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978-0-521-03249-0 - *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics 1871-1899*

Jaap van Ginneken

Frontmatter

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The significant role that crowds and mobs play in modern history has been recognized since the French Revolution, and the efforts to understand their origin and behavior constitute an important, if neglected, part of early psychology. In *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 1871–1899*, Jaap van Ginneken explores the fascinating relationship among crowd psychologists and the important events of their day.

Examining the work of five theorists in the late nineteenth century, Jaap van Ginneken traces the history of crowd psychology from its inception to the work of the French physician Le Bon – widely considered to be the founder of the field – just before the turn of the century. Although he was the most popular and influential of the crowd psychologists, Le Bon’s work was much influenced by his predecessors and by contemporaries in his field, a debt he never acknowledged. Jaap van Ginneken traces the descendants and heirs of Taine, Sighele, Fournial, Le Bon, and Tarde, using unpublished correspondences to shed new light on their mutual relations.

*Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 1871–1899* also brings together the important events of the nineteenth century and the work being done on crowd psychology, examining the effects that events, such as the Paris Commune revolt and the Dreyfus affair, had on the founders of crowd psychology. The approach of each theorist is placed in the context of the debates of the day, such as the “hypnosis” debate between Charcot and Bernheim in psychiatry and the “imitation” debate between Durkheim and Tarde in sociology. The inability of crowd psychology to establish itself as an academic discipline resulted from its multidisciplinary approach toward popular events, although the work of Le Bon remained influential with twentieth-century politicians ranging from Theodore Roosevelt to Adolf Hitler.

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*Cambridge Studies in the History of Psychology*

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# Crowds, psychology, and politics 1871–1899

Jaap van Ginneken

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## Contents

List of figures, maps, and tables	<i>page</i> vii
Preface	xi
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>1 The revolutionary mob: Taine, psychohistory, and regression</b>	20
Taine as a critic and psychologist	22
The Franco-Prussian War and the Commune revolt	26
French historiography in transition	33
The origins of contemporary France in the French Revolution	37
Boutmy and the origins of political psychology	45
Taine's influence on crowd psychology and related fields	47
<b>2 The criminal crowd: Sighele, criminology, and semiresponsibility</b>	52
The emergence of positivist criminology in Italy	56
The riots of the eighties, and the introduction of the semiresponsibility defense	67
Sighele and <i>La Folla Delinquente</i>	76
Rossi's crowd psychology and the crisis of 1898	84
Sighele and the Associazione Nazionale Italiana	90

<b>3 A missing link: Fournial, anthropology, and the priority debate</b>	100
Colonialism, race, and physical anthropology	102
Criminal anthropology in France	108
Fournial and his “Psychologie des Foules”	113
Sighele, Tarde, Le Bon, and the priority debate	119
The mysterious silence of Fournial	126
<b>4 The era of the crowd: Le Bon, psychopathology, and suggestion</b>	130
Le Bon as a medical popularizer and a colonial anthropologist	132
The Paris School of psychopathology and the Salpêtrière–Nancy debate	138
Boulangism, socialism, and antiparlamentarianism	149
Le Bon’s psychology of peoples, crowds, socialism, and education	171
Le Bon as a political psychologist	180
<b>5 The era of the public: Tarde, social psychology, and interaction</b>	188
Tarde as a provincial judge and criminologist	190
Sociologism, psychologism, and the Durkheim–Tarde debate	195
The Dreyfus affair and the emergence of modern public opinion	203
Tarde’s studies on crowds and publics, conversation and opinion	217
Tarde and the American connection	222
<b>Summary and conclusions</b>	230
<b>Bibliography</b>	239
<b>Index</b>	262

## Figures, maps, and tables

### Figures

Lecture at the École de Médecine	<i>page 23</i>
Battle between loyalist and rebellious guardsmen in front of the Paris Hôtel de Ville, January 22, 1871	27
Proclamation of the Commune in front of the Paris Hôtel de Ville, March 28, 1871	28
Radical guardsmen evacuating the Catholic Saint Sulpice Church, May 12, 1871	29
Execution of Communard prisoners	30
A phrenological chart	58
Portrait and skull of the bandit Gasparone (Fra Diavolo)	61
“The Torrent of the Oppressed,” drawing by Galantara	70
Part of a print commemorating founding of the Italian Socialist Workers party in 1892	74
Encounter between demonstrators and carabinieri, Milan, 1898	85
Zouave soldiers embarking for Tunisia, 1881	105
“The four races of man,” from a French textbook in Fournial’s day	106
Systematic measurement of the length and width of the body, head, hands, and feet	110
A French military infirmary	134



A comparison of the brain size of supposedly more- and less-developed primates	135
Heads of different kinds of primates	140
“The Hypnotist,” by Daumier	142
Collective hysteria at the sound of a gong	146
General Boulanger’s send-off at the Gare de Lyon	155
Police charging the first May Day demonstration, Paris, 1890	162
Cover and score of “L’Internationale”	166
Assassination of President Carnot by the Italian anarchist Caserio	170
Portrait and handwriting sample of Caserio	170
The crowd waiting for news outside the building of <i>La Cocarde</i>	205
Newsstand going up in flames during a demonstration, 1893. People reading the paper next to an overturned newsstand on the following day	207
Front page of <i>Le Petit Journal</i> , January 13, 1895, depicting the degradation of Alfred Dreyfus	211
The escalating press campaign: Drumont’s antisemitic daily <i>La Libre Parole</i> , September 10, 1896; Clémenceau’s radical daily <i>L’Aurore</i> , January 13, 1898	213
Cartoon by Caran d’Ache	216

### Maps

The unification of the Italian states 1847–1919	54
Strike propensity of agricultural workers, by Italian province, 1878–1903	68
European influence in Africa, 1891	103
Major European expeditions in Africa, 1827–1900	128

### Tables

1 Evolution of colonial possessions	104
2 Evolution of publications on hypnotism according to M. Dessoir	145

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Figures, maps, tables*

ix

3	Estimated number of participants in the Labor Day demonstrations of 1890 in France	163
4	Evolution of the parliamentary Left in France around the turn of the century	165
5	Clark's summary of Tarde's system	201
6	Evolution of newspaper circulation under the Third Republic in France	206
7	Foreign residents and naturalizations in France during the latter half of the nineteenth century	208

## Preface

This study evolved over a long period of time – too long, I admit. In a sense, it is even a belated product of the 1960s. As an activist and a journalist, I identified closely with the protest movements of those days. As a student and a junior lecturer in the academic field of “mass psychology,” however, I was simultaneously confronted with a long line of largely derogatory theories about such phenomena. Thus arose my interest in taking a closer look at them and in reviewing their historical backgrounds.

My prime source of inspiration for this whole enterprise was my teacher Marten Brouwer. I also received encouragement from Constance van der Maesen and my colleagues at the Baschwitz Institute of the University of Amsterdam, where I lectured intermittently during the seventies and eighties. A “positivist” psychologist by training, however, I was lacking in documentary skills, as the historian Ger Harmsen soon pointed out to me.

If these skills have improved since those early days, this is largely due to my successive colleague historians of psychology: first at the Theoretical Psychology Department of Leyden University (which, though called a department, had to make do without professorial guidance for most of its existence) and then at the Foundations of Psychology Department of the University of Groningen, where Pieter van Strien directs a rapidly growing body of major research projects in this field.

Furthermore, I received useful feedback at annual scientific meetings of relevant international societies. These included the regular history panels at the meetings of the International Society of Political

Psychology, with Bill Stone, Tom Bryder, and others as regular participants; as well as presentations of papers on related subjects at meetings of the American and European Cheiron Societies for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences. One group of foreign colleagues with which I had particularly fruitful exchanges, and which has greatly contributed to the historiography of social and crowd psychology itself, consisted of Erika Apfelbaum, Ian Lubek, and Gregory McGuire.

Another encouragement was the help of biographers and heirs of the various founding fathers I studied: Maria Garbari of Trento and Anna Maria Gadda Conti Castellini of Milan for Scipio Sighele; Charles Fournial in Draguignan for Henry Fournial; and in Paris Pierre Duvrger for Gustave Le Bon; Jean Milet, Guillaume de Tarde, and Mrs. Paul Bergeret de Tarde for Gabriel Tarde. Furthermore, I received kind assistance at universities in Rome, Turin, Lyons, Paris, and Brussels; at the national libraries in Rome, Florence, and Paris; and at the military hospital of Val de Grâce in Paris (for the Fournial files).

Special thanks go to my colleagues C. de Boer, A. den Boon, and R. Veneboer for technical assistance, to my mother Mrs. B. J. van Ginneken–van de Kastele and to Ms. A. Sundaram for helping edit the English text, to the historians A. Heering and O. Wedman for reading the manuscript and pointing out some errors. Mitchell Ash and William Woodward carefully reviewed the provisional text for weak points and inconsistencies. Needless to add, however, they cannot be blamed for possible remaining mistakes, which are solely my responsibility.

Last but not least, I have to ask forgiveness to the many friends, family members, and administrative staff at various departments, for having bothered them with an endless succession of drafts. Some told me my continuous postponements were a way of refusing to grow up. They were probably right.

Jaap van Ginneken