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# A neglected legacy: *Massenpsychologie und ich-analyse* in the era of nations and nationalism

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the influence of Sigmund Freud, in particular that of his book *Massenpsychologie und ich-analyse*, on the academic representation of nationalism. Written after World War I, just before the rise of the fascist regimes that would lead to World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, *Massenpsychologie* very quickly became a work of reference for understanding the politics of the “masses” and the “irrational” behaviour of the multitudes. Although Freud did not write the book with the express desire to analyse any particular contemporary political doctrine or ideology, his psychodynamic interpretation of collective conduct would, in the following decades, constitute the foundation for explaining and denouncing the behaviour of mass nationalism, both within academia and beyond.

## KEYWORDS

authoritarianism, masses, nationalism, prejudice, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Despite the sociological and constructionist turn in most academic literature, there still existed two grand visions or “social representations” of *nationalism* at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (García-García, 2013, 2015a; Moscovici, 1961/1979). One was based on *History*, on the epic of the Nation, on the saga of the past, on the collective story of the *Homeland*, on the narrative of an allegedly timeless *Us*; the second, much more tragic, dark and bleak, focused on the *psyche*, on the mind of the individual subject, on a dark story of unconfessable desires and repressions, on the traces of a tormented childhood. The former, of a historicist nature, had been formulated in the Western world

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throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by historians, philologists, poets, novelists, archaeologists, and psychologists of peoples, in what came to be called the “Century of History” (“a nation is a work of art and a work of time”, said the politician and writer Benjamín Disraeli, 1913, p. 343). The latter, of a psychological nature, arose from the ruins of the two World Wars, from the denouncement or moral condemnation of the fallacies, fictions, and prejudices, as well as from the contributions of the psychology of the masses and psychoanalysis. According to historian Elie Kedourie (1960/1933), “the politics [of the nationalist] is a passionate statement of the will, but in the heart of this passion lies an emptiness, and all its activity is solely the delirium of desperation; a search for the unreachable that, once attained, destroys and annihilates” (p. 83).

The two social representations of nationalism have their own academic and intellectual sources. The first, as is well known, owes much to the initial formulation of European Romanticism and German Idealism, to the publication and diffusion of key works as *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (Herder, 1791/1800), *Addresses to the German Nation* (Fichte, 1808/1977), *Le Peuple* (Michelet, 1846/1877), *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation* (Renan, 1882), and *Scènes et Doctrines du Nationalisme* (Barrès, 1902/1987). The second, much less frequently analysed to date, cannot be adequately told without mentioning the dissemination and popularisation of the ideas of *The Descent of Man* (Darwin, 1871), *The Crowd* (Le Bon, 1896/2001), *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (Trotter, 1915/1947), *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950), and *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport, 1954/1971). In this last section, neither can we forget an intermediate work, published at the end of the Great War, just before Benito Mussolini's March on Rome and Adolf Hitler's *Putsch* of Munich; a text that, while hardly speaking of nations or nationalism, will end up greatly influencing the social representation we still have today of nationalist ideology: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Freud, 1921/2010). In this paper, the original title in German has been maintained throughout the text as it shows, much better than the English translation, the connection of Freud's text with the end of century literature on the psychology of multitudes. (Quotes are from the translation to Spanish).

In this article, the aim is to examine more closely the way in which this second representation of nationalism came into being, taking advantage of the centenary of Sigmund Freud's classic book. In fact, it is very difficult to find a text that serves this aim better, as it is a key piece and a fundamental link in the chain between *the psychology of the masses or multitudes* (Le Bon, 1896/2001), which had attracted renewed interest at the end of World War I, and *the social psychology of prejudices* (Adorno et al., 1950), which reached its peak with the spread of anti-semitism during World War II. Neither Freud nor Le Bon wrote their classic texts on social and collective psychology with the express purpose of openly denouncing the mobilisation of the masses of nationalism. Even so, as we shall see, both books were to provide the explanatory framework and the basic rhetoric to articulate the denunciation of extreme nationalism following the Great War. In the first section, the fundamental ideas concerning the *psychology of the masses* of Le Bon and Freud are reviewed, stressing the similarities and differences between both authors. In the second section, the focus is on the specific impact that such ideas, especially those of Freud, would have on the criticism and denouncement of extreme nationalism from the 1930s onwards. In the third and fourth sections, I point out how the rise of National Socialism, the outbreak of World War II, and the memory of the Nazi Holocaust forged an ever more critical, moralising, and blame-placing discourse concerning the ideology, consolidating the psychopathological explanations of nationalism.

## 2 | PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MULTITUDES: FROM GUSTAVE LE BON TO SIGMUND FREUD

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the psychology of the multitudes (of Taine, Sighele, Tarde, and Le Bon) possessed a distinctly elitist and conservative stamp. As is well known, most crowd theorists were genuine conservatives who contemplated with fear the arrival of a new urban and democratic society, the emergence of the parties of the left and, in particular, the start of a cycle of social unrest and mobilizations (Borch, 2006; Giner, 1979; Ginneken, 1992; Nye, 1975). In fact, the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had seen, together with the access of the working class to

political life, an ever growing number of strikes, demonstrations on the streets and, from 1890, massive celebrations of May 1<sup>st</sup> in Europe's principal cities. In this context, and with a reactionary stance, the psychologists of the multitudes searched the terminology and concepts of the first dynamic psychiatry ("hypnosis", "suggestion"), epidemiology ("contagion"), and criminology ("reduced responsibility") for a scientific explanation of what, in their judgement, was the irrational behavior of the multitudes. When individuals become part of a crowd, said Gustave Le Bon, the inhibition of the superior mental functions and the stimulation of the lowest necessarily take place. The members of the crowd are guided by instincts and unconscious mechanisms, by suggestion and emotional contagion. The individuals who form part of it are not responsible for their acts:

We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will. Moreover, by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian - that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings (Le Bon, 1896/2001, p. 19)

Le Bon compared the behaviour of the masses to the irrational and unconscious behaviour of the sick or deranged; or, alternatively, to the erratic conduct of those who, in his judgement, belonged to a prior level of evolutionary development. Crowds are always immature, puerile, barbarous, feminine:

it will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several -such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and others besides- which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution -in women, children and savages, for instance. (Le Bon, 1896/2001, p. 20)

Le Bon uses apocalyptic language in various passages of the book to frighten the political and social elites of his day and to warn them of the terrible threat that the new urban multitudes would constitute for the social and moral order of civilization:

While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter will in truth be the Era of Crowds... Today the claims of the masses are becoming more and more sharply defined, and amount to nothing less than a determination to utterly destroy society as it now exists, with a view to making it hark back to that primitive communism which was the normal condition of all human groups before the dawn of civilization. (Le Bon, 1896/2001, pp. 8-9)

Shortly after signing the armistice that brought the Great War to an end, Sigmund Freud made his incursion into a subject that still intrigued many intellectuals of the time: the psychology of the multitudes. For the father of psychoanalysis, there was no doubt at all: individuals who form part of a mass become impulsive, thoughtless, passionate, voluble, irritable, uninhibited, credulous; their acts are guided by cruel, brutal, destructive instincts, a residue from previous eras. Initially, Freud (1921/2010) praised the description made by Gustave Le Bon a quarter of a century earlier—"the impressive picture of Le Bon" (p. 63)—although Freud also pointed out that his work was not entirely

original, being based on ideas previously expounded by other authors, such as Sighele. Like Le Bon, Freud compared the multitude's conduct to that of a child and of primitive man.

the decreased intellectual activity, the unbridled affection, the inability to show restraint and hold oneself back, the tendency to overstep all limits when showing affection and acting entirely on such emotions; all these characteristics and other analogous ones... represent, beyond any shadow of a doubt, a regression of mental activity to a previous phase in which we are not surprised to find the savage or the child. (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 63)

Nonetheless, the ultimate explanation for collective behaviour does not reside for Freud in hypnosis/suggestion, as Le Bon had asserted, but in the libido—"the characteristic of a crowd is to be found in the interrelated libidinous bonds" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 45). To be more precise, the behaviour of an individual in a crowd could be explained through two types of affective bonds—on the one hand, a primary identification with the leader (transformed into an ideal of the self); and on the other, a secondary identification with the followers (who share the same love for the leader) (Freud, 1921/2010). Thus, the individual from the mass abandons his distinctiveness, renounces his ideal of the self, "swapping him for the ideal of the crowd, embodied in the leader" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 77).

According to Freud, primary identification with the crowd's leader evokes the unconscious, undifferentiated, and impulsive state of mind of humankind's prehistory, when the population was subjected to the yoke of the primitive horde's tyrannical chieftain.

the disappearance of a conscious individual personality, the orientation of thoughts and feelings in one same direction, the predominance of affectivity and of unconscious psychic life, the tendency to immediately realize one's intentions... correspond to a state of regression to a primitive state of mind such as we would attribute to the prehistoric horde. (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 70)

But, identifying with the leader also resembles the primary identification with the father in a child's development process. Just as the child would wish to be like the progenitor, to conform his self with him, "replace him in everything" says Freud (1921/2010, p. 49), the members of the mass renounce their own self and regress to a state of childish dependency, identifying with the chief as if he were their father. A multitude or mass is, ultimately, "a coming together of individuals who have replaced their ideal self with the same object, consequently establishing among them a general and reciprocal identification of self" (Freud, 1921/2010, pp. 62–63).

The second part of the psychodynamic equation is almost inevitably born from the first: the collective conduct allowed aggressiveness towards an external enemy to be released. Following the establishment of affective or amorous bonds with the leader, which Freud assimilated to those of a prior phase of ontogenetic and phylogenetic development, the members of the crowd would abandon their own conscience for that of the authority. By childishly renouncing their conscience, by abandoning any accountability for their actions, individuals would give their instincts free rein: "...all cruel, brutal and destructive instincts that are residual from primitive epochs and are latent in the individual awaken and seek to be freely satisfied" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 19). To explain mass violence and aggressiveness, Freud resorted to another key concept in his psychoanalytical theory: ambivalence. In both an individual's psychological development and the evolution of civilization, Freud gave enormous importance to ambivalent feelings, love-hate bonds that are always present in the interaction of families: "almost all lasting, intimate, affective relationships between two people -marriage, friendship, parental and filial love-have an undercurrent of hostile feelings which need to undergo a process of repression to make them disappear" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 45). Equally, the loving bonds with the leader, the surrogate father for the members of the crowd, would leave traces of resentment and hate that needed to be suppressed for the good and security of the self; or, alternatively, redirected and vented on individuals who are alien to the collective. Thus, identifying with the leader and the rest of the members of the collectivity hid unconscious desires of aggression and death that would have to be channelled towards some external enemy.

### 3 | PSYCHOLOGY OF THE NATIONALIST MASSES

Neither Le Bon nor Freud wrote their classic texts on collective behaviour to expressly and openly denounce the mobilisation of the nationalist masses. Even so, both books were to provide the explicative framework and the basic rhetoric for articulating the denouncement of the nationalist ideology following the Great War. The inter-war intellectuals would take from Le Bon the setting, the protagonists, and the plot of an authoritarian, regressive, and violent storyline: the elite-masses dichotomy, civilization versus barbarity, the degenerationist nomenclature, the apocalyptic rhetoric and, above all, the vision of citizens converted into masses, incapable of thinking for themselves, irrational, unconscious, and impulsive, always subject to manipulation. From the book of Freud, they would first take the constant references to the universe of the family and the psychodynamics of childhood (there is nothing in the phenomenon of the masses that cannot be found “in more limited circles” warned Freud, 1921/2010, p. 11). Second, the affective bond with the leader: “the considerations of Le Bon concerning the directors of multitudes and the nature of prestige do not reach the same heights as his brilliant description of the collective soul” (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 22). Third, a renewed interest in the study of prejudice and collective violence: “every religion is a religion of love for the faithful... cruel and intolerant towards those who do not recognize it” (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 43). Let us now look at all this in greater detail.

The British economist, John A. Hobson, was surely the first to use the teachings of Le Bon's *The Crowd* in a different sense to that which its author intended. In fact, if Le Bon's main objective was to warn the conservative elites of the emergence of the large left-wing political parties and the mobilisation of the masses in Europe's principal capitals, the liberal elites and the Marxists were quick to use the best-seller of the French author in a different way: to denounce the jingoism that, from Hobson's point of view, had led his country to enter the Boer War. The principal argument of his book, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (Hobson, 1901), was based on the hypothesis of degenerationist psychiatry and the psychology of the masses. Hobson stated that whatever the interests of the politicians, bankers, and agitators really were in provoking the conflict, the popular enthusiasm could not have been provoked by any logical or rational process. By means of collective “contagion” and “suggestion” through the press, and through reiterative appeals to primitive hate and animal violence, the civilised British nation was transformed into an unconscious and warlike mob:

This is the very atmosphere of Jingoism. A coarse patriotism, fed by the wildest rumours and the most violent appeals to hate and the animal lust of blood, passes by quick contagion through the crowded life of cities... [Jingoism] is a collective or mob passion which, in as far as it prevails, makes the individual mind subject to a control that joins him irresistibly to his fellows... [The] possession by the passion of Jingoism of the mass-mind of a people intellectually disposed like that of Great Britain presents a subject of incomparable interest for psychological study. (Hobson, 1901, pp. 6–9, 12).

Two decades later, academics and intellectuals from the entire political spectrum (conservatives, liberals, socialists, pacifists) would once more use the explanatory model of the psychology of the masses to account for the origin and development of World War I (García-García, 2015b, 2016). Through the propaganda of a scheming, greedy, and unscrupulous elite, they said, by means of suggestion and emotional contagion in a particular direction, the nations involved in the fray suddenly suspended their superior capacities of moral responsibility and critical thought; the most civilized and well-educated peoples were turned overnight into irrational and barbaric mobs, into criminal crowds disposed to wage war. The citizens, normally peaceful and inoffensive, would be completely subject to the collective power of the multitude, abandoning their conscience and will, giving free rein to their instincts (Buell, 1925; Handman, 1921; Howerth, 1919; Madariaga, 1929; E. D. Martin, 1920; Starr, 1929). The same diagnosis that Le Bon had made at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to discredit the workers' movement and the class struggle now seemed to serve to explain and denounce nationalistic warmongering and the war of nations: irrationality, unconsciousness, emotional contagion, extreme suggestibility, impulsiveness, credulity, a return to barbarity. The critics of the nationalist ideology, the “internationalist” and “cosmopolitan” intellectuals, as William McDougall (1925) said, look upon the majority of the population with pity or contempt, as if they are a rabble, “a multitude dominated by prejudices and irrational

passions" (p. 46), subject to the whims of primitive instincts and hoodwinked by pipe-dreams. For these authors, the conflict of war had definitively confirmed the premises and hypotheses established by the psychology of the masses. In the words of the writer and social psychologist Everett Dean Martin (1920):

The classic example of the killing crowd is, of course, a nation at war... At such times not only the army but the whole nation becomes a homicidal crowd... The mental processes of an entire people are transformed. Every interest—profit-seeking excepted—is subordinated to the one passion to crush the enemy... a nation becomes warlike to precisely the extent that its people may be made to think and behave as a crowd. Once a crowd, it is always "in the right" however aggressive and ruthless its behaviour. (pp. 108–110)

Following the Great War, and until the end of World War II, many intellectuals would continue to consider the extreme nationalism and warmongering of the time as a kind of regression into barbarity, a return to the primitive horde, to the irrational and unconscious masses of Le Bon and Freud. Both books (*The Crowd* and *Massenpsychologie*) soon became reference texts to denounce nationalism's politics of the masses. Indeed, Le Bon's book has almost always been studied as a key element in the justification of the nationalism of the masses (c.f., Gentile, 1982; Mosse, 1973; Sternhell, 1999); however, Le Bon's book is also used by the critics of nationalism (Billig, 1978; García-García, 2015b, 2016). "The problem [of nationalism] is a problem for the social psychologist and for the philosopher interested in group behavior and the emotions of the masses, more than for the historian", stated the American historian Frederick Schuman (1931, p. 522) at the start of the 1930s. Even so, the rise of fascism and National Socialism gave *Massenpsychologie* a differential advantage over *The Crowd* in that Freud had explored the affective bond between the leader and the masses in greater detail: "the affective bonds linking individuals to the leader are seen to be more decisive, at least for them, than the bonds between individuals themselves" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 43). During the inter-war period, in particular following Adolf Hitler's ascent to power, many critics of nationalism once more focused on the paternal relationship between the leader of the masses and the followers, advancing an interpretation of nationalism in terms of the psychodynamics of the affects and defense mechanisms of the self. The hypothesis was already present in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, by the Austrian doctor and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, written the same year Hitler became Chancellor of Germany:

For the psychology of the masses, the nationalist leader (*Führer*) represents the incarnation of the nation... concentrating in his persona all the affective postures primitively adopted towards the father; severe, but also protective and representative... Much more essential, however, is the *identification* with the father of the individuals who form part of the multitude. This identification... is the psychological basis for the *national narcissism*, that is, to say, the love for oneself (*Selbstgefühl*) that he extracts from the *grandeur of the nation*... The wretchedness of his material and sexual situation is ...overshadowed by the exalting idea of belonging to a master race and having a brilliant *führer* (Reich, 1933/1972, pp. 86–87).

Thus, the behaviour of the nationalist is at one and the same time a regression to the barbarity of the masses and a return to the subject's childhood. "In the structure of the individual of masses, the national and family ties coincide" (Reich, 1933/1972, p. 86). The constant transposition and overlapping of *mass*, *nation*, and *family*, finally give the psychoanalyst the master key to understanding the origin and purpose of political mobilisation. Following the scheme set out by Freud in *Massenpsychologie*, the conduct of nationalist masses is now analysed as a means for substitutive identification and covert narcissism, behind which the *self* would hide his problems of insecurity and personal self-esteem. At the same time, it would also be used as a channel to release all the aggression accumulated from individual frustrations, aiming it towards a supposed external enemy. In his article, *The Psychology of Hitlerism*, originally published in 1933, American political scientist Harold Lasswell (1933/1977) followed the same explanatory scheme:

the German mentality has been ripening for an upsurge of the masses... Nationalism and anti-semitism were peculiarly fitted to the emotional necessities of the lower bourgeoisie. Rebuffed by a world which accorded them diminished deference, limited in the opportunities afforded by economic reality, the members of this class needed new objects of devotion and new targets of aggression. The rising cult of nationalism furnished a substitute for the fading appeal of institutionalized religion in a secularizing world. (pp. 294–296)

Quoting Freud (1921/2010) and the American historian Carlton Hayes (1926), Lasswell saw a new cult of the masses in the nationalism of his time, a modern religion in a secularised world that has to balance the same principles of psychological economy or impulsiveness; a religion of love towards the faithful, as Freud said, but cruel and intolerant towards the rest. "Nations, classes, tribes, and churches have been treated as collective symbols in the name of which the individual may indulge his elementary urges for supreme power, for omniscience, for amorality, for security" (Lasswell, 1935/1950, p. 33). Along similar lines, some years later, German psychoanalyst, Erich Fromm, explained the relation between Hitler and the masses of nationalism in terms of the "psychological principle of scarcity", that is, as a sado-masochistic, regressive bond that evoked the dynamics disentangled by Freud (1921/2010) in *Massenpsychologie*. In the words of Fromm (1941/1982):

The love for the powerful and hate for the weak, so typical of the sado-masochistic nature, explain a great deal of the political actions of Hitler and his supporters... There exists the desire to subject oneself to a power of daunting strength, to annihilate the self, in the same way as there is a desire to exercise power over those who do not possess the said power. This masochistic aspect of the Nazi ideology and practice becomes particularly clear with respect to the masses. (pp. 257–258)

In his essay *Anti-semitism and Mass Psychopathology*, German neurologist and psychoanalyst, Ernest Simmel (1946), used *The Crowd* and *Massenpsychologie* even more explicitly to explain the anti-semitic nationalism of his time. Simmel referred to modern times as an era of the masses, agitated, and turbulent ("in modern times the crowd man is on the March" p. 44); to nationalism as a psychopathological disorder of the masses produced by civilization ("a regression to the ontogenetic and phylogenetic stage of the development of the ego" p. 35); to the nationalistic leader as a regressive representation of the original father of the members of the crowd ("replacing their individual inner superego" p. 49); and, finally, to the resulting anti-semitism as a necessary offloading of accumulated aggressiveness:

The current wave of hyper-nationalism and hyper-racism is the last flare-up of an illusion which the crowd-man needs. He is panicky because he feels that with the increasing industrialization of our civilization his ego is doomed to perish. He needs a collective entity more powerful than his individual ego, through identification with which he can experience the rebirth of his ego, can once again become powerful and capable of discharging hatred by destroying weaker groups, weaker races or weaker nations. (Simmel, 1946, pp. 64–65)

#### 4 | DELIMITING NATIONALISM, LOSING THE MESSAGE: THE MASSES ARE THE OTHERS

The thesis on the extraordinary fragility of *civilisation*, the irrationality and unconsciousness of the masses, and the periodic return to the primitive, barbaric horde, was very present among European intellectuals at the end of World War I. In some way, as political scientist John McClelland stated, the pessimistic message that Le Bon had launched a quarter of a century before about the *Era of Crowds* could be taken much more seriously after the war. "European dreams of a fellowship in civilization were no longer dreamable, and were replaced by much grimmer intimations of

the future, based on a view of the present as the age of the masses" (McClelland, 1989, pp. 23–24). In that context, the books of Le Bon and Freud on collective conduct became necessary references both inside academia and beyond, validating a new representation of nationalism as the regressive, unconscious, primitive, childish, and violent conduct of the masses. Even so, with the rise of Adolph Hitler to power in Germany, the debate concerning nationalism in other European and western countries began to lose one of the most important messages that the book *Massenpsychologie* had left us: that the *mass* is inside our very selves (Glazier, 2021). The separation between self and the ideal self cannot be borne for very long either, as Freud said in the final pages of the book; there must, from time to time, be a regression. "Despite all the privations and restrictions imposed on the self, the periodic violation of the prohibitions constitutes the general rule" (Freud, 1921/2010, p. 79).

In fact, one of the most original and unconventional ideas of Freudian psychoanalysis was that of questioning all the analytical boundaries and categories that the normalising psychiatry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had established; that is, the limits between civilisation and barbarism; normality and abnormality; health and sickness; sanity and insanity; criminality, delinquency, and respect for the law (see Frosh, 2016; Pick, 1989, 2012; Pick & Ffytche, 2016). Not even the psychoanalyst himself was free from the regression towards barbarity. From Freud's perspective, the savage, irrational masses no longer lay in wait beyond the borders, or at the gates of the palace or the medieval castle; they silently waited in each individual's interior self. At this point, the contrast between the author of *The Crowd* and the author of *Massenpsychologie* should have been complete: as opposed to the authoritarian, elitist, and cavalier diagnosis of Le Bon, who tried to silence and repress the mobilisations of urban masses and multitudes that he compared and lowered to the category of barbarian, criminal, sick and crazy. Freud limited himself to searching for the repressed traces of the mass in *our own* collective past and in *our own* childhood, to which, one way or another, we would all be destined to return. As Pick and Ffytche (2016) stated the desire to possess or kill the other was no longer restricted to a different and eccentric category of individuals (psychopath, madman, criminal), but was necessarily alive within each one of us as individuals:

Murderous feelings, a narcissistic sense of entitlement, wishes to enslave the other or merge with the leader, or even a profound unconscious desire to break human links and bonds apart, might be seething beneath urbane social appearances. They might emerge in lacerating forms of guilt complex, or be projected onto neighbours who could then... be annihilated as the 'bad objects' in which all the violence or intolerable feelings had been relocated. (p. 9).

From the 1930s onwards, the terminology used by Freud in *Massenpsychologie* to explain all kinds of mass conduct (regression, identification, substitution, narcissism, projection, aggression) was made use of by many of his followers and disciples in such specific, urgent political agendas, as the fight against fascism, the war against the Axis powers, or the denouncement of anti-semitism and the Holocaust (Mandler, 2016; Pick, 2012). Immersed in an era of totalitarian regimes, radical fanaticism, and extreme nationalism; subjected to the impact of the expansionist, xenophobic, and anti-semitic policies of Adolph Hitler, that many would suffer directly, the Freudian practitioners finally echoed that binary, regulatory discourse which civilisation had come up against so many times before: reason and decency against barbarity and the madness and degeneration of the masses (Frosh, 2016; Pick, 2012). The tone of the old normalising psychiatry could be glimpsed in the first pages of *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, by Wilhelm Reich (1933/1972):

This has been written during the rise of the reactionary wave that has swept across Germany from 1930 to 1933... at first sight, at the crossroads between socialism and barbarity, history seems to have taken the road to barbarism. (pp. 10, 20)

The quest for an explanation of German nationalism was stitched together as a finger-pointing discourse on its authorship: who were the members of the crowd? Who were the subjects of nationalism? The critics of nationalism often limit the phenomenon by referring to a specific type or character, a distinctive psychology, an *authoritarian personality*.



On the one hand, certain left-wing analysts who sought to combine the insights of Freud and Marx emphasised the irrational and pathological bond with the nation of some social strata, Germany's petite bourgeoisie and working class. For instance, Wilhelm Reich, himself, located the source of working-class conservatism in its psychology—a rigid and authoritarian character formed during childhood in a patriarchal family that repressed the free and spontaneous expression of sexual instincts. According to his scheme, boys raised in lower-middle class homes developed a strong identification with a severe and repressive father; they grew up with anxiety, insecurity, and fear and were predisposed to identify later in life with a leader who concentrated in himself the emotional ties with the father (Reich, 1933/1972). This need for compensatory and regressive identification cast them into the arms of nationalism (Reich, 1933/1972). Although psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1941/1982) did not believe that the character structure was determined by the sexual urge but by the inability to develop individual autonomy, he also spoke of the authoritarian character structure of the German lower-middle class to explain the rise of extreme nationalism:

his love for the strong, hate for the weak, meanness, hostility, greed... his asceticism. His concept of life was narrow, full of suspicion of foreigners who he hated; full of curiosity about their friendships, he envied them and rationalized his feelings as moral indignation: his entire life was based upon the principle of scarcity, from both the economic and psychological points of view. (pp. 236–237)

This was not the only attempt to clinically explain and set limits to the subject of nationalism; neither was it, by any means, the most crude and reductionist. During World War II and the post-war years, some Anglo-American psychiatrists claimed that the irrational and *psychopathological* ties to nationalism did not depend on the “character” of the German lower-middle class, but on the “character” of the entire nation. The key concept for them was the old historicist term *national character*, revamped with contributions from psychoanalysis (clear proof that the language of historicism and of psychoanalysis could, in the 1940s, be adapted to a new discourse). The new Anglo-American probe into national character was different from the preceding one. First, the majority of researchers were no longer historians or men of letters, as they had been during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but anthropologists, psychiatrists, or psychoanalysts (Delanty & O'Mahony, 2002; Znaniecki, 1952). Second, the study did not revolve, as of old, around the character of the *Nation* itself, nor did it appeal to the regeneration of *the People*; psychiatrists and anthropologists were preferentially studying the character of *other* nations, the character of the enemy. In the words of Margaret Mead (1951), it was America's war demands, “waging a total war, including psychological warfare, against little-known and inaccessible enemies” (p. 70), that stimulated the study of the national character. Third, investigators into *national character* were now, paradoxically, known for their criticism of nationalism: they sought to prove why the *character* of certain peoples, the Germans or the Japanese, appeared to regularly condemn them to the “irrational” and “warmongering” conduct of nationalism (Dicks, 1950; Spitzer, 1947; Young, 1944/1969). In the words of Henry Dicks (1950):

the motivations for nationalism, militarism and an aggressive foreign policy have deep roots in the psychological compensations and reactions of Germans... Nazism especially exploited some of these tendencies and systematized into a political code of behaviour another germane complex which was never far below the surface of the German character... the tendency to psychological projection. Germans have great difficulty in accepting in themselves considerable charges of smouldering hatred against the paternal authority. Therefore... guilt tensions were relieved by being directed onto outside scapegoats... the Jews and the Bolsheviks. (p. 204)

With propagandistic intentions, these authors drew all kinds of similarities and parallels between the primary ties of the patriarchal-authoritarian family, the German *national character* and the nationalist attitudes of the German people. In fact, psychodynamic language itself, which Freud had used as an instrument of cultural criticism and to question the normative account of civilisation, now became a direct weapon to stigmatise or psychiatrise the enemy: an uncivilised, repressed, neurotic, self-conscious, and aggressive nation. Peter Mandler (2016) claimed that “psychoan-

alytic diagnoses of the Germans and the Japanese during the Second World War “illustrate vividly how well designed for propaganda purposes the Freudian language of pathology proved to be” (p. 102). The ultimate description of the German character resembles that of Reich and Fromm of the lower-middle classes, to which an authoritarian personality was also attributed. In the words of Dicks (1950), the typical German is docile and servile, rigid and disciplinarian, inhuman, and ruthless with those he can dominate:

His anxiety to know his place in the social hierarchy, his touchy insistence on paying and receiving due respect to title and rank, his love of uniformity and regimentation and his incapacity to cope with the unexpected... his martial swagger, his nationalist arrogance and self-adulation especially when in the mass, and his resentful jealous accusations of all his neighbours of evil designs against his innocent nation and incomparable Fatherland... The individual German has felt so small and helpless in his personal relations with his father that he has tended to project this situation into his national destiny. (pp. 199, 205)

## 5 | AFTER THE HOLOCAUST. THE MEASURE OF EXTREME PREJUDICE

One last attempt to diagnose and limit the nationalism of the masses dispensed with the *class* and *nationality* variables and focused on the psychodynamics of *prejudice*. This proposal gradually gained ground in North American post-war social psychology, resulting from research into the prejudices and scalar measurement of attitudes. People with extreme prejudices, said Gordon Allport (1954/1971) in *The Nature of Prejudice*, those for whom prejudice is embedded in the structure of their personality, are almost always “nationalist”, “superpatriots” (pp. 439, 549). The best-known contribution was that of the Berkeley group (Adorno et al., 1950) on the *authoritarian personality*. Despite Adorno's Marxist background, attention to economic conditions disappeared now in favour of family relations in childhood and its effects on personality (Samelson, 1986; Roiser & Willig, 1995). The authors swapped Freudian-Marxist interest in the study of modern ideology and society for research on individual prejudices and attitudes that barely made any reference to the socio-political context (Billig, 1982; Danziger, 1997; Samelson, 1986). In fact, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, *prejudice* was defined above all as a problem of a psychological nature, the expression of emotional processes that operated unconsciously and channelled the personality's internal frustrations (Ackerman & Jahoda, 1950; Adorno et al., 1950; Bettelheim & Janowitz, 1950).

The post World War II effort to investigate the psychodynamics of *prejudice* was understandably focused on the recent experience of Nazism and Holocaust (Frosh, 2016). According to Daniel Pick (2012), Adorno was preoccupied with “the kind of officialdom that operated the concentration-camp system and organized the genocide” (p. 225). In this work, a clinical and therapeutic gaze was turned upon America's own population. The starting point for the study had been the application of a scale to assess anti-semitic prejudice (*Anti-Semitic Scale*). But the *irrational* logic of anti-semitism could not be understood without explaining why the subject also hated the Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, and most foreign nations (*Ethnocentrism Scale*). Using psychoanalytic language, Adorno et al. (1950) set out the existence of underlying psychopathological factors that would explain the predisposition of certain subjects towards prejudice, ethnocentrism, pseudo-patriotism, and *authoritarianism* (*F-scale*). Put differently, pervasive prejudice was viewed as a kind of madness, the expression of a deficiency of character, a disturbance of personality that has its roots in the emotional problems of early infancy. To summarise their argument: the *authoritarian personality* will have learned during his first years of life, within a severe, intransigent, conventional and puritan family, to accept authority in a submissive and uncritical way, painfully suppress his own desires and passions, project outwardly any prohibited impulses and release his personal resentment and aggressiveness towards other individuals and collectives, the scapegoats.

The publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* stimulated the undertaking of numerous investigations that sought to confirm the positive correlation between nationalism (measured according to different scales: *Nationalism Scale*, *Ethnocentrism Scale*, *Cosmopolitanism Scale*, *Jingoism Scale*) and the *F-Scale* for authoritarianism (Bay, 1951; Bay

et al., 1950; Farris, 1960; Levinson, 1957; J. G. Martin & Westie, 1959; Smith & Rosen, 1958). All of them endorsed the hypothesis that extremely prejudicious individuals exhibited a certain character structure, rooted in their earliest years of life, which set them up for subsequent identification with nationalism. More than 20 investigations confirmed the correlation between extreme nationalist attitudes and the measure of the authoritarianism (Forbes, 1985). Even so, attention to extremes was also an ideological priority. The denunciation of the war and the Holocaust fed a certain Manichaeism on the psychological and moral constitution of individuals (Billig, 1978; Pick, 2012). After Hitler, researchers sought the psychological portrayal, the mental imprint of the nationalist with the same insistence that Lombroso had applied to examining the immutable atavistic traits and contours in the skull of the criminal Giuseppe Vilella (Lombroso, 1876). They were looking for extreme types on psychometric scales: on the one hand, fanatic, unbalanced, even psychotic nationalists; on the other hand, internationalist, balanced, reasonable citizenry. Perhaps, and only perhaps, North American scientists appeared to be caught in the same mechanisms of concealment and covert culpability that they attributed to prejudicious subjects, projecting their own intolerance on the authoritarian subject (Mock, 2019; Richards, 1997).

## 6 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

While Le Bon had incorporated the clinical concepts of the first dynamic psychiatry (*hypnosis, suggestion, imitation, contagion*) to the politics of the turn of the century and announced the historical protagonism of a new, diffuse, threatening, and polymorphous collectivity (the *mass*); the text of Freud fully incorporated the repertoire of psychoanalysis (*identification, narcissism, repression, substitution, projection, transference*) to the political debate of the inter-war years. With the rise to power of autocratic and totalitarian leaders, the enigmatic reality of the *mass* would overlap with the psychodynamics of the family to create a new portrait of the nationalist as a prejudiced, fanatical, and authoritarian personality. However, the mid-century critics will somehow forget one of the most important teachings that *Massenpsychologie* had left us: that *we are the masses*. In fact, the final representation of mass nationalism restricts the problem to eccentric individuals who have extreme prejudices; to pathologically insecure people, obsessed with feelings of insignificance, incapable of recognising their doubts, fears, and repressed instincts. Thus, upon the ruins of World War II and the ashes of the Nazi Holocaust, one of the most durable academic and social representations of nationalism would finally be constructed: the paradigm of madness, the view that connects the nationalist with anxiety or internal conflict, personal insecurity, mental and moral weakness, and psychopathology (Pick, 2012).

Although research into authoritarianism declined from the 1960s onwards, the psychodynamic vision of the nationalist as a weak and frustrated subject who flees from emotional problems to cause pain and death to millions of human beings would remain one of the most penetrating and enduring social representations of nationalist ideology. We encounter it again in publications by scientists, writers and polemicists to account for conflicts and wars closer to us, in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Azerbaijan; or to explain the behavior of such authoritarian, populist and xenophobic leaders as Marine Le Pen, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, or Donald Trump (Blank, 2003; Brown, 2000; Burston, 2017; Ignatieff, 1996, 1998; Kecmanovic, 1996; Kristeva, 1993; Prager, 1997; Searle-White, 2001). As with crowd psychology, psychoanalysis retains indisputable strength in the present as a “profane theory” of nationalism (García-García, 2013; Moscovici, 1961/1979). This is so despite the fact that academic research set out, in the last 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a different epistemological twist, beyond historicism and psychologism, towards a progressive sociologisation of its concepts and explanations.

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