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REDESCRIPTIONS
Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory

The Phantasmatic Core of Fascism: Psychoanalytic Theories of Antisemitism and Group Aggression Amongst the 'Political Freudians'

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The period predating and overlapping with World War II saw psychoanalytic authors respond to the authoritarian and fascist developments in Europe through scholarly and analytical writings. These authors, sometimes referenced as 'political Freudians', were interested in bringing psychoanalysis in a dialogue with progressive social and pedagogical movements of their times, focusing their critique on the persecutory, eliminatory and purificatory fantasies, which they saw as animating the fascistic movements in Europe. This article analyses selected texts by Otto Fenichel, Ernst Simmel and Rudolf Loewenstein and argues that these authors asked about the political and ethical stakes of the fascist constructions of its ideal subject; one that was armoured against the threats of dispossession perpetuated by racialized minorities. In different ways, these thinkers showed that projection, paranoia, scapegoating and ego-regression became operative as group phenomena at that historical moment. By engaging with these texts, it becomes possible to not only understand better the history of how the critical psychoanalytic theorising developed at the backdrop of war-time European history, but also to consider the contribution that concepts of desire, irrationality, fantasy and affect make to the studies of fascism, historically, and perhaps today.

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I—INTRODUCTION

The historical development of twentieth-century European fascism and the formation of Freudian psychoanalysis not only had overlapping chronologies, but both have been discussed by scholarship as responses to the crisis of European modernity, and in particular the way it was precipitated and cast into relief through the events and consequences of World War I (see Kurzweil 1984; Forrester 2009; Roseman 2011). Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future* (1961) described this crisis as a breakdown of three Western paradigms of social and political life, which, as she argued, were closely fused in Greek and Latin antiquities: tradition, religion and authority. She further argues that in Western modernity, these paradigms have not merely been weakened, but have become inaccessible as frameworks of public life and collective experience (cf. Arendt 1961: 95–96). This opening remark is not meant to conflate psychoanalysis and fascism in any way,[1] but, rather, to outline their historical, cultural and political backdrop as a moment of crisis that magnified, in Jeff Malpas' words, 'the horrifyingly contradictory aspects of human existence [...] an almost complete loss of faith in progress' (2006: 276).

Taking this point as an opening into a discussion of selected psychoanalytic critiques and interpretations of German fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, I suggest that the historical moment immediately predating and overlapping with World War II saw psychoanalytic authors respond to the authoritarian and fascist developments in Europe through scholarly and analytical writings. These authors are sometimes referenced as 'second generation' of Freudian psychoanalysts, many of whom were interested in bringing psychoanalysis in a dialogue with progressive social and pedagogical movements of their times. Sometimes called 'political Freudians' (see Jacoby 1983), the group included, amongst others, Wilhelm Reich, Otto Fenichel, Ernst Simmel, Siegfried Bernfeld and Frances Deri. They asserted Freudian psychoanalysis as a theory of modern society and of the social (and not solely a clinical inquiry into the individual psyche). While this had already been apparent with Freud, the psychoanalytic authors of the pre-war period focused their critique on European fascism, and on the persecutory, eliminatory and purificatory fantasies, which they saw as animating the fascistic movements. This article contributes to the scholarship on psychoanalytic critiques of fascism in two ways. First, it draws attention to the diversity and heterogeneity of the discursive field formed by these responses, some of which, to mention only one element, adopted a Marxist view, while others followed a distinctly liberal (and anti-Marxist) orientation. Second, it emphasizes the historical importance of the critical insights of the authors that insisted that fascism occupied a Their emphasis on stigmatizing and exterminatory impulses within fascism put in a different light the question of minority populations, and that of aggressive drives. Finally, the argument that these writings offer a unique critical insight into the history of fascist popular movements and political ideology is meant to address a relative lack of attention to Freudian psychoanalysis in contemporary scholarship on fascism (exceptions include Damousi and Plotkin 2012; Pick 2012).

Providing a uniform definition and characterization of fascism has been notoriously difficult for historians and political theorists alike (cf. Griffin 1991; Orwell 1944; Shenfield 2004). Circumventing these difficulties, this article focuses on those

1 There is an extensive academic literature on institutionalized psychoanalysis' coexistence with authoritarian governments. For discussions of Nazi Germany, see Goggin and Goggin (2001), Rickels (2002), Frosh (2005), Peglau (2013).

aspects of German fascism that were considered pivotal by the public intellectuals associated with Freudian psychoanalysis as clinicians and theorists in the 1930s and 1940s. Characteristic of their interpretations was a tendency to read fascism as the unleashing of violent irrational forces amongst the 'masses'. In his book on Freud as a political thinker, Eli Zaretsky names amongst these irrational forces 'group paranoia, the role of projection in justifying aggression, [and] the futile longing for leadership' (2015: 2). The question of psychoanalysis' theoretical responses to fascism covers scholarship on the psycho-social appeal of dictatorial control and leadership, on the unconscious affect and the massification of modern society and on the subjective gratification derived from a 'racially unified and hierarchical organized society' (Saxena 2015: 43; see also Payne 2003, 2014; Frosh 2005; Rustin 2016; Jay 2019).

The focus here is on three texts: 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism' by Fenichel (1940), 'Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology' by Simmel (1946), and *Christians and Jews* by Loewenstein (1951). It is important to note that in all three cases, the objective has been to investigate fascism's development through the prism of the theory of the unconscious, rather than critically engage with Freudian psychoanalysis as such, by taking as their foci Freud's texts on civilization, group psychology, Jewishness and antisemitism (see Freud 1953 [1930]; 1955 [1922]; 1964 [1939]). Because this essay seeks to unpack the conceptual nexus of fascism and antisemitism, it omits other texts produced in that period by the 'political Freudians', notably the work of Wilhelm Reich (which has seen a revival of interest in the recent years). Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (2013 [1946], which analyses the effects of sexual repression and patriarchal family on the emergence of authoritarian movements and state structures, it is only parenthetically interested in modern figurations of Jewishness and their importance for German fascism.[2]

In his book on the 'political Freudians' Jacoby draws attention to the former students of Freud (or of Freud's immediate collaborators) who were affiliated with the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society and who were committed to exploring progressive socio-political implications of psychoanalysis (see also Steiner 2020). In particular, their social, clinical and scholarly nexus of psychoanalysis and Marxism, as exemplified by activities undertaken in 1920s and 1930s, aimed at making analysis accessible to and popularized amongst the working classes (for details, see Goggin & Goggin 2001; Danto 2005; Frosh 2005; Makari 2008). Fenichel, Simmel and Loewenstein came from secularized and assimilated German-speaking Jewish families. They were all educated as medical doctors, and, either before or during the war, emigrated from Europe to the USA (Fisher 2004; Zaretsky 2005). Fenichel and Simmel (the 'political Freudians' *sensu stricto*) differed from Loewenstein in their Marxist radical views, as well as in theoretical-psychoanalytic approach (Greenson 1966; Peck 1966). The essay 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism' was written by Fenichel as a presentation for a Zionist Prague organization in 1930s, and it reflects, and perhaps foreshadows, the professional and personal difficulties faced by Fenichel after National Socialists came to power in Germany (see Steiner 2020: 193). Stephen Frosh (2005: 63–90) has

2 Thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School are also excluded from this analysis. It should be noted that both Fenichel and Simmel collaborated with Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse during the period of the institute's émigré period, and that their collaboration included research on discrimination (see Horkheimer 1948). Others working on fascism and antisemitism from psycho-social perspectives in that period were Berliner (1946), Orr (1946), Brenner (1948).

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written persuasively about the devastating effects of Nazism on Jewish and socialist psychoanalysts in Germany, including a group of clinicians and social reformists that collaborated within the framework of Fenichel's *Kinderseminar* in Berlin (Goggin & Goggin 2001: 53–65; Zaretsky 2005: 217–248; Makari 2008). Many of them were forced into exile; Fenichel migrated to Norway and Czechoslovakia, and subsequently to the USA, where his precarious legal and professional status resulted in what is frequently described as a 'tempering' of his Marxist views (Danto 2005: 266; Pick 2012: 21). Fenichel correspondence with his closest collaborators and friends in *Rundbriefe,* or the 'circular letters', offers a poignant testimony to these hardships (Gifford 1985; Harris & Brock 1991).

Ernst Simmel's writings on fascism concerned, in Danto's words, 'the twin predicaments of mental illness and structural oppression' (2009: 337). In Berlin, and after his migration to the USA in Los Angeles, Simmel was equally committed to social activism and clinical work. His 1932 article 'Nationalsozialismus und Volksgesundheit' combines his political interests with clinical expertise in order to scrutinize the psychic appeal of violence and war in the context of mass psychology. In 'Nationalsozialismus und Volksgesundheit', Simmel used the term 'murderous drives', which he later developed in 'Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology' (1989; see also Pick 2012: 88–89). 'Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology' was first presented at the Psychiatric Symposium on Antisemitism in San Francisco in 1944, which was also a forum of collaboration between the 'political Freudians' and members of the Frankfurt School (Jacoby 1983: 64).

Rudolf Loewenstein differed in his theoretical, analytic and political orientation from Fenichel and Simmel perspectives. This is partly due to his ego psychology approach (Makari 2008), and partly to his liberal political views, and the broadly humanistic framing of the book, *Christians and Jews,* which ends with a call for greater religious tolerance and ecumenical collaboration in order to eliminate the 'anti-Jewish bias' that, as Loewenstein argued, continued in Europe after 1945 (see Ages 1973; Ostow 2018). Loewenstein was a student and translator of Freud into French, who moved to Paris in 1925, before emigrating to the USA in 1942. In France, Loewenstein played a key role in the formation of French psychoanalysis and was an analyst of Jacques Lacan. In the USA, he established a collaboration with Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris and became one of the founding figures of the psychoanalytic school of ego psychology (see Roudinesco 1990).

II—OTTO FENICHEL: ANTISEMITISM AS DEFLECTION FROM POLITICAL ACTION AND AS ANACHRONISM

Otto Fenichel's analysis of German fascism in his essay on 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism' (1940) is framed by a dual objective of representing social phenomena as more than simply an aggregate of individual dynamics of the psyche and of historicizing what Fenichel saw as a distinctively modern character of Nazi antisemitism. Fenichel thus explicitly set the aim for the text to shed light on 'the current and external stimulant' (1940: 25) for the proliferation of the antisemitic views and sentiments in Germany and Austria in 1930s. Fenichel thus zoomed onto the question of increased public openness and receptivity to propagandistic exclusionary discourses, which he located at 'the specific historical conjunctures [of] the political and economic context' (Fisher 2004: 60).

In Fenichel's Marxist-psychoanalytic perspective, the on-going tactics of activating and magnifying collective animosity of the working-classes towards the Jewish minority groups by fascist leaders cannot be reduced to processes of 'mass-suggestion' or to rational calculations of socio-economic gains (1940, 25). Rather, the psychoanalytic prism brings together within the rubric of antisemitism elements of ideology, social movement *and* political mediation of the unconscious (cf. Klafter 2020). Since the nineteenth century antisemitism had served as an effective tactic of re-directing and deflecting revolutionary affects and energies, for Fenichel it thus bound with the historical emergence of the politically conscious working classes. Construing Jews as objects of hostility and disgust 'resolved' and channelled elsewhere the psychic tensions of the proletariat.[3]

In this account, the working classes were positioned in a dual and paradoxical relation to political authority: they simultaneously sought to rebel against those who held power *and* desired to obey. As a 'condensation of [these] most contradictory tendencies', antisemitism channelled the proletarian urge to 'rebel [...] against the authorities', as well as offered an opportunity for a 'cruel suppression and punishment of this instinctual rebellion, [...] directed against oneself' (Fennichel 1940, 31). There is thus a link between the mass antisemitic sentiments and the fear and terror experienced by the subject at their own 'rebellious drives' (Bergmann 1988: 13; see also Falk 2008). While notably in a later edition of his text, Fenichel downplayed the notion of antisemitism as a counter-revolutionary deflection (likely in order to distance his own position from Wilhelm Reich following Reich's conflict with both the socialist groups and the psychoanalysts), he nevertheless continued to give attention to the political mechanisms of minority populations scapegoating through antisemitism, whereby the ruling classes were able to 'load their sins onto the Jews' (1940: 26).

'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism' articulates the nexus of a Marxist reading of history and the psychoanalytic concept of the drive. Fenichel's view on antisemitism is that the figuration of Jewish otherness has produced exclusionary discursive and material effects as regards land ownership and industrial production (1940: 28). Harris & Brock (1991) notes here a similarity between Fenichel's point and the language used by the pioneering European Zionists in the early twentieth century; it is also known that Fenichel was a reader and an admirer of Arnold Zweig (see Zweig 1921, 1988 [1922]). 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism' also clearly echoes Leo Pinsker's critique of the Jewish othering by European societies in his 1882 *Auto-Emancipation* (see Barlett 2005).[4] At the same time, Fenichel complicates the Marxist interpretation of Jewish othering by means class subordination when he pairs it with the psychoanalytic notion of the 'unconscious root' of Jewish hatred, which Freud outlined in Civilization and Its Discontents (1955 [1922]) and in Moses and Monotheism (1964 [1939]). Freud posited a symbolic link between the castration complex and the association of Jews with the fears of material dispossession (cf. Frosh 2005: 39–40). Pointing out the linguistic (metonymic) shift from the Jewish circumcision to the threatening figure of a castrating stranger, Freud argued underpinning the social mechanisms of Jewish othering and exclusion modern amongst European societies was the fear of a violent 'cut' to be executed by the minority populations upon the subject (1955 [1922]: 36).

3 For non-psychoanalytic interpretations of antisemitism as a 'deflection' for the working-class see Hausheer (1936) and Alexander (1987).

4 Pinsker writes, for example: 'to the living the Jew is a corpse, to the native a foreigner, to the homesteader a vagrant, to the proprietary a beggar, to the poor an exploiter and a millionaire, to the patriot a man without a country' (1906: 6).

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This 'cut' took different discursive forms—dispossession of economic assets, cultural corruption or defilement of 'racial purity'—but its phantasmatic core was the loss of precious properties of the subject (cf. Jonte-Pace 2001: 107; Falk 2008: 67).

The originality of Fenichel's intervention comes to the fore, in my view, in the discussion of what he calls 'Jewish anachronism', and by which Fenichel understood the social constructions of minority, and the role that these constructions had played historically in the development of European fascism. Fenichel suggested that the European Jewish populations were construed as having retained and rendered visible for their host societies certain characteristics and 'peculiarities', which these societies had relegated to the past in effect of the civilizing process (cf. Freud 1953 [1930]). Using the term of 'archaic foreignness' (of the European Jews), Fenichel postulated a kind of 'plural temporality' that emerged historically from the continued presence of what majority societies saw as their 'inchoate past'—a trace and a return of what is believed to have disappeared (1940: 29). As such, the argument was that for the modern European societies the Jewish populations and other minority groups identified by ethnicity came to signify '[the] old primeval powers with which one had, oneself, lost touch' (1940: 31). They were associated with 'magical thinking'—a shorthand for othering perceptions of Jewish 'unintelligible language' and their 'ununderstandable God'—which the modern societies were to abandon in their purported embrace of rationality and secularism. The minority figure became synonymous with uncanny contents 'not only because they [the majority populations] cannot understand [the Jew] and therefore can imagine all sorts of sins in him, but still more so because they can understand him very well somewhere in the depths […]' (1940: 31). In this rather creative take on the Freudian notion of the return of the repressed, Fenichel argues that 'the [repudiated] instincts […] come back to them in these incomprehensible people who live as strangers in their midst' (1940: 32). By depicting the Jew as both a neighbour 'in the midst' *and* a bearer of unassimilable strangeness, Fenichel shed light on antisemitism as a deflection of the working classes from transformational and resurgent political projects *and* as a social projection operating as a 'weapon in class-warfare' (1940: 39). While the attempt at bringing together psychoanalytic insight into the dynamics of othering of minority groups with Marxist notion of history as class antagonism ultimately 'troubled' Marx's conception of antisemitism, Fenichel urged his contemporary readers to consider the unconscious affects as a psycho-social scaffolding of European fascism.

III—ERNST SIMMEL: ANTISEMITISM 'PASSES OVER HUMANITY'

Ernst Simmel's critique of fascism unfolds through two trajectories of Freud's psychoanalytic theory: first, the analysis of the distortions in psychic life whereby the subject reverts to infantile stages of ego development and, second, the analysis of the modern element in group formations. Simmel's essay 'Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology' was first published in the German Marxist journal Der sozialistische Arzt in 1932 and was subsequently revised and re-published in English a decade later. Simmel built in it on the idea that Freud developed in *Civilization and its Discontents* that civilization [*Kultur*] is a set of dynamic processes that society 'passes through' as (if) through phases or stages. Key to this critical theory of modernity—critical in the sense that it questions discourses presenting modernity as an unambivalent achievement or 'progress'—is that in narrating civilization Freud employs the literary device of analogy, situating the cultural process in relation to his theory of the libidinal stages

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of character development as a kind of 'model' or a 'figure' for articulating the former (cf.1953 [1930]: 96). The language used both in theorizing the libidinal development and civilization is that of 'passage' or 'passing': just as sexual organization 'passes through' [*durchläuft*] different developmental phases, civilization is described to 'pass over' [*abläuft*] society (1953 [1905]: 151; 2002; cf. 1953 [1930]: 96–97). What is well known about Freud's work on libido and civilization alike is that at hand is not an image of unobstructed passage or a linear progression—the subject can be 'blocked' or 'stuck' at different libidinal phases and anachronism abound in modern societies. Simmel's texts follows closely Freud's analogous figuration of the individual psyche and modern society as a staged 'movement' and uses the language of 'passage', which disappeared in Joan Riviere's translation of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (she translates *ablaufen* features as 'undergoing'; see Freud 1953 [1930]).[5]

The starting point of Simmel's text was similar to Fenichel's 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism': employing the Freudian concepts of the 'civilizing process' in connection with the sociological Marxist analysis of modern antisemitism. But the subsequent direction of Simmel's argument is different as 'Anti-Semitism and Mass Psychopathology' presents antisemitism as a civilizational 'by-product' or an unsuccessful 'passing through' rather than the subject's regression to base feelings as a withdrawal from, or suspension of, the civilizing process. That argument hinges on Simmel's use of the language of 'passing over' or 'passing through' from *Civilization and its Discontents* in relation to the European history of antisemitism with the effect of complicating the idea of a rational modern subject, who shapes history consciously and autonomously. As such, the proliferation of antisemitic views and attitudes in 1930s Germany—antisemitism connotes here both fascistic social movements and an affective emergence—assumes a national subject shaped by a 'by-product' of civilization (1946: 66). Importantly, this is not to suggest a determinist view of history whereby the subject is absolved of responsibility. By linking fascism and the affective concentration of fear and hatred (in relation to the Jewish populations), Simmel identifies the 'primary frictions' of civilization at work in European history and highlights the tension between the desire for freedom and group demands for conformity.

Not unlike Fenichel in 'Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism', Simmel sees the ideas about antisemitism as ideology or as an economic discourse of material profitability as an insufficient explanation of the historical alignment of fascism and antisemitism in 1930s Germany. Rather, he points to elements that (according to Simmel) have been missing from sociological analyses of antisemitism, namely phantasy and affect. As such, for Simmel, modern antisemitism has a tripartite genealogy. It is individual because it marks a subjective retreat to a state dominated by ego-preservative instincts and hate; it is collective insofar as it is accompanied by the subject's submersion

5 It should be noted that Riviere downplays the rich causative and agential associations of Freud's civilizing imaginary as she inverts the subject and object of the sentence '[die] Kulturentwichlung erscheint uns als ein eigenartiger Prozess, der über die Menscheit abläuf' ('[the] development of civilization appears to us as a peculiar process which mankind undergoes', 1953 [1930]: 96). Riviere also translates the German verb 'ablaufen' as 'undergo', rather than 'pass'; the latter would render visible the connection between Freud's notion of civilizing process and the idea that human sexuality metamorphoses and consolidates by moving through phases or stages (a connection that Simmel recognizes). David McLintock's more recent translation is lexically and grammatically closer to the original: '[the] evolution of culture seems to us a peculiar kind of process passing over humanity'. The concept of subjective, affective and ideational 'passing' in Freud is in my view deserving of more scholarly attention; I have identified only two short discussions: in Brennan's theory of affective transmission (2004) and in Wegman's work on psychoanalysis and cognitive psychology (2013).

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within the psycho-social dynamics of a mass, and it is also symptomatic of the 'disturbance of interaction' between the individual and society (1946: 34). Whereas at the collective level, antisemitism corresponds to what Gustave Le Bon called 'crowd-mindedness' of modern individuals (2006 [1896]), at the level of individual psyche, it exemplifies the broader discriminatory and aggressive tendencies that manifest in modern society. Simmel calls it an 'infantile regression' to the oral stage (1946: 33), which in psychoanalytic theory is associated with the desire for violent incorporation of the other (biting, devouring, etc.). This 'pathological symptom formation' enables the return of the subjugated, repressed and sublimated aggressive instincts (Simmel 1946: 33). By placing European fascism at the interstices of the research into modern mass psychology and the psychoanalytic discourse of ego regression, Simmel depicts that the nexus of fascism and anti-Semitism as a psycho-social shift from the 'inner ego-superego conflict' to the 'outer ego-object conflict' (1946: 52). In result, the text carefully traces the quotidian and socially normalized expressions of antisemitism, including prejudicial or stereotyping language, which for Simmel is continuous with acts of violence. Whether 'ideational aggression', or what Simmel also calls 'a pogrom of words', turns into 'physical aggression', or 'a pogrom of actions', is a matter of power constellations, and not two distinct phenomena (1946: 52).

Simmel's text shows that the psychoanalytic engagements with fascism by the 'political Freudians' were *not* reducible to questions of individual psyche but were works of political critique and serious attempts at grappling with fascism as a *mass* phenomenon. Arguing against the psychoanalytic interpretations of the fascistic subject as neurotic, Simmel postulates instead that, in contrast to suffering of neurotics, fascists are not displaying signs of social maladaptation. On the contrary, Simmel describes them as strikingly 'normal' and 'well-adapted' and displaying a remarkable capacity to, as he puts it, 'go on about [their lives]' (36). One way of interpreting that part of Simmel's argument is as an early contribution to the historical and philosophic debates about fascism that took on the question of authoritarian or fascistic 'personality', as evidenced in the work of Adorno on authoritarian personality, or by Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann's 'banality' and ordinariness (1963), or, more recently, by Goldhagen's thesis about the pervasiveness of eliminationist fantasies within broad segments of German war-time populations (1996). Simmel stressed that participation in organized anti-Jewish activities and persecutions required, in his words, a 'break with reality', whereby the ego came to interpret the social world through 'the irrational imagery of his unconscious' (1946: 42). Rather than group neurosis, then, at hand was a phenomenon of mass psychosis or collective delusion. Insofar as such 'delusion' feeds on the lack of knowledge (scientific or social), modern and earlier (premodern) antisemitisms are alike in one key aspect – the mechanism of projection. While the recurring epidemics in medieval Europe had fuelled allegations of Jewish culpability ('well-poisoning', etc.), the nineteenth and twentieth century pogroms rest on the social portrayal of Jews as culprits of economic crises and pauperization. The Jew has become an internally contradictory figuration, which successfully was mobilized in the projections of European Jews as both exploitative capitalist benefactors and ideologues *and* as committed communists with no respect for private property or land ownership of the German farmer. This mode of othering was not neurotic, but psychotic, as one of the features of psychosis are irrationality and delusion prevailing over reality. However, Simmel also stressed that the fascistic subject did not suffer from psychosis clinically, but by way of their absorption into a 'mass'. Through the collective submergence of the egos, they had 'overcome [...] infantile impotence towards reality', which is to say that they gain a sense of historical agency in respect to their lives (Simmel 1946: 43).

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Furthermore, not unlike Fenichel who referenced incorporating fantasies as unconscious forces underpinning European fascism, Simmel developed the idea of a 'devouring' fascistic subject. The urge towards violent symbolic 'incorporation' of the frustrating object ('primitive cannibalism') is thematised as a form of regression to an infantile state and as desire for external moral authority (1946: 43). Simmel draws here closely on the psycho-social research from early nineteenth century, including writings by Le Bon (2006 [1896]) and Freud (1955 [1922]), who were characterizing European fascism as a situation whereby the superego is 're-extroverted' and located in the dictatorial leader (*Führerprinzip*), (Simmel 1946: 49; see also Moscovitz 2018). On the one side, there is *Führer* as the bearer of authority and moral guidance, who personifies the 'loved parent'. On the other side, there is the *volksfremd* Jew, who personifies the 'hated parent' and against whom the fascist subject directs their aggressive energies and impulses (1946: 50). This dual externalization of the superego solidifies the group and enables the transfer of responsibility.

Finally, Simmel also considers an argument that Judaism has been historically solidified as Christianity's 'other'. Drawing on Freud's *Moses and Monotheism,* Simmel suggests that Judaism reinscribes within its history a 'specific collective mental trauma' related to the prohibition against creating visual representation of divinity.[6] This opens up a new discourse within the essay, as Simmel speculates about the 'psychological truth' of anti-Jewish beliefs (the 'blood crimes') through references to displacement and projection. While Fenichel considers the image of a Jews as a castrator of Christians, Simmel identifies in the Jewish figuration the fear of annihilation and devouring. Referencing the antisemitic myth of blood libel he points to a phantasmal distortion of the Passover celebration, in particular the ritual roasting and devouring of lambs, as 'a repetition of the wholesale slaughter of [lambs] in Egypt' and a 'renewal of memory of the rescue [when] the Angel of Death "passed over" the houses of the Jews' (1946: 56). What renders the metaphoric transfer of meaning between lambs, Christ and children operative is the 'shared motif of innocence', as well as the idiom of blood as a medium of sacrifice, redemption and survival of the community of faith, but also of possible contamination and annihilation (cf. Roux 1988; Anidjar 2016). Binding together pre-modern and modern forms of antisemitism is the desire for a totemic animal that would carry 'the load of hate [that] […] has not been absorbed in the process of Christian civilization'.[7]

IV—RUDOLF LOEWENSTEIN: ANTISEMITISM AS CHRISTIAN AMBIVALENCE

Rudolf Loewenstein's book-length study of European antisemitism takes as its focus the historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, which it analyses from the perspective of the concept of ambivalence. Loewenstein's understanding of ambivalence is clearly psychoanalytic as he maps in the history of the Judaic-

6 By rendering god invisible, the Jews gave a 'stimulus towards spirituality in religion' and eliminate totem figures, which was, at the same time, a civilizational threshold and an impossible demand on humanity to dispense of material redemptive objects. Christianity, in this view, is a kind of return of totemistic gratification.

7 What is interesting about Simmel's claim about the continuing need for a totem animal in Western societies is its implication for their continuing Christian character, which in turn imbricates with those contemporary political philosophers who argue that modern secularization has been akin to 'repression of Christianity', rather than any successful elimination from the public sphere (Agamben 2007); or that Christianity is the only institutional and ideational formation in the West that has not yet been de-constructed (Anidjar 2015, 2016).

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Christian relations simultaneity of 'contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings' (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 26). Primarily interested in Europe, the book thus also sees ambivalence as a defining characteristic of the Jewish-Christian relations from, for instance, those between Jews and Arabs (bar one mention of the 'recent fighting' in the Palestine region, it does not discuss the founding of Israel). As such, the book is also concerned with cultural and material historiography of land ownership. Some of it can trouble the reader: as Loewenstein discusses the European history of excluding the Jewish populations from agricultural occupations and from land ownership by majority societies, he also unequivocally affirms the 'primordial […] link between a man and his land' (1951: 79).[8]

Loewenstein views the surge of social support for fascistic ideology and movements in Germany before and during the war through the psychoanalytic prism of rebellious of aggressive drives opposing the superego (law) with the aim of eliminating its two key 'products'—social morality and individual ethical conscience. The main argument is that while Nazism strategically reproduced and amplified the language of medieval anti-Jewish hatred and prejudices, it also assigned to antisemitism a novel role of overcoming the superego and dismantling the civilizational 'achievements' of European modernity (1951: 104–105).[9] In the first instance, Loewenstein suggests, antisemitism provided a way for 'clearing' the German war guilt – a collective psycho-social remnant of World War I, which was paired with national ressentiment and self-victimization – and Hitler clearly saw German national guilt as an obstacle to the emergence of belligerent nationalism (1951: 55; see also Bessel 1993). Following Erikson's article on 'Hitler's Imagery and German Youth' (1942), which locates Nazism's origins in a magnified conflict between the cosmopolitan and nationalistic orientations of the German culture in modernity, Loewenstein argued that national socialism's ideological and affective investments in antisemitism facilitated a swift transformation of masochism of the post–World War I period, which manifested through guilt, self-pity and resentment, into a xenophobic sadism. Effectively, German 'weakness' and a sense of defeat were projected onto the Jew,[10] imbricating with fascist state formation on the basis of on ethnic and racial unity. Rosenberg (1937: 221–223) has written in this context about 'nationalism particularized in the most extreme manner possible', where the figures of the other (the Jew, but also Roma, and others dehumanised as *Untermenschen*) were placed in binary opposition to the category of the national people, members of racialized statehood, 'racial comrade[s]' (*Rassenkamerad*) and those who were 'equal […] of kind' (*Artgleichkeit*).

Similarly to Fenichel, Loewenstein drew closely on psychoanalytic and anthropological discussions about social constructions of otherness and of scapegoating, which were activated within the political rhetoric of 'expelling evil'. Loewenstein articulated a related perspective by way of a historical narrative of the gradual socio-economic and political

8 Even though Loewenstein distances himself from Zionism, this essentialist historiographic interpretation of land ownership has clear political implications as he voices support for Israel's restoration of that 'primordial link' between Jews and the cultivation of land (1951: 79–81). One might ask how to read the passages in Loewenstein's book about the agricultural skill and the keenness to cultivate the land by the Israeli settlers (he writes for instance about the 'enthusiasm and competence with which the young Jews of Palestine have thrown themselves into the business of farming' (1951: 81)), if not in relation to the annexations and displacements of Palestinian populations.

9 For a different take on the superego in a related discussion see Hartmann (1945).

10 Loewenstein echoes Reich's claim about the masochistic roots of German fascism in asceticism, which 'transpose[d] religion from the 'other-worldliness' of the philosophy of suffering to the 'this worldliness' of sadistic murder' (1951: xv; cf. Zakai 2020: 47),

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alienation of Jews amongst the European host societies. Loewenstein's analysis bears some resemblance on this point Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1962 [1951]), which also was published in the early 1950s; for Loewenstein, the core dynamic of Jews' politically precarious position was their dispossession of political and civil rights. However, Loewenstein parts ways with Arendt when he outlines a pre-modern genesis of this dispossession—the fall of the Roman Empire, which coincided with the introduction of 'legal and economic sanctions' against the Jews, effectively solidified their political status as 'a separate ethnic group' (1951: 75). Loewenstein subsequently interprets the history of social and cultural isolation of European Jews amongst majority society with the view of the act of separation, which for him solidified into a cultural attitude to which subsequent laws and rulers had to respond. Loewenstein combined this point with a distinct understanding of 'Jewish anachronism'; borrowing from Arnold J. Toynbee's controversial designation of Judaism as a 'fossilized remnant' of the past, Loewenstein articulates these psycho-social dynamics of a 'persecuted minority' in relation to selected historical events (1951: 68).

Loewenstein's argument is contingent upon his idiosyncratic narrative about the relations between Christians and Jews, which he calls a 'cultural pair' (1951: 93). This is perhaps the most interesting part of Loewenstein's book, which is concerned with a *traumatic history* affecting and shaping relationships and attitudes. Loewenstein references here another remote historical event: the first century schism between Judaism and early Christianity, which consolidated their emergence as separate communities, and resulted in Christianity's (self-)identification as both antagonistic to *and* dependent on Judaism (1951: 94; cf. Nicklas 2014). He points out that in medieval and early modern Europe, the discourse of the Christian church was not straightforwardly antagonistic and inimical towards Jews, but ambivalent and at times contradictory in its attitudes. He states further that the Christian 'resentment [towards] and revolt' against Judaism coincided with a deeply engraved sense of 'attachment and obligation' (1951: 94). Loewenstein's use of the term 'ambivalent' as a descriptor of European antisemitism 'ambivalent' is psychoanalytic, meaning that he seeks to capture by it the simultaneity 'of contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings' (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 26). He illustrates this 'antisemitic ambivalence' by referencing official church discourses in medieval Europe. On the one hand, its ecclesiastical texts provided theological justification for discriminatory and violent acts against Jews by the Christian majority populations by designating Jews as the 'inner enemy' of Christianity (1951: 98). On the other hand, they simultaneously 'appealed to Christian charity to protect the Jews from excessive persecution' (1951: 100). This co-occurrence of 'tolerance and hatred' means that the official acquiescence with variable levels of violence against the Jews coincided with explicit prohibition within the church to exterminate the Jewish minority populations insofar as the 'very existence' of the Jews was taken to be the 'proof of the Gospels' and 'their abasement [was taken to be the] proof of the triumph of Christianity' (1951: 100). Connecting the psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence with the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, Loewenstein concludes that, prior to the processes of modernity and secularization in Europe, the survival of Jewish minority groups amongst Christian majority societies had been guaranteed, paradoxically, by their inferior status. Loewenstein suggests that European nation-states had not changed or done away with that 'ambivalence', but, rather, inherited and incorporated it within nineteenth-century minority politics. This further sheds light on a controversial point in *Christians and Jews*, which is that its use of the term 'anti-Christianism' to characterize the collective fantasies galvanized by German fascism and elucidate their importance in relation to its persecutory

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and exterminatory rhetoric and practices. German fascism disturbed the historical 'equilibrium' (or 'ambivalence') that had characterized attitudes to the Jewish minorities. Jews were attacked as Jews, but also as Christianity's 'double' to 'root out [...] from the German mind any attachments or preoccupations which did not exclusively serve the interests [of the fascist state]' and eliminate 'ethical principles [of] the superego' by subordinating morality to state interest (Loewenstein 1951: 104–105).

V—CONCLUSIONS

Against the view that continental psychoanalysis did not produce any politically adequate response to the authoritarian developments in 1930s Europe (cf. Peglau 2013), I have argued that Fenichel, Simmel and Loewenstein were committed intellectually and politically to the critique of fascism and antisemitism. They did it by casting into relief the political and ethical stakes of the fascist constructions of its ideal subject; one that was armoured against the threats of dispossession perpetuated by the othered Jew. In different ways, these authors thus showed projection, paranoia, scapegoating and ego-regression operating as group phenomena that were irreducible to individual psyche. By engaging with these texts, it becomes possible to not only understand better the history of how the critical psychoanalytic theorising developed at the backdrop of war-time European history in Europe but also to consider the contribution that concepts of desire, irrationality, fantasy and affect make to the studies of fascism, historically and perhaps today. This essay read the texts by the 'political Freudians' as contributions to what Isaac (2003) called anti-totalitarian political thought that subsequently had an impact on other social and political émigré writings, including their interlocutors in the Frankfurt School.[11]

Also, by situating Fenichel, Simmel and Loewenstein as critical theorists of fascism's historical intersection with antisemitism, this essay has argued that they have approached antisemitism as the 'phantasmic core' of fascism, rather than simply a 'propaganda tactic' of the Nazis (cf. Hartmann 1984). Rather, in different ways, Fenichel, Simmel and Loewenstein all argued that the unleashing of virulent affects against othered minority populations was constitutive to fascism. By taking the nexus of fascism and antisemitism as the 'phantasmatic nucleus' of national socialism, they also offered broader insights into the operations of unconscious fears, exterminatory impulses and purificatory desires underpinning subject formation of a belligerent majority (cf. Theweleit 1987).

Finally, I want to point out two implications of these texts, which connect with the opening remarks about psychoanalysis' response to the crisis of Western modernity and gestures at directions and areas for future research. The first point concerns the difference between modern ideological antisemitism and earlier forms of anti-Jewishness. As Hannah Arendt has argued, in modernity, antisemitism has become decoupled from the context of other social conflicts and has functioned independently of 'actual' minority–majority relations (1962 [1951]: 54–88). While Arendt's suspicion of psychoanalysis is well-known, it is striking how closely Fenichel's and Simmel's perspectives imbricate with her argument on the point that fascism is an organized mass irrationality. By showing that the power of paranoid affects was proportional to their disconnect from social realities and class exploitation (Simmel) and that antisemitism provided ways of distracting populations from social and political conflict

11 Martin Jay persuasively argues that prior to the war both Horkheimer and Adorno had largely 'subsume[d] antisemitism under the larger rubric of class conflict [...] and crisis of capitalism' (1980: 138–139).

(Fenichel), these writers both undermined the belief that fascism was a political discourse reflecting 'real' group interests and rationally calculated benefits, and, not unlike Arendt, highlighted in modern antisemitism its self-referential and affectively driven dynamics.

The second point concerns the question of religion and secularism within that crisis. Their limitations notwithstanding, what is interesting about Simmel's claim about the enduring need for a totem animal in Western societies, and about Loewenstein's investigation of the 'cultural pairing' of Judaism and Christianity, is their implicit critique of the view that secularism equals progressive elimination of religion from the public life and public concerns. In this, they echo some of Freud's remarks about religion and its role vis-à-vis the social. Simmel's and Loewenstein's analyses suggest that secularism could be perhaps better understood as a 'repression' of religion, rather than its successful obliteration from the public realm. Christian 'truths' can re-appear in secular, non-religious forms, such as when Simmel suggests that violence against Jews is a re-enactment of Christian crucifixion. In this way, the psychoanalytic inquiry into the nexus of fascism and antisemitism also indirectly contributes to the rethinking of the role of religion in modern societies.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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