

# Introduction to the special issue: The 100th anniversary of Sigmund Freud's *Group Psychology*

## 1 | IMPORTANCE AND LEGACY OF MASSENPSYCHOLOGIE UND ICH-ANALYSE

One hundred years have passed since Sigmund Freud (1921/1955c) published *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (literally *Mass Psychology and Ego Analysis* but translated into English with the term 'group' instead of 'crowd'). This key work is one of the most important in Freudian social thought. It is halfway between the anthropological hypotheses of *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913/1955e) and Freud's mature works on society, namely, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927/1955a), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1955b), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939/1955d). On the one hand, Freud's *Group Psychology* develops and applies the *Totem and Taboo* hypotheses on the role of love, the father figure, idealisation, and identification in the origin of human society. On the other hand, Freud's (1921/1955c) text precedes his reflections from 1927 to 1939 on the cultural aspect of repression, renunciation of the satisfaction of drives, domination, discontent, and religious or political illusions.

Freud's *Group Psychology* contributions are crucial, even revolutionary. They include a conception of the human being as a horde animal – not a herd animal, an elucidation of the role of sexuality and power in groups, a valuable attempt to explain the hypnotic power of leaders, a hypothesis of constitutive group identifications of the individual, and the first formulation of the theory of narcissism of small differences to understand the hostility between close or similar groups or peoples. These contributions are part of the work with which Freud inaugurated a psychoanalytic tradition of social psychology that breaks the narrow limits of the psychological discipline that is still dominant in the professional and academic fields.

Freud's *Group Psychology* is at the origin and the foundation of very diverse psychoanalytic or Freudian-inspired approaches to groups, society, and politics in general; and to historical phenomena in particular, such as fascism, totalitarianism, and the mass society. Renowned authors who have been influenced by Freud's book include group psychoanalysts, such as Wilfred Bion, Didier Anzieu, René Kaës, and Enrique Pichon-Rivière; Freudo-Marxist Wilhelm Reich; philosopher Theodor W. Adorno; intellectual León Rozitchner; and political theorist Ernesto Laclau. Some great intellectual works of the 20th century, including *Crowds and Power* by Elias Canetti (1962) and *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1977), arose in part from a revolt against Freudian social psychology.

## 2 | A SPECIAL ISSUE COMMEMORATING 100 YEARS OF MASSENPSYCHOLOGIE UND ICH-ANALYSE

The continuing influence of Freud's *Group Psychology* in the 20th and 21st centuries has not been affected by the events that have occurred since the book's publication. Since 1921, we have seen the heyday and decline of the labour movement, the rise of fascisms and totalitarianisms in the world, the American mass society, the youth mobilisations of 1968, the emergence of new social movements (such as the pacifists and the ecologists), the proliferation of apolitical tribes in the postmodern period of the 1980s, the new polarisation of societies since the 1990s, the development of social networks and other forms of technologically mediated socialisation, collective actions (such as the *Occupy* and *Indignados* movements), the Arab Spring, the advance of neofascism, the return of populism and authoritarianism, the feminist wave, and the global protests against neoliberalism. Far from diminishing the validity of Freud, these events

seem to corroborate many of his ideas about groups and crowds, but also require a work of revision, reevaluation, and reinterpretation of these ideas – a work such as that pursued in this special issue.

Some of the authors in this special issue address social phenomena that occurred after 1921: García-García and Pavón-Cuéllar reassess fascism and Nazism, Pavón-Cuéllar explores communism and the labour movement, Olivier focuses on the wave of support for Trump in the United States, Barria-Asenjo and her colleagues explain the Chilean protests of 2019, and De Vos examines the new digital masses. These phenomena are analysed with Freud's theoretical categories from 1921, but these categories are also questioned or deepened in light of current phenomena.

The articles in this special issue do not avoid debate with Freud or, at least, the enrichment or free branching of his ideas. Even authors who show great fidelity to the Freudian legacy, such as Olivier, and Orozco and Soria, allow themselves to add nuances or argumentative links on the basis of other Freudian texts. This is the case with Orozco and Soria, who conducted a detailed analysis of the theoretical background of *Group Psychology* to conclude that the Freudian conception of the crowd needed to include imaginary aspects associated with the ego in narcissism.

Some articles distance themselves from certain positions of Freud in relation to groups. What we can describe as Freudian 'pessimism' is implicitly or explicitly rejected by Gallo and Castiblanco Cortés, Barria-Asenjo and her colleagues, and Pavón-Cuéllar, who somehow vindicate the group and defend it with some passion against its denigration by Freud. Gallo and Castiblanco Cortés are openly optimistic when they invoke love to defend a courageous approach to the other rather than preventive distancing. Barria-Asenjo and her colleagues use the 2019 Chilean protests as an example to show that a crowd can be egalitarian and free from leadership, having no other leader than an idea, an ideal, a signifier, such as dignity. In the same way, Pavón-Cuéllar refers to horizontal communist groups, which lack leadership and are irreducible to the Freudian representation of the group as a vertical horde – a representation that would only be applicable to groups such as militaries, fascists, and Stalinists.

The defence of the communist, egalitarian, and loving crowds reveals the political commitment of some of the authors who participated in this special issue. Such commitment can be seen in the ideas expressed by Olivier about Trump; by De Vos about current capitalism; by Orozco and Soria about leadership in general; and by García-García about the normalisation, stigmatisation, and psychiatrisation of certain groups. The common denominator of these articles is a critical position – sometimes clearly progressive and anti-conformist – that alternately questions psychology, dominant ideologies, capitalism, neoliberalism, conservatism, authoritarianism, fascism, the right and the far right.

The contributions to this special issue repoliticise Freud and thus reveal his radical critical potential; a potential reinforced by other renowned authors. The ideas of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan permeate all the articles except that of García-García. Some texts are marked by the works of the great names of the Lacanian left: Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou are important references for Gallo and Castiblanco Cortés, while Barria-Asenjo and her colleagues give a central place to Ernesto Laclau. Although also developing ideas related to the Lacanian left, Pavón-Cuéllar prefers to directly invoke Karl Marx and Marxist authors, as well as Baruch Spinoza, who is also studied by De Vos to understand the voluntary propensity of crowds towards servitude.

There are great theoretical and political affinities between the contributions to this special issue. This does not mean that they are repetitive, for they concentrate on different aspects of Freud's *Group Psychology*. The articles can even be considered complementary, like chapters of a unitary book. First, Orozco and Soria review the antecedents and conceptual and argumentative aspects of Freud's work. Second, García-García critically review the heritage of the Freudian conception of the crowd in the study of nationalism. Third, Pavón-Cuéllar shows at least two types of groups with their respective psychologies – both describable and explainable from the Freudian perspective. Fourth, Olivier, De Vos, and Barria-Asenjo and colleagues illustrate Freud's ideas in modern times. Finally, Gallo and Castiblanco Cortés consider a possible crossing of the psychology of the masses through the event of love.

These articles unravel a significant part of all that Freud's *Group Psychology* can mean and imply a century after it was published. As is often the case with classics, this book has not aged. Instead, it is transforming as it tells us everything it has to say about groups, the masses and society, power and politics, ideology, and culture. What Freud said in 1921 about these questions is only part of all that he has yet to say through his readers.

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