



Volume 19, Number 3, 2021, ISSN: 1556-9195

# Psychotherapy and Politics International

**Special Issue: The 100th anniversary of Sigmund Freud's Group Psychology**  
**Editor: David Pavón-Cuéllar**

WILEY



# Another Freud for the left: Our group psychology and the analysis of ourselves

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## Abstract

Freudian social theory is criticised for misconceiving groups and crowds by psychologising, depoliticising, dehistoricising, familiarising, and naturalising them. Other authors are questioned about a misconception of the masses through their psychopathologisation in Mackay and Taine, their criminalisation in Sighele, and their infantilisation or primitivisation in Le Bon, Flores Magón, and Ortega y Gasset. These authors, and Freud himself, are rehabilitated by considering, with Reich, that their ideas are suitable for certain fascist and neo-fascist groups with authoritarian, patriarchal, familist, and anti-political tendencies. Such tendencies are contrasted with the distinctive ones of the leftist masses, which are reconstituted from what was taught by Hobbes and Spinoza, Marx and Engels, María Talavera, Federn, Canetti, and Freud himself. When ‘our’ socialist and communist masses resist their slide to the right, they appear intrinsically fraternal, horizontal or egalitarian, feminine and matriarchal, and centred on the ‘us’ and not on the ‘ego’.

## KEYWORDS

crowds, group psychology, groups, masses, psychoanalysis

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

There are deep affinities of Freud with the left, among them the rejection of prejudices and dogmas, the irreverent attitude towards ideals and moral values of the right, and the questioning of disciplinary norms, oppressive and repressive institutions, and, particularly, prohibitions regarding sexuality. These affinities and others explain in part why the Freudian left has its place in the history of psychoanalysis. They also provide clues as to why Freud’s books burned

together with Marx's in far-right fires (e.g., 1933 in Germany, 1976 in Argentina) and why psychoanalysis has been so important to the New left and to radical critiques of culture in the 20th century (see Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017).

The left has been a propitious terrain for the spread of psychoanalysis. In parallel, however, the Freudian heritage has been recovered by the right through its Nazification and Americanisation in the 1930s and 1940s, and since then through its psychiatrisation, psychologisation, commodification or lucrative liberal professionalisation (see Hager, 1997; Jacoby, 1983).

Despite its affinities with the left, psychoanalysis is not necessarily incompatible with the right (Zaretsky, 2015), at least with the right broadly understood as the option for inequality as opposed to an essentially egalitarian left (Bobbio, 2014). A rightist could even justify inequality with the support of the Freudian idea of the human being as a horde animal, split between an oppressive position as a father and a submissive position as a sexual object or as a son. This idea and others like it seem 'cut to size' for the right, which is why they have always posed a political problem for those of us who come to Freud from the left.

Will we so easily give up some of our convictions by being persuaded by Freud's lucidity? Would we prefer to reject him *en bloc*, renouncing his lucidity, because we are not willing to tolerate his political ambiguities? Is it valid to study his work selectively, accepting what confirms our convictions, but discarding what contradicts them? Is there a less arbitrary way to approach Freud?

This article tries to avoid arbitrariness by applying to the right, and only to the right, those Freudian ideas that seem best suited for the right. This is the case with many of the ideas that we find in the key work, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, published in 1921 – exactly a century ago. The ideas contained in this work allow us to understand groups of the right – especially the extreme right – as well as groups of the left that have turned or are turning to the right, thus betraying their commitment to equality by tolerating growing inequalities between the leaders and the bases, and between the intellectual bureaucrats and the manual workers.

Many right-wing groups, both in the right and in the spurious 'left' (i.e., in bureaucratic, totalitarian, despotic and repressive organisations or regimes), can be studied with Freud's social psychology. This psychology makes it possible to elucidate the authoritarian, patriarchal, familiarist and allegedly apolitical or anti-political tendencies of many right-wing and especially far-right groups. These same groups often have pathological, criminal, puerile, and primitive traits that have been elucidated by other classic crowd psychologies that will also be reviewed here (e.g. those of Charles Mackay, Hippolyte Taine, Scipio Sighele, Gustave Le Bon, Ricardo Flores Magón and José Ortega y Gasset).

Genuine left-wing masses require other psychosocial approaches that we can unravel with Freud himself, but only after travelling part of a long path from Reich to his psychoanalyst Paul Federn, passing through Elias Canetti, the Mexican socialist María Talavera, then Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, and finally Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. At each stage of the journey, we will find a different rethinking of the same distinction between two categories of masses that, today, we associate with the left and the right. This distinction makes it possible to delimit Freudian psychosocial theory after criticising its naturalisation, dehistoricisation and depoliticisation of groups.

## 2 | A LEFTIST READING OF FREUD

Freudian psychosocial theory can be puzzling and unpleasant for people with a left-wing political sensibility. If this sensitivity has been further cultivated by Marxist theory, one will have strong reasons to challenge almost every idea in texts wherein Freud addresses society and culture. One of the texts, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, presents several weak points that are open to question.

The first questionable premise that stands out in Freud's *Group Psychology* is perhaps also the most characteristic of the psychoanalytic approach. It is the apparent exaggeration of the weight of love and sex or 'libido' (Freud, 1998c). This exaggeration is also found in modern bourgeois literature. In many great European novels of the 19th and 20th centuries, as in Freud's works of the same period, sex and love are at the centre of everything, even social and political conflicts.

Freud's groups, like any bourgeois literary character of the time, are driven by their desire or loving passion; not so much by their interests, needs, or political programmes. The objective and rational aspects of social mobilisation take a back seat to the subjective irrationality of the 'sexual drives', 'loving force', 'love bonds' or 'sentimental ties' (Freud, 1998c).

Freud offers us an erotic–romantic vision of the masses. Is that not how social phenomena have always been viewed by the bourgeoisie, from romance novels to Hollywood movies? This is, in part, because of a privileged position typical of the ruling classes, which allows one to become obsessed with the 'psychological factor' at the expense of the 'economic factor' (Plekhanov, 1907/1974). In other words, having this privilege is to forget such prosaic and boring issues, such as misery, exploitation or economic interests, and to concentrate instead on more poetic and interesting matters that are sexual and sentimental.

Like other bourgeois of his time, Freud gives little importance to the stomach and the working arms, while he puts at the centre the heart and, especially, the genitals and other erogenous zones of the body. This bourgeois representation of the human being underlies even the Freudian representation of the masses as madly in love with their leader. We have, here, a good example of the psychologisation of the political (see De Vos, 2014).

Freudian psychologisation, like any other, implies a depoliticisation, trivialisation, and even invalidation of what is psychologised (i.e., the masses, their collective actions and social movements). By agreeing with Freud that groups and crowds act in a passionate and impulsive way, perhaps we should ignore their programmes, interests, justifications, and demands. We may even conclude that these are all mere pretexts and rationalisations for fundamentally irrational motives.

Freud's crowd psychology erases both the rational aspect of social protest and its properly social character. This occurs because the sphere of society, as conceived by Freud (1998c, 1998d), is a fundamentally familiar sphere, dominated by paternal figures and organised in an Oedipal configuration. On one hand, the family is in the prehistoric origin of society, in the primordial horde composed of an all-powerful father who monopolises all women, protects children, and expels young men who may be his rivals. On the other hand, the Oedipal triangle of the family underlies socialisation and internally determines any social phenomena.

Everything in society, including the masses, has a fundamentally familiar character for Freud. This Freudian *familiarism*, criticised by Deleuze and Guattari (1972), is also perfectly bourgeois, not only because the bourgeoisie is obsessed with the family and always puts it before society, but also because Freud has a bourgeois idea of the family. The Freudian family is a typical bourgeois one, a modern nuclear one, a patriarchal, heterosexual, monogamous family, with an all-powerful father, an objectified and desired mother, and a son dominated by typically bourgeois attitudes (e.g., possessiveness, aggressiveness and competitiveness). This family is the one that we find in the Oedipus Complex and in the primordial horde.

Freud projects into prehistory, into the primordial horde, the structure of the bourgeois family of his time. He then employs this extrapolated structure to explain the origin and internal form of society and of groups and crowds. Everything becomes bourgeois, history as well as prehistory, because the human being himself is universally conceived as a bourgeois, as what 'man in capitalism' is, as an 'isolated, asocial, insatiable, and competitive being', as Fromm (1955/2011, pp. 69–70) pointed out when criticising Freud.

Freud universalises a particular and historically determined human form. The bourgeois is, for Freud, the human being in general: a patriarchal, possessive, aggressive, and competitive individual. It is comical to find such a bourgeois acting as a primitive hominid in the Freudian representation of prehistory (Freud, 1998d). This representation is sometimes like those Hollywood movies in which we find typical Americans from the 1950s to 1970s, with their distinctive hairstyles, gestures, accents, and behaviours, playing 19th century pioneers, Roman emperors, gladiators, pharaohs or biblical characters.

The anachronisms of Freudian psychosocial theory reveal its dehistoricisation of the masses and other social phenomena. This dehistoricisation proceeds through generalisations, projections, and extrapolations that are inadmissible from a historical materialist perspective. A Marxist cannot admit Freud's propensity not to draw sufficient

distinctions not only between different historical, social and cultural contexts, but even between different phenomena in the same context.

The indistinction between the phenomena studied by Freud can be confirmed in his approach to the masses. They were first understood in the strict sense as a kind of multitude or crowd (Freud, 1998c), then as institutions, considered 'artificial masses', and, finally, as the most diverse social belongings of individuals, among them 'their race, their estate, their faith community, their state community, etc.' (Freud, 1998c, p. 122). Freud understands all social phenomena as mass phenomena. For him, the psychology of the masses is synonymous with social psychology, as if society were only a collection of masses.

The mass, as conceived by Freud, is an abstract and general category that can correspond to any concrete and specific social phenomenon. The category is only exemplified by two institutions – the Army and the Church – which have nothing to do with the masses in the strict sense. Why, then, does Freud turn to the Church and the Army as examples of masses? Perhaps because of their vertical appearance, which Freud attributes to any mass, internally moulded by the matrix of the primordial horde, with a 'leader', a hyper-strong individual – Christ in the Catholic Church, the General in the Army – who dominates others and 'loves them equally' (Freud, 1998c).

To verify that the masses are like hordes, Freud needed institutions similar to hordes, with powerful leaders, generals, gods, popes or bishops, all characterised by their marked paternal traits. These patriarchal institutions, which are so vertical, so hierarchical and authoritarian, were the ones that allowed Freud to verify his hypothesis of the constitutive verticality of the masses. The hypothesis could not be verified in a more extravagant way, with masses more different from what we usually understand by masses, but the biggest problem is not only the extravagant verification of the hypothesis. The biggest problem is the hypothesis itself, which naturalises verticality, authoritarianism, inequality, and the power associated with any leadership, while presenting horizontality and equality as only apparent, derived or forced (i.e. unnatural).

### 3 | MASS PSYCHOLOGIES AND THE DENIGRATION OF THEIR OBJECT

Perhaps we are entitled to assert that Freud's anti-egalitarian hypothesis is conservative and reactionary. What is certain is that he offers a rather negative image of the masses by attributing to them a lack of freedom, a dependent and subordinate character with respect to their leaders, after having admitted their primitiveness, impulsiveness and thoughtlessness. This denigration is not exclusive to Freud but can be seen between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries in other intellectuals who offer sketches of crowd psychologies.

Charles Mackay's (1841) famous book, entitled *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, describes how the crowds, understood in a broad sense as groups, 'fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit' (pp. 1–2). This is what has happened throughout history in alchemy, crusades, duels, economic bubbles, and many other irrational or nonsensical collective situations. Mackay's conviction is that men, in his own words, 'go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one' (p. 3). Mental health is the solitary individual state of each one, while madness is a multitudinous phenomenon. The mass is, thus, psychopathologised.

Mackay's view of opposition between the mass and the individual becomes, in Hippolyte Taine (1875/1986), an opposition between the crowd and the elite. According to what Taine tells us when referring to the times of the French Revolution, the elite of the aristocrats were 'cultivated, friendly', while the crowd of the people was 'brutal and savage' (p. 368). Taine depicted the popular insurrection as a 'movement of a brute animal exasperated by need and maddened by suspicion' (p. 333). The masses have 'raging brains' and 'murderous impulses' (p. 346) that occur, for example, when 'hatred rises from an empty stomach to a diseased brain' (p. 355). Pathologising the masses, as Mackay (1841) already did, Taine recounts a history of France in which the maddened revolutionary masses are described as fierce, bestial, cruel, ruthless, and criminal.

Crime becomes the main defining trait of the crowd as conceived by Sighele (1892). This Italian psychologist and criminologist wrote his book, *The Criminal Crowd*, to expose, on his own terms, 'the social danger of crimes committed

by the masses' (Sighele, 1892, p. 23). The premise is that 'the mass is more disposed to evil than good' (Sighele, 1892, p. 62), and the guiding idea is that 'the soul of the crowd causes the good to spoil, and the potentially wicked and the cruel to actually realise themselves' (Sighele, 1892, p. 125). This idea is illustrated with historical examples, some from Taine, in which we can verify the bad inclinations of the revolutionary masses with their 'bloodthirsty instinct', 'cruelty and lust', and even 'cannibalism as the last degree of abjection' (Sighele, 1892, pp. 107–108). For Sighele, criminality is more of the mass as a whole than of its members since the mass contains 'all the factors that cooperate in the production of the crimes committed by its members' (p. 127). Individuals may have criminal predispositions, but the mob creates the conditions for criminal acts to be carried out and even drives the individuals to carry them out.

The mass is criminalised in Sighele just as it was pathologised in Mackay and Taine. Then, in Gustave Le Bon (1895), the mass is *primitivised* (i.e., considered primitive) and, derivatively, infantilised and feminised, since Le Bon conceives children and women as primitive beings. Le Bon attributed to the masses the characteristic features of 'beings belonging to lower forms of evolution, such as the woman, the savage, and the child' with traits that include 'impulsiveness, irritability, inability to reason, the absence of judgment and critical spirit' (p. 24). Masses have 'the spontaneity, violence, ferocity and enthusiasm or heroism of primitive beings' and, like them, are led 'almost exclusively by the unconscious' and are 'impressed by images, by words to the point of acting against their own interests or customs' (Le Bon, 1895, p. 20). The primitivism of the masses is also evidenced in their 'sensitivity as extreme as ferocity' (Le Bon, 1895, p. 150) and in their resistance against 'reasoning'. Instead of conscious rationality, the unconscious and sensitivity dominate the masses.

The prevalence of sensitivity is also a characteristic feature of the masses described by Ricardo Flores Magón (1910). This Mexican anarchist conceives of the crowds as beings that 'obey the impulse produced by the influence that strong colours, flashes, and the brilliance of metals exert on simple souls' (para. 1). Hence, the crowds follow leaders who are brilliant only on the outside. These leaders do not lead the masses; rather, they are led by the masses and must reflect them, their simplicity and their 'vulgarity and mediocrity' (Flores Magón, 1910, para. 4). The masses are simple, vulgar, and mediocre; and, as in Le Bon, they are compared with children and primitive beings.

The primitivisation and infantilisation of the masses is continued by José Ortega y Gasset (1930/2019), who represents mass individuals as 'primitives in a civilized world' (p. 142) and compares them with 'spoiled children', ungrateful towards civilisation, who believe that 'everything is allowed and nothing is required of themselves' (p. 117). This ingratitude is manifested in the propensity of the masses towards 'direct action' in which the norms, reasons and other mediations and 'complications' of civilisation are disregarded. The masses have no interest in 'conforming to the truth' (Ortega y Gasset, 1930/2019, p. 132). Ortega y Gasset already conceives of what we currently call 'post-truth' and associates it specifically with the fascist masses.

Ortega y Gasset is as contemptuous of the masses as were Mackay, Taine, Sighele, Le Bon and Flores Magón before. All of them denigrate the masses, stigmatise and value them negatively. As we have seen, this denigration takes the form of a psychopathologisation in Mackay and Taine, a criminalisation in Sighele, and an infantilisation and primitivisation in Le Bon, Flores Magón and Ortega y Gasset.

The different forms of denigration of the masses can be critically interpreted as reactionary ideological operations of a bourgeois individualist society. These operations would be destined, on one hand, to promote individualism by awakening animosity towards the collective; on the other hand, the operations would aim to discredit the revolutionary masses (e.g. anarchists and communists) who upset Western societies in the 19th and 20th centuries (see Parker, 2007; Reicher, 1982, 1991). Although this critical interpretation is correct, we should not discard the aforementioned psychologies of the masses *en bloc* and thus lose their underlying truths.

## 4 | FAR-RIGHT MASS PSYCHOLOGY

Much of what is posited by mass psychologies seems insightful and even prescient when applied to the masses that are oriented towards the right of the political spectrum. These masses were still unknown by the authors mentioned, except Ortega y Gasset, who significantly directed his statements to fascism. Once we think of the masses who followed

Mussolini, Franco, and Hitler, or who today follow Trump, Bolsonaro and Orban, we suddenly discover a profound truth in the ideas we have reviewed.

Mackay's and Taine's theses on the madness of crowds can be verified through the far-right insanity that unfolds in delusions of racial, cultural or national grandeur, and through persecutory paranoid conspiracies presuming Islamist terrorist or Judeo-Masonic communist persecutors. The criminal violence of the Nazis realises the worst fears of Sighele. Le Bon offered a prophetic picture of the primitivism of the extreme right. The predominance of sensitivity in fascism, identified by Benjamin (1936/2013) in his reflections on the 'aestheticization of political life' (pp. 102), had already been sensed by Le Bon and especially by Flores Magón. Finally, Ortega y Gasset discovered the characteristic post-truth of the far right that denies the evolution of species, global warming and the Jewish Holocaust.

The far-right masses also confirm some key ideas of Freudian psychosocial theory. The erotic-sexual relationship of the masses with their leaders has been quite evident among the followers of Mussolini or Hitler in the past and Trump or Bolsonaro in the present. The far-right movements also tend to be characterised by the development of a paradoxical, apolitical, psychologised, personalised politics, centred on the leader's personal traits, which justifies a depoliticised psychological vision like Freud's.

Where Freudian social psychology corresponds more to rightist movements is in its conception of the groups structured vertically as hordes and unified by the father figures. This patriarchal familiarist orientation prevails not only in the right-wingers' ideals, but in their feelings – more paternal or filial than fraternal – and in their vertical forms of constitution and organisation of groups. In the fascist and neo-fascist masses, as in those conceived by Freud, the first and the most fundamental and true thing is verticality, authoritarianism, the power associated with strong leadership.

Freud exemplifies his group psychology precisely with vertical institutions like the Church and the Army. There are deep affinities between these institutions and the far-right masses, which are (not coincidentally) often associated with the Church or with religious groups and are sometimes organised into militias (e.g. Latin-American paramilitaries, Italian Black Shirts or German Brown Shirts). The strategy and rhetoric of far-right movements often present martial and ecclesial aspects that also confirm Freudian psychosocial theory.

Freud's *Group Psychology* is surprisingly accurate, penetrating, and enlightening when read as a psychological treatise on the masses of the extreme right or on religious and military or paramilitary groups. When applied to other collective entities, however, it can present serious limitations. All of this was well understood by Wilhelm Reich, as evidenced by his retrospective analysis of a revolt that was decisive in converting him to Marxism and Communism, a major riot that occurred in Vienna in July 1927, when a furious crowd of socialist workers rose up against the government, attacked and damaged a police station and a newspaper building, and set fire to the Vienna Courthouse.

Reich surely surprised many of his readers by applying the Freudian psychology of the masses not to the socialist workers revolted in 1927, but to those who fiercely repressed them and killed nearly 90 rebels. The mass, as Freud conceived it, was that of the murderers: policemen and members of the *Heimwehr*, a fascist paramilitary organisation equivalent to the German *Freikorps*. As Reich (1953/1976) explained in his own terms, the repressors acted according to the pattern of the 'primordial horde', maintained a 'servile identification' with their leader and evidenced a total subordination to the 'almighty father', thus confirming that 'Freud's claims were correct' (p. 28). Freudian social psychology could be applied to police-military or fascist-paramilitary groups, but it is not applicable to the masses of socialist workers who obeyed a different psychological structure.

Reich does not seem to have sufficiently precise ideas about the social psychology of the socialist workers who revolted. When approaching the psychological plane, he only observes 'a true mass emotion, a genuine search for justice' (Reich, 1953/1976, p. 32). It goes without saying that this very cursory observation is not even a sketch of theory.

When it comes to theorising about group psychology, Reich focuses on the far right. This is how he builds his masterful work, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, wherein we see clearly the Reichian Freud-Marxist theoretical device at work (Reich, 1933/1973). On the sociological level, described in Marxist terms, the Nazi and Fascist masses of the 1920s and 1930s obey the social promotion of the workers and their dual fear of communism and big capital. At the same time, on the psychological plane described in Freudian terms, the masses that follow Hitler and Mussolini are founded

on and originate in the authoritarian family, with its repression of sexuality, inhibition of independence and rebellion, oedipal structure, and familiarist and patriarchal ideology.

We see how Reich applies Freud's psychosocial theory to the fascist masses. We could complete his work with the teachings we receive from the other psychologies of the masses. These psychologies, as we have seen previously, identified traits that are characteristic of the extreme right-wing masses and that can be elucidated through the idea of their regression to the primordial horde.

The regressive constitution of the fascist and neo-fascist masses would provoke, in the first place, their primitivism and infantilism, to which Le Bon, Flores Magón, and Ortega y Gasset referred. The same regressive constitution would imply, secondly, a predominance of primary processes over secondary processes, which would in turn translate into the pathological and criminal aspects characteristic of the far right and originally identified by Mackay, Taine, and Sighele. Finally, the regressive constitution of the fascist and neo-fascist masses would entail a prevalence of the pleasure principle over the reality principle that would translate into contempt for the truth to which Ortega y Gasset referred.

The fascist and neo-fascist masses would appear as the object of the crowd psychologies discussed earlier. These social psychologies would have the same particular object, historically determined and glimpsed even before it manifested itself with total clarity. The consecutive psychological approaches to this object are not mutually exclusive and could well be integrated. As I have just shown, one possibility of integration is through Freudian psychosocial theory that Reich wisely applied exclusively to the fascist masses.

## 5 | CAN THERE BE A PSYCHOLOGY OF OUR MASSES AND AN ANALYSIS OF OURSELVES?

Reich applies Freud's psychosocial theory to the fascist groups, but not to those of the left, who appear to be devoid of a psychology of their own. What happens is that Reich (1933/1973) considers that we should not explain psychologically the behaviour of masses of the working class fighting exploitation, because their causes and motivations are fundamentally socioeconomic. The behaviour is, therefore, a matter of sociology and not of psychology.

For Reich, psychologically explaining the revolt of the exploited workers can only serve to overlook what they suffer. Exploitation is the real, objective cause of a rational revolt that must be explained at the level of sociology and economics. In this case, psychology is superfluous; it is only useful for the exploiters, who will use it to deny the rationality of the revolt that responds to a real objective cause.

Rather than simply acknowledging the exploitation against which exploited workers rise up, Taine, Sighele, and Le Bon prefer to see here the infantile, primitive, pathological, and criminal impulses that we now know are hallmarks of the right-wing masses. The strategy, described previously, is the denigration of social movements through their infantilisation, primitivisation, pathologisation and criminalisation. At the most fundamental level, Reich reveals that it is a psychologisation and psychopathologisation that seeks to disqualify perfectly rational acts of revolution based on objective socioeconomic factors. The purpose is for objectivity to disappear – for the socioeconomic to vanish behind the psychic and for the rational to be seen as irrational.

Although Reich's reasoning is quite convincing, one might ask why a psychosocial explanation of the left masses would have to represent rationality as irrationality and cloak socioeconomic objectivity behind psychic subjectivity. Is it not possible to psychosocially approach a revolt like the 1927 one in Vienna without psychologising or psychopathologising it, without considering it irrational, and without denigrating or disqualifying it? This is, at least in part, what Elias Canetti, who participated in that Viennese revolt of 1927, tried to do.

While Reich followed the rebels from afar, observed them and then helped to heal the wounded, Canetti (1980/2003) preferred to surrender to the mass and to merge with it, 'completely dissolving himself in it without offering the slightest resistance to whatever it undertook' (p. 638). This is how he experienced, first-hand, various features of what he himself would later call the 'open masses': spontaneity, freedom and equality, lack of leadership,



cohesion, and unitary feeling. With these features and others, the open masses of Canetti (1960/2009), which for him are the masses proper, have their own psychology that clearly differs from the psychology of the 'closed masses' – the distorted masses, the institutionalised ones, which are 'directed' and 'domesticated'.

The closed masses to which Canetti refers correspond to those theorised by Freud and later by Reich in their respective proposals of social psychology of 1921 and 1933. These are the Nazi and Fascist masses, which have the vertical structure of the primordial horde and can be exemplified with the Church and the Army. Yet, the open masses – the true masses for Canetti – are something different, something radically horizontal that makes us think of the left masses. They are something that deserves a psychosocial approach like the one carried out by Canetti himself between the 1920s and 1960s from the discomfort caused by his reading of Freud's *Group Psychology*.

Contrary to the masses of Freud, those of Canetti (1960/2009) are characterised primarily by their 'absolute and indisputable equality' that 'possesses such fundamental importance that the state of the masses could almost be defined as a state of absolute equality' (p. 88). This equality is immediately experienced by those who participate in a crowd. To be part of the crowd is to experience oneself as equal to the others. This experience, 'which everyone knows in his own way in the crowd', is for Canetti the source of 'all egalitarian theories' (Canetti, 1960/2009, p. 88). The defining egalitarianism of the left stems significantly from the constitutive equality of the masses.

Canetti's (1960/2009) mass psychology associates equality with unity and with certain freedom. On the one hand, the mass allows us to 'feel equal' because it frees us from the 'hierarchies' by which we are forced to be 'above' or 'below' others. On the other hand, by freeing ourselves from these hierarchies in the masses, we also free ourselves from the 'distances' that separate us, each one joining the others by 'feeling free' and by finally overcoming 'the distances that make us withdraw and enclose us into ourselves' (Canetti, 1960/2009, p. 76). This is how the masses help individuals to be free, to free themselves from their individual prisons, and to discover themselves to be united and equal to others.

As Canetti eloquently synthesised it, in the mass 'we are all equal', we feel others 'as we feel ourselves', and 'everything happens as inside a single body' (p. 70). The body of the mass is our body; it displays what we are, and for this reason, Canetti says, we feel others as we feel ourselves. The category of 'we' is fundamental here. We are the ones who form the mass. This mass is *our* mass in the most radical sense of the term. Let us say we *are* the mass instead of just being *in* it. This is why the analysis of the subject in the mass cannot be an analysis of the ego, as in Freud, but must be an analysis of ourselves.

Our 'we' is irreducible to the ego and its constitutive narcissism elucidated by Freud (1998a) and by Lacan (1955/2001). It is true that the narcissistic structure allows us to understand groups such as the ecclesial or martial, the fascist or neo-fascist. This kind of group can be understood, according to the famous Freudian definition, as a 'multitude of individuals' who 'have identified with each other in their ego' (Freud, 1998c, p. 110). As Canetti shows, however, there is another kind of mass in which 'we' are not only a multiplied self, but an indivisible unit that can only be designated by the pronoun 'we'. This unity cannot emanate or be inferred from the 'I'.

What is between me and us is contradiction and conflict. This was well understood by Canetti, thanks to what he, himself, described as an 'enlightenment' that occurred in Vienna in the winter of 1924–1925. At this time, shortly after reading Freud's *Group Psychology*, Canetti (1980/2003) suddenly understood that 'there was a mass instinct in permanent conflict with the individualistic instinct, and the struggle between the two made it possible to explain the course of human history' (p. 509). Instead of instincts, one could speak of impulses, drives, forces, orientations, perspectives or even conflicting beings. They are, in effect, beings, because as Canetti observed, the mass was not only around him, but 'inside him' (Canetti, 1980/2003, p. 536).

The 'we' constitutes the subject and is not only a sum of individuals. The ego cannot lead to the 'us' by multiplying. The difference between one and the other is not quantitative, but qualitative. As Canetti pointed out, the 'we' is even in contradiction and conflict with the ego. This is why it cannot proceed or derive from the ego.

## 6 | FROM NARCISSISM TO SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

There is no possible transition from my narcissism to our socialism or communism. The transition is a leap – a break with my own individuality – and it implies a fundamental contradiction, as I have tried to show elsewhere when analysing the love affair of the socialist María Talavera with the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón on the threshold of the Mexican Revolution (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2016). What we see here, around 1906, is the heart-breaking way in which a man is freed from himself by surrendering himself to a woman's 'we'.

It must be said that María Talavera presents herself as someone indiscernible from a community specified as popular. She merges with the people and, in some way, is the people for her and for her lover. For example, in the letters that she writes to Flores Magón while he is in prison, María Talavera tells him in a mysterious way that 'she has no faith except in the people', that 'she does not believe in anyone else', because no one 'can take care of her lover as she does' (quoted by Pavón-Cuéllar, 2016, p. 11). It is as if the people are personified in the woman who makes them mobilise in favour of her lover.

María Talavera also assumes the strength of the people that is transmitted to her as a socialist. Socialism, according to its own terms, is 'for wanting the good of all and to be strong', because 'we need to be strong to fight' (quoted by Pavón-Cuéllar, 2016, p. 12). The strength of the woman is the strength of the people, of the 'we' in which María Talavera dissolves when she leaves herself through socialism. She is neither more nor less than the mass of Canetti, the mass of the left, our mass that allows us to free ourselves from the prison of the ego to dissolve into the unity and radical equality of us.

Our popular and revolutionary mass embodied by María Talavera is the exact opposite of the other mass disqualified by Flores Magón, the conservative and reactionary mass, to which we referred earlier. The mass disqualified by Flores Magón is made up of puerile and impressionable beings who remain subject to brilliant leaders like the dictator, Porfirio Díaz. On the contrary, the mass of María Talavera is a force that does not allow itself to be subdued, manipulated, or impressed; and it is not composed of anything but itself since it does not decompose into its members. That is why María Talavera embodies it. To be understood in the strict sense: María Talavera is not only *part of* our popular and revolutionary mass, but she is our mass, our entire mass, embodied by a humble and rebellious woman who represents the people and the revolution for her beloved.

In a letter from prison, Flores Magón writes to María Talavera that he 'thinks of her', that 'he thinks of the revolution', and 'thinking that she loves him, he is happy' (quoted by Pavón-Cuéllar, 2016, p. 9). María Talavera is confused with the impending revolution, just as she is confused with the people. It is as if the popular and the revolutionary were condensed into the beloved woman.

It is no coincidence that María Talavera is a woman. There is an inextricable cultural and historical link between femininity and that which is at stake in the *us* that is irreducible to the ego, just as there is also an analogous link between masculinity and the ego constituted by narcissism. Although the links are not essential, or much less natural, they are operating there at all times and allow us to affirm that there is something feminine in our left masses, in the communist and socialist masses, just as there is something masculine in the fascist and neo-fascist crowds with their patriarchal structure of the primordial horde. It is also for this reason that the left turns right when it becomes masculinised, when it becomes more markedly virile and patriarchal. On the contrary, the left becomes more consistent when feminising and adopting anti-patriarchal positions and practices.

The sex of the masses was already foreseen by Hobbes (1652/1983), almost four centuries ago, when he vindicated the masculinised 'people', a stronghold of the monarchy, property, and inequality, against the communist and egalitarian 'multitude', situated in a 'state of nature in which all things belong to everyone, and there is no place for mine and yours, for dominion and property' (VI, p. 91). In this natural sphere of the multitude, there is certainly 'equality' between human beings, even between men and women, but femininity prevails because of its 'original dominion over children' (IX, pp. 122–123). In Hobbes, the communal and egalitarian multitude, which prefigures the future political left, is in effect predominantly matriarchal and feminine, while the king – as an option for verticality, a personification

of the people and an anticipation of the future right – appears as a man and even makes us think of the primitive father of the primordial horde who retains as privileges the rights of which he deprives others.

In reality, contrary to Hobbes's suggestion, monarchy not only opposes the multitude, but is founded on it and must count on it. This was emphasised by Spinoza, who insisted, with good reason, that the power of the state comes from the multitude, but that the multitude retains all its 'force', a force made of human 'affections' (Spinoza, 1675/1966), of the 'internal action of the soul' and particularly the 'empire of love' (Spinoza, 1670/1965, XVII, pp. 278–279). The loving feeling of the multitude towards the state is the strongest and surest foundation of state power.

Spinoza not only anticipated Freud in recognising the fundamental role of love in the crowd and in the relationship with its leader, but continued the Hobbesian psychosocial approach to that multitude that we associate with our current left-wing masses. Both Hobbes and Spinoza, anticipating reflections like ours, or those of Talavera and Canetti, offer us sketches of the social psychologies of our masses. Hobbes teaches us its communist, egalitarian and feminine aspects; while Spinoza instructs us about its affective and loving power.

Another lesson from Spinoza is that, despite what Reich thought, there can be a psychosocial approach to our masses that does not see them as irrational, psychopathologise, or denigrate or disqualify them. It is true that we do find this denigration and disqualification in the Hobbesian conception of the crowd; however, what is degrading and disqualifying for Hobbes is not for us. On the contrary, our feeling is one of relief, satisfaction and pride in knowing that our masses have matriarchal, egalitarian and communist tendencies.

Two hundred years after Hobbes, in Marx's (1882/1988) *Ethnological Notes* and in Engels' (1884/2011) *The Origin of the Family*, we find supplemental elements that allow us to understand the essential link of our masses with matriarchy, with equality and communism. The primitive, matriarchal, and radically egalitarian community appears to us as the mythical origin of our masses. This origin, perhaps coming after the pre-human primordial horde, undoubtedly precedes the patriarchal class society that perpetuates the horde and is the mythical origin of the other masses (i.e., those theorised by Freud, those of the right, the fascists and neo-fascists).

In *Totem and Taboo*, and then in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud recognised the three mythical moments of origin: first, the primordial pre-human horde with an all-powerful father who monopolises women and drives out his rivals; later, after the murder of the father, the matriarchal and fraternal community with egalitarian relations between the brothers and between them and the women; and, finally, as a return of the repressed, the reconstitution of the primordial horde in a patriarchy marked by inequality (Freud, 1998b, 1998d; see also Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021a, 2021b). While the first and third moments give rise to vertical masses (e.g., the martial and ecclesial theorised by Freud in 1921), the second matriarchal moment would be at the origin of our horizontal masses. The recognition of this second moment makes clear that there is another Freud for the left, one that does not exclude who we are, one that could have offered us a psychology of our masses and an analysis of ourselves.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

We must not contradict Freud in order to distinguish our masses from those that he theorises: the horizontal and the vertical, the fraternal–matriarchal, and the filial-patriarchal. In fact, the distinction between the two kinds of masses, each with its respective mythical origins, was drawn by psychoanalyst Paul Federn in his brilliant 1919 text, *Towards a Fatherless Society*. The great finding of Federn (1919/2000) was that there were communist masses, such as the Spartacists and the Councilists, who organised themselves in a radically egalitarian and fraternal way associated with matriarchy and not according to the patriarchal model of the Freudian horde that still prevails in the right and leftist authoritarianism. The distinction drawn by Federn is exactly the same as we find between the closed mass and the open mass of Canetti, or between the people and the multitude of Hobbes and Spinoza.

Like Spinoza, Federn also showed that there can be a psychosocial approach to our masses that does not see them as irrational, psychopathologise or denigrate them. It simply must be a different psychology from the one Freud

proposed in 1921. As I have tried to show elsewhere, however, the Freudian psychosocial theory of 1921 can be read *symptomally* in such a way that we can see in it the shadow of our masses (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021b).

In a *symptomal* reading of Freud's *Group Psychology*, our masses appear by being silenced, avoided, and surrounded. They also appear threatened by everything that we have criticised in Freud's text, such as familiarisation and the naturalisation of verticality. These ideological operations are only carried out when Freudian psychosocial theory is abusively directed at our masses, not when it serves exclusively for the knowledge of the other masses, the conservative and reactionary ones. In this case, there is no dehistoricisation, just as there is no familiarisation – only a confirmation of the historical bourgeois form of certain masses constituted by the vertical family structure of the mythical primordial horde.

It goes without saying that the horde constantly reappears in the contradictory form of vertical masses of the left. It is a phenomenon that we saw repeatedly in various communist parties and in the bureaucracies of real socialism. It is about a left that betrays itself and that makes us imagine that the human being is completely, always and everywhere, a horde animal. To imagine this is to forget that the human being is also what we are – something else, something human.

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**How to cite this article:** Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2021). Another Freud for the left: Our group psychology and the analysis of ourselves. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 19(3), e1598. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1598>