The politics of "gods" and arms

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"We live in very remarkable times. We find with astonishment that progress has concluded an alliance with barbarism" (Sigmund Freud, [1939/1975])

Abstract

Based on a document from the Nuremberg Court on the death of Rosa Graf, Sigmund Freud's sister, in a Nazi extermination camp, Treblinka, on the concepts of anxiety and helplessness (*Hilflogiskeit*), and on the notion of the longing for the father, the author defends the idea that "Group Psychology and the analysis of the ego" (Freud, 1921) is a premonitory text of the catastrophe that meant the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century.

Keywords: ANXIETY; HELPLESSNESS; LOGING FOR THE FATHER; POLITICS; TYRANNY.

A política das armas e dos deuses

Resumo

A partir de um documento do Tribunal de Nuremberg sobre a morte de Rosa Graf, irmã de Sigmund Freud, em um campo de extermínio nazista, Treblinka, a autora defende, em base aos conceitos de angústia e de desamparo (*Hilflogiskeit*) e da noção de nostalgia do Pai, a ideia de que "*Psicologia das massas, análise do eu*" (Freud, 1921) pode ser considerado um texto premonitório da catástrofe que significou a ascensão do totalitarismo no século XX.

Palavras-chave: ANGÚSTIA; DESAMPARO; NOSTALGIA DO PAI; POLÍTICA; TIRANIA.

La política de los "dioses" y las armas

Resumen

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Desde un documento de la Corte de Nuremberg sobre la muerte de Rosa Graf, hermana de Sigmund Freud, en un campo de exterminio nazi, Treblinka, la autora defiende, basándose en los conceptos de angustia y de desamparo (*Hilflogiskeit*) y la noción de

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nostalgia por el Padre, la idea de que "Psicología de masas, el análisis del yo" (Freud, 1921), puede considerarse un texto premonitorio de la catástrofe que significó el auge del totalitarismo en el siglo XX.

Palabras-clave: ANGUSTIA, DESAMPARO, NOSTALGIA DEL PADRE, POLÍTICA, TIRANÍA.

Nuremberg, 1946.

"Judge Smimor. – I ask you, Mr. Witness, to tell us how Franz Kurt killed the woman who introduced herself as Sigmund Freud's sister. Do you remember?

Rajman. - It was as it follows: The train arrived from Vienna. I was at the pier when people got out of the cars. A woman of a certain age approached Franz Kurt [commander of Treblinka], showed her *Ausweis*¹, claiming to be Sigmund Freud's sister. She asked if it was possible to get a job in an office. Franz carefully examined the *Ausweis* and said it should have been a mistake. He showed her the train schedule and said that a train would be coming from Vienna in two hours. She could leave all her valuable objects and documents there, take a shower, and after that, her documents and ticket to Vienna would be at her disposal. The woman entered the bathroom but never left it" (Leupold-Löwenthal, 1992, p. 406-407)

In these terms, we learn about the tragic and sad end of one of Freud's sisters, Rosa Graf through a draft of the case of the International Military Court against the main war criminals. Taken by perplexity and horror at first, we gradually realize that this old lady believed, above all, in the insignia presented to the commander of the concentration camp. She did not seem to doubt for a moment that the name of her brother, the one who had brought the discovery of the century to the world, would no longer positively influence the Nazi officer's decision. Faced with her simple request, an ordinary job that would be suited to her at her advanced age, we must admit that Rosa, apparently, could not imagine the implacable fate that man and his murderous fury had set aside for her. According to her family history, it was up to the sisters of the founder of psychoanalysis to watch over the future of Freud's career with serenity and unconditional acceptance. Anna, the eldest of the sisters, even interrupted her piano studies so that the prodigious little Sigmund could study in silence. It was only fair for Rosa to think of claiming a place of respect, in the name of psychoanalysis, during war.



Freud and family. Rosa Graf standing in the center.

But, as analysts, what is the effect of such a testimony on us? A testimony that tells us a fact no less perverse than many others, which occurred in the Hitlerian concentration camps and no more amoral than any inhumane episode of our perverse daily life. In fact, which analyst is not taken by anguish when, in a more directed reading he or she perceives, in this Nuremberg protocol, that in the clash between Nazi ideology, which was transformed into a kind of religion, and psychoanalysis, at that moment, the the former, took to the gas chamber Logos, the "god" of the latter?

First of all, it must be said that *Logos*, "the principle of order, mediator between the sensible and intelligible world" (Hollanda, 1992) does not mean just reason as we usually think. An instrument of public debate in ancient Greece, in its origins, it actually took on a double meaning: on the one hand, it came to mean reason, defining man as a rational being and, on the other hand, it came to represent the discursive speech of Greek speakers at the polis assembly, place of regulation of the country's social life (Vernant,1990,198). Once directed by a priest-king, Greece only succeeded in desecrating and rationalizing the social life of its people under the aegis of *Logos*, in its double aspect: reason and discursive word. However, it was in the speech that the Greeks marked the difference between the order of the human and the inhuman, called man "a living being that has Language". A definition that lost all its radicality with the Latin translation of "animal rationale" (Leão, 1992, p. 20).

When Freud named psychoanalysis in the cult of *Logos*, possibly his intention was to convert analysts, unrestrictedly, to the "*Logos-word*" aspect. After having wounded humanity narcissistically, moving from the sacred place that reason and conscience occupied until then, the inventor of psychoanalysis traces a precise path for those who wish to occupy the position of analyst: go against the unshakable certainties imposed by any reason. To reach a point of arrival, an ethical limit is required: to denounce this imposition of a univocal and totalizing truth, giving voice to words that produces multiple truths. Thus, we can state that, prior to Borges, in his cult of "*Logos*" Freud starts to revere only the secret dictionary of God: "*cabe sospechar que nõ hay universo em el sentido organico, unificador que tiene [la] ambiciosa palavra. Si lo hay, falta conjecturar su propósito, falta conjecturar las palavras, las definiciones, las etmologias... del dicinário secreto de Deus" (Borges, 1985, 706).*

The curious point is that, by choosing to elevate *Logos* to the category of a "god", to psychoanalysis, Freud tries to preserve it from the danger of becoming a religion. Indicating the function of unawareness of consciousness and the Ego, the Freudian discovery, under the protection of "*Logos-word*" breaks forever with any possibility of totalization of knowledge. With this choice, the master of Vienna could also outline his combat strategy: the reason that is constituted itself in a totalitarian way is equally illusory and religious. The Freudian project of attacking dogmas was constituted, in its radicality, in making unveiled, through speech, what the beliefs manipulated by the established Churches tried to hide.

"The Future of an Illusion" (FEUD, 1927), known as one of Freud's most optimistic writings, points to the inevitable decline of religion while asserting the future of psychoanalytic science. But it is worth remembering here that we know from correspondence with Pastor Pfister, with whom Freud maintained a friendly polemic about religion and psychoanalysis, that he intended, above all, to protect psychoanalysis against priests, which made him strive to precisely mark the text in question, the universe and the mode of psychoanalytic action. He vetoed the exercise of psychoanalysis to the religious, once, ideologically committed to religion, they would end up putting at risk the status and clinical radicality of psychoanalysis. Therefore, if religious would not be allowed to use the Freudian method to "save souls, as Pfister wanted, analysts were

recommended not to turn psychoanalytic knowledge into a dogma or even a belief, under penalty of turning it into a religious *Weltanschauung*. Freud was really hopeful while writing the text in question: he had invented the "talking cure" with the hysterics and thus the revealing effect of words discovered by the Greeks returned to the scene in modernity as a possibility of constituting a science: "No, our science is no illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere". (1927/1975, p. 133). With these last words, the author ends the essay, reaffirming the triumph of the verb over religion.

However, this well-known Freudian optimism was apparently not Freud's last word. As we know, he believed in the beauty of the transience of life and in the power of the word as a possibility of clarifying the obscure imposed by repression. In the same year he wrote the text formerly mentioned, he also sounded pessimistic about the possibility of a radical deconstruction of the religious illusion. Elizabeth Roudinesco (1989, 419) tells us that in a private conversation with Maria Bonaparte, Freud insisted on the inevitable and imminent return of the religious power established in the Middle Ages: the empire of divine reason. It was in the face of the princess's attempt to convince him that anti-Semitism was just an obscurantist evil of the Dark Ages, with no possibility of happening in modern times, that the wise old man replied implacably: "Wait! We will undoubtedly see a terrible offensive return [from religious obscurantism]". Marie, who believed in the Enlightenment as an unbeatable weapon capable of ensuring the dismantling of racial persecutions, growing in Europe, could not have imagined, on that occasion, that it would fall to her, within a few years, the responsibility of saving her interlocutor, and some of their relatives, from the clutches of the gestapo.

How can we not link Freud's words to the princess with the Nuremberg document, transcribed at the beginning of this text, where the thesis of the triumph of a totalitarian project, the Nazi illusion, over words is explicitly ratified? What would have led this 20th century "prophet" to formulate such a forceful prophecy, if he himself was also an ardent adherent of the Enlightenment thought?

Helplessness and longing for the father

A few years before the writing of "Totem and Taboo" (FREUD, 1913), a text in which he will work on the origin of religion (Totem) and morality (Tabu) as intrinsically linked to the birth of culture and the subject, Freud wrote to Jung: "It occurred to me that the ultimate basis of man's need for religion is childhood helplessness, so much more accentuated in man than in animals." (Freud/Jung, 1976, p. 337). Freud will return to this idea in "Civilization and its Discontents" (1930) to answer some questions that his friend, Romain Rollan, had posed him on the feeling of religiosity in man. The writer had confessed to Freud that he believed that the ultimate source of religiosity was a "sense of eternity", an oceanic feeling of limitlessness or barriers. For his part, the psychoanalyst is peremptory in his response to his friend: oceanic feeling is not a fundamental question of man's need for religion, it is just an attempt at the narcissistic restoration of the Ego. And, resuming his intuitions from the beginning of the century concerning religion, he affirms that the true origin of religious needs comes from childhood helplessness and longing for the father, always revived in the face of the omnipotence of destiny, a source of anxiety (Freud, 1930/1976,90).

Underlying all the symptoms to the anxiety Freud conferred, in the face of evidence taken from the clinic, the status of *Affekt*, a more real affect, is closer to the energetic discharge. Thus, even in "Manuscript E" (FREUD, 1894) he will define it as "the sensation of accumulation of another endogenous stimulus, the breathing stimulus, a

stimulus that cannot be psychically elaborated beyond the breathing itself" (Masson, 1986, 78). This impossibility of elaboration is the consequence of a traumatic experience, causing an overflow of the drive, which does not find psychic determinants, representations to be linked. The origin of anxiety as an effect of trauma, later called automatic anxiety by Freud, will permeate all of Freud's work, and when he introduces the notion of signal anxiety, linked to sexuality, he only indicates a way to avoid a situation of danger that can lead the subject to total psychic helplessness.

However, it was up to J. Lacan to resume the dimension of anxiety as an expression of the original helplessness in the light of the death drive, if we define this as that which overflows beyond the sexuality inscribed in the psyche and helplessness as a drive expression of the subject's always traumatic encounter with the Real (1962/2004,11-24). Thus, in Seminar XI he points out that: "What is awakened by trauma is the other reality hidden behind the lack of what takes place in the representation - it is the *Trieb*, Freud tells us" (Lacan, 1979, p. 61). Facing the subject with what should have remained hidden is an awakening, but once this has come to light, it causes a feeling of profound strangeness. Freud called *Umheimlich* ([1919]1975) this sort of experience, as it reveals the insistence of anxiety on the model triggered by birth: "the act of being born is the first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the feeling of anxiety" (Freud, ([1925-1926]1975, p. 118). In other words: the affekt will always arise in the face of the inexorable helplessness to which we are always exposed since our entry into the world, facing emotions what we cannot master. Once anxiety is a constant companion of the human condition, it reflects the unbearable noise of silence, the "response to the most original danger, from the unbearable *Hilflosigkeit*, to the absolute helplessness of entering the world" (Lacan, 2004, 153) when the proto subject was passively facing the Other's desire.

The period between the letter to Jung and the writing of "Civilization and its Discontents" (Idem), Freud publishes "Totem and Taboo" ([1912-1913]1975). By writing this essay, he elaborates a whole theory of religion, with the construction of his well-known myth of the "Father of the Horde" (*Urvarter*), realizing that the origin of man's desire is connected to the desires of the primitive which is connected to the one of a neurotic man. The hypothesis presented in "Totem and Taboo" is that "religion, morality, and a social sense - the chief elements in the higher side of man —were originally one and the same thing. (Freud, [1923/1925]1975, p. 19) The resort to myth was the Freudian attempt to establish, logically, from the clinical findings themselves, a metaphorical construction about the foundation moment of modern society and the origin of the subject. Origin marked by a mythical foundation, the original repression, responsible for the *Spaltung* between the conscious and the unconscious. Freud will think about religion like this *splitting*, extracting from its myth a consequence: ontogenesis repeats the phylogenesis starting from the paternal complex (*Vaterkomplex*).

The Faustian apothegm, "in the beginning was the act", sets the tone for the myth. Freud slowly and laboriously discovered what the poet spontaneously knew. The foundation of humanity is the effect of an act, the parricide, which, as a consequence, lead to the advent of language and the symbolic order, once the loss installed a primal lack. The paradox that the myth presents to us is that the murderous children ended up installing a culture of impediment of *jouissance* which the tyrannical Father lacked, thus preventing them from behaving like their father. Therefore, once dead, the Father of the horde won an indelible triumph, becoming more effective. Devastated by the guilt that sets in after their murderous act, the children moved on to a second scene: a totemic banquet where they reinforce the social bond established to kill the *Urvater*. The brothers begin to identify, not only with each other, but, above all, with the dead Father, the object of

supreme idealization. Identification and idealization, according to Freudian logic, are two axes of strength in the parental-paternal complex. Identification works antithetically, as an imperative and an interdict – "you ought to be like that (like your father)...you may not be like that (like your father) – that is, you may not do all that he does, some thinks are his prerogatives" (Freud, [1923/1925]1976, p. 34); whereas idealization is the investment that gives the religious coloring to the myth. Once hated, but now, after death, the Father is beloved and the children begin to magnify him, elevating him to the category of a nostalgic object. By the Law of the prohibition of *jouissance*, which established desire in man, the brothers begin to watch over the vacancy of the place left by the *Urvarter*. This was a condition of the social bond to perpetuate itself, under penalty of whoever dares to occupy this emptiness, structuring of the phratry, has death as a destination.

It means that the power, previously exercised only by the One who held the *jouissance* and kept the other under deprivation, must be, from its murder, re-distributed and shared among all, through the Father's present-absence: it is about the installation of an otherness space, Ideal Ego, instituting the human community.

However, the order of the Father's murder left deep marks, ineradicable traces in the history of humanity (Freud, ([1912/1913]1975) and that is why the children will transcribe it, religiously, from time to time, restarting the living moment of the installation of culture. It was in the face of this evidence, the impossibility of humanity to definitively disentangle itself from the paternal referent, that Freud began to articulate religion, helplessness and longing for the father: orphans and desperate people are faced with the inevitable encounter with the always traumatic reality, the children will evoke, compulsively, a father who protects them from the helplessness. This authorizes us to say that: any configuration in which the paternal complex ("Vatercomplex") is reactivated must be considered religious (Assoun, 1991, 43).

The re-updating of the myth, Freud undertook to demonstrate in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" ([1921]1975), the first text of *Complete Works* that testifies to Freud's concerns about the politics of hatred towards the other that was then taking shape in Eastern Europe. If in "Totem and Taboo", totemism inspired the construction of the myth of murder, in the writing of the 1921 text, the logic of modern human manifestations "succeeded with increasing frequency and violence, causing amazement on the part of politicians and police officers who struggled above all in assigning them a responsibility" (Goldenberg: 2014;27), contributed to the construction of the answer why the sons murdered the father of the horde in an evident and radical way. In prehistory, the individuals commanded by the father of the horde remained tied to the group psychology, that is, prevented from expressing a singular will (Freud, [1921] 1975, 69-99). That was why the sons committed the act of violence that started the invention of democracy - the political regime founded around the void once occupied by Ürvarter.

However, as Freud pointed out in "Totem and Taboo", democratic equality between the "killer" brothers did not hold for long; he missed his father at the first sign of helplessness (1913/2003: 216). And men created their gods and, later, conceived the idea of an almighty God. And in modernity, even with the promulgation of Nietzsche's famous sentence - "God is dead" -, they knew how to shift the demand for protection to a leader whose family image of a powerful and grandiose individual favors the identification of his person with *Urvarter* (Freud, [1921]1975). This permanent phantasmatic demand for protection reveals men's choice to passively surrender to the Other, which means that there is a religious adherence to be discerned in this offer: the savage and the modern subject equally insist on the imaginary appeal to the Other to

whom they attribute the capacity to free them from the worries, torments and worries of life.

Church and army, 'artificial arms', sustain themselves as long as their individuals place only one and the same object in the place of their Ideal Ego (Freud, ([1921] 1975, 116). It is, therefore, the installation of a fetish whose belief will be supported by idealization. What is clear to the reader of the 1921 text is that, although "God is dead" in modernity, this does not prevent men from making ideologies or any form of power, analogous to religion: they offer, in exchange for the alienation of all, a fetish to buffer the irreducible human malaise, anguish. As demonstrated by Paul Laurant Assoun (1987, p. 109), even nowadays, the essay in question reveals how the Freudian myth of the primitive horde is "practiced": the mass, faced with the insistence of anxiety, will summon a protective Father who will certainly promise the end of helplessness, in exchange for the compulsive servitude of all. Those who do not obey him and who do not identify with the majority, will have the destiny of exclusion from the group by banishment or death. Therefore, the price to be paid for the imaginary gain of protection as helplessness is the end of otherness: exercise of love between those who identify with each other, hatred for those who do not. As history keeps on testifying, we can see the establishment of a totalitarian order from which no one can distance themselves or differentiate themselves, under penalty of destruction.

Tyranny in the name of protection

In light of these considerations, we can conclude our little reflection, indicated at the beginning of this text, on the Freudian intuition that foresees the updating of divine reason, a paradigm of the Inquisition, in the middle of the 20th century. Even being an illustrious son of Enlightenment thought and an avowed supporter of the triumph of science, Freud was lucid, above all. Moreover, "... would not lucidity be a glimpse of the permanent possibility of war?", as the philosopher Emanuel Levinas well asks (1980, p. 9). The experience of violence in modern civilization, was already an issue for the Master of Vienna since the World War I when he wrote the article "Thoughts for the times on war and death" ([1915]1975). On the occasion of a conversation with Marie Bonaparte, while the world was moving dizzily towards the Second War II, Freud finalized his modifications in the conceptual apparatus in psychoanalysis that served as a precise compass for the future. Thus, his prophecy of the imminent return of religious obscurantism, the flag of holy war, dramatically confirmed a posteriori, was only the effect of an acute historical perception, allied with the forcefulness of his theoreticalclinical discoveries. Freud realized there is an inevitable compulsion to repeat in civilization, the "Vaterkomplex", in the form of a perverse system, and due to that, he was able to tell the princess: all war is and will always be religious, just like the Inquisition, for war consists in keeping the subjects dominated by an absolute truth, demanding from all of them unconditional fidelity to a closed system of beliefs, without horizons other than their own dogmas. This lack of an open future which makes the production of new truths unfeasible also prevents the emergence of multiple singularities, which only happen in the face of an alterity desire, that is, a desire that is infinite, by definition, unspeakable, and invisible². There are no absolute truths about desire, but truths to be built: this is the "tiny difference between man and non-man" (Levinas, 1980, p. 23). Freud foresaw the triumph of theological reason in full Nazi ascent, because he realized it lucidly in the middle of our century and the return of barbarism: the installation of a perverse system, capable of keeping children in the order of exclusive and religious obedience to a single truth. Fervent adepts believe in a superior intelligence, they bow and start to serve the

despotic will of One, assuming it is possible to be prevented from the powerful and merciless forces of nature. Now, it is possible to state that, in the registration of the materialization that entails the consistency of this belief, there are no atheists. "The atheist", recognized Lacan, "as a combatant, as a revolutionary, he is not one who denies God in his omnipotence function, but one who asserts himself as someone who serves no god" (Lacan, 2004, 336)

The Germans were about to institute a new "god", Freud envisioned even before Hitler, became commander-in-chief of the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany (Wehrmacht) from 1935 to 1945. By institutionalizing genocide, to erase differences and banish the plurality of desires, the "god of race" opened, in the middle of the 20th century, an unavoidable paradox: tyranny in the name of protection. The leader gains strength using the hypnotist's technique: through hypnosis he materializes the injunctions and fierce commands of the Superego. This type of millenary repetition leads us to think that the dead father is out of question and that it founds the origin of the father's role in his murder (Lacan, 1979, 60), as it presents a tyrannical and omnipotent father who, in the name of love, demands that all may be faithful to him and obedient to his ideals. This loyalty is only imposed on the members of the mass through the identification of the leader and his supreme idealization. This complex mechanism is what makes everyone equally, "gods", masters of life and death.

It was certainly this type of identification that, fostered by idealization, led Commander Treblinka to murder Freud's sister when she presented him with his badges, bearer of differences. As we know, Freud told the princess that he was certain about the return of the obscurantist reason in force in the Dark Ages - Hitler's political illusion, in that devoid of any otherness ethics. However, he could not possibly intuit that the return of such obscurantist reason would eventually lead his own sisters to extermination in the Nazi concentration camps. His four sisters who stayed in Vienna were first confined to a single room in the family apartment. Then Marie, Adolphine, and Pauline were sent to Therienstadt. Aldophine died, according to local deaths, of "internal hemorrhage". Marie and Adolphine were sent to Maly Trostiner's extermination camp; Rosa, according to the document cited at the beginning of this article, dies in Treblinca's gas chamber.

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Notas:

- 1. Identity Card.
- 2. Keeping alive the impossibility of realizing the Ego ideal it is what makes possible the civilizing process.

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