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Sarra Moneir

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Economics and Political Science - Future University in Egypt,
sarra.moneir@fue.edu.eg

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Cover Page Footnote

This paper is an extracted section of the theoretical chapter of my doctoral dissertation. The doctoral thesis has already been defended in 2019, at the Department of International Development Studies, University of Vienna.

(Re-) Envisioning the Masses: Critiquing Theoretical Foundations¹ and ‘Black Lives Matter’

Sarra Moneir

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Economics and Political Science
 Future University in Egypt

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Corresponding Author:

Sarra Moneir
 sarra.moneir@fue.edu.eg

ABSTRACT

This research revolves around drawing up the trends of scholarly contributions on collective action, in particular, the concept of ‘masses’ in a sample of literature of the Global South, driven by the significance of such action for more than a decade ago across various regions. This paper uses the case of the Black Lives Matter Movement that started in 2013 in the US as an example of the applicability of the theoretical contributions demonstrated. The use of social movement theories has attained great focus for decades, which is often believed to not be the sole representation of how to interpret cases of collective action, especially when focusing on the interpretation of why and how individuals act collectively and the impact on their memories. In that respect, here comes the significance of the concept of ‘the masses’ as an alternative reading and tool of explanation. The paper revolves around the prime question of how can we interpret a sample of literature from the Global North, as the root for ‘masses’ as a concept, in apprehending the various modes of social mobilization, and their validity in explaining Black Lives Matter. This paper also sheds light on concepts that may help in the interpretation of how to see the purpose of the movement of Black Lives Matter. In approaching this question, the paper adopts a qualitative discourse analysis approach to the narratives posed by the respective sample of literature under study. The coverage of the state of the art under study includes, and is not limited to, the works of Gramsci, Le Bon, and Canetti.

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I. Introduction

For over a decade, different world regions were confronted by drastic hurricanes of mass revolts, questioning traditional paradigms rooted in culture, society, and political institutions. While many of which receive immense attention in international media as well as academia, the movement of 'Black Lives Matter', strongly revived in the 2020's murder of George Floyd, still remains a rather understudied phenomenon in social science. As a grassroots movement triggered by the shooting and killing of teenager Trayvon Martin, and further followed by the killing of numerous women and men, Black Lives Matter became a prominent hashtag on social media from 2013 onwards. While the most academic contribution to the analysis and understanding of this movement has been based on social movement analysis, a gap remains in tackling it as a mass movement rather than a completely organized action-based movement. As this parallels with movements requesting socio-political change in other parts of the world over the last decade, the urge increases to apprehend various angles of what brings individuals together to enforce their voice. In that sense, the concept of masses comes to the foreground as an alternative method of explanation, instead of the classical use of social movement theories.

Based on the inspiration of the special nature of Black Lives Matter, this paper tackles the question of how have theoretical narratives represented in the masses literature, contributed to explaining matters of shifts and changes in collectivities to help us understand collective action? The prime assumption for this study is that the conception of the masses provides a rather new gateway as a re-visiting of the concept, and its suitability as a tool of analytical reflection on mass mobilization. This hypothesis is being put to test through a qualitative discourse analysis of a sample of the literature found paramount and impactful in the source of 'mass' literature in the Global North from classical to somewhat a rather modern scholarship.

The focus is not to provide an all-inclusive coverage of the literature but rather to conduct an analytical dialogue amongst the most dominant literature that is pivotal in dealing with providing a theoretical canvas to the central question of this paper. The method used in dealing with the theoretical narratives at hand was a rather pragmatic process of categorization, based on the induction method, organized according to the relationship drawn between the categories of relevance and inducing analysis of the theoretical contributions and their relevance to the research problem at hand.

In this respect, the paper provides a theoretical study on the concept of the masses, while relating it at times to Black lives matter, to envision the relevance of the literature as a method of explanation. This will be translated into the following sub-section of this paper: an analysis ranging from Sighele to Gasset on criminal and psychological crowds, followed by the analysis of the Gramscian mass alliances and concluded by Hannah Arendt and Elias Canetti's work on the active and passive masses. This will be followed by a conclusion reflecting on the applicability and validity of these papers today and some of the open questions for further research.

II. A Historical Contextualization of the 'Masses'

In the advent of global changes that are marked by mass movements and collective action, not related or limited to specific world regions, it is an essential need to commence the study of the central notion of masses, by providing an overarching historical contextualization of the concept. The masses, often so, were depicted as the audience that is made and created by states, distanced and brought closer by the leader, across classes and intellectual faculties and political orientations,

whose response and reactions are measured through speech. On the theoretical front, the concept masses witnessed a rather large share of intellectual debates, extending from the second half of the 19th century until the present, across the disciplines of psychology and sociology initially, along with psychology in the 19th century, and a post-WWII sociological and philosophical account in the 20th century. The intellectual tradition of the masses is therefore what needs to be shed light on in this section. The masses is a notion that has been confronted with innumerable question marks, as to whether or not it should continue being used in academic and intellectual writing in the post-WWII era, particularly with the need to end fascism (through fascist-related jargon and intellectual corpus), or at least limit it. The calling for a change in the functions of academia, and the outlook on the socio-political relationships (between people and the state), was a fundamental revisionist movement, to also avoid the remedies brought through the British and French colonial era, as well as the German NS perception towards the society, and the leader-subordinate context, to tame the masses and circumvent their threat and will towards the ruler (Günzel 2004: 117). This is particularly highlighted in pre-WWI literature, which registers the beginning of the dilemma facing the concept of the masses today, namely the point of origin of a reductionist and criminalizing conception of the masses in scholarship (118). In that respect, the literature here is divided up into two prime phases: the first is the classical scholarship until the mid-20th century, adopting a predominantly behaviorists' psychology approach, followed by the second phase of scholarly accounts across the fields of sociology, cultural theory, political theory, literature, and philosophy.

In that respect and given the historical contextual setting of the concept of 'masses', shedding light on the classical literature on how this concept was treated is inevitable to apprehend its development. This theoretical reflection commences with Sighele to the works of Gasset and the idea of criminal crowds, among others.

III. From Sighele to Gasset on Criminal and Psychological Crowds

In the first phase (classical literature on the masses), interchangeably used with the crowd, Italian criminologist Scipio Sighele in his *The Criminal Crowd* (Sighele 1894 original; 2018) described them as objects that needed to be studied through the question of how to determine the criminal features within a crowd/ masses to arrest and isolate them. This perspective is similarly shared in the work of Italian criminologist Gabriel Tarde (Tarde 1901, 2000). If anything, this was a direction of scholarship depicting the fear that masses, particularly through the French Third Republic, as incited in intellectuals and leaders in Europe at the time, questioning the savage energy of masses of individuals moving in crowds due to their anger and rage. The masses, as viewed in these texts are depicted as primitive collectively, motivated by the lack of reason, or rather lack of controlling the faculty of reason and actions. Through the criminology stance to scholarship on the masses, the limits of the individual are depicted as being unable to make a consciously rational decision, thus posing a threat to the society at large and the leaders. Hence, the masses in this context can be understood as the segment of the society, at times a large segment that acts without intellect and thus threatens the status quo of the respective system in charge, therefore labeled as criminals.

Contrary to the criminology approach of the criminal mind of the masses, classical literature is predominantly marked by Le Bon's social psychology studies (mostly used as the direct translation from the German the masses or die Masse) *Crowd Psychology* and *The Psychology of the People* as well as *The Psychology of Revolutions* (Le Bon 1898; 2001b (1896 original); 1913) where the central idea is the 'the group mind' that is formulated through their

tendency to be primitive, unreasoning and emotional, ultimately becoming their drive for action (Le Bon 1913). His encounter with the German conquest of Lorraine and Alsace influenced his formation of the concept of the masses in that sense, where he concludes them being irrationally motivated by personal motives and are easily led, especially since this event raised the issue of far-right politics in Germany and Europe in general at the time, being in favor of nationalist thought and promoting anti-Semitism (Günzel 2005: 119). The central belief is that the masses have a sense of a “collective unconsciousness” and its relationship to imitation as a power owned by the crowd in its mass form, which indicates the otherwise vulnerable nature of the individual. Invincibility is gained by numbers, and thus the contagion factor, that makes individuals within the crowds act similarly in ways they would otherwise not do, had they been individually active. This ultimately brings the role of the hypnotizer to the foreground, or the leader (Le Bon 2001b). The motivation dynamics that mobilize them, according to Le Bon, are in fact produced by “having entirely lost his conscious personality, he obeys all the suggestions of the operator who has deprived him of it and commits acts in utter contradiction with his character and habits.” (Le Bon 2001b: 18). This is the moment when the conscious and willing individual becomes an unconscious element or component of the general mass, and thus becomes hypnotized by the power of the number, chants, and images, rather than personal intellect. Within the context of the mass, the individual becomes unconscious to the extent that differentiation between reality and imagination becomes a hardship. The power of suggestion is paramount, as this is what forms the drive for the general mass to be led by the hypnosis of a collective being called the mass acting as a crowding subject on the move. Le Bon states,

“The state of the individual forming part of a psychological crowd. He is no longer conscious of his acts. In his case, as in the case of the hypnotized subject, at the same time that certain faculties are destroyed, others may be brought to a high degree of exaltation. Under the influence of a suggestion, he will undertake the accomplishment of certain acts with irresistible impetuosity. This impetuosity is more irresistible in the case of crowds than in that of the hypnotized subject, from the fact that the suggestion being the same for all the individuals of the crowd, it gains in strength by reciprocity. The individualities in the crowd who might possess a personality sufficiently strong to resist the suggestion are too few in number” (Le Bon 2001b, 18).

Crowd morality is also another paramount level of analysis in Le Bon’s perception of mass formation through crowd actions. In this understanding of the psychological mass formation of crowds, Le Bon depicts that the crowd formed into masses are incapable of thinking beyond the moment they are acting within, as they are momentary beings. In that respect, he evokes that “they may be animated in succession by the most contrary sentiments, but they will always be under the influence of the exciting causes of the moment. They are like the leaves which a tempest whirls up and scatters in every direction and then allows to fall.” (21). The masses of crowds are seen as a being that has lost the sense of fear, deconstructed limits of traditions of obedience, which enables the crowd within the masses of crowds to act in ways otherwise impossible for the individual to assume, had they been isolated from large numbers (22). This is what Le Bon labels as furious passion as part of the characteristic of the mass-moment of crowd actions. This notion is accompanied by the authoritative feature of the masses, in which if a crowd within the masses opts for a totality of reaction; entirely refuse or accept a suggestion without the function of rationality.

Le Bon indicates that “a crowd is as disposed to give authoritative effect to its inspirations as it is intolerant. An individual may accept contradiction and discussion; a crowd will never do

so. At public meetings the slightest contradiction on the part of an orator is immediately received with howls of fury and violent invective, soon followed by blows, and expulsion should the orator stick to his point. Without the restraining presence of the representatives of authority the contradictor, indeed, would often be done to death.” (31). This therefore depicts the intolerance and violence embedded in the actions of the masses at large, and particularly of crowds composing it, known for their impulsive actions, motivated by commonly preached feelings, suggestions, imitation, and therefore the common intolerance towards the other, or outsider to the crowd or even among crowds in a mass moment at a particular event or space. In that respect, the use of the theatre and the church or religious preaching, as well as the military institution are solid examples as reference points in Le Bon’s articulation of the characteristics of the masses and how crowds within it are formulated.

While it is one of the classical foundational pillars of the field of crowd psychology and mass theory, hence setting the overall paradigm of thought for the field, the fascination of what Le Bon describes, in terms of emotionally-led imitating individuals whose detachment from their intellectual reasoning sets in as they enter the mass, must be critically observed. The conception of the furious passion is certainly embedded into various moments particularly seen during the Black Lives Matter movement, triggered strongly, especially since the killing of George Floyd in 2020 due to racist orientations by the police in Minneapolis - USA. However, its association with blind imitation and submission to suggestions is questionable. It was seen very clearly how protesters of Black Lives Matter did not follow blind imitations of actions but were rather attentive to the agenda of requirements they had. In fact, followers of the movement, on the streets or on social media, were immensely conscious of their message, namely fighting terrorism in the form of racism, and imposing human rights regardless of color. The fact that the movement and mass action of Black lives Matter lasted from 2013 until the present date, is yet another proof that blind imitation, and acting without a strong sense of conscious reflection of one’s action, is by far inapplicable in this case.

Le Bon’s depiction of what constructs an active crowd in a mass movement is the moment and therefore the numbers. In that respect, what can be concluded is that the physical presence of the masses is what attains its legitimacy for its actions on one hand. On the other hand, the assumption that the consciousness of the individual is lost in the moment of the mass action of the crowd, while it is applicable at times of rage marches against the US police force in various states due to the countless killing of African-Americans, launching the Black Lives Matter. Hence, the visibility of the masses is pivotal as proof. The observation being, while Le Bon’s depiction of the masses is that they do not learn from experienced agitations and decisions made

Influenced by Le Bon’s psychological group, Sigmund Freud’s Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (2011) is another piece of contribution that depicts the explanation of what the mass is, through centralizing the notion of libido of the ego generated by the suggestor (leader) and the power vested in him, by himself and granted to him through the following mass. Freud differs from Le Bon’s conceptualization of the masses and crowd behavior, through the development of when a crowd is constructed. For Freud, the consciousness of the individual is not absolutely diminished once partaking in a crowd for a mass movement at a given point in time. There are five elements that the individual owns as characteristics before entering an unorganized mass, after leaving the organized one. These are namely: “hierarchy of positions, individual awareness of a collective emotional drive or goal, interaction between groups, customs and traditions, and organization.” (O’Brien 2013: 10). The moment the individual enters the

unorganized group, the sense of mass actions and behavior of unorganized nature, deteriorates parts of these five elements, leaving the individual, nevertheless, with segments of consciousness and the ability to differentiate between values that do not comply with the collective behavior. It is this moment, when the individual becomes driven by emotions; the love for the collective one is present at a given moment in time or event, collected by a consciously agreed upon collective emotional goal (10). This status thus develops what Freud identifies as the hypnotizer or the suggestor (through the process of suggestibility) as the drive for the individual actions within the group and mass movement, ultimately reaching the imitation phase mobilized by love (libido) through the suggestibility of the group psychology in unison. Ultimately, this produces the herd (Freud 2011: 81), which Freud explains as immanent in representing the natural modes of action of the individuals in their collective nature at moments of emotionally driven action and unorganized mass presence, as opposed to the controllable contexts of the church and the military; two examples Freud mentions as constructed group psychologically due to the checking processes over controlling people's emotions and actions.

While Freud and Le Bon's accounts reflect on the fusion of the individual into the crowd they become ultimately part of it as seen in Black Lives Matter, where individuals of common interests naturally became part of this active collectively, due to the shared values and purpose. On one hand, the contagion variable, prevalent in Le Bon and Freud, can be reflected in terms of the roles given to social media and the internet as means of mass mobilization. The idea of leaderless contagion from the Black Lives Matter experience, for instance, triggered the need for the sense of belonging to the same movement in different parts of the world like in a sample of European countries, who also support the cause of Black Lives Matter (BLM). However, what is fundamental, which departs from the Freudian and Le Bon's claims, is that the impact of the leaderless contagion, or the aftermath of contagion in general, is not addressed, as what captures the core of their ideas (the psychological group) is the moment of number-based collectivity, rather than the impact on the aftermath of mass assembly.

The tradition of perceiving the masses as emotionally motivated individuals mobilized purely by primal instincts was further evidenced in Spanish and German-speaking literature. These contributions primarily were made by intellectuals of either far-right political nationalist orientation, as well as of a liberalist promoting belief like that presented by Spanish liberal phenomenologist and philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). Following Le Bon's thought, Gasset's masses are seen as elements of the society disturbing the natural development of liberal thought, and hence need to be ordained and controlled. For him both the masses and the "mass-man" making up the masses are to be treated rather critically as they "crush everything different beneath them, everything excellent, individual qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated. In addition it is clear, of course, that this "everybody" is not "everybody." "Everybody" was normally the complex unity of the mass and the divergent, specialized minorities. Nowadays, "everybody" is the mass alone. Here we have the formidable fact of our times, described without any concealment of the brutality of its features" (Gasset 1930: 10). The solution would be for the intellectual elite to govern and rule the masses, as they (masses) are unruly and therefore incapable of thinking beyond their interests. Gasset's understanding of masses is as a point or stage of transformation from the quantitative being of a hidden and invisible multitude at the backstage of political action, to becoming a social mass whose visibility is sensed as it influences the state and the society at large. Gasset addresses that by stating:

“The concept of the multitude is quantitative and visual. Without changing its nature, let us translate it into terms of sociology. We then meet with the notion of the “social mass.” Society is always a dynamic unity of two-component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons no specially qualified. By masses, then, is not to be understood, solely or mainly, “the working masses.” The mass is the average man. In this way what was mere quantity- the multitude- is converted into a qualitative determination: it becomes the common social quality, man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type.” (Gasset 1930: 6-7).

Through this plot, Gasset’s narrative has three categories of individuals in the society, Spanish and European in general at the time of his account. The first is the status of a multitude, which through activity becomes a socially engaged mass as it becomes visible. This visibility factor, that transforms the numbers into active engagement, entails the transformations of the working class and the average man into a visible subject of action and a voice, one that is destructive to the general wellbeing of the society. The second is the intellectual elite, whose judgments can combat the unruly nature of the masses in preserving the heritage and intellectual assets of the society. In that respect, the assumption is that individuals of the working class and ordinary non-intellectual individuals in the society, belong to the threatening elements of the community, in need of ruling measures to direct their actions.

The contributions to the concept continued, often also referencing Friedrich Nietzsche’s Master-Slave morality is also another depiction of the vision of the masses, and how to him it is very much related to the conception of slavery and submission (Günzel 2004). Nietzsche’s masses have two dimensions, as he depicts them according to a topology: which shows they are enslaved by their inability to exist in a particular space of their own and hence lack the *Bewusstsein* (consciousness and awareness) and need a master; while the second type is the mass that can build its sense of existence and owns its consciousness, only then it can be something (Günzel 2004). Karl Jaspers is also one of the followers of Nietzsche, believing also in the notion of *Masse-Sein* (the being of a mass) which is denoted through it (the masses) having the duty to become a mass, to actually become a human mold or unity in that sense (2004).

By the dawn of the 20th century, another wave of scholarly contribution erupted in the European literature on the concept of ‘masses’. This is particularly evident in the work presented by Antonio Gramsci and the conception of mass alliances as presented throughout his work and thought.

IV. Gramscian Mass Alliances

Following the classical approach to the masses, early 20th-century scholarship provided a somewhat empathetic outlook on the passivity of the masses, and a somewhat diversion on who they are as well as their characteristics or definition at large. Scholarship in this phase tried to divert from the criminology and psychological approach to the masses concept to a rather social science approach, before the active engagement of sociology by the end of WWII, the replacement of masses with the concept “group”, and later on the enactment of social movement theories until the present.

The cultural critic and critical theory approach of the masses, following the Le Bon and Freudian era, was largely unable to approach the concept of the masses technically, allowing scholarship to methodologically deal with the phenomenon through the notion of mass societies and mass culture at large, which was particularly the case in German produced literature (Middendorf 2013: 8). Scholars such as Wilhelm Vleugels, Theodor Geiger, and Hans Barth were among those during the world war era who had adopted a rather organizational approach to addressing the masses as a concept and social structure. This also included John Dewey's critical theory approach on the conception of experience and freedom of the individual and the collective action in the US context from the time of the economic crisis of the 1930s until shortly after WWII. The common factor among them, it being mass organization or the shifting towards the collectivity approach rather than psychological analysis of earlier scholarship, brought various perceptions to the social and cultural organizational order of the masses. One attempt at explanation was by looking at them as individuals coming together in face of collective action to push for democracy and shift from totalitarian social and cultural paradigms (Dewey 2011 [1956]), while another explained the process of the collectivity of the masses as a product of myths, in which myths play a role of a social engagement of the masses (Barth 1959). Vleugel's sociological approach to the masses (1930) was one where he provided a categorization of the masses into three broad zones: the latent mass (*latente Masse*), the historical mass (*Historische Masse*), and the current mass (*Aktuelle Masse*).

The relevance of Vleugel's work is paramount to Black Lives Matter, as more so than the counterparts of his era, as he approached the mechanisms of the masses and their identity drive for social action in more precision. His definition was clearer of what is the mass through the three categories: the latent masses is a collectivity based on shared sentiments and fate that is however not enacted in public and therefore has less impact in terms of being less action-oriented, the current mass, on the other hand, acts in terms of protests on the moment and has a less long-term impact on the overall social and political arena. Contrary to the two, is the historical mass which is of long-term impact as it is organized and visible. Vleugel also distances his masses from the multitudes (Hake 2017) as the multitudes are a numerical translation of individual presence, while masses are action-oriented of the three stages or norms mentioned. Vleugel's argument can be found significant for the BLM, as it does not confine the masses to physical presence only, nor to a momentary event of acts of protest, as was the case earlier literature. The three forms of masses display the diversity of inclusion of active individuals, as the action takes on different forms based on the degree of engagement. The same applies to BLM, which initially started as a protest calling as an outcry to police reform in the US (Chen 2021: 1), which continued on until the present day, as a form of continuous revisionist movement against racism manifested in the US police apparatus. They have, indeed, also taken on a snow-ball effect in different states of the US, as well as in other parts of the world as mentioned earlier, forming a sense of alliance. However, the element of alliance among these was rather unclear in the work of Vleugel as left unexplained by him, which brings the significance of moving on to one of the most influential scholars at the time, namely Antonio Gramsci's conception of the masses.

Before proceeding, it is paramount to mention that masses scholarship of cultural and sociological studies, especially German contributions, could not withstand the isolationist measures against this concept, as the US intellectuals and sociologists waves after the world wars entrapped mass theories and interpretation to its association with the Nazi regime and national socialism thereunder, primarily motivated by political agendas behind scholarship which was widely promoted (Middendorf 2013: 10). However, although work on the masses became

entrapped after the world wars into the cold war in the fields of philosophy mainly, the fact that the concept of the masses was transformed from the 19th-century scholarship to well into the 20th century, was evident in its integration into the societal interpretation of collective action and behavior, as to be later on seen in historical interpretations of societies in the Arendtian and Canetti approaches masses.

The central notion relevant for this review section is the infamous hegemony concept. In the review of the Gramscian construct, hegemony took on multiple tiers of apprehension: class alliances, enemies, social and ideological hegemony as well as the relationship between revolution and hegemony. Through these tiers of analysis, the contextualization of the concepts of the state, the civil society as well as the forms of hegemony comes into resolution. In that respect, the development of the concept of hegemony in relation to the masses is sketched over two phases: the phase of the famous article *Some Aspects of the Question of the South*, and the phase of Prisons Notebooks. In the general sense, hegemony as a concept means a form of class alliance in face of a dictatorship (in this case the modes of racist acts on an individual or collective basis by the US police officials) through a process of dictatorship construction of their very own interest serving their (class/group) own existence. This brings about the realization of what the masses mean and how they come about in Gramscian conceptualization.

In the first phase, hegemony was specifically connotated to the self-less economic struggle of the leading proletariat group by winning “the support of the poor peasantry and southern intellectuals” (Forgacs 2000: 422). In *Some Aspects of the Southern Question South* (originally 1926, see Forgacs 2000), Gramsci depicts the problem that necessitates this form of hegemony through the Turin communists in their quest against the Northern hegemony over Southern Italy and the Island, turning them into military bases serving capitalists ends (171). The call for an alliance between the northern and southern peasant masses to emancipate the south was one of the motives bringing about the understanding and development of the notion of hegemony to the foreground in Gramsci’s thought. This brought the problem behind the structure and presence of the proletariat in general into light by tackling them structurally; the problem being between the northern proletariat towards the southern, looking down on them using biological argumentations as an ideology which is key in the problematic. A dispersed ideology in this sense and exploitation among members of the same class, Gramsci argues, means that “no mass action is possible if the masses in question are not convinced of the ends they wish to attain and the methods to be applied. The proletariat, to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice, and incrustation.”(174). Instead, “they must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a class that can win and built socialism only if it’s aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat does not become the leading class; and these strata (...) remaining under bourgeois leadership, enable the state to resist the proletariat assault and wear it down” (174). The southern question would be in that respect, “what can a poor peasant achieve by occupying uncultivated or poorly cultivated lands (...) without all these things, what can a poor peasant achieve by occupying?” (172). The solution Gramsci proposed is the ideological problem essentially inside the construction of the proletariat as already mentioned. In addition to ideology, the fragmentation of the southern mass was paramount in highlighting the reasons why as Gramsci puts it, it is “difficult to adduce a whole series of great mass events which prove the immediate, lightening effectiveness of these actions...” (178). The lack of centrality in the role of the peasant masses, in the southern case for Gramsci, was a reason for their failure, and therefore the abortion of the realization of the “dictatorship of the majority” as he calls it, where the two

major dominations remain to be the politicians dominating state apparatuses, and the intellectuals dominating the ideology or misrepresentation and misinterpretations of the peasants (179).

The second aspect is the intellectuals and the psychology of intellectual life according to Gramsci that influenced the image of the Southerners of Italy. This general analysis of the psychology of the intellectuals can be traced to three elements. First, is that intellectuals come in two levels the old type that became an intermediary stratum between society and the state through administrative functions over time, and the new type is the intellectuals who are known for being “democratic in its peasant’s face; reactionary in the face turned towards the big landowner and the government: politicking, corrupt and faithless” (179). The second element is that the intellectuals come from the rural bourgeoisie, concerning the Southern Italian case, “in other words, the small and medium landowner who is not a peasant, who does not work the land, who would be ashamed to be a farmer, but who want to extract from the little hand he has (...) the wherewithal to live fittingly; the wherewithal to provide dowries for his daughters, who must marry officers or civil functionaries of the state” (180). Given the background, the intellectuals do overtime develop a distanced antipathy towards the working class, one which is mingled with personal interests over time and is molded with “Refined hypocrisy and a highly refined art of deceiving and taming the peasant masses”(180) for securing personal ties with the state at times of political and economic crisis in particular. The third and final element is the role of men of religion among the intellectuals. In short, Gramsci highlights the centrality of the intellectual role in the emancipation of the peasants by focusing on “the mass of intellectuals” and not just the individuals dispersedly. The acute change in the intellectual orientation in ideology in favor of the public, Gramsci argues, is rather difficult if not impossible. On top of that, as “the proletariat, as a class, is poor in organizing elements (...) it does not have its stratum of intellectuals and can only create one very slowly, very painfully, after the winning of state power” (185) parallel to the need for an organic break within the already existing intellectuals to give space for the birth of a new generation of intellectuals who can bring in a change with a modern left tendency.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci furthered into hegemony through revolution, politics, and economic angles of analysis. The concept of the permanent revolution comes into light at this phase of his life, which Gramsci elaborates on through his inquiry on the claim of class power and the construction of power relations “as moments and stages” (Gündogan 2008: 52). When integrated with BLM, it is evident that the members of the movement, or those who feel as an intergrat part of, do not believe that their mission is related to individual cases of public killing of innocent civilians of African-American identity. In fact, it is an inevitably eternal purpose and mission to free humans of color from racism and brutality by officials and personal dispositions. Furthermore, through the three stages or moments, Gramsci claims to grasp the relationship between the civil society and the state: a balance of the objective forces, political power relations through his conception of “self-consciousness”, and finally military control (52). This is, as noted through his reviewers, the formation of the bourgeois class and not the general formation of the class society to be following the permanent revolution moment, hence a political and administration series of moments that frame the establishment of the bourgeois of the society. Also in his work, Gramsci developed the idea of hegemony concerning strategy or political strategy. Seeing that the state hegemony was dominant until the 1848 revolutions in Europe at the time, he accounts that following that a “civil hegemony” should replace the permanent revolution, one which replaces state domination with civil society hegemony, where the pure political leadership no longer is at the heart of the action, while civil leadership is as well as cultural leadership. In that respect, the development of Gramsci’s thought implies that “hegemony has not only political

meanings but also it is closely related to a new and wider kind of civil society and a new conception of the world” (56). At this point, Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony superseded Marx and Engels as well as developed Lenin’s vision of state and society, where he explains the collapse of state hegemony as a result of the power leadership claim of the civil society. This claim can and will only be realized through the morality behind the role of the intellectuals and the peasant class at large (once again the role of the intellectual mass with the peasant mass), and the reshaping of ideologies, rather than the refocusing on the rebasing of the state.

Gramscian thought, though criticized by some (see Gündogan 2008; Forgacs 2000) for being often unclear in when and how he used the concepts of classes, masses, and the state as well as the use of hegemony at large, yet his work at his point in time entailed embryotic conceptions that unfolded in time. The civil society empowerment debate has come to the foreground for over two decades, which Gramsci tackled in his work through collaborations between the intellectual mass and the working-class mass. Gramsci’s masses have taken on another level of becoming not only the poorer or worse off laymen of the society but rather those involved in the processes of change and transformation whose alliances are paramount, namely the intellectual mass and the working-class mass and peasant mass. Although the concept of hegemony and forms of leadership in terms of civil leadership were not clarified in his work, his empirical accounts through his historical readings as well as personal experience give a methodological framework for contextual analysis useful for today’s world changes in different world regions at large, and the pivotal or groundbreaking mass movements at large in various parts of the world, using different causes as their focus.

The Gramscian thought was one of the significant voices in the early 20th century, until the end of WWII, and one of the last progressive outlooks onto the masses at its time. While the concept ceased being used as earlier indicated, later on, use of the concept was still brought about during the 1970s onwards in the fields of political theory, and literary and historical studies. These provide a more empathetic outlook to the masses, as a historical subject on one side, but also as an agent of change on another, as opposed to the earlier perceptions of criminal destructive collective minds. This is particularly embodied in the work of Arendt and Canetti.

V. Arendt and Canetti on Active and Passive Masses²

Despite the gradual replacement of the concept of the masses in sociological scholarship, historical analysis, and political theory contributions still related the concept of masses to social resistance at times, as well as its association with dealing with oppressive and totalitarian leadership, evident in Arendt and Canetti, and later on also in works of Judith Butler (2014), as an attempt to reference masses as part of the modernity complex of subjectivity. This is so, as it reciprocates the being of the individuals and their self-perceptions or modes of actions the moment they take on the form of a collective action mode in a mass form (Middenhof 2013: 16).

In light of this, Arendt’s work on the society, power constructs between the masters and the masses under a totalitarian regime, and the reasons why people behave and act in certain ways are evidential of sociological and partially ethnographic components of analysis (Baehr 2002; Morariu 2012). On another front, Arendt’s conception of the masses plays a pivotal role, as it is the base for many as a reference point in apprehending the relationship between her people-

²The work conducted on Hannah Arendt and Elias Canetti on the masses is partially extracted from a paper I presented at the conference of CBRL (Centre for British Research in the Levant) in Amman, Jordan September 2014.

totalitarian relationship, a pillar in political theory and eventually also ethnographers. The context within which Arendt unfolded her ideas and the locus of her lifetime contributions, revolve around the totalitarian characteristics residing in the role of the people, the masses, the formation of the totalitarian movement, portrayed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976), violence and populism in *On Violence* (1970), as well as a thorough study of the human development and condition within social transformations in *The Human Condition* (1998), to mention only but a few. Having dedicated most of her analysis on Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, particularly in the Origin, while also spending most of her life as an adult in the USA and pursuing her career, the augmenting of the way she sees the non-state actors becomes substantial yet problematic at the same time. Substantial, as she uses concepts such as the people, the masses, the mobs, and the elites, as forms of non-state actors, who perform some form of action, counteraction, disgracing submission, and the like. The substantiality of the matter derives from the need to pay close attention to the differences between these terms, as Canovan (2002) points out that Arendt's experience under Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism, oriented her position toward the power and impact of the unorganized collectivity of people as being rather threatening rather than emancipating for the fate of the country, partially following Le Bon's stream of thought, contrary to Gramsci.

Arendt, as a political theorist, does not provide or stress strongly on empirical foundations to distinguish clearly between the concepts and the functionality of the masses, the mobs, and the people. In a sense, she does take the space to describe their general attributes, and she is found to be rather sentimental towards their passivity as she exposes them in *the Origins*, as opposed to her predecessors of scholarships on the masses, namely Gasset, Le Bon, and Freud. How to spot those masses and how to study them, remains an open question, if one were to resort to Arendt as a reference point. Hence, the operationalizing of the masses and the mobs, from an ethnographer's perception seems rather challenged in that respect.

Arendt would also add to her construction of the masses, that they are only found as organized beings when assembled by the totalitarian movement, mainly serving the interest of the latter at times of political and social mobilization to solidify the foundations of the totalitarian rule and the rise for a dictatorship (Arendt 1976: 306). Thus, the masses are tools in the hands of the totalitarian movement serving to abuse the rise or the path towards democratic freedoms for countries and people (312). This is certainly not to be found in the case of BLM. On the contrary, the US government under Trump for instance, was very much opposing BLM participants, as it was seen as a disturbance to the US regime. Furthermore, the masses are seen as those who have lost their social and class belonging and identification as a result of 'abrupt political, geopolitical and economic dislocation' (Baehr 2008: 12), being the result of the turmoil in post-WWI Europe. As seen to have been the prime approach used by Trump while addressing the nature and dysfunctionality, in his perspective, of BLM. Hence, the second unit of analysis regarding the masses; is existence marked by loss and turmoil.

The positioning of memory and experience concerning the masses is another unit of perception. Arendt depicts the masses as "forgetful" and are bound to the 'totalitarian curse' (Arendt 1976: 306). The role of propaganda utilized to stabilize the existence of the totalitarian movement is yet another tool to deepen the renewed memory the totalitarian regime aims at implanting into the minds of the mass-men shaping the masses to secure a broader base of followers to legitimize itself (Canovan 2002: 416). In fact, memory and experience are paramount constituents of the creation of values and principles, deciding who and what is evil and good, the very genealogy of things by which the masses live and strive to perhaps find a rewarding

alternative to regain their stability back before the turmoil and detachment from their former being. It was and still remains to be inevitable in the BLM movement's use of images of the diseased of African-American background, as form of symbolism to engrave the names of the victims into the memories (collective and individual in that sense) of the by watchers across the world.

Another mode of scholarly contribution to the conception of masses as crowds is reflected in the work of Elias Canetti. Canetti's *Crowd and Power* tackles a rather transdisciplinary analysis and explanation of the masses which includes analytical dimensions of anthropology, social psychology, ethnography, philosophy as well as myth transformation and processes within societies. Perhaps it could be seen that Canetti's work is rather distinguished in comparison to his predecessors and counterparts, as it retrains from the classical analysis and interpretive points evoked through Le Bon and Freud in their crowd psychology; denoting the original backward nature of the masses and their inability to rationalize matters of their existence. Important enough to note, however, is that Canetti, does not provide operationalizing techniques for the identification of the masses and how to study them based on fieldwork research, even though his work on the masses was inspired by a series of protests he himself has witnessed in his earlier years in central and eastern Europe.

Canetti's contribution serves as one of the important works since World War II on the matter of the masses and crowds. It is hence clear, that he does not explain WHAT the masses are, unlike Arendt's description and differentiation between masses and mobs for instance, or Le Bon's descriptive picture of the masses-leader relationship. On the contrary, Canetti provides an attempt in explaining the features of the masses through their functionality and actions, hence the HOW, while not so much the techniques of how to study them as ethnographers for that matter. This HOW element was similarly also missing in the definition provided by Hardt and Negri (2000) as they tried to distance their multitude from the masses as concepts. In that respect they defined the masses saying that while for them the masses are of essential "indifference: all differences are submerged and drowned in the masses. All the colors of the population fade to grey. These masses can move in unison only because they form an indistinct, uniform conglomerate." (Hardt and Negri 2004: xiv). Hence, the essential problematic of the masses in that respect is their inability to encompass the differences of the people or individuals comprising it in general while assuming that they (the masses) act and move in unison based on their uniform composite organization.

Canetti's work has perhaps been getting rather little attention in the field of social sciences and has primarily been studied within the field of philosophy and literature primarily in the German-speaking world. Little attention has been given to his work in the field of social sciences if any, as to attempt to use his notions to analyze the crowd movements and the masses' formation. Canetti's notion of death and fear are central in his work when referring, like Arendt, to the master-slave relationship. Fear from death is on both sides: the masses or crowds and that of the leader. For him, though the two major types of masses, the closed and the open mass, one can better understand that the stability of the crowd is best when it is closed and hence capable to protect itself against external threats and abuses. Even threats from within the closed group can be maintained, since membership is limited, and all is known and revealed (Canetti 2011: 15). It is this closer tie from within that eliminates the closed crowd or mass from fast vanishing or death, and hence holds on stronger with a larger life span. In return, the fear as a factor from the death of a crowd is eliminated by a set of rules and discipline in particular, especially at moments of clashes against a ruler and tyrannical practices (15). The masses, being a situation for the sake of planned and legitimized resistance, are also described by Canetti as having what is called the

Zerstörungssucht or the tendency to destroy. In this case, according to Canetti, it is related to the second form of the masses, namely, the open masses. This form or situation of masses is one where the tendency to grow and enlarge is much higher than the closed mass. The number and mobilization to enlarge the mass is a pivotal aspect of understanding the masses in this case.

Without much attention to the processes and mechanisms of mobilization and how they take place or the consequences of such, Canetti plainly explains that the masses are, therefore, in their open form, at the highest risk of death as a collective once the moment is over (16) unless saved by another moment directly attached to it as a series. The reason behind the tendency to destroy one's self is due to the need to exist and continue as well as expand. This is done through the various methods and tools briefly mentioned: the use of fire and noise for attention. It is the lack of attention that proves the existence of the masses that contributes to its death and hence their fear of such drives them to use both noise and fire as some of the elements to hold on to their existence (18). The pivotal aspect of the master-slave relationship or the subject-leader relationship of the fear as a construct in Canetti's thought could be marked as his understanding of the "sticks and order" mechanism that governs the relationship between the tyrant and the subject or the masses. Important to note is that Canetti, unlike Freud and Le Bon, does not believe that the masses need leadership to succeed or to keep them intact as a unity. On the contrary, Canetti believes that the very fact of having a leader and vesting the power or order within the hands of one, is the beginning of the death of the masses, or as he calls it the death threat. (Canetti 1978). Hence, the leader is a form of hypnosis or libido that can have nothing but negative connotations and leads to the breaking down of the bond between the individuals forming the *Massenkrystalle* or the "mass particles" but also the mass itself.

When focusing on the forms and evidence of power, Canetti mainly vests his definition of power in his work as the center, leading to the devastation of the use of violence as a legitimate source of leadership (see chapter "Elements of Power" in Canetti 1978). The automatic translation of power is not only on the battlefield against the masses or the enemies of the paranoid leader but through also the use of order and discipline (ideas that are also found in later work in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *Hermeneutic of the Subject*).

VI. Conclusion

In retrospect to the study presented, various elements of reflection can be extracted in summary but also for the sake of encouraging further research encounters in this field. The prime research question of this research was putting the modes of mass movements' scholarship in perspective and how they have developed over time through scholarly contributions. The hypothesis was that the concept of the masses should reserve a priority in social science studies, as an alternate framework to the predominant social movement literature, while using the example of Black Lives Matter Movement, throughout the research.

On one hand, one can conclude the state discourse of the masses as posing a threat to the overall national well-being, was immanent in earlier literature on crowd psychology and mass assembly. This in return shed light on a particular meaning of any moments assembly where numbers always play a fundamental role in the definition of masses and crowds, namely that the masses are placed ultimately into a submissive and threatening position to the overall wellbeing of a society and dominance of the state. Ultimately, a less excluding approach, largely still based on the element of number, approached the masses with empathy (the Arendtian approach) for being a threat to democratic processes due to their inability to distinguish and resist the totalitarian leader,

but also for their inability to retain a prolonged process of resistance towards the tyrant (the Canetti approach). The only one who explained it as a process was Gramsci which was not only about a moment of assembly but an alliance process between the intellectual and the peasant masses against state hegemony and domination. This status of going outside of the physical norm of a moment captured while protests are happening challenges the classical texts of Le Bon and Freud and gives greater leverage of credit to Gramsci's outlook on necessary alliances amongst intellectual and working groups in society in face of regime dominance. On another level of analysis, while Canetti and Gramsci, along with Arendt's narratives on the masses, as they touched on the element of self-reflections from afar, as to the positioning of individuals within the mass movement, whether at a given moment as per Canetti or as a process of mass alliances in the Gramscian sense.

Throughout the paper it was evident that various concepts, ranging from the concept of death, violence, physical representation, alliances, and identity, were presented from the classical literature to the rather modern literature on the masses as a concept. Throughout the paper, these concepts and theories were reflected on in relation to their applicability to the BLM, which depict that the theoretical tool-kit of the concept of the masses can indeed, at least on some levels of theoretical contributions, be applicable in reference to mass movements seeking a prime aim and mission to prove their existence, being the end of racism and applicability of human acceptance and tolerance regardless of color in the case of BLM. The recommendations that one may conclude concerning this research, in that respect, indicate the necessity to move away from widely employed scholarship, as well as extract the wide array of conceptual settings presented by the discourse analysis of the studied scholarship. While there are indeed various trends of focus on the being and the active nature of the masses, it is nevertheless evident that a setting for a theoretical toolbox is presented through this paper. It can be extracted, that perhaps the more classical schools of thought towards the concept of the masses and the characterization of the masses are rather unemployable, depending on the nature of the researcher and their methodological outlook. The more controversial contributions that can and should indeed be translated into methodological tools, canvassing empirical work, is that of the 20th century (selectively).

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