

Psychology of Brexit 5: Projection

In crisis lies opportunity. And so too with Brexit. This series of events gives me a chance to explain one of the most fundamental and tricky psychological concepts.

Projection.

In projection, thoughts, motivations, desires, and feelings that cannot be accepted as one's own are dealt with by being placed outside the self and attributed to someone else. It is a way we get rid of unacceptable or unwanted parts of ourselves and, unable to eliminate them from the world altogether, we place them in other people. It is the mechanism of racism, elitism, nationalism, populism - anywhere where you find attitudes and actions driven by the (supposed) malevolence of others. It is the activity underlying the old aphorism: 'the pot calling the kettle black.'

What are the unacceptable parts of the Brexiteers? We only have to inspect the things that they attribute to others to see. I think there are three main elements driving these projections and the bullying, name calling and vilification that flows from them:

1. The first is the issue of **Potency**. The most common fault of the EU is that it takes power away from us. That includes things like the ability to make our own decisions, rule our own roost, go our own way. So disenfranchisement - a feeling of *powerlessness* - is one of the things that results from EU membership.

We suggest those who voted for Leave feel disenfranchised, powerless, unable to influence the agenda. And that their potency is reduced by being 'subject' to EU direction.

[My counter-argument here is that while powerlessness is an unacceptable feeling, it is not due to the EU where we have primary powers of veto on almost anything we don't agree with, but to the fact that many of us don't participate in local elections, council matters, democracy, even voting. No, it can't be me sitting at home in front of the telly, it must be those bloody outsiders.]

2. Next there is **Identity**. Who am I? A quick way of identifying myself is by nationality. I am English. And some other people in the UK and Europe are not. This is not a problem unless there arises a feeling of inferiority or peril, that one's own identity is in some way less valuable, less laudable than it was: or is held in less esteem than that of other nations. I suspect that in many Brexit regions that has been a continuing groundswell of inferior feeling as once great industries and enterprises have run down or disappeared as we can see and empathise with in the USA's rustbelt. Or where the work they create is no longer attractive to indigenous people and is being done by foreigners from the EU or elsewhere. In other words if my identity is no longer boosted by the work of my local traditions, or by new endeavours that lack glamour or any sense of heroism, then I will cleave to nationalism inside of an idea that my nation, my England is superior to others and that they, by

extension, are inferior.

I do not want inferior people making up the rules and laws by which I must live.

3. The final and third compound of our cocktail is the principle of **Entitlement**. A sense that because I live here, was born here, went to school here, I am entitled to the benefits and resources that live here too. *If England belongs to we English, how much of it is mine?* This secret, private greed and sense of entitlement is then projected as an attribute of the outsiders, immigrants who come here to take what is ours. It is the immigrant who lusts after more, not me, it is he who would take my council house, benefits, welfare check, education or GP's appointment. This persists because it is our own greed, disguised as that of others, even though the Department for Work & Pension's own estimates are that *no more than 70p in every £100 of benefits are fraudulently claimed. Either by English dossers or foreign invaders.*

The reason these projections and the hatred they inspire is so prevalent and persistent is that they are a cocktail or compound of interlocking resentments, fuelled by the media as a means of cheap identification to sell papers by stirring hate, largely arising out of our own indifference to our democracy or our national debate and reliance on buying stuff at the shops to make us feel better.

Amongst all this xenophobia, it is hardly surprising that consumer debt is increasing faster than at any time in the last eleven years: [Massive rise in consumer debt this year](#)