

The Language Game of Europe: Politics, Identity and the Divided¹

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Abstract: The paper discusses the psychoanalytic interpretative possibilities for understanding Europe's reluctance to accept the UK's decision to leave the union. It develops an interpretation based on Lucan's concept of 'Name of the Father' to inquire whether the 'European identity' is in fact a neurotic identity, marked by a blocked presence of the primary Lacanian psychoanalytic signifier and the resultant erratic and ineffective policy which can be considered as a group equivalent of the neurotic symptoms that, in psychoanalysis, are treated as primary individual symptoms. This perspective aims to test the limits of the debate over whether psych diagnostics can be applied to political collectives as well as to individuals, and attempts to do so by drawing parallels between the behavior of individual people, on the one hand, and institutions, on the other.

Key-words: Psychoanalysis, European identity, neurosis, psychosis, Name of the Father, Signifiers

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Crisis of European identity: Where does the crisis come from?

There appears to exist an almost consensual view in European politics that the European identity is in crisis. This has perhaps particularly poignantly been illustrated by a recent interview by French President Emanuel Macron to *The Economics*, where President Macron basically says that Europe must develop a new vision of its identity and conceive itself as a great power in order to deal, conceptually as well as politically, with the challenges which the current developments in global politics and security pose before it.

But what do these words by Emanuel Macros really mean, and what issues are there in global politics that so threaten the European identity?

Perhaps the most pronounced such threats are the mass migration from Syria and other countries in the Middle East, to which the various European leaders have responded very differently, and the nasty word of European politics today: Brexit.

Both of these challenges have emphasized different aspects of neurosis built into conceptions of a European identity. The migration crisis has forced European countries to ask themselves who they are in terms of religion and culture, and their differences have been quite different: on the one hand, Germany responded with a tolerant view of the influx of migrants, partly because of its gaping needs for additional workforce primarily in the field of manual labor. The "new" European countries, championed by Hungary and its colorful President, Victor Orban, declined to obey the European regulations on quotas assigned to individual countries to accept the respective numbers of migrants, and exclaimed that "Hungary is a Christian country", where there is no place for Muslims, nor are there conditions for them to practice their religion. The argument came complete with a statement on the numbers of mosques in Hungary.

On the seafront, countries such as Italy and Spain have struggled with sinking rafts packed with desperate Middle Eastern refugees, pushing for quotas within the European institutions to at least partially relieve the load on their economies and societies imposed by the immediate pressure of mass arrivals across the sea.

All of these developments led to a rise in the political right, challenges to the authority of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and helped shape the mood in the United Kingdom to leave the EU. Today, the problems remain largely unaddressed effectively: migrants are still arriving, and the response by the countries of first arrival is becoming increasingly restrictive, including Italy's banning of the boats with rescued migrants from docking in its ports. The crisis is palpable and has the shape of a clear symptom. The question for discussion appears to be what it a symptom is. What is the disorder or illness behind the

symptom, or what kind of greater disorganization and value confusion the symptom itself stabilizes. This is where the question of European crisis today touches psychoanalysis and may benefit from a slight play with psychoanalytic concepts and techniques. That is the aim of this paper, with the idea that locating the divisive nature of the relevant European identity (or identities) might help address the issues which, in the future, might lead to, or be aggravated by, other crises which, in politics, come periodically and almost inevitably.

Facing others and facing oneself

I propose that the issues faced by Europe as an aspired-to community (towards the end of the paper I will argue that Europe is in fact not a community and that this is the main problem with its facing other identities) are identical, or at least analogous, to problems which individual persons face in encountering others, especially those who challenge their self-perceptions. Our unconscious self-perceptions shape our attitudes to others whose identities militate against these views of ourselves. Encounters with such others, although usually unpleasant, are invaluable as triggers of self-examination and enhancers of self-knowledge. They highlight our prejudices, implicit values-commitments and life narratives which live just underneath our conscious existence, hidden behind our deep fears and our deeply buried desires and secretly cherished dreams. Just as a person faced with a brutal or particularly straightforward individual whom one is convinced one generally 'dislikes' is forced to face one's own neurotic 'other', the primitive self which is kept under control by the civilized 'ego', Europe has been forced to face an immediacy of undeniable human suffering in a context which directly tested its humanity. The migration crisis faced Europe with the truth of its values and ideals as a democratic supranational society which takes it upon itself to preach values and human rights policies to the less fortunate parts of the world, in a way for which it was completely unprepared, and which, in a most indiscrete way, revealed all of its own issues with its own values. It proved that Europe was neither a society (for the various countries showed such disparate values that no 'social' response to the migration crisis was possible across the board of European politics). Symbolically, the migration crisis faced Europe with its deepest frustrations from the fairly recent past: it saw the erection of barbed wire to contain human beings, once again after World War 2. Likewise, Europe saw the recruitment of 'civil militias' to 'hunt migrants', where the obvious shape of a migrant to be hunted was not one's legal status, but one's appearance. Once again, Europe saw its own nightmare about itself: trains guarded by uniformed personnel and escorted to special 'camps' or 'alternative stations' where 'care' could be offered to the passengers who were on those planes contrary to their own will and could not freely leave. The refugee crisis

triggered the built-in neurosis of the European identity in a way for which nobody was prepared, and shook the foundations of a sense of community to which European policies appealed as their value-ground for decades.

In Britain, the challenge to neurotic identity was different, and again reminiscent of the not-so-distant past. Leaving 'the mess of Europe' across the English channel proved to be the top priority: the refugee camps on the French coast with migrants desperately trying to get to the UK through the tunnel hidden in trucks and repeatedly pushed back by the British border guards was a graphic illustration of how Britain saw itself, again, in relation to continental Europe. Eventually the refugee camps were demolished and migrants resettled, thus signaling the abandonment of a hope, both on the part of the migrants and on the part of the French authorities, that a significant number of them might eventually seek in finding refuge in the UK.

Leaving the EU by London was a natural consequence. It was a deeply rooted process, and the political commentary which portrayed the British referendum as a 'change victory by a small margin' of those who are less well educated, less visionary and intellectually inferior to the 'remainers' is nothing but a naive symptom of denial. However small the actual statistical minority which swayed the referendum vote might have been, it was still a massive proportion of the British population and, more importantly, it consisted mostly of those who most spontaneously share a sense of common identity, namely the working class.

The reaction to Brexit by Brussels has been even more neurotic: it was to make it as difficult as possible to negotiate an exit agreement, using Ireland as a chip in the game, and to humiliate the Brexitiers as much as possible on the domestic political front. It appeared as though, on the one hand, Britain wanted to leave Europe, but struggled to affirm its identity as even more authentically European than that of the other European countries: statements to this effect abound by most members of the camp of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

On the other hand, the language game of Europe was equally divided: while it exclaimed that Britain 'needed to say clearly what it wanted' in terms of when and how it wants to exit, simultaneously it involved an institutional play seeking to delay the exit, impose conditions which challenged Britain's sense of sovereignty, and flouting prohibitive financial obligations by the UK as a 'price' of departure from the Union. All of this has led to a weakening of the democratic and social credentials both of the UK government, which has been unable to deliver on its promise of leaving the EU by 31 October 2019, and of Brussels, which has portrayed itself as a supra-national structure with largely intransparent corporate interests and agendas not immediately answerable and controllable by the member countries. Only when British Prime Minister, through his mouthpieces in Downing Street, threatened to obstruct the new European budget

was a deal quickly agreed and signed, however too late to address the cleavages which have meanwhile arisen in the British domestic politics.

This type of contradictory attitude characterizes what Freud called 'the divided neurotic subject', namely a subject which, at the same time, desires and disavows the same thing. On the one hand, 'our' Europe, 'we' like our tolerance, inclusiveness and respect of sovereign rights of the constituent nations to either voluntarily belong to our club, or to voluntarily leave it, but on the other hand we disavow such an unpredictable situation, disdain those who actually wish to exercise the right to leave (the Brexiteers are variously characterized as 'poorly educated', 'deprived of vision', 'working class', 'misinformed', etc.). It is one thing to formally possess a right, and it is quite another to actually wish to exercise that right. The neurotic European identity not only tolerates, but has what Lacan called 'joissance' in the former; however, on the other hand, it disavows the latter.

The same structural situation of a divided subject applies to the refugees. On the one hand, they are considered to embody rights and claims to human rights entitlements that everybody should have by European standards; on the other, they are unwelcome within Europe: the idea of entitlements and rights is in fact a colonizing idea; other countries should institute 'our' standards because we know them to be exemplary, however individual people, who are the primary bearers of the stated rights and entitlements, are no longer entitled to those claims once they show up at our doorstep. The divided subject likes to preach, but it dislikes to bear the brunt of the sermon. It likes to present itself to others as a desirable object, but it dislikes the troubling in-depth encounter with the other. This is almost precisely the description of Freud's understanding of neurosis.

Language as a simplifying concept

There are numerous ways in which to explain identity, ranging from values, social practices, rituals of membership in a community, special actions which affirm the mission and nature of a particular community, etc. However I would argue that language includes all of those: the play of language in the broad sense, and especially what Lacan called the spilling of the unconscious in the language. To consider the evolution of the European identity in language games, as Wittgenstein called the play of language, it is useful to consider the successive structural progression of the language games of European unity.

The first language game of identity was very specific: it was about preventing a future war between Germany and France and Germany (the European Coal and Steel Community). It was hoped that, by placing the production of coal and steel as key strategic assets under joint control the potential for a new Franco-German war would be lowered.

The second game was that of a single market: the facilitation of a free movement of goods, people and capital (the Maastricht Treaty).

Both language games were easily testable because they were simple in structure and verifiable in practice; both were successful in the long term and generated benefits for the European citizens.

However, the situation with the third stage in the evolution of the language game of European identity has proven both less successful than the previous two and highly critical in terms of the very survival of the EU. It has been the game of creation of a common society, with shared key values.

This third language game has proven far more complex to run, far less testable for success, and, in everyday experience, highly perilous for the EU as a whole. It has faced Europe with its internal divisions in cultural and social terms, with its inner conflicts with regard to proclaimed European values, and with its ultimate lack of capacity to implement those values in reality.

One of the reasons Europe has been unable to live its values with regard to the challenges it has faced with the refugee crisis and Brexit, namely the values of tolerance, respect for the liberty and sovereignty of member countries and their citizens, and the proclaimed culture of inclusiveness, has been the divided subjecthood of Europe, resulting in a dichotomous, neurotic identity: desiring one type of values and at the same time detesting the actual presence of those values and their consequences in the Europeans everyday lives. This neurotic, divided identity has led to contradictory policies and, as a result, contradictory identity profiles of various European countries vis-a-vis the same, key challenges to European identity. Such challenges are psychological in nature, because they test the limits of understanding Europe and the ability to accept messages received from the environment.

The language game of Europe is disturbed by tests such as Brexit or the refugee influx from Syria because the rules of the game are strained. The questions that constitute the strain are of the sort: Does Europe function on the level of values only if it is wealthy? If it has high employment? If it is tidy and clean? If it is not marred by thousands of desolate Syrians camping in its streets, "taking jobs from its citizens"? Does it function on the level of values only if it is complete and fully operational, with no countries exercising their right to depart from the Union, like Britain did? If Europe's values are useful only in optimal conditions, then such values have a low resilience and are unlikely to withstand the future situational tests, including political, security, migration, ecological, economic and other crises. A low level of value integrity makes Europe highly susceptible to internal political shifts and, ultimately, to political disintegration which was started by Brexit.

Is European identity a neurotic identity?

Freud considered neurosis to be based on two simultaneous yet opposed attitudes towards the same subject: desire, and disavowal. The desired subject is at the same time the detested and feared subject: this is the root of a deep seated ambivalence which, when understood properly, can lead to insights about the nature of our identity and to developing tools to address identity and value deficiencies.

While Freud believed that neurosis, grounded as it is in a divided subject, can be cured by bringing up to the conscious realm the repressed content from the unconscious, or subconscious, Lacan radicalized the idea of a divided subject, arguing that all subjects are divided, neurotic subjects, and that the fundamental ambivalence, or division, can in no therapeutic way be addressed successfully. We are all divided, and in and of ourselves we cannot overcome this division. However, there is reason to believe that one way to practically heal the divided subject is by immersing it in a strongly interconnected, organic community. An independent, relatively solitary, individualistic subject is unavoidably divided and neurotic; however a well-integrated, insufficient by itself, but assisted by others subject, who belongs to an integrative, inclusive community with strong mutual bonds, is able to overcome one's neurosis, at least most of the time in one's life. This idea is strongly supported by observational evidence and statistics of longevity amongst people who change countries and cultures individually, and those who move together with their organic communities (Chopra, 1993: 53–55).

The overall implication of the social remedies to neurosis is that the nature of neurosis itself, as well as most identity-related issues on an experiential and psychological level, is social, rather than medical or physiological. If this is so, it has implications for collective and political identities as well: issues arising from divided group identities might be able to be addressed by increasing the cohesiveness of the group, on the one hand, and by immersing the group in a broader, inclusive and integrative group which will give it meaning and a sense of purpose and thus address its sense of incompleteness; this sense accompanies neurosis both in individuals and in collectives. Thus logical question to ask at this stage would be whether Europe has been able to trigger the social bonding and cross-identification which would have addressed the divisions in its subject hood, and if not, whether and in what way it could in the future.

My proposition as to why effective community creation has not yet been a success in Europe is the liberal ideology, which lies at the foundation of European democracies. Much has been written about the deficiencies of liberalism in generating common identities and a strong sense of community belonging, and this is not the place to repeat the same arguments (Fatic, 2016). What must be said as part of my argument here is that a change of both ideology and other

conceptualization of political leadership is necessary to save Europe both as a supra-national institutional entity, and as an attempted value community. I would propose that a thorough re-examination of the main concerns of the European citizens across the various countries, followed by public policy geared to address the grievances and dissatisfactions not by providing what people specifically desire or need, but by bringing them closer together in their needs, is called for. It is one thing to offer better working conditions to railway workers in Romania or to miners in France, and quite another to bring the overall concerns by those workers together with the views of railway workers in Germany or miners in Poland. Being able to express common concerns (all of which, most likely, cannot be fully addressed by any national government or by European authorities) and cross-identify between each other as members of the same value community would facilitate bonding and a strengthening of the sense of common identity, which would make workers, miners, and others more resilient to the particular hardships they face anywhere where they live. This is not a proletarian idea of the unification of the working class world-wide, but a communitarian idea of empathetic strengthening of mutual links and emotional, rather than political, bonding on a broader scale which would psychologically strengthen everyone. By achieving this psychological effect, the policies of community-creation would immediately increase the quality of life of everybody concerned. Quality of life is a strange concept: on the one hand it appears to lend itself easily to an economic interpretation: the better the standard of living, the better, in a sense at least, the quality of life. However, on the other hand, the existential experience of one's quality of life is not necessarily related to economics, or even to democracy: one can have a high or low quality of life both when living in a society with an exceptionally high standard of living and a flourishing democracy, and in an authoritarian and poor society, if one's emotional experiences generate a high level of satisfaction.

Very simply speaking, a person who is in love will have a high quality of life even in politically suboptimal conditions, while a person who is frightened, depressed or bored will have a low quality of life even in the wealthiest and most democratic society. These individual aspects of quality of life need to be taken into account more substantially. At the moment they are tentatively taken into account by various institutions who compose 'indices of happiness' by country, where they measure various aspects of individual satisfaction and attempt to statistically factor them in a more general estimate of 'happiness' (or high quality of life). The subjective aspects of quality of life always take precedence in one's life experience to objective aspects; in fact the objective aspects (living standard, benefits, free time, etc.) are only relevant insofar as they actually translate into the subjective aspects (the actual sense of satisfaction). Arguably the sense of satisfaction depends more on the fulfillment achieved through quality interpersonal

relationships than on external factors. Thus any community building must rely more on internal, subjective, than on external, objective factors, and must focus on principles developed in psychotherapy to increase the quality of life in the most direct and effective, rather than the indirect, meandering, institutional ways.

One inevitable way to do the above is to circumvent an exclusive focus on institutionally insofar as it obscures access to information about what really matters to individuals. To be sure, institutional efficiency does matter to most people, and getting the appropriate services and protecting one's rights and social and legal entitlements, through the institutions, undeniably contributes to heightening one's quality of life. However, on the other hand, in most cases an overwhelming focus on institutionally clouds the leaders' vision of the internal factors which make up the substance of a relatively high quality of life.

This particularly applies to procedurally as a part of institutionally. Procedural correctness is generally considered necessary for the correctness of the substantive outcomes of the respective procedures; however the costs of procedurally should not be underestimated. Procedurally often involves administrative evil, namely the focus of institutions on following the law and the rules of the games to the extent of actually trampling on the obvious concerns of the citizens the law and the rules were designed to address in the first place. Examples of this are legion, however perhaps the most obvious is bureaucracy. Instead of being taken as a conditional, sometimes necessary tool to provide services and sometimes not, bureaucratic procedures are standardized, with the end result that individual judgement is drastically circumscribed. Not every client of bureaucratic institutions is the same, and judgement is necessary in providing any kind of institutional service or performing any kind of social action. Individuals must be held accountable for their professional judgement, rather than simply assigned procedural standards which help them to avoid making a personal call whenever possible and thus also avoid facing any kind of accountability for judgement.

Bureaucracy is a well-known problem as a part of European institutionality both for individual citizens and for member countries. However bureaucracy in Europe plays the role of a symptom, which stabilizes a deeply set neurosis, which is connected to the lack of authority. A lacking authority figure destabilizes the person, just as a lack of the master subject destabilizes a political collective. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the best and most standard example of the lacking subject is the Oedipus complex: a child lacks an insight into one's needs and drives which appear as part of her sexuality and, to address that lack, she turns to the father (Master signifier S1) to provide the relevant direction (knowledge, S2) (Verhaeghe, 2008: 48).

The authority figure in neurosis

A key stabilizing factor in the formation of an identity, whether it is an individual or group identity, is the socializing influence which is typically exercised by an authority figure. Traditionally, in western societies this role has been played by the father in the family and by father-like figures in the corporate world and the world of institutional governance. Lacan thus calls the socializing function 'Name of the Father'. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the successful execution of the role of Name of the Father builds a person's resilience to psychosis and disorganization of identity under pressure. For him, socialization is a large part of the concept of 'normalization' or establishing normalcy, and any disturbance in the structure of socialization increases the risk of psychopathology later in life. Thus, if the function of Name of the Father is blocked, this may lead to neurosis. Such blockage happens when the legislator, the norm-giver and socializer, typically the father, does not perform his function effectively, e.g. because one is not sufficiently active, interested as a father, or one is inept at exercising the normative functions expected of a father. If, however, the function Name of the Father is absent, this predisposes a person for manifest psychosis later in life, if the life experience contains triggers which confront the person too closely with an unbearable 'Real'. The function Name of the Father is absent if the person who plays that function (again, typically, but not exclusively, the father) is physically inaccessible, because he has died, left the family, or is otherwise unavailable (ill, in prison, etc.). Such situations maximize the risk of psychosis because they deprive the child of key orientation influences which allow here to build sufficient and high quality responses to stressors later in life.

When this logic is translated onto the level of organizations, and further upwards, to the level of supranational institutions, such as the EU, it leads to the identification of factors of socialization which play the role of Name of the Father. In the case of the EU, this function is primarily played by the USA. This is visible from the constant reliance of the EU on USA-backed structures in key aspects of its common policies, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy. All EU member countries are members of NATO, which is fundamentally a USA-backed military block, and they rely for their collective security on military collaboration within NATO, which is not fundamentally a European, but a trans-Atlantic defense block. This is visible from several attempts at the EU level to found the EU's own 'Common Defense Identity', which would allow for military interventions in crisis situations without relying on the US. These attempts have failed largely because the EU countries do not have the military capacity to organize rapid intervention troops because of the lack of strategic transportation capacity (large transport aircraft to quickly move artillery pieces, heavy equipment and heavily equipped troops to far away theatres of engagement) (Fatic, 2000).

Europe's reliance on the US in the military and diplomatic area, especially during European crises, was clearly visible during the wars of the Yugoslav disintegration, where the various attempts by European envoys, including Lord Carrington and Lord Owen, have failed miserably, and have led to a worsening of humanitarian situations during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, until the US stepped in through NATO, established a presence in key parts of the former Yugoslavia, and bombed Serbian troops in order to stop their onslaught. After the mediation had been taken over by the American diplomat, Richard Holbrook, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in 1995, ending the war in Bosnia. There are various examples of Europe's inability to deal with its own crises, especially with difficult diplomatic negotiations which require the flexing of a military muscle, even when dealing with small, regional trouble-makers. In the psychological sense, the US has traditionally been the EU's 'Name of the Father' bearer, allowing the Union to flourish in civil, legal and economic fields, while providing an umbrella of nuclear and conventional defense, as well as diplomatic support and oversight.

The crisis of European relations with the US which has started with the vote in favor of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as the American President is silent, but nevertheless it is very real. It is partly triggered by the fact that the UK is the US's closest and most reliable military and diplomatic ally in Europe, and with the UK's departure many important links between the US and the EU will also be gone. Another part of the crisis is due to the US's dissatisfaction with the European handling of diplomatic negotiations such as those over the denuclearization of Iran and those over the Israel-Palestinian and Israel-Iranian relations, where Europe has attempted to pursue an agenda of its own, without at the same time being able to enforce its position militarily or willing to fund an equivalent military effort by the US. The silent crisis reached its open expression in Emanuel Macron's interview for *The Economics* mentioned at the beginning here: a critique of and gloomy predictions about Europe's future in the case that it continues to rely on NATO suggest another attempted 'break' with the US as a sponsor, and the call for a re-conceptualization of Europe as a 'superpower' clearly resonate with the same emotional and political content as Europe's previous attempts to break the bond with the father figure of the US in foreign and security policy.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, the crisis which has surrounded Brexit has exemplified the father-figure issues which Europe continues to face, and the subsequent global crisis with health policy, associated with the Corona virus pandemic of 2000 and 2001, the inability of Europe to establish a clear and sufficiently widespread vaccination program (as opposed to the UK; which has conducted a highly successful vaccination program), and its constant reliance on the US for fundamental issues, such as health policy in the face of the pandemic,

has merely replicated the lessons made obvious in the crisis over Brexit, namely the psychological issues with the European identity which open room for psychotherapeutic intervention. In other words, the current state of Europe requires the involvement of philosophers just as much, if not more, than it did in 4th century b.c, when philosophers were seen as the necessary advisors to ancient rulers and the then bearers of public authority.

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