought forth by the struggle for recognition of individuals and the emphasis on their autonomy through the works of Nietzsche did eventually galvanize into the framework of liberal democracies with an astute appreciation for freedom, liberty, and the free market.

[2] According to Inglehart, The United States remains an outlier in the Western world when it comes to secularization as the public still holds more traditional worldviews than any other high-income country except Ireland. That being said, the USA still shows clear trends toward secularization (Inglehart, 2018, 67).

It is hard to disagree with the concept that everyone has the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. But the mystery of human life became exactly that, a mystery. The evaporation of a shared moral horizon and the emergence of a "confusing pluralism of alternative forms of association" (Fukuyama, 2018, 58) does not make people take to the streets to celebrate their recently discovered freedom of choice. On the contrary, people are left perplexed, and feelings of estrangement and uncertainty arise because people do not know who their true self is. In this vacuum of confusion, a feeling of identity crisis emerges which in its turn "leads in the opposite direction from expressive individualism to the search for a common identity that will rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon" (Fukuyama, 2018, 56). Modern liberal democracies are heirs to this confusion, and this psychological dislocation lays the groundwork for the demand of the dignity of collectives or, more precisely, in this instance, nationalism. There has been an upsurge in nationalism in the 'liberal' sphere of the West in recent years merged with an obtrusive form of populism. From Victor Oban in Hungry, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, Jair Bolsonaro and his Alliance for Brazil party and the Tea Party movement and Donald Trump in the U.S. These people, movements, and political parties are situated within one branch of identity politics, although not often characterized as such, and are symptoms of the inherited confusion left by the evaporation of a shared moral horizon. These movements echo the first wave of nationalism that spread throughout Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries. The social mechanisms and above all the resentment characterizing this first period is central to the upsurge of contemporary nationalism.

Nationalism in this context refers to when a group, with partial identities based on nation, demand recognition of their dignity (Fukuyama, 2018, 59). A central figure to the sentiment that there exists a special demand for the recognition of collectives within certain borders or geographically enclosed areas is the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder. In his account of Herder's literature, Fukuyama is quick to underline that Herder is inadequately read and studied within the English-speaking world, and as a result, he is often misunderstood and attacked as the father of modern European ethno-nationalism (Fukuyama, 2018, 60). Unlike some of his contemporaries and nationalist predecessors who established a hierarchy among the world's races, Herder clearly stated "that there is a single human species…(but) that each human community is unique and separate from its neighbors" (Fukuyama, 2018, 60). Uniqueness,

according to Herder, is due to geographical variations and climate that forces communities to express their "own genius in the ways they have to adapt to local circumstances"(Fukuyama, 2018, 60). Hence, Herder's link to modern nationalism is based on his quest to promote an "appreciation for the unique customs and traditions of each of the world's people" which he did by applying "his idea of cultural authenticity to the Germany of his time" (Fukuyama, 2018, 61). Germany, who during Herder's time and to his frustration tried to be a mini-France by emulating the splendor and culture of the French court at Versailles, should rather celebrate and take pride in their own culture and traditions (Fukuyama, 2018, 61). Herder's perception of nationalism is characterized by egalitarianism or isothymia, as coined by Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2018). This entails that communities, societies, people, and their culture should demand to be respected on an equal basis with other communities, societies, people, and cultures. Each nation also ought to, according to Herder, celebrate its uniqueness in customs and traditions. The problem is, and as history has brutally shown us, that some nations went a bit too far in the celebration of their uniqueness. Cultural relativism became ethnocentrism and isothymia grew into megalothymia. The latter in both pairs is constituted upon the belief and desire to be recognized as superior.

The sentiment that one is to be recognized as superior grew in a sense out of anxieties relating to modernization which created "an intense nostalgia for an imagined past of a strong community in which divisions and confusions of a pluralist modern society did not exist" (Fukuyama, 2018, 65). As industrialization started steaming, millions of Europeans went through a transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* as labeled by the social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies (Fukuyama, 2018, 64-65). A thinker who lamented and resented this shift was the polemicist and biblical scholar Paul de Lagarde. He blamed cosmopolitan liberal society with its doctrine based on rationality and science as the curator of the cultural decay he was witnessing in Germany. He longed for the old Germany, and in his longing, he developed a rather conspiratorial view. He saw the German people as innocent victims of outside forces. According to de Lagarde, the embodiment of these outside forces were the Jews with their "universalist ideas of democracy and socialism that undermined the unity of the German people" (Fukuyama, 2018, 66) and the only way to secure German greatness again was to banish the Jews from the new German *Reich* that he envisioned.

The unification of Germany into a single nation with an emphasis on their superiority became "a political project over the next three generations undertaken by leaders from Bismarck to Hitler" (Fukuyama, 2018, 67). With regards to identity and the question of "who am I?", de Lagarde provided a clear-cut answer to all the confused Germans moving from agrarian society to modern urban industrial life: "You are a proud German, heir to an ancient culture, connected by your common language to all of the millions of other Germans scattered across Central and Eastern Europe" (Fukuyama, 2018, 66). Hence, the confused, lonely worker gained "a clear sense of dignity, a dignity that, he now realized, was disrespected by bad people who had somehow infiltrated his society" (Fukuyama 2018, 66). His answer resonated so well that a rejected art student in Austria rose to power on it.

As mentioned, the history of identity diverged into two separate paths by the late 19th century and early 20th century. During World War II, the collective understanding of identity firmly rooted in the strong, overtly, and restrictive belief for superior recognition of dignity based on nationality and race was defeated. Or so we thought. In the aftermaths of WW II, the victorious liberal universal doctrine that fought for the Rights Of Man "was joined by another universal doctrine, Marxist socialism, which would fight for the rights of proletarians" (Fukuyama, 2018, 62). The former allies would now battle it out for global hegemony. What these two competing ideologies failed to recognize was the strength of the nationalist response to questions of why people felt lonely and confused and how well an emphasis on the nation resonates with thymos and our need to be recognized. Fast forward six decades or so, and the demand for the recognition of dignity in restrictive ways has gone full circle and is yet again starting to be a dominating factor on the political battlefield globally, regionally, and nationally.

The notion of identity and having it legally recognized and socially accepted should be understood as the key marker in the struggle for recognition that according to Hegel, and later Honneth, propels human progress. In the Western canon of identity compromising, in this thesis, everything from Plato's *Republic* to Paul de Lagarde's *German Writings*, the central theme has been that of the recognition of some intrinsic hidden worth. That interior worth is the wellspring of our feelings of dignity, esteem, and distinctiveness that we construct our sense of self upon, which again is acquired and maintained intersubjectively. The battle for having that interior worth recognized motivated Martin Luther to establish a schism between the outer sinful social

being and the authentic inner self, built on his Christian worldview. Rousseau went on to secularize this schism and apply it to all human beings living within larger commercial societies. Through Kant and Hegel, dignified recognition of one's worth was universalized and democratized, which turned, in part, the private quest of self into a political project. This political project diverged into two separate paths. One fought for the dignity and recognition of individuals and the other for the dignity and recognition of collective groups. The former is best expressed through the works of Nietzsche, who celebrated human autonomy in the wake of God's death. The latter took on national cultural relativistic suit through the works of von Herder but decayed into an ethnocentric understanding of nationalism via the works of Paul de Lagarde. This view was, in part, defeated during the Second World War, which set the stage for the plight of individual recognition.

However, as the 1950s became the 1960s, there was a merger between the individual plight and the collective plight for recognition and dignity, as people seek recognition of their sameness to other people and not of their individuality (Fukuyama, 2018, 104). This merger is best embodied by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. From the outset, this was a necessary force of good and took the form of emancipatory politics. It was much-needed development that aspired to secure equal recognition for all citizens living within liberal democracies, with special consideration for supporting the rights of a broad range of marginalized groups (Fukuyama, 2018, 106). Each social movement emulated the politics of identity found in antecedent nationalist and religious identity movements (Fukuyama, 2018, 107), that battled feelings of invisibility and systems of oppression. In this way, identity politics is not a modern phenomenon, but a continuation of the struggles and perspectives of erstwhile historical movements that deployed the category of identity as a tool to frame political and social claims of recognition and dignity. Throughout the 1960s, these social movements exhibited a language of inclusion that transcended group differences through a lens of colorblindness and commonality. However, at some point in the early 1970s, commonality started to invert to dissimilarity, inclusion was substituted with exclusion, and to be colorblind became synonymous with ignoring the oppressive hierarchy of society.

What sets contemporary identity politics apart from former notions of the phenomenon is exemplified by the fact that "[f]acebook now lists more than fifty gender designations from

which users can choose, from genderqueer, to intersex to pangender"(Chua, 2018). Contemporary identity politics is the demand to be respected, recognized, and dignified *as* different. Further explained by Sonia Kruks, as quoted in Amy Chua's book *Political Tribes,* contemporary identity politics is a "demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied" (Chua, 2018). This notion of the politics of identity has entrenched itself firmly on the political Left, where it ties into their historical narrative as breakers of chains under the banner of liberation and recognition for all. Historically speaking, this has been an alloyed force of good as it has secured civil and political rights that protect individuals from infringement by governments, powerful individuals, and oppressive social organization. However, an identity politics obsessed with differences and devoid of commonality does little good for a liberal democracy founded upon the motto of *E Pluribus Unum*. It eats away at reciprocal obligation and duty towards other objects than your own or your specific identity group's agenda. This is essential to how and why this thesis argue that the politics of identity has become an enigmatic force within present-day American politics.

Furthermore, other aspects (which we will return to in the analysis) of contemporary identity politics augment the feeling of modernity, for a large part of the American people, as one of chaos and disintegration. Confused and uneasy about the direction in which the country is heading, an intense nostalgia for an imagined past of strong community ensues. Evidence of this can be found in two of the biggest upsets that liberal democracies have experienced in modern times, the rise of Donald Trump and Britain's decision to leave the EU (Fukuyama, 2018, 6). Echoes of the rise of nationalism pre-World War II is found in the slogans that fueled both campaigns. "Make America Great Again" and "Let's Take Back Control" are put forth as responses to the growing alienation, aggrievement, and insecurity found among the working- and lower-middle-class of both countries as well as the resentment towards their political elites. Starring as the Jews in the build-up to WW II in present-day America are immigrants. Be it Mexicans, Muslims, or other 'not real Americans' as the current president imprecisely and unapologetic refers to them as.

Corresponding to de Lagarde's answer to confused Germans, Trump constructed a similar narrative in his presidential campaign were the answer to confused Americans went something like this: You are a proud American, heir to a great culture, connected by your common greatness

to all of the millions of other great (white) Americans across this great nation. This is where I am supposed to give in to old familiar cliché and claim that history repeats itself. Well, it does not. Such a claim obscures decades of human progress and suffering. A more accurate statement would be something along the lines that "history never repeats itself, but the kaleidoscope combinations of the pictured present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends" found in the 1873 edition of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's book *Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day* (Twain & Warner, 2004). To comprehend how we got here and to fathom the enigmatic nature of the politics of identity, we need to put on our theoretical glasses. More specifically, we need to talk about morality, social identity, and intergroup emotions and how they relate to contemporary American identity politics.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Outline

A wise man by the name of Homans is quoted by Norman K. Denzin, claiming that "a theory is nothing if it is not explanation" (Denzin, 2009, 34). It is hard to disagree with Homans, and all theories do by their structural nature aim to explain. Theories are what drives scientific progress forward and a strong marker of the human condition. The explanatory potential of a theory rests on the relationship between its concepts and propositions and how they answer to empirical reality. The phenomenon under consideration in this thesis is the rise of identity politics in the U.S. and its significance for present-day American politics. To maneuver in the enigmatic field of contemporary identity politics this thesis adopts theory triangulation in the broadest sense of its definition, which refers to "using and correlating multiple theoretical strategies" (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). This is done because I suspect there are multiple relevant theories that, if combined, give a better understanding of the enigmatic nature of the politics of identity. The theoretical outset of this thesis is to apply theories that affect, influence, and induce the phenomenon of identity politics. This will build the structural framework for the analysis where the salience and relevance of the politics of identity will be discussed in relation to contemporary American politics and the political rise of Donald Trump.

Social Identity Theory, Intergroup Emotion Theory and Moral Foundation Theory will be applied as theoretical schemes in this thesis. All three originated within the field of social psychology but have evolved to become interdisciplinary theories applied to a variety of different scientific disciplines. Within these theories' concepts such as social categorization, social comparison, social identification, positive group distinctiveness, intergroup context, polarization, emotions, evolved cognitive module, and foundations of morality will underline the content and shape of the theoretical framework of this thesis. An abundance of other concepts can be found in these theories that will reveal other interesting aspects of identity politics that would be beneficial for further research into the field, but due to the scope of the thesis, I will focus on the ones mentioned above.

Although I aim to reveal as much as possible of the complex nature of the politics of identity, there is no escaping that it is a political concept anchored in social reality. Since social reality is an object that is constantly being negotiated and one that will not permit one interpretation to be stamped upon it, this also applies to the aim of my thesis. In other words, the politics of identity and especially contemporary identity politics is a concept that is still being negotiated and one that will have different connotations depending on the context to which it is applied.

3.2 Moral Foundation Theory

As a launching pad for the content of Moral Foundation Theory (hereafter MFT), I find it apt to start with the grand narratives of liberalism and conservativism within the context of U.S. politics. This will highlight the relevance of the theory to my thesis and underline the relationship between morality and the politics of identity. Both narratives are found in Jonathan Haidt's book *The Righteous Mind* (2013), though not developed by Haidt himself. The liberal narrative is the work of the sociologist Christian Smith and is found in his book *Moral, Believing Animals* (2003). The conservative grand narrative is found in the book *The Political Brain* (2007), written by clinical psychologist Drew Westen and is drawn out of major speeches made by Ronal Reagan (Haidt, 2013, 332). Both narratives are constructed to "orient listeners morally – to draw their attention to a set of virtues and vices, or good and evil forces – and to impart lessons about what must be done now to protect, recover, or attain the sacred core of the vision" (Haidt, 2013, 330). The liberal narrative of progress found on the political Left side of American politics goes like this:

> "Once upon a time, the vast majority of human persons suffered in societies and social institutions that were unjust, unhealthy, repressive, and oppressive. These traditional societies were reprehensible because of their deep-rooted inequality, exploitation, and irrational traditionalism… But the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression, and eventually succeeded in establishing modern, liberal, democratic, capitalist, welfare societies. While modern social conditions hold the potential to maximize the individual freedom and pleasure of all, there is much work to be done to dismantle the powerful vestiges of inequality, exploitation, and repression. This struggle for the good society in which individuals are equal and free to pursue their self-defined happiness is the one mission truly worth dedicating one's life to achieving" (Haidt, 2013, 331).

To which Reagan and the American political Right side would respond:

> "Once upon a time, America was a shining beacon. Then liberals came along and erected an enormous federal bureaucracy that handcuffed the invisible hand of the free market. They subverted our traditional American values and opposed God and faith at every step of the way… Instead of requiring that people work for a living, they siphoned money from hardworking Americans and gave it to Cadillac-driving drug addicts and welfare queens. Instead of punishing criminals, they tried to "understand" them. Instead of worrying about the victims of crime, they worried about the rights of criminals… Instead of adhering to traditional American values of family, fidelity, and personal responsibility, they preached promiscuity, premarital sex, and the gay lifestyle… and they encouraged a feminist agenda that undermined traditional family roles… Instead of projecting strength to those who would do evil around the world, they cut military budgets, disrespected our soldiers in uniform, burned our flag, and chose negotiation and multilateralism… Then Americans decided to take their country back from those who sought to undermine it" (Haidt, 2013, 332-33).

Two widely contrasting views. Progress versus conserving. Attack versus defense. Proactive versus reactive. Equality versus proportionality. What these two grand narratives do well is to illuminate the core foundations of morality found within MFT and the different notions of what they might entail to different people on different sides of the political spectrum. The six core foundations within the theory are *Care*, *Fairness*, *Loyalty*, *Authority*, *Sanctity*, and *Liberty*. Each corresponds to a negative form of itself. Hence, care becomes harm, fairness becomes cheating, loyalty becomes betrayal, authority becomes subversion, sanctity becomes degradation, and liberty becomes oppression (Haidt, 2013).

Returning to the grand narratives of the Left and the Right, it is evident that each narrative is constructed carefully upon each foundation in various ways, or to different degrees (Haidt, 2013, 179). Despite Christian Smith writing the liberal narrative before MFT existed, one can clearly see which foundations it derives its moral force from (Haidt 2013, 331). The *Care/harm* foundation is integral, where special consideration is taken for the suffering of victims. The *Liberty/oppression* is equally important, where a celebration of liberty takes the form of freedom *from* oppression and freedom *to* pursuit one's own definition of happiness. Via words such as 'the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression' *Fairness* is depicted as political equality. Equally important to the grand narrative of the Left is what foundations are left out or only mentioned in negative connotations. *Authority* is the force of evil, while *Loyalty* and *Sanctity* are not mentioned at all (Haidt, 2013, 331-32). The liberal Left's narrative, is well suited to cater for the politics of

identity that seeks recognition and dignification upon the basis of being different. The narrative of the Right stands in contrast to this, however the narrative does not exclude the possibility of deploying the politics of identity as I will show in the analysis chapter.

First and foremost, the moral impetus in the grand narrative of the Right is constructed upon and supported by all six foundations as opposed to only three in the liberal narrative (although, 'Care' for the victims of crime scarcely qualifies). This is a political advantage that the political Right side has enjoyed for decades in American politics (and to which attention will be returned to in the analysis part of this thesis). The rhetoric of nostalgia is also noteworthy by wrapping the familiar metaphor of the U.S. being a "shining beacon upon a hill" in the past tense form invoking sentiments of an imagined past of greatness and a current state of degradation. As discussed in the history chapter, Reagan and his administration were not the first or the last politicians to deploy such nostalgic language. Looking past these rhetorical devices and the vague hints towards the *Care* foundation, the five other moral foundations are clearly referenced. *Liberty* takes on the form of freedom *from* government constraint, a do-not-tread-on-me attitude. *Fairness* is referenced as (dis)proportionality in the sentence 'taking money from those who work hard and giving it to welfare queens. By invoking imagery of betrayal towards soldiers, flag and country *Loyalty* is referenced in its negative form. Likewise, *Authority* is depicted as a subversion of the family and of traditions, and *Sanctity* is found in the statement of 'replacing God with the celebration of promiscuity' (Haidt, 2013, 333). Both narratives are examples of what Haidt calls moral matrices, which "bind people together and blind them to the coherence, or even so existence, of other matrices" (Haidt, 2013, 129-130). Two opposing narratives where there is little common moral ground to which partisans would be able to sympathize, let alone understand, the story told by the other side (Haidt 2013, 333).

Arguments, conflicts, debates, disputes, and rivalries between politicians, partisans, people, and identity groups in the U.S. are to a lesser or larger degree, depending on the issue, rooted in conflicting moral matrices. When people construct arguments about what and why something is right or wrong, they usually draw on aspects of their morality to rebut the opposition's arguments or strengthen their own. This is an essential part of the human condition that MFT takes seriously. For instance, in the build-up to the 2012 presidential election Obama accused Mitt Romney of "supporting thinly veiled social Darwinism in backing a budget which sharply

reduces taxes for millionaires while cutting public spending on education, justice and medical research" ("Obama Accuses Republicans of 'social Darwinism' over Paul Ryan Budget," 2012). MFT is applied to this thesis because morality is the grammar of the politics of identity and its inherent struggle for social justice and recognition. The overall aim of MFT is to identify the universal cognitive modules upon which cultures construct their moral matrices (Haidt, 2013, 146). Within MFT, it is important to take notice of the idea of "modularity", which Haidt and Joseph borrowed from the cognitive anthropologists' Dan Sperber and Lawrence Hirschfield (Haidt, 2013, 144). Modules are like small little on/off switches in the brains of all animals. They are turned on by patterns than enhance survival in a certain ecological niche, and when a pattern is detected, they send out a signal that (eventually) changes the animal's behavior in a way that is (usually) adaptive (Haidt, 2013, 144). A cognitive evolved modules' function is to process a given type of stimuli or inputs in situations that presented problems or opportunities in the ancestral environment of the species (Haidt, 2013, 144).

Universal cognitive modules are the triggers of instant intuitive reactions and specific emotions in certain kinds of events; they are "adaptations to long-standing threats and opportunities in social life" (Haidt, 2013, 144). Morality varies between cultures because "cultures can shrink or expand the current triggers of any module…(and) within any given culture, many moral controversies turn out to involve competing ways to link behavior to a moral module" (Haidt, 2013, 145). Capital punishment exemplifies such a moral controversy in the U.S. Should people be sentenced to death for heinous crimes? On the political Right side, capital punishment is linked to judgments about proper enforcement of rules and justice measured as proportionality (you reap what you sow mentality). On the political Left side, capital punishment triggers judgments of cruelty and harm. The point is that even though "we all share the same small set of cognitive modules, we can hook actions up to modules in so many ways that we can build conflicting moral matrices on the same small set of foundations" (Haidt, 2013, 145). This is the conundrum that Haidt and Joseph wanted to examine further and served as the outset of MFT. They created MFT by "identifying the adaptive challenges of social life that evolutionary psychologists frequently wrote about and then connecting those challenges to virtues that are found in some form in many cultures" (Haidt, 2013, 146). To get a better grasp of their project, the figure they created is provided in the appendix of this thesis, which exemplifies the five (later six) foundations of

morality and their adaptive challenge, original triggers, current triggers, characteristic emotions, and relevant virtues.

An adaptive challenge facing humans since the dawn of time is cooperation and especially cooperation between larger groups of people. In relation to what was discussed in the history chapter, it is possible to apply MFT to investigate how 'God's death' slowly deconstructed two important foundations upholding a shared moral horizon (see pages 20-21). When God 'died', a successful moral cooperation formula built on the moral foundations of *loyalty*, *authority* and *sanctity* was toppled. What was left was a moral void in which strongs feelings of estrangement and uncertainty arose. This can trigger an *Authoritarian Reflex* "in which people close ranks behind strong leaders, with strong in-group solidarity, rigid conformity to group norms and rejection of outsiders" (Inglehart, 2018, 173) as labeled by political scientist Ronald F. Inglehart. Attention will be turned to the Authoritarian Reflex in the analysis chapter.

Our moral matrices dictate our feelings, emotions, and reactions through cognitive modules that work instinctively and unconsciously when we face certain adaptive challenges. Emotions, feelings, and reactions are often amplified, intensified, and reinforced when we find ourselves within meaningful social groups that we believe constitute and form our parts of our identity. This aspect of the politics of identity will be illuminated through *Social Identity Theory*.

3.3 Social Identity Theory

In concordance with what was discussed in the history chapter, the private quest for recognition turned into collective action focusing on expanding social patterns of recognition (see page 18). For that private quest to become a collective quest, there needs to be something that binds these individuals together. That something is, quite often, a social identity. Social identity can be rooted in shared feelings of being victims of institutionalized exclusion, systematic insult, and general degradation, thus making their lives intolerable. In other cases, the social identity can be linked to a certain traditional way of life, which the group inhabiting it believes to be under attack. An example of the latter social identity is found among Tea-Party sympathizers throughout the rural Midwest and South in the U.S. The former among the activists of the BlackLivesMatter movement.

In an analysis of the concept of identity within Social Identity Theory (hereafter SIT), the definition of identity is grounded in a collectivized identity understanding. A collective identity, as mentioned, results from the process whereby people identify with social group(s) they believe they belong to, the meaning they give to these groups and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes stemming from the identification process (Schwartz et al., 2011, 3). Collective identity is by no means a restrictive definition and encompasses "membership in any form of social group or category, including ethnicity, religion, and gender, as well as smaller, face-to-face groups such as families and work groups" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 3). In this thesis, the spotlight will be on membership in and identification with social groups that evolves around immutable and biological anchored social categories such as ethnicity, religion, race, sect, nationality, and gender. Although religion is not unchangeable, it is, within an American sociocultural context, a very stable identity that rarely changes. That is not to say that relations to religion are in flux, as secularization, although less prominent in the U.S. than in Western Europe, is still happening (Inglehart, 2018, 75). These social groups are more 'fixed' than for example membership or association with collective groups that use social class as a marker for identification.

Individuals can also occupy multiple identities and make use of them in different social contexts. A theoretical focal point of collective identity is that it examines collective processes, both at an inter-group context level as well as at a wider socio-historical level where transformations over time in the meanings of ethnic, national or gender identities are taken into account (Schwartz et al., 2011, 4). The strength of the collective identity definition and SIT is that it reveals the intersubjective nature of human life and identity formation. We always consider ourselves in social contexts and that we form social reality and social identity with and through others. In other words, we are, as argued on page 23, guided by the principle of ubuntu. This makes SIT both dynamic and fluid in its application in my thesis.

One cannot mention SIT without mentioning Henri Tajfel, the founder of social identity theory. Being a Polish Jewish student in France at the outbreak of the Second World War, Tajfel became acutely aware of the relevance of group identity, not just as a projector of meaning and value for one's own group, understood as in-group(s), but also in terms of how it could be devalued and derogated by other groups, understood as out-group(s) (Schwartz et al., 2011, 202). Luckily, Tajfel survived the war by keeping his Jewish identity secret, and in the aftermath of the war, he

helped resettle refugees, with both experiences heavily influencing his work as a social psychologist (Schwartz et al., 2011, 202). SIT started to gain influence within the field of social psychology in the mid-1970s. It was put forth as a response to the shortcomings of prevailing individualistic approaches, especially dominant in American mainstream social psychology, in explaining some of the intergroup phenomena, that was perhaps more salient in Europe than in the U.S. at that time (Schwartz et al., 2011, 202). Since the 1970s, SIT has gained influence well beyond the realms of social psychology and well beyond the geographical borders of the U.S and Europe.

SIT is an interdisciplinary theory and has made contributions to the understanding of group identity from a multitude of disciplinary angels. SIT was the "first to theorize a distinct form of identity at the group level, and to accord ontological and explanatory significance to group identities" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 202) and has from its conception provided additional and necessary input and contested the hegemony that individualistic approaches (see pages 14-15) had enjoyed for decades. Tajfel, who, due to his Jewish background, was destined to a role at the backline during WW II, stepped up to the frontline with his early work (1957) on social judgment and social perception as a new way of explaining and investigating intergroup phenomena (Schwartz et al., 2011, 202). At the core of both SIT and Tajfel's work is an ambition and a theoretical framework that aims to explain social change. Since SIT is designed to explain social change and politicized identity groups want to change the social and political status quo, there exists an explanatory relationship between the theory and the overall aim of this thesis.

SIT within the context of this thesis will be applied to illuminate the intergroup context of the politics of identity in contemporary American politics, where the concepts of social categorization, social comparison, social identification, and positive group distinctiveness feed into its enigmatic nature. Social identification, social categorization, and social comparison set out the socio-motivational starting point. Social identification is a rather straightforward process whereby individuals identify and define themselves as members of a certain social group and/or groups. Such as white rural Christian evangelical men identifying as such and/or Hispanic urban catholic women identifying as such. These groups go through a process of social categorization where they distinguish themselves from other groups. E.g. white rural Christian evangelical males distinguishing themselves from groups such as white urban secular men or urban catholic

Hispanic women distinguishing themselves from suburban protestant white women. Finally, a process of social comparison between these groups occurs, e.g., the white rural Christian evangelical group of men compare themselves to the group of white urban secular men or the group of urban catholic Hispanic women compare themselves with suburban, protestant white women. This is indeed an oversimplified and highly generalized picture of how this process might take place in the real world.

Nonetheless, what SIT proposes is that we "derive value from our group membership to the extent that we can compare our own group positively with others", which motivates us to "gain and maintain a sense of group distinctiveness from the other group(s) to which we do not belong, and against which we compare our own group" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 203). In other words, meaning and value of the group to which one associates oneself with is derived through positive comparison to other groups. Hence, it becomes essential to maintain and gain a sense of group distinctiveness. As mentioned, this is only the social, motivational starting point. Another important aspect is the social structure surrounding the groups and the group's position within that structure (i.e., the intergroup context). This context determines the salience and relevance of group identities. To measure the salience and relevance of group identities, Tajfel envisaged an interpersonal-intergroup continuum, where different situations amplify the meaning of identifying and belonging to a group (Schwartz et al. 2011, 203). Group identity can also be of accorded meaning in and of itself by telling us who we are without the processes described above taking place.

The interpersonal intergroup continuum provides a structural framework for how SIT is used in the context of this thesis. It captures the essence of how believing and perceiving to be in a context of intergroup competition amplifies the importance of one's group identity. Intergroup conflicts and discrimination between groups are traditionally explained by there being tension over certain valued resources or conflicts of interest between groups (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). This is the classical realistic group conflict theory, which has enjoyed a dominant position for decades as an explanation for why intergroup conflict arises. It derives its explanatory power from the atomistic perspectives discussed in the first part of the history chapter (see pages 13-14). There is a need to look beyond the long-upheld perception on conflicts as mere fights over resources and interest. Within contemporary American society, there are other factors at work

that better illuminate the root(s) of tension between certain identity groups. Realistic group conflict theory overlooks our thymotic craving for recognition and dignity as sources for intergroup competition. There is an argument to be made that both recognition and dignity are sets of self-interests or group-interests that could be obtained through intergroup conflict. However, if we look at the minimal group studies (1971) that Tajfel and colleagues conducted, such an argument would fail to explain the peculiar findings of that experiment.

SIT is grounded in the intersubjective nature of human beings. This encourages the theory to move beyond the common fallacy of perceiving human actions and interactions as purely strategic and instrumental. Hence, proponents of SIT advocate that the theory is situated closer to empirical reality, which is where we want to be in. However, this empirical reality might be hard to explicitly observe, making experiments such as the minimal group studies integral to the empirical integrity of SIT. The minimal group study has provided empirical groundwork that can be used to illuminate the different elements in SIT and the intersubjective reality it aims to interpret. In fact, the very concept of social identity partly emerged to explain the findings of this experiment and the concept of positive group distinctiveness (Schwartz et al. 2011, 204). Positive group distinctiveness captures the tension between self-esteem and self-enhancement, on the one hand, and the quest for distinctiveness, on the other hand (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). To grasp the concept of positive group distinctiveness and its relevance to this thesis a short summary of the minimal group studies is necessary.

In the experiments, Tajfel and colleagues categorized participants (schoolboys) according to trivial criterion (favoring Klee's or Kandinsky's abstract paintings) to demonstrate that merely the act of categorization appeared sufficient to encourage in-group members to allocate more resources to fellow in-group members than to out-group members (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). An important aspect was that participants did not know who the other in-group members or out-group members were. They ruled out self-interest as an explanatory factor because reward was allocated to other in-group individuals, not to the group as a whole; thus, participants never allocated rewards directly or indirectly to themselves (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). An interesting observation was that not only did they favor the in-group, but they would maximize the difference in rewards favoring the in-group member over the out-group member, even at the cost of absolute rewards to the in-group (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). In other words, if they had the

option between allocating an equal but absolute larger amount of money to both groups and the option of allocating an absolute smaller but relatively larger amount to their in-group, they would choose the latter. Hence, they would try to maximize the difference between the groups by giving a relatively smaller amount to their in-group provided that the out-group received less. This is referred to as the maximum difference strategy and could be interpreted as a form of discrimination, but a form of discrimination that seemed to be symbolic or purely social (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). To account for these findings, the concept of social identity, and the motivated quest for positive group distinctiveness was developed.

Social identity theory now found itself moving beyond purely cognitive approaches to stereotyping and discrimination by adding the process of identification with one of the groups (Schwartz et al., 2011, 204). The quest for group distinctiveness through processes of identification can illuminate what happens when social groups experience loss of recognition of their distinctiveness, something Richard Hofstadter labeled as status anxiety. He explains the phenomenon as a process where traditional groups experiencing decline in social status search for internal enemies, naturally finding them in rising social groups (Brown, 2006). This phenomenon highlights core elements of the appeal of Donald Trump to white rural working-class Americans, an appeal that will be further discussed in the analysis chapter.

At this point, it is important to note that the findings of the minimal group experiment are controversial, and there is still debate about how widely the findings can be generalized. However, applying the findings of the experiment to contemporary American politics could prove beneficial as it would illuminate how threats to social identity – in terms of distinctiveness and esteem – could potentially result in antagonistic strategies of differentiation such as discrimination or systemic degradation towards certain identity (out)groups. Keeping in mind that contemporary U.S. politics is not a minimal paradigm where identities such as Republican, Democrat, black, Hispanic, white are far from trivial criteria, making them a lot more salient then preferring Klee's or Kandinsky's abstract paintings. The findings of the study illuminate important mechanisms in play when people think of themselves as belonging to a certain (identity)in-group, which they believe to be in opposition to a certain or multiple (identity) out-group(s). Within such a political climate, feelings and emotions run high.

3.4 Intergroup Emotion Theory

On February 4th, 2020, after President Trump had given his State of The Union Address, viewers were treated to a display of just how high emotions and feelings are running in American politics. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, usually an epitome of civility and decorum, could simply not contain her visceral response. As the president was leaving the floor, she was filmed tearing up a copy of his speech, affectively demonstrating exactly how she felt about the speech. Watching the address in hindsight and focusing on Pelosi's face throughout the speech, one can clearly see how tormented she actually was by the words and claims coming out of the President's mouth. She later stated that tearing up the speech was the most courtliness thing to do, which poses the question of what she would have done if she had given in to the strongest emotions and feelings bursting inside of her.

Why feelings are running so high in American politics can be illuminated through the lens of *Intergroup Emotion Theory* (hereafter IET). Group identity and identity politics involve a lot of emotional significance as well as behavioral implications, and IET investigates the affective meaning given to social identities (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). Meaning, passion, and reactions towards an out-group depends on the appraisals of the in-group's relation with the out-group. (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). Hence, the relation between groups based on classic social identity analyses of status and power provide appraisals that will color group-based emotional responses, along with associated action tendencies. Within such an analysis the asymmetrical relationship of power and status will make groups with low power and status fear powerful outgroups and avoid them, whereas groups enjoying high levels of power and status will have the strength to feel anger if they feel thwarted by outgroups and confront these groups (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). Other scenarios may include groups with legitimate high status feeling "contempt, disdain or even disgust toward low-status groups, and, under less threatening conditions, perhaps more benevolent paternalistic emotions" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). The emotional response of the in-group is likely to advise and inspire the forms of action (e.g., discrimination, avoidance, etc.) directed towards the out-group (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). By adding Intergroup Emotion Theory as a theoretical lens in this thesis the understanding of intergroup relations is injected with the affective color that gives social identities more significance and a behavioral impetus. This

will allow a closer examination of why and how the politics of identity is shaping contemporary American politics.

4. Analysis

Given the amount of information discussed and reviewed in the two previous chapters, a restatement of the overall aim of this thesis is necessary. *How did politics become identity, and how is a politicized identity shaping contemporary American politics?* In the history chapter, we traversed the philosophical paths of various visionaries that gradually moved the notion of identity from the private sphere to the social sphere. Along the way, a conceptual process was inaugurated, which slowly incorporated the paradigm that politics can be identity and identity can be politics. Theoretical considerations that, I argue, induce this process were then given in the theory chapter. Grounded in both inquiries, an analysis of how the politics of identity with its politicized identities shape contemporary American politics will now be given.

Contemporary American politics, as Lilliana Mason contends in her book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (2018), is one of clashing social identities, rather than a clash between party and attitudes (Mason, 2018, 8). The clash of social identities, as opposed to a clash of political policies, is well suited for political outsiders. One such outsider is currently roaming the halls of the White House. His rise to the presidency, as Mason argues, was "particularly rooted in identity and intergroup competition" (Mason, 2018, 2). I will use the political rise of Donald Trump to illustrate how relevant and significant the politics of identity has become in the United States.

This chapter will mainly draw on the theoretical and historical aspects already introduced. However, the chapter will (also) introduce relevant literature that both challenge and shed new light on the facets of the politics of identity discussed in the preceding chapters. Moreover, as asserted by Marx and reiterated by Fukuyama, "material conditions shape people's receptivity to certain ideas" (Fukuyama, 2018, 28), and the material conditions of contemporary American society are widely different from those of the historical time periods discussed in chapter two. Conditions that I believe need to be addressed to comprehend the opaque characteristics of the current politics of identity. These conditions are empirically supported and discussed in Inglehart's book *Cultural Evolution* (2018). Inglehart's hypotheses provide an overarching framework for interpreting and analyzing how politics became identity and how politicized identities within this framework shape contemporary American politics.

4.1 Living in the Post-material World

Inglehart argues that unprecedented economic growth in the West after WW II, the emergence of welfare state safety nets, and the absence of war between major powers, spawned cultural changes that reshaped the values and worldviews of Western democracies (Inglehart, 2018, 1). These cultural changes saw a gradual shift in priorities from materialist values such as economic and physical safety toward an emphasis on postmaterialist values such as individual freedom to choose how to live one's life (Inglehart, 2018, 1). One side to the story of how identity politics became such a salient concept in U.S. politics has to do with the merger of social sorting and social polarization. The other side to that story based on Inglehart's theory of cultural change is that identity politics also became more relevant as economic-issues declined in salience and gave way to sociopolitical issues of self-expression. These two developments feed into each other, as Appiah explains, "social class as defined by one's work has declined in significance in people identifications. In that very profound way a new kind of identity politics, based in the declining social salience of class, has been on the rise since the 1960s" (Appiah, 2006, 7). Ultimately, when identities related to social class become less relevant, social identities related to other facets of people's life increase in relevance.

Inevitably, with social class identification in decline voting based on social class followed suit. In the United States, according to *Alford Social Class Voting Index*, "they fell to zero and even lower(…)[t]he 2016 U.S. Presidential elections actually showed a negative social-class voting index, with white working-class voters being more likely to vote for Trump than Clinton" (Inglehart, 2018, 191). Consequently, and in relation to SIT, the overall cultural shift as described by Inglehart as a shift from Materialist to Postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 2018, 1), changed the "nature of the social structure in which people and groups are embedded" (Schwartz et al. 2011, 203). In other words, the intergroup context surrounding social groups in America changed as class-based politics was replaced by value-based politics, materialist values gave way to postmaterialist values, and economic issues abdicated to non-economic issues.

These new cultural changes "manifested themselves in the politics of high-income societies around 1968, when the postwar generation became old enough to have political impact, launching

an era of student protest" (Inglehart, 2018, 176). In the United States, this spawned a series of powerful new social movements such as the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, a sexual revolution, and environmental movements (Fukuyama, 2018, 105). With regards to the seven different ways of which we might talk about identity politics as labeled by Appiah, the U.S experienced a particular rise in four of them as materialist values gradually became replaced by postmaterialist values. Political conflicts about who's in and who's out ensued as the sphere of equal recognition expanded saw more people accepted as rights-bearing citizens (Fukuyama, 2018, 104). The new postmaterialist values caused a cultural backlash that saw socially conservative identities mobilized by politicians on the Right. Formerly marginalized and oppressed groups pursued politics of recognition. While some social groups, found among the progressive Left, mobilized – in support and in opposition – to respond collectively to all of the above (Appiah, 2006, 8). Thus, the cultural changes from materialist values to postmaterialist values, beginning to gain traction in the mid-1960s, altered the intergroup context of the United States, which "stimulated situations that amplified the meaning of identifying and belonging to a group" (Schwartz et al. 2011, 203). Situations that created an intergroup context which augmented the meaning of belonging to and identifying with narrowly defined social groups, often at the expense of wider social class-based ones. As the 20th century marched on this created new cultural and demographic fault lines in American politics and society.

According to Brewer, "group identity provides a way of satisfying two very basic human needs and their associated motives, namely the needs for social inclusion and for social differentiation" (Schwartz et al. 2011, 206). Despite social class declining in salience, we humans still need to satisfy our appetite for inclusion and exclusion. Hence, in the vacancy left by social class, new social and collective identities emerged. Identities based on ethnicity, gender, race, and religion. Therefore, what I argue in light of Inglehart's theories, that sets contemporary American politics explicitly apart from the historical periods discussed in the history chapter, is a rearrangement of broad coalitions anchored in social class toward narrow coalitions based on ascriptive social identities. For the rest of the analysis chapter, this rearrangement process, brought about by new cultural values, creates an overarching framework for interpreting how the politics of identity and its politicized identities shape contemporary American politics. This framework saw the emergence of new social group identities onto the political battlefield. In isolation, these single group identities can have powerful effects, however, "multiple identities all playing for the same

team can lead to a very deep social and even cultural divide"(Mason, 2018, 19). Examination of this facet of present-day American politics will now follow.

4.2 A Country Sorted

In Lilliana Mason's book, one part of the premise for the current levels of polarization in the U.S. is found in the social and political developments of the 1960s and 70s. Summed up, this is a period that saw a development from people and the political parties being a little bit different in a lot of ways to people and the political parties being very different in a few powerful ways (Mason, 2018, 43). This period gradually implemented a mindset of us-versus-them into the prefrontal cortex of American people and political parties alike. In relation to *Social Identity Theory (SIT)*, what characterizes this period is a social identification process in which racial, ethnic, religious, and geographical identities are sorted and socially categorized into clear-cut partisan identities. This is an important aspect to consider in relation to the overall aim of this thesis, as Mason argues that the politics of identity "is a far more powerful concept if we consider how a collection of identities is working in concert, rather than isolating each one and examining them in turn" (Mason, 2018, 19). The politicization of identities has sorted the American electorate "into two increasingly homogenous parties, with a variety of social, economic, geographic, and ideological cleavages falling in line with the partisan divide" (Mason, 2018, 19-20). Socially categorizing racial, religious, geographical, and ethnic identities to become synonymous with party affiliation is a recipe for political division as what used to be non-political identities get flavored with partisan spices.

By all means, partisan identities have always been a part of American politics. However, a problem arises when "partisan identities fall into alignment with other social identities, stoking our intolerance of each other to levels that are unsupported by our degrees of political disagreement" (Mason, 2018, 63). This alignment process dismantles and marginalizes cross-cutting identities, which Mason argues work as a buffer against social polarization (Mason, 2018, 62). This shed some light on the findings of the *Hidden Tribes Report* which echoes Mason's sentence 'unsupported by our degrees of political disagreement' in its findings that political polarization is an asymmetrical phenomenon in the U.S. In other words, that most Americans are actually not as polarized in their political policy's view(s) but that the wings – progressive

activists on the Left and devoted conservatives on the Right – of the political spectrum fuel the perception of a very polarized electorate (Hawkins, Yudkin, Juan-Torres, & Dixon, 2018). However, if we conjure the results of minimal group studies (see page 36-37) conducted by Tajfel and his colleagues, we could see how the will to politically compromise is obfuscated by partisan lenses.

Mason argues that the problem with partisans is that they "have natural incentives to see the world through a partisan lens, and to privilege their own party over their opponents" (Mason, 2018, 140). An argument supported by the findings of the minimal group studies, which suggest we have a natural inclination to favor and give privilege to our in-group(s) over perceived out-group(s). This is true if we put meaningless labels on groups such as preferring one abstract painter over another, as in the case of the initial experiment. It becomes exponentially truer if we replace those trivial labels with prominent identities such as conservative, liberal, black, and white. When these identities are in play, the motivated quest for positive group distinctiveness overshadows the will to compromise. Hence, 'winning' becomes more important than governing and compromising. In analyzing how politicized identities shape contemporary American politics, we need not look any further than to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus to find evidence of how an inimical quest for group distinctiveness curtails compromise.

In the face of a national crisis, nations and their people usually respond with a rally-around-the-flag reflex. This was the case on September 11th, 2001, when the U.S. experienced its first foreign attack on American soil since December 7th, 1941. People were quick to put their political differences aside, and a Gallup Poll conducted September 21-22 saw a record-breaking 90% approval rating for George W Bush (Inc, 2001). Although a terrorist attack and the outbreak of a pandemic are two widely different threats that require widely different political reactions, one could perhaps anticipate a similar united political response without partisan bickering. "Liberate Minnesota", "Liberate Michigan" and "Liberate Virginia, and save your great 2nd Amendment. It is under siege"("Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) / Twitter," 2020), anticipating political responses will not get you far in 2020.

These words, or tweets to be more precise, belong to the sitting president. They were fired off in characteristic style as demonstrators in the mentioned states took to the streets to protest the current measures taken by both state and federal government to prevent further spread of the

Covid-19 virus. A lot of the protesters were heavily armed and equipped with signs, flags, and posters with Trump's slogans on them ("Scattered Protests Push Back on U.S. Coronavirus Stay-at-Home Orders," 2020). True to his in-group, President Trump fired off those tweets to show his support to fellow partisans fighting 'oppressive' restrictions imposed on them by liberal Democratic governors. It must be mentioned that according to a YouGov survey conducted on the 19th of April, most rank-and-file Republicans did not agree with the protesters (Jr, 2020) and that bipartisanship saw a rare glimpse of daylight as Congress managed to agree on a rescue package ("Trump, Congress Agree on $2 Trillion Virus Rescue Bill," n.d.). Nonetheless, that the president, along with his diehard supporters, express group distinctiveness in the face of a deadly pandemic is a testament to the current state of partisanship in American politics. In relation to Moral Foundation Theory (MFT) the protesters deployed the social conservative foundation of *Liberty* (Haidt, 2013, 215) in the form of freedom from government constraints, where a clear message of we will not-be-tread-upon by federal and state officials were conveyed.

The examples of partisanship behavior discussed above exhibit ways of how the politics of identity and its politicized identities shape and color present-day American politics. Social sorting has augmented the salience of these politicized identities as parties are now able to draw convenient battle lines between increasingly homogenous and isolated partisan collections (Mason, 2018, 20). The psychology behind the divisive effects of sorting can be illuminated by Haidt's *Durkheimian model of religious psychology*. In this model, "believing, doing, and belonging are three complementary yet distinct aspects of religiosity"(Haidt, 2013, 291). Although we are not dealing with religiosity, I propose that the model can be transferred over to illuminate the psychology of the partisan mind, by simply swapping the word religiosity with partisanship.

In relation to the protesters against stay-at-home-orders, Haidt's Durkheimian model would formulate the following reasoning: I *belong* to social groups identifying with the protesters against stay-at-home-orders; therefore I *believe* that the current restrictions are unfair; hence I ('*do*') protest against the restrictions. Not a groundbreaking insight, but it highlights what Haidt refers to as our extraordinary human ability "to care about things beyond ourselves, to circle around those things with other people, and in the process to bind ourselves into teams that can pursue larger projects" (Haidt, 2013, 318). We bind ourselves to these teams because "we

humans have a dual nature – we are selfish primates who long to be a part of something larger and nobler than ourselves" (Haidt, 2013, 255). This is a facet of the human nature that is echoed in SIT(s) proposition that we (as a socio-motivational starting point) engage in processes of social identification, social categorization and social comparison to satisfy our need for social inclusion and for social differentiation" (Schwartz et al. 2011, 206). Haidt argues that our "groupishness is focused on improving the welfare of the in-group, not on harming an out-group"(Haidt, 2013, 253). However, our human ability to bind ourselves into teams does propose the idea that there exists an 'us' that is in opposition to 'them'. Under the 'right' circumstances – those leaning toward the intergroup end of Tajfel's continuum – an us versus them mindset can lead to antagonistic displays of politicized identities and uncivil forms of identity politics.

Our human ability to bind ourselves into teams that project an "us versus them mentality" is integral to how politicized identities shape contemporary American politics. Moreover, "a candidate that picks up the banner of "us versus them" and "winning versus losing" is almost guaranteed to tap into a current of resentment and anger across racial, religious, and cultural lines, which have recently divided neatly by party"(Mason, 2018, 3). Trump picked up this banner and ran with it. The sorting of the political parties into socially distinct and separate groups intensifies the perception of politics as a zero-sum game. Moreover, it reinforces the latent partisan bias of the American electorate, and according to Mason, this is what constitutes the American identity crisis (Mason, 2018, 63). Although this is inexorably a part of the diagnosis, the social sorting process enhancing partisan bias is but one of many symptoms that comprise the crisis of identity for America. Another symptom, one that ran parallel to the social sorting discussed above and a latent aspect of cultural changes discussed in subchapter 4.1, is the hollowing out of America's working lower-middle-class and its blue-collar workers. This has seen the politicization and emergence of social identities that reverberate the alienating feeling of Germans experiencing a transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (see page 22). Except *Gesellschaft* and industrialization is replaced by *Weltgesellschaft* and deindustrialization. Social identities rooted in an acute sense of aggrievance and resentment.

4.3 Bypassed and Hollowed out

SIT proposes that we "derive value from our group membership to the extent that we can compare our own group positively with others", which motivates us to "gain and maintain a sense of group distinctiveness from the other group(s) to which we do not belong, and against which we compare our own group" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 203). Simply put, the value and meaning of one's social group is relational as it depends on positive comparison to other groups. Consequently, as mentioned on page 35, it becomes essential to maintain and gain a sense of group distinctiveness. However, sociopolitical developments over the last five decades in America have made it increasingly hard for white lower-middle-class and working-class Americans to gain and maintain distinctiveness. Rather than gaining and maintaining, they have been losing and hollowed out. Worse yet, according to a Case and Deaton, mortality and morbidity among midlife white Americans is rising in the 21st century (Case & Deaton, 2015). Coupled with "precarious job prospects and an awareness of the vast economic gains made by those above them"(Inglehart, 2018, 196), the white lower-middle-class and working-class of America have few grounds upon which they can gain and convey a sense of group distinctiveness.

In addition to experiencing descending social status, life expectancy and economic status these, often socially conservative people, have seen the sacred core of their moral communities dismantled by emerging cultural norms and global liberalistic polices. Moral matrices built on equal consideration of all six foundations with its most sacred value being "preserve the institutions and traditions that sustain a moral community"(Haidt, 2013, 357). Consequently, the conjoint feeling of declining social status and seeing your moral matrix threatened conveys sensations of estrangement and anger. Experiencing what Hofstadter labeled status anxiety white lower-middle-class and working-class Americans saw it increasingly harder to gain value from their group membership without engaging in antagonistic strategies of differentiation. When their group membership no longer provides a favorable ground for positive comparison, they turn their anger and resentment towards emerging social groups and the 'elite's' they perceive to be representing them or helping them climb the social latter. Thus, this creates a sociopolitical context of intergroup competition which amplifies the meaning accorded to one's group identity

and with social class as a social identity gone the anxious people of the heartland started to bond over what was left, their ethnicity and race.

In her book *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2018), Arlie Russel Hochschild pays special attention to these people, who, over the course of the last five decades, have become increasingly marginalized and invisible. The people left behind by deindustrialization and globalization. To encapsulate how these people feel Hochschild conjures a metaphor that portrays these people as patiently waiting in line for the American Dream, but due to no obvious fault of their own, have in recent years been slipping further and further back in the queue. Hochschild calls this metaphor a deep story, which is a "feels-as-if story – it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel" (Hochschild, 2018, 135). The essence of their deep story as constructed by Hochschild goes like this:

> "You have patiently been waiting in a long line leading up a hill (…) you are situated in the middle of this line along with others who are also white, older, Christian, and predominantly male, some with college degrees, some not. Just over the brow of the hill is the American Dream, the goal of everyone waiting in line (…) The sun is hot and the line unmoving. In fact, is it moving backward? (...) Look! You see people cutting in line ahead of you! (...). Through affirmative action plans, pushed by the federal government, they are being given preference for places in colleges, universities, apprenticeships, jobs, welfare payments, and free lunches(…)[Some of the line cutters are black other] women, immigrants, refugees, public sector workers – where will it end? Your tax money is running through a liberal sympathy sieve you do not control or agree with (…) [Everybody] cut ahead of you in line. But it is people like you who have made this country great. You start to feel uneasy (…). You are a compassionate person. But now you have been asked to extend your sympathy to all the people who have cut in front of you (…). Then you become suspicious. If people are cutting in line ahead of you someone must be *helping* them. Who? (…) His name is President Barack Hussein Obama (…) you see him *waving* to the line cutters (…) He is on *their* side. He is telling you that these line cutters *deserve* special treatment, that they have had a harder time than you've had (…). You feel betrayed. The president is *their* president, not *your* president (…) the great pride you feel in being an American cannot be conveyed through him (…). If you can no longer feel pride in the United States through its president, you'll have to feel American in some new way – by banding with others who feel as strangers in their own land" (Hochschild, 2018, 136-140).

This deep story epitomizes the resentment, anger, insecurity, anxiety, and mourning felt among white rural working-class Americans that no longer feel as though their beloved country belongs to them anymore. Through the theoretical lens of IET, the deep story illuminates how affective meaning given to social identities involve a lot of emotional significance. Affective meaning and

emotional significance that eventually can have very real behavioral implications. IET proposes that "groups enjoying high levels of power and status will have the strength to feel anger if they feel thwarted by outgroups and confront these groups" (Schwartz et al., 2011, 219). Although the social group - composed of mainly white, evangelical working-class men - in Hochschild's story no longer enjoy high levels of power and status, they are *rememberers* of a past where their social group did enjoy power and status. What they needed to regain the strength to feel angry and to confront the outgroups thwarting them, was an unapologetic mouthpiece that said the words they were thinking but were not allowed to say aloud.

One the one hand, the angry mourners in Hochschild's book point a blaming finger downward at ascending minority groups, who they feel are reaping way more than they are sowing. One the other hand they point upward towards elite liberals that are not only helping these minorities cut in line but at the same time argue that the mourners' "ideas are outmoded, sexist, homophobic" without giving a clear sense of what "*their* values are" (Hochschild, 2018, 137). That liberals in the United States are unable to disclose a clear set of moral values that gives considerations to all six moral foundations rather than just three have haunted them for decades, and highlight some facets of why Republicans have won six out of the previous nine presidential elections.

Investigation of this shortcoming in the liberal political platform can also illuminate an aspect of American politics that has dumbfounded political scientists for years. Namely, "[w]hy do rural and working-class Americans generally vote Republican when it is the Democratic Party that wants to redistribute money more evenly?" (Haidt, 2013, 215), i.e., why do they vote against their own economic self-interest? This paradox, according to Haidt, is rooted in moral interests. Moral interests imperceptible to the liberal Left. Interests that, combined with the politics of identity, have seen politicized identities shape contemporary American politics to new heights of hostility.

4.4 *Pluribus* at the Expense of *Unum*

First and foremost, as implied throughout this entire thesis, the rationale that we humans act primarily to benefit our self-interest is a deceptive argument at best. Haidt contends that "self-interest is a weak predictor of policy preferences" (Haidt, 2013, 100), a claim supported by Mason as she argues "[p]rimal psychological influences such as motivated reasoning and social

identity are capable of shifting and sometimes entirely determining the policies that citizens support" (Mason, 2018, 20). Our soul, as proposed in subchapter 2.2, is not bipartite but tripartite, consisting of *epithumia*, *logos,* and *thymos* and we WEIRD humans and our liberal democratic doctrines tend to put too much emphasis on desire and confidence in reason.

We vote, believe, and make decisions based on the social groups we belong to, as they answer to our need for recognition, "[o]ur politics is groupish, not selfish" (Haidt, 2013, 100). Hence, why rural working-class Americans tend to vote against their self-interest is partly based on the premise that these individuals belong to social groups that generally do not favor the political positions of the Democratic party. However, this does not answer the question of why these social groups vote against their group's self-interest. The answer to that question has spawned an array of literature, perhaps most famously Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas*. Here, according to Haidt, the answer provided by Frank is, "Republicans have duped these people into voting against their economic self-interest"(Haidt, 2013, 215-216). Yet, through the lens of MFT, these people do not vote against their economic self-interest as much as they are "voting for their moral interests"(Haidt, 2013, 216). And as proposed on page 31, morality is the grammar of the politics of identity. Thus, when different moral matrices get entangled in identity politics' inherent struggle for social justice and recognition, the salience and relevance of social identities get further intensified. Moreover, empathy walls, "an obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances"(Hochschild, 2018, 5), grow taller.

In light of the deep story of the mourners in Hochschild's book, contemporary democratic liberal politics does not only push them further back in the line by creating an express lane for minorities, but it also works as a solvent on the central institutions that bind their local moral communities together. Liberals' "low score on the Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity foundations, often lead them to push for changes that weaken groups, traditions, institutions, and moral capital"(Haidt, 2013, 361), changes that make the already confused blue-collar workers estranged. In order to elucidate this "blind spot of the left" (Haidt, 2013, 342), there is a need to investigate how the liberal Left became increasingly blind to the binding foundations – Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity – and the crucial role they play in a good society (Haidt, 2013, 316). This underlines why white rural working-class people vote for their moral interest rather than against

their economic self-interest and concordantly how the politics of identity solidified itself as the focal point of contemporary American politics where politicized identities run havoc on an already divided country.

Concurrent to the descendent social status of the white working-class is the ascendant social status of former marginalized and oppressed identity groups. As mentioned on page 24, this was a welcome and necessary development and one that applied identity politics as a "natural and inevitable response to injustice"(Fukuyama, 2018, 115). This type of identity politics is encapsulated by the non-violent side of the Civil Rights Movement and its initial claims, best expressed by the interracial and equal treatment sentiment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's famous speech on August 28, 1963. King's application of identity politics aimed at changing culture and behavior in a way that would have real benefit for the people involved (Fukuyama 2018, 115), coupled with the idea of the U.S as a melting pot echoed in the motto Out of Many, One.

Frustrated by, the leisurely pace of racial integration and "growing reservations about the process of integration that seemed to unfold solely in terms of established whites" (Kruse and Zelizer, 2019, 52) the identity politics of the 1960s yielded to a new form of identity politics in the 1970s. A form of identity politics that spread from African Americans to all racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. One that deployed the category of identity in a context of inequality and injustice and with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness and dignity and recognition on the basis of that distinctiveness (Neofotistos, 2013). Identity politics is not problematic per se, "it becomes problematic only when identity is interpreted or asserted in certain specific ways" (Fukuyama, 2018, 115). During the 1970s, the politics of identity had a new emphasis – one on division and diversity. The melting pot became a salad bowl, which "did much to preserve and protect individual cultures of different groups" but at the expense of a "coherent and cohesive national identity"(Kruse and Zelizer, 2019, 64). Gone was the feeling of a nation, left was the quest for diversification.

However, during the latter parts of the 20th century, the Soviet Union posed as an external threat to the U.S which, to some degree, tamped down the salience of sociopolitical issues of self-expression. When that external threat ceased to be, issues of self-expression through the lens of contemporary identity politics went haywire. Despite efforts from socially conservative Democrats, Bill Clinton among them (Kruse & Zelizer, 2019, 202), to shackle down the special

interest side of politics, the recognition of the diversification of America increasingly became the credo of the liberal Left.

Concerning MFT, the new tenet of the Democratic party became obsessed with the liberal *Care/harm* and *Liberty/oppression* foundation with its most sacred value being that of caring for victims of oppression (Haidt 2013, 351). Just to be clear, this is an immensely important moral value of a society, one that historically has performed miracles that have widened the circle of people enjoying freedom and equal opportunity. Furthermore, it is also an integral moral value to uphold in 21st century American politics as huge institutional problems of racism, prejudice, and gender inequality still loom large. Nonetheless, the sacralization of caring for victims of oppression through a liberalistic political platform "tends to overreach, change too many things too quickly, and reduce the stock of moral capital inadvertently"(Haidt, 2013, 343). Moreover, to do this through political programs or educational programs that celebrate diversification at the expense of commonalities does more harm than good, as argued by Karen Stenner in her book *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (2005).

Stenner contends that "that exposure to difference, talking about difference, and applauding difference – the hallmarks of liberal democracy – are the surest ways to aggravate those who are innately intolerant, and to guarantee the increased expression of their predispositions in manifestly intolerant attitudes and behaviors" (Stenner, 2005, 330). Take for instance the rulings of the 1974 Supreme Court case of *Lau v. Nichols* that established new bilingual and bicultural guidelines that swept away immersion courses aimed at integrating students with limited English proficiency (LEP) into standard school curriculum by enhancing their English skills (Kruse & Zelizer, 2019, 63). At the expanse of "promoting cultural integration these 'Lau remedies' aimed to preserve the unique cultural traditions of non-English speakers"(Kruse & Zelizer, 2019, 63). Alas, "emphasizing differences makes many people more racist not less" (Haidt, 2013, 361), as Stenner further elaborates "our showy celebration of, and absolute insistence individual autonomy and unconstrained diversity pushes those by nature least equipped to live comfortably in a liberal democracy not to the limits of their tolerance, but to their intolerant extremes"(Stenner, 2005, 330-331). Extremes that were further intensified by the growing emphasis of the interconnectedness of the world.

Concordant to the increasing celebration of diversity on the political Left was a growing embracement of a global consciousness, which portrayed the United States as a part of a larger global social sphere. Something that the U.S. undeniably is, but for a large segment of the electorate, such as the mourners in Hochschild's book, this global consciousness is seen as an abomination of everything that they believe America represents. These people "are more parochial – concerned about their groups, rather than all of humanity"(Haidt, 2013, 204). Furthermore, it devalues and misrecognizes what they believe to constitute a large part of their authentic inner self, an inner self that values hard-work, communitarianism, and personal responsibility. It mirrors the disjunction explored by Martin Luther (see pages 15-16), as it puts their communitarian and rural inside at odds with a cosmopolitan and global outside. It triggers their moral Liberty/oppression foundation where a clear message of "don't tread on my nation (with your United Nations and your sovereignty-reducing international treaties)"(Haidt, 2013, 204) is conveyed. A strong emphasis on the world as a global social sphere dismantles their vision of America as one of localism built on parochial altruism and constructs in its place a confusing pluralistic vision of alternative forms of association.

Dazed and confused about the way the country is heading and their role in it, the white rural working-class people vote, react, and act out of group-based defense as they find themselves in a real squeeze. Stuck between their thymotic desire to be recognized for who they really are and a dread of joining the parade of victimized social identities as they are critical of such appeals for sympathy (Hochschild, 2018, 144-145). With a dream of progressing but a reality that sees them regressing, they turn desperate. The party that is supposed to bring them upward social mobility is preoccupied with pursuing "policies that promote *Pluribus* at the expanse of *Unum*", unamerican policies in the moral mind of the white rural south "that leave them open to charges of treason, subversion, and sacrilege"(Haidt, 2013, 215). Policies that not only contradict the white working-class' moral interests but policies that they perceive to give unproportionate privilege to victimized social identities pursuing the dreaded politics of identity. Well then, as a former Never Trumper explained in an *Atlantic* article, "If you want identity politics, identity politics is what you will get" (Bodenner, 2016) and identity politics is what it became.

4.5 The Identity Politics of the Authoritarian Reflex

In the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1790), Smith contends that "to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the day-light of honour and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps the most agreeable hope, and disappoints the most ardent desire, of human nature"(Smith & Hanley, 2009, 63). The hollowing out and marginalization of the American working-class did not only deteriorate the honor and dignity of the white rural working-class, but it also saw them become invisible and disapproved. It neglects a vital part of our human nature, namely our thymotic desire for recognition of our dignity or status (Fukuyama, 2018, 81). Alternatively, as Hochschild contends, it distorts our sense of self as "you do not recognize yourself in how others see you"(Hochschild, 2018, 144). Feelings of denigration and invisibility leave people open to nationalist responses as they can translate losses of relative economic positions into losses of identity and status (Fukuyama, 2018, 89). That a real-estate mogul would embody this response seemed rather unlikely. However, as the politics of identity became the focal point of American politics, Trump and his entourage mobilized and politicized social identities that for decades had been confined to the margins of the political discourse.

On page 12, I challenged Fukuyama's claim that "identity politics as currently practiced on the left has stimulated the rise of identity politics on the right" (Fukuyama, 2018, 118). A glance at the previous paragraphs does little to back up the initial rebut. However, without getting too caught up in semantics, that something stimulates a rise is not the same as a causal explanation. Although opposition to *political correctness* was a rallying cry for unmoored and anxious whites in the 2016 presidential election, it abides to a reactionary tradition of the conservative movement. This tradition stretches back to the French Revolution and is rooted in a peculiar notion of identity. In his book *The Reactionary Mind* (2018), Corey Robin states that conservativism is "a meditation on – and the theoretical rendition of – the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back" (Robin, 2018, 4). That Trump moved "the focus of identity politics from the left, where it was born, to the right, where it is now taking root" (Fukuyama, 2018, 119) is an inaccurate argument. Identity and the politics of identity have always been essential to the conservative ideology, but it has been an identity politics attuned to a special type of victim. A victim "who has lost something of value as opposed

to the wretched of the earth, whose chief complaint is that they never had anything to lose" contemporary conservativism appeals to the constituency of the "contingently dispossessed" (Robin, 2018, 55). Contemporary identity politics on the Left did not give rise to identity politics on the Right as much as it rekindled old sensations of disinheritance and loss.

Conservativism is built on a counterrevolutionary substratum with a sensibility to defend ruling hierarchies. That is not to say that conservativism is static, as Robin explains, "[i]f conservativism is a specific reaction to a specific movement of emancipation, it stands to reason that each reaction will bear the traces of the movement it opposes" (Robin, 2018, 29). Although Fukuyama might be wrong in his initial statement, he touches upon an important aspect when he states that it is now taking root as "not only has the right reacted against the left, but in the course of conducting its reaction, it also has consistently borrowed from the left" (Robin 2018, 29-30). The political Right borrows, mimics, and imitates the political Left in its endeavor for restoration and recovery.

Historically, the conservative Right generally opposed the entrance of the masses onto the political stage. Now it makes use of them, "aware that any successful defense of the old regime must incorporate the lower orders in some capacity other than as underlings or starstruck fans" (Robin, 2018, 30). It throws them bones of recognition and dignity as a means for "[t]he masses (…) to locate themselves symbolically in the ruling class" which makes for an "upside-down populism, in which the lowest of the low see themselves projected in the highest of the high" (Robin, 2018, 30). In terms of themes discussed in the history chapter, Trump and present-day Republicans make use of the anxieties relating to deindustrialization and confusing pluralistic forms of association. They address, as the conservative movement has continually done throughout Western history, the sensation of loss, and as Robin notes, "nothing is ever so cherished as that which we no longer possess" (Robin, 2018, 56). In the context of *Intergroup Emotion Theory*, Trump and his associates use the high levels of power and status that whites have historically enjoyed in the U.S. to build a platform of anger and contempt toward low-status out-groups that threatens their in-group(s)' status and power.

Judging by how Trump has conducted himself as a businessman one could argue that he would never settle to be recognized as equal in dignity to others, i.e. *isothymia*. His whole professional career is built on a desire to be recognized as superior, i.e. *megalotthymia*. Thus, to actuate his

political career forward he latched onto the resentments of rural white-working class people who feel that their way of life is disrespected, their moral matrices under siege and estranged in their own land. Good portions of this mournful constituency want to be seen as just as good as everyone else, but feel that the urban bicoastal elites and their media allies have been ignoring them and their problems for a while (Fukuyama, 2018). However, the "desire for equal recognition can easily slide into a demand for recognition of the group's superiority" (Fukuyama, 2018, 22), especially when the mouthpiece for that desire could be said to show symptoms of delusions of grandeur.

With a liberal Left failing to bridge their concerns for oppressed victims with responsiveness for their old working-class constituency, the reactionary Right, with Trump as their bannerman, seized an opportunity to deploy one of their oldest tricks in the book. It adapted, reacted, and created a counterrevolutionary narrative of a country in disarray and disbelief tailored for the distressed constituencies of the heartland. A tale of a country where the social conservative moral matrix built on equal consideration for *Care, Liberty, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority,* and *Sanctity* is replaced by a liberal moral matrix built on *Care, Liberty,* and *Fairness.* A country whose most sacred value is to "care for the victims of oppression" (Haidt 2013, 351) and not to "preserve the institutions and traditions that sustain a moral community" (Haidt, 2013, 357). A counterrevolutionary narrative of a country in dire need of a strong leader who can put the country back on course. A hero who can drain the swap, one who speaks for the silent majority, the aggrieved privileged, the leftovers of the confusing post-material world. A white dark knight for dark white times.

The appeal of a xenophobic narrative, constructed to motivate anxious and distressed citizens to rise up against cultural changes that erode 'traditional' American values, has always been a facet of American politics (see the conservative grand narrative draw out of Reagan speeches on page 29). However, aspects of American life in the 21st century have seen this appeal resonate with a wider set of people as Inglehart contends, "[c]ultural backlash explains why given individuals support xenophobic populist authoritarian movement – but declining existential security explains why support for these movements is greater now than it was 30 years ago" (Inglehart, 2018). Often criticized for his lack of moral integrity, President Trump, nonetheless constructs a comforting and soothing moral narrative for the insecure and concerned people experiencing

"declining real income and job security, along with a massive influx of immigrants and refugees" (Inglehart, 2018). His narrative orients his audience to draw attention to a set of virtues such as loyalty (to flag and country) and fairness (as proportionality) that must be mobilized to fight for the 'good' forces of (white) hard-working (Republican) Americans against the evil forces of liberals, Democrats, immigrants, Obama and Muslims. For this to be done, they must protect by building walls and recover by bringing back American jobs, so they can once again attain the sacred core that preserves the institutions and traditions that makes America great.

It will be a hard-fought struggle, one that requires the 'real' American people to close ranks behind him (Trump) as their leader, coupled with strong in-group solidarity and conformity to group norms, and lastly a firm and strong rejection of outsiders (Inglehart, 2018, 173). By deploying and latching himself onto the identity of the mournful, angry, white, rural, and insecure people of the heartland Trump has been able to use the politics of identity as tool or more so outlet for his arguably *megalothymic* nature. Concordantly, as he tells these people they are worthwhile – which they really are, something the political Left side seems to have forgotten – they project themselves in him and asserts like him that their social group should be recognized and dignified on the basis of superiority.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore how identity became politics and how politicized identities shape contemporary American politics. Identity as a political concept in the Western sphere evolved by virtue of our human thymotic desire to be recognized and dignified by other people. Conjuring Hegel's notion of history as a narrative of the different stages of human freedom, identity has been left, right, and center in this process. Identity as a political phenomenon rests on the belief of individuals and their surrounding society that there exists a true inner self in all of us that is both entitled to and worthy of recognition and dignity. The struggle to have that true inner self recognized was inaugurated by Martin Luther's reconnaissance of the inner chambers of the self and moved to the social sphere through the works and thoughts of Rousseau. Identity and the struggle to have it recognized was then democratized and universalized by Kant and Hegel. Once democratized and universalized, it turned into a political project undertaken by social groups.

Identity politics is the collectivized and organized endeavor of groups, bound together by their social identity. These groups deploy the category of identity as a tool to secure their distinctiveness, group-esteem, and group enhancement to satisfy the fundamental human need of feeling recognized and dignified. It is a dual process where identification with the group provides each individual with these vital feelings, which individuals then feed into the overall group-esteem, enhancing the overall confidence of the group, thus making it more ambitious in its endeavor. It is a political strategy that aims to improve and widen the circle of groups enjoying social justice. For much of America's history, it has been a force of good. However, identity politics' contemporary characteristics are negating its initial aims by demanding recognition and dignity based on restrictive and ascriptive traits.

Contemporary American identity politics is like a sociopolitical chameleon; depending on the environment it will reveal different colors and patterns to the observer. It is a multifaceted process where a one-dimensional causal explanation is as rare as bipartisan agreement in present-day American politics. However, and despite its elusive nature, contemporary identity politics does evolve around collective processes, both at an inter-group context level and in a wider socio-historical context. It is rooted in the intersubjective nature of human life and negotiated

within the spheres of social reality and morality. By deploying Moral Foundations Theory, this thesis has explored how morality and different moral matrices dictate people's feelings, emotions, and reactions through cognitive modules that work instinctively and unconsciously when they face certain adaptive challenges. Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Emotions Theory has explored how emotions, feelings, and reactions are often amplified, intensified, and reinforced when people find themselves within meaningful social groups that they believe constitute and form parts of their identity.

We human beings are innately social creatures, and bonding together allows us to achieve incredible things, but it can also leave us blind to the possibility of alternative forms of association and moral beliefs. We are predisposed to defend, support, maintain, and recognize the people and social groups that look and act like us. To sacralize and build political and moral beliefs upon ascriptive identities such as ethnicity, race, regionality, and religion paralyzes a nation built on the idea of *E Pluribus Unum*, as people get stuck and immersed in tribal moral enclaves.

It is like the famous cliché from the movies where the world is fast-forwarding past newly released prisoners. Trailing behind has quickly become a universal shared feeling and a marker of what it means to be human in the 21st century. We cannot catch up, the world is moving too fast, society is moving too fast, technology is moving too fast, information is moving too fast, and we are not able to worry or think about one problem before a new one arises. Until, of course, that new problem – disguised as a spherical shape with a crown of club-shaped spikes on its surface – suddenly hits the pause button and demands our unconditional attention as the sole problem facing humankind. However, even in the face of global pandemic, the politics of identity has been deployed as a tacit tactic among strongly identified groups in the U.S. as a means for establishing and upholding group distinctiveness.

American politics nowadays is reminiscent of a dissolving patchwork, where new holes keep appearing because of the increasing complexity of the world. In an age of bewilderment, people become desperate for certainty and find themselves inclining towards old patterns of recognition along traditional lines of division. Inclinations that have seen the resurgence of antecedent notions of a government of the few, by the few and for the few rooted in the belief and desire to be recognized as superior.

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7. Appendix

Foundation:	Care/ harm	Fairness/ cheating	Loyalty/ betrayal	Authority/ subversion	Sanctity/ degradation
Adaptive challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid communicable diseases
Original triggers	Suffering, distress, or neediness expressed by one's child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of high and low rank	Waste products, diseased people
Current triggers	Baby seals, cute cartoon characters	Marital fidelity, broken vending machines	Sports teams, nations	Bosses, respected professionals	Immigration, deviant sexuality
Character-istic emotions	Compassion for victim; anger at perpetrator	anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness

The five foundations of morality as found on page 146 in Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2013).