

How Did We Get Here? Some Considerations Regarding the Unconscious Factors that Trump'D Reason during the Presidential Election

In the US, there is basically one party — the business party. It has two factions, called Democrats and Republicans, which are somewhat different but carry out variations on the same policies. By and large, I am opposed to those policies. As is most of the population.

—Prof. Noam Chomsky (2016)

As most things, this election, and its outcome, was steered by both conscious and unconscious anxieties, fears, wishes and fantasies we have — in this case, about the present and the future of our country, about our basic needs for safety and security, and about how our new leader might be able to gratify these (and other) needs and wishes.

While consciously, it seemed like a clear and rational choice, for many, to vote for the Democratic candidate, it also became evident that there existed the fantasy of her preordained win, shared by the majority of the Democrats, the pollsters, the (mainstream) media and, perhaps, even among some of the Conservatives. This fantasy was perpetuated by all of the above, despite the very obvious, if not alarming, shortcomings of, and wrongdoing by, this candidate: as The Guardian's Thomas Frank writes, "Democratic leaders made Hillary their candidate even though they knew about her closeness to the banks, her fondness for war, and her unique vulnerability on the trade issue – each of which Trump exploited to the fullest. They chose Hillary even though they knew about her private email server. They chose her even though some of those who studied the Clinton Foundation suspected it was a sketchy proposition"

(<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/09/donald-trump-white-house-hillary-clinton-liberals>).

And so, most of the (neo)liberal public followed the candidate that was given to them — whether it was because some had identified with her as a woman, because she had governance experience, because they liked her husband or simply because she was not-Trump, or due to a combination of any number of these (conscious) factors — while, unconsciously, denying the fact that, for the most part, the Democratic Party leadership systematically derailed the primaries and consistently organized in their actions to nominate the less popular and more flawed candidate for the Presidency. In other words, the fact that HRC & Co. subverted the primaries to get her nominated was largely glossed over — that is, negated — by those, who backed her *and* by those, who tacitly accepted this rigged process.

Most notably, it seems, the fantasy of Hillary's inevitable win was also accompanied by the fantasy that most of our fellow citizens are rational human beings, who, in the year 2016, in America, would not even think to support Trump, a narcissist, utterly lacking in both experience and basic human decency. What was, for the most part, disavowed, though not entirely unnoticed, was the anger and hatred, both rational and irrational, that

the majority of the population has been feeling for quite some time. A sort of Winnicottian belief had prevailed, in that most human beings are “good(-enough)” and only react with aggression situationally, in response to frustrations caused by the environment. The fundamental idea of the death drive (that Freud introduced and Klein extended), manifesting itself in hatred and envy that is destructive to both self and other, appeared not to have figured in many, if not most, hopeful minds, as they envisioned (phantasied?) the near bright(er) future. The very prominent existence of envy that destroys all “goodness”, possessed both outside and inside one’s self (Klein, 1957), was disavowed, by both sides.

Had the death drive (and envy as its corollary) been taken into account seriously — that is, recognized and made conscious, through genuine public debate — the liberals would have probably been outraged by the subversion of the democratic process during the primaries, and, as a result, they would have demanded, with determination, that the candidate, who had galvanized the actual progressive movement, Bernie Sanders, be rightfully nominated for Presidency. The fantasy of Clinton’s preordained win further denied the reality of researchers’ predictions that she would lose to Trump on the Election Day, whereas Sanders would win. In a sense, Trump may be described as Sanders’ “evil twin”, to the extent that both of them, albeit their very different background and tactics, ran on the platform of challenging the status quo (which Hillary, on the other hand, represented and therefore believed to be essentially unchallengeable). Bernie appeared to have been able to understand and to “mobilise the aggression” (the phrase I borrow from one of my Kleinian teachers), *as well as* to direct it where it truly belongs — against the myriad of special interests of the corporations and the elites that have been persistently corrupting our (and the world’s) governance — in contrast to Trump, who had used it, and successfully so, in displacement, toward our hatred of the different/foreign, the most vulnerable and of one another.

On this note, we are reminded by Bion’s theory of the basic-assumption groups that, “Such groups have aims far different either from the overt task of the group or even from the tasks that would appear to be appropriate to Freud’s view of the group as based on the family group. But approached from the angle of psychotic anxiety, associated with phantasies of primitive part object relationships, described by Melanie Klein and her co-workers, the basic assumption phenomena appear far more to have the characteristics of defensive reactions to psychotic anxiety, and to be not so much at variance with Freud’s views as supplementary to them. In my view, it is necessary to work through both the stresses that appertain to family patterns and the still more primitive anxieties of part object relationships. In fact I consider the latter to contain the ultimate sources of all group behaviour” (*Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*, 1961, p. 189).

In the culture of so-called micro-aggressions, trigger-warnings and safe spaces, we have, thus, grown insulated (and isolated) within our phantasied claustrum of how “good” we have become and how well we treat each other — as though the potential mother of our nation (Hillary) would be able to sustain this phantasy (thus, representing our regression to what Bion referred to as the “dependency” basic assumption) and as if the familiar parental couple would ultimately take care of us (Bill and Hillary therefore, to our minds,

representing the “pairing” basic assumption). Moreover, engaging into the “fight-flight” basic assumption, we seemed to have disavowed our (understanding of) hatred — especially, in the context of group dynamics — and appeared (more) comfortable with dissociating ourselves from those in our society, who may represent the not-so-rosy, if not a primitive-anxieties-laden, view of the world. We have shamed them, by using a plethora of righteous post-modernist/feminist labels, and continue to do so, in the attempts to silence them, when, as grown-ups — and, especially, as analysts — we should be trying to listen to them and to speak *to*, rather than *at*, them, in the way that would address the underlying anxieties and fears that they have the right to express. After all, “their” and “our” anxieties and fears are quite similar: most, if not all, of us, as a nation, are profoundly angry — and it is this anger that needs to be acknowledged and channelled to where it belongs: against our common enemy, which is very much within, rather than outside, our country and government.

We are, of course, entitled to feel frustrated, disappointed, sad and disheartened, and it is understandable that we may want/need to take the time to grieve. Nonetheless, if there is anything that psychoanalysis teaches us, it is that it is also crucial to *think* about these feelings, beyond the (un)conscious (basic) assumption that we are “good” and rational beings. As analysts, we know that it isn’t particularly fruitful to feel “shocked”, while disavowing the internal *and* external realities, as well as resisting (!) the understanding of how we got to this point. As Bernie Sanders states in his editorial in The New York Times, "I am saddened, but not surprised, by the outcome. It is no shock to me that millions of people who voted for Mr. Trump did so because they are sick and tired of the economic, political and media status quo". Furthermore, speaking practically, he makes some sound suggestions as to where we — as liberals, rather than neoliberals — might go from here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/12/opinion/bernie-sanders-where-the-democrats-go-from-here.html?mabReward=A4&recp=1&moduleDetail=recommendations-1&action=click&contentCollection=Politics®ion=Footer&module=WhatsNext&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&src=recg&pgtype=article>.

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