



Crossing Cultural Borders- A Psychological Examination of the World-Wide Political Movement to the Right

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Abstract

This is an attempt to examine the psychological dynamics of the recent world-wide political movement to the right, with reference to both group psychology and the authoritarian personality. Reports of current events in several European countries and China provide information about such shifts.

Keywords: Political right shift; Group psychology; Authoritarian personality; Cognitive styles; Religion; Current events

Introduction

It was 1946, and I had faith in the democratic process. At the time, however, there was a sufficient number of politically left-leaning citizens and communist sympathizers in this country that a fear of them reigned. In that climate it was so great a surprise to me that I never forgot a sociology professor's prediction, "Should the United States ever veer politically, it will be to the right."

And here we are [1]!

In 2016 United States voters elected a president who subsequently ignores certain existing laws, and consolidates executive power by undermining the government's checks and balances that are meant to insure the democratic processes according to our Constitution. He attacks the press and recently announced his intention to reduce financial support of Social Security and Public Broadcasting.

What made it Possible?

In "America Has Never Been So Ripe For Tyranny," Andrew Sullivan ascribed to Plato the idea that "the longer a democracy lasted, the more democratic it would become ... its equality spread. ... But it is inherently unstable. ... Establishment values cede to popular ones ... and when

all barriers to equality ... have been removed ... you arrive at what might be called late-stage democracy."

That is the moment when, according to Plato, a "would-be tyrant" can seize the reins [2].

How did this right-swing phenomenon spread across geographic and political borders to places with differing cultures and histories?

It seems that despite their differences, in each of the Western countries mentioned below a particular segment of the population had been seriously affected by technological advances, globalization, income discrepancies, and immigration - as is the case in the USA.

Authoritarian Trends Across the Borders

The traditionally autocratic countries of the Middle and Far East differ from Western countries: In response to some terrorist action, China, for instance, has taken draconian measures to "reeducate" its Uighur, mainly Muslim, minority. They have been herded into what resembles Nazi concentration camps under strict surveillance and a lack of freedom. The aim is to dilute the Uighur's ethnic identity and dissuade them from religion, particularly Islam [3]. In the West, instead of resorting to coercive measures,

potentially authoritarian leaders have succeeded in rallying their supporters by acknowledging a population segment's bitterness over harsh socio-economic circumstances and by promising to reverse these.

Additionally leaders have fostered fear of both strangers, i.e. immigrants, and of citizens with opposing views. Vamik Volkan ascribes hostility to strangers and immigrants to its origin in infants' eight-month anxiety [4].

Hungary's President Viktor Orban has kept out immigrants in order to maintain the country's Christian character and to protect it from Islamists. He also maligns the Hungarian-American Jewish philanthropist George Soros, thereby offering up the man who funded a Hungarian university as a convenient scapegoat to the populace [5].

Poland, with a brief, celebrated democratic period after the end of WWII has maintained its capitalist economy; but now, with a reactionary regime, permits active anti-Jewish public demonstrations. Pruchnik observes the Christian Good Friday tradition of dragging, beating, and dismembering [an effigy of] Judas ... Its head cut off, was burned and drowned in the river [6]. The reverend Tadeusz Rydzyk, a powerful. Politically active cleric, is referred to as "Father Director."

Germany's far-right political party AfD, the Alternative fuer Deutschland, already has representatives elected to the legislature. This party is strongest in formerly thriving industrial towns and in the former communist German Democratic Republic, where the aging population of the East feels abandoned and neglected. They. To are dissatisfied and pining for the "good old times" [7].

Great Britain's Brexit, the effort to retreat from the European Union, is also an attempt to deal with globalization by closing borders to the easy entry of non-British subjects. Hoping for a return to a long-lost past, the expected damage to their economy is all but ignored. Is that secondary to allaying the shame of the former Empire's reduced status in the world and the anxiety about strangers in their midst [8]?

Moreover, Daily Kos asked [9], "Can the, prime minister really suspend parliament to prevent anyone from taking action until it's too late to act [on Brexit, in this case]? Can he suspend parliament when that parliament is considering a vote of no confidence?...". Yes. First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, described Johnson's action as 'that of a dictatorship' and told the BBC, 'I think today will go down in history as the day UK democracy died.' "

In France, the disgruntled *gilets jaunes*, the "yellow vests" represent those who moved to the hinterland because the elites have taken over most Paris domiciles. A planned

small tax increase on gasoline left them feeling particularly neglected and unfairly treated. This gasoline increase would hit them especially hard because the excellent railroad transportation among France's large cities helps them not at all: Local train schedules have been reduced; therefore, they must drive their cars to work. Despite receiving much government support, their expectations of becoming middle class has been dashed, they, too, feel *declassé*. They want to be recognized. But unlike the other groups, *gilets jaunes* are not lining up behind France's leader; quite to the contrary,

The *gilets jaunes* distrust their elected president, Emmanuel Macron, who dresses and speaks as elite, was elected by them, and sometimes presents as if contemptuous of the lower classes. Resenting Macron's high ideals for the EU, while appearing to ignore his own people in the hinterlands, where modernity has disrupted the former vibrant small communities of residents and shopkeepers, the *gilets jaunes* are fighting him with marches in Paris and even some vandalism [10].

Finally, there is Isis, a movement literally without borders. Its tentacles stretch across continents from the Middle East to Scandinavia and beyond to the Philippines [11,12].

Hamed Abdel-Samad, who left his native Egypt as a practicing Muslim to attend a German university, has emerged as a gifted writer in the language of his adopted country. In his book *Integration Ein Protokoll des Scheiterns* (Integration, a Protocol of Failure) he addresses the grandsons of Muslim Turkish and Arabic immigrants on the fringes of society: He addresses their feelings of not belonging, of being outsiders - "Others." Abdel-Samad recognizes their uncertainty, their fragile, conflicting identifications with Western culture and their parents' wish for them to remain religious and tied to their culture of origin [13].

For these offspring of immigrants, the seduction of Isis - an extreme form of Islam - is great: Isis offers them a mission; and when the young people are solicited, they feel wanted, they will belong. Abdel-Samad reasons that in this era of globalization young people seek a strong leader and unrestricted authorities. But he warns, a return to past utopias is dangerous. And in the book's letter to a hypothetical young Muslim points out the illogic of the mission: of committing murder in the name of a compassionate god, Nevertheless, he admits that rage can be useful when the person can identify the true origin of that feeling within himself. In the end, Abdel-Samad encourages striving for self-actualization rather than escape into ISIS.

That is sound advice, indeed.

The ability to have some insight into one's personal

dynamics in relation to external circumstances requires a cognitive ability, however, to overcome the egocentrism of the Piagetian preoperational stage of cognitive development and also to perform deductive operations, (rather than only inductive ones from concrete cases. as in the operational stage.

Accounting for Loyalty to Leaders

Group Phenomena: Authoritarian leaders tend to emerge in socio-economic or political crises. (as did Hitler, for example,) Their grandiosity and brazen mendacity are paired with an instinctive ability to decipher and evoke their followers' emotions - while keeping reason at a low level when addressing the masses. That in itself does not explain why, in the USA, Trump voters can believe that reducing taxes on high incomes and reducing health benefits for the needy, that prohibiting abortions without public child support for poor families - that keeping out people who will work at jobs that US citizens generally are unwilling to perform - may benefit them. Or, if they do not believe it, why are they still supporting their elected president? It requires an explanation.

Freud understood the underlying individual dynamics of groups. He explained them in *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, ("Mass is translated as Group; hence Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego) Freud addressed the importance of the libidinal drives being directed to both the group leader (representing father and ideals) and the group members who identify with each other (much as siblings do) .Identification with the leader's super-ego ideals results in the separation of the members' ego from their own (now abandoned) ego-ideal's inhibiting force - their conscience [14,15].

This affects the group's behavior: In 1904, fifteen years before Freud began his work on Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, Robert Park's dissertation entitled *Masse und Publikum* (Crowds and the Public), distinguished between crowds (*Menschenmenge*) and groups. It differed from Freud's individual, dynamic perspective.

Park's more descriptive view of the group-as-a-whole mentioned group characteristics such as members' mutual influence. And Park observed that the whole-group will (*Gesamtwille*) overwhelms all individual drives. At that point individual group members' emotions and thoughts point in the same direction, so that a unified consciousness, a "collective [group] soul" is created, adding a sense of power to members, while simultaneously protecting each of them by their individual anonymity.

Thus, individuals who would normally heed custom and law, would, under the influence of the excitement, or group

arousal by a leader (*Massenerregung*), lose self-control. They would then behave like rabid beasts - which Freud attributed to the separation of ego and (personal] ego-ideal, the conscience

The Authoritarian Personality: Recent research based on Theodor Adorno's 1950 studies, *The Authoritarian Personality*, showed indications that an authoritarian personality is drawn to grandiose, seemingly powerful leaders. Followers put their trust in the leader, as they might have in a parental figure as children; they follow the rules, obey and partake of the leader's grandiosity - as described by Freud and Park.

The current terminology for authoritarian personality is people who are "wary" of, or more closed to change and set in their ways. Authoritarian personalities have difficulty tolerating ambiguity; "Fluid" personalities, on the other hand, are more open to new experiences, while "mixed are those who are ambivalent" [16]. Because traditionally ambivalence has meant being of different opinions or feelings about one thing, I would rather characterize the "mixed" group as open to some changes and wary of others.

In a 1960's book, reporting research on *The Open and Closed Mind*, Milton Rokeach made distinctions between rigidity of thought and the dogmatism of the closed mind [17]. The rigidity impeding acceptance of single new or different aspects of a system, affects people's analytical abilities, whereas when the entire system is at stake, dogmatic thinkers' synthetic abilities begin to fail in an attempt to preserve the system. Thus, closed thinkers tend to remain loyal even to an inherently contradictory system. And this theory helps us understand what may be operating in Trump followers who cannot synthesize the negative aspects of their elected leader into their dogmatic system. Unable to integrate, to synthesize, they remain with their original position. That is extreme conservatism!

And this might be what Abdel-Sadam referred to when he wrote of the illogic of accepting that a benevolent god requires the killing of infidels. Synthesizing this into Islam, might threaten the religious system. Cognitively this is related to an adult's abandoning Piaget's Formal Operations stage of development. In the modern terminology, these are the "wary" people.

Dogmatism in Religions

Systems of organized religion provide comfort to those caught up in individual crises, or societal ones, such as the exigencies of vast technological changes. Distinguished by varying ideologies and rituals, fundamentalist religions nevertheless resemble each other in the dogmatism of

authoritarianism. The fervor of evangelical Christians, ultra-orthodox Jews and Muslims hardly differs.

Religious dogmatism functions as an antidote to the doubt of the scientific method and the prevailing uncertainty in the current scientific age. Religious literalism provides some certainty and mitigates against ambiguity, complexity, fear, and feelings of helplessness. Believers who put themselves in a god's hands, or follow a grandiose leader are comforted. Obedience and fear ward off the wrathful god [18].

The dogmatic systems of orthodoxy require defenses against non-believers. "The absolutism of a fundamentalist religion necessitates splitting of the godly and spiritual from the material. The good idealized object from the sinful, and the spiritual from the material." Disowned desires are externalized, resulting in an ethical obligation to kill the evil [19].

This,, according to Martin Bergmann confronts us with "a new type of culture in which libidinal ties, hate, and self-destructive tendencies are amalgamated ... [a culture] that unites life and death." Sacrificing the body to save the soul may achieve "the equivalent in the aggressive drive... what sexual orgasm is for the libido" [20].

Killing becomes healing. The killer becomes the savior who will be saved [21-23].

Conclusion

Are then these the rigid thought processes and dogmatic systems that prescribe the dedication to the elimination of the intruding Others and the evil non-believers? Are these the dynamics motivating Jihad? Are these also the self-preservative dynamics of nationalism and populism across the geographic and political borders?

In summary, this article presents the existential predicament of certain population segments and attempts to account for their political right-swing response by adducing the dynamics of group behavior [24], the cognitive patterns of the open and closed mind in the authoritarian personality, and their manifestations in religion.

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