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Rensmann, Lars

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Lars Rensmann

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Guilt, Resentment, and Post-Holocaust Democracy

The Frankfurt School's Analysis of "Secondary Antisemitism" in the Group Experiment and Beyond

LARS RENSMANN

Previous discussions of the Frankfurt School's work on Judeophobia have almost entirely neglected the Critical Theorists' pathbreaking analysis of "secondary antisemitism" after Auschwitz. This new form of Jew-hatred originates in the political and psychological desire to split off, repress, and downplay the memory of the Holocaust because such memory, with which Jews are often identified, evokes unwelcome guilt feelings. As Holocaust memory undermines the uncritical identification with a collective, family, or nation tainted by anti-Jewish mass atrocities, the repression of national guilt may unconsciously motivate the reproduction of resentments that helped cause the Shoah. In this light, the article re-examines the empirical postwar German study Group Experiment and other works of the Frankfurt School. Three specific defensive mechanisms in relation to historical collective guilt feelings are identified that engender a variety of antisemitic projections—from the "Jewish power" to "Jewish money" and other anti-Jewish tropes—after the Holocaust. It is argued that these insights into post-Holocaust secondary antisemitism, empirically analyzed in the German context, can partly be transferred to other contexts in European democracies and beyond. This article demonstrates that an unprocessed history of national guilt can have a negative impact on democracy and the resilience of antisemitism.

Initially sending out “messages in bottles,” the Frankfurt School has been tremendously influential in shaping a wide range of research and theorizing in the humanities and social sciences. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, and Herbert Marcuse, but in part also Otto Kirchheimer, Franz Neumann, and Friedrich Pollock, can be identified as the “inner circle” of the Institute for Social Research, which was established in Frankfurt, forced into exile by the Nazis and reconstituted in exile in America, and then re-founded in Frankfurt after the Holocaust.¹ Yet, even though the experience of anti-Jewish persecution was a constitutive experience for all members of the Institute—an experience that arguably profoundly transformed Critical Theory—and despite the fact that since the 1940s, several of the Frankfurt School scholars dedicated much of their work to social research on antisemitism and reflecting on the Holocaust, their specific analysis of Judeophobia has received only sparse systematic scholarly attention until this day.² This neglect is all the more striking because certain claims and phrases introduced by the Frankfurt School have entered the field of antisemitism research (for instance, on the nature of antisemitic projection, on “antisemitism without Jews,” or Adorno’s memorable phrase that “antisemitism is the rumor about Jews”). Moreover, previous discussions of the Frankfurt School’s work on Judeophobia have almost entirely neglected the Critical Theorists’ conceptualizations and analysis of so-called “secondary antisemitism” after Auschwitz—a concept introduced by Adorno and Peter Schönbach in the early 1960s.³ This is the case even though the term has been used frequently without reference to the Frankfurt School. Of particular importance in this context are the Institute’s postwar studies on the dynamics of German guilt, defense mechanisms, and “secondary antisemitism,” including its empirical study *Group Experiment* and a variety of smaller essays and theoretical contributions.⁴ The Critical Theorists primarily explored attitudes toward the Nazi past and the underlying political psychology of national guilt in empirical studies with various groups and strata of citizens in early postwar Germany. These

studies also address the implications for reproducing and regenerating anti-Jewish collective resentments.

Post-Holocaust “secondary antisemitism,” as will be explored below, is not conceived as a “weaker” form of Jew hatred, but, rather, the concept points first and foremost to a particular, new origin or source of antisemitic resentment: it is motivated by the wish to repress and split off Holocaust remembrance and guilt from the collective memory of a tainted nation. In short, Jews are collectively blamed, by their very existence, for reminding Germans of their nation’s crimes, guilt, and responsibility. Such antisemitism “after Auschwitz” can thus also be understood as antisemitism “because of Auschwitz.” At the core of this dynamic are unprocessed, diffuse, and denied guilt feelings in German perpetrator society—a society responsible for the most horrible atrocities in the history of humankind. Those respondents who strongly identify with the nation, and to whom feelings of guilt vis-à-vis the past remain largely external to the self, especially tend to have a desire to exonerate Germany from national guilt and responsibility—and thus minimize, relativize, or downplay the Holocaust. According to the Frankfurt School’s findings and analytical reflections, there is also a strong tendency among these people to invert victims and perpetrators, to psychologically turn “the Germans” into the victims of “the Jews,” and thus the latter into perpetrators that need to be punished. Perceived as living representatives of the criminal national past, Jews are made responsible for the unwanted memory of the crimes of which they have been the victim. Both guilt feelings and the morality of the punishing superego are projected onto the image of the Jews. Such secondary antisemitism is therefore seen as a reflection of ideological and socio-psychological aftereffects of Nazi rule. They also point to the societal failure to critically process the Nazi past and its terror. Secondary antisemitism, in this conception, is motivated by the refusal or lack of capacity to address Nazi barbarism, to face its crimes, and to take responsibility for this legacy. It adds another layer to the antisemitism problem that may take new subtle forms and induce indirect exclusion and denigration of Jews.

The goal of this article is to recover some of the Frankfurt School's largely forgotten work on the resentful socio-psychological effects and legacies of the Nazi past in Germany and on conditions of democracy in Europe after the Shoah. In so doing, the article also points to this work's critical potential for contemporary research on antisemitic resentments, problems of guilt, defensive reactions towards memory, and post-Holocaust democracy in Germany and beyond.

The article has three sections: first, some qualitative findings from the *Group Experiment* are discussed. The focus will be on key motives and examples of underlying defense mechanisms, or defense aggressions, in the framework of Adorno's socio-psychological interpretation. Second, I take a closer look at the link between these defense mechanisms and the concept of secondary antisemitism. Third, some implications for contemporary research and critical theorizing of democracy are considered. These implications point to the role of coping with legacies of genocide and guilt for the democratic evolution of post-totalitarian society. In so doing, they also raise broader questions about the political-psychological relationship between the social processing of a criminal national past, societal and individual guilt and responsibility, and democratization.

GUILT AND DEFENSE: SITUATING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE
GROUP EXPERIMENT AND ITS FINDINGS

Originally conducted in 1950 and 1951 and first published in 1955, the *Group Experiment* is the first study exploring everyday discourse and awareness of the Nazi past among various strata of postwar German democracy, beyond mere public opinion surveys.⁵ While the starting point was still “vintage critical theory,” as Jeffrey Olick and Andrew Perrin argue, the Frankfurt scholars develop an advanced and methodically innovative research design.⁶ It uses multiple group discussions to empirically examine not just manifest attitudes and postwar transformations of nationalistic, anti-democratic,

and antisemitic affects but also their deeper underlying psychosocial structures and the social context in which these affects occur.⁷

To explore these issues, 137 group discussions were initiated. They involved Germans from different social backgrounds, occupations, ages, and political milieus. Horkheimer, Adorno, Pollock, and their fellow researchers initiated group discussions among groups of farmers, housewives, high-ranking employees, and students.⁸ In contrast to quantitative surveys based on questionnaires, this new group discussion design sought to “avoid studying attitudes, opinions and behavior of humans in isolation, in which they hardly ever occur.”⁹ The Frankfurt scholars’ approach therefore “strove to move beyond the putative monistic assumptions of contemporary opinion research to a more profoundly social” and contextual view.¹⁰ In order to motivate the participants to speak freely about charged and conflictual topics, they were given aliases and remained anonymous. To start discussions, a basic stimulus was used in the form of a fictitious letter ostensibly written by a former American soldier who criticizes German authoritarianism and the way Germans have failed to deal with the past, but who also praises the Germans for their cultural achievements and abilities. The letter was designed to touch upon and mobilize the participants’ “psychological nerve points.” After reading the letter, free group discussions followed. The group moderator only formally moderated these discussions.¹¹ In the second half of the group discussion, the moderator was to employ standardized counter arguments thematically oriented at the original stimulus. These arguments directly addressed the self-understanding and self-perception of Germans, the question of guilt, economic hardship after the collapse of Nazism, and the country’s relationship with other nations, including the Allied forces.¹² The Frankfurt scholars were quite satisfied with the quality of the group discussions, which instigated statements “loaded with affects, from deeper levels.”¹³ This is especially expressed through the contradictory use of language and ideas: “The irrational, which the speaker seeks to unconsciously suppress, is set free in the structure of language. Its seemingly futile, nonsensical character proves to

make sense as it provides insights into the latent psychological mechanisms effective in the speaker.”¹⁴ The group context may complicate the validity of the findings due to the specific nature of group interactions and the problem of controlling for findings, as well as the lack of anonymity and therefore, the problem of social acceptability (i.e. that participants only say what they think is socially acceptable). However, the group discussions give access to new dimensions and enable reconstructing manifest collective and individual orientations in German postwar society. Furthermore, the group discussions illuminate latent meanings, affects, and psychological undercurrents and dynamics, which were hidden or rejected on the surface.¹⁵

Most of the findings published in the *Group Experiment* are actually limited to statistical data on aggregate individual attitudes on antisemitism, guilt, and democracy. Only a small part of the study’s rich empirical material was actually subject to a qualitative analysis—namely, the one published by Adorno in the monograph *Guilt and Defense*, which arguably offers the study’s most intriguing output. But, as Jan Lohl argues, the “heuristic value” and “theoretical insights” of this work for a social psychology of coming to terms with the past “cannot be exaggerated.”¹⁶ In this early qualitative study on guilt and defensive mechanisms regarding the Nazi crimes, Adorno develops a set of groundbreaking theoretical interpretations of postwar German reactions to the Holocaust that have found only limited reception until this day. However, they also form the empirical basis for Adorno’s later, much discussed and publicized radio addresses and lectures on “coming to terms with the past” and antisemitism in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁷

As indicated, the participants were given a fictitious letter that would serve as a basic stimulus to evoke reactions on German cultural achievements and failures in coping with Nazism. Across different social strata, milieus, religious affiliations, and political convictions, strong affective reactions were detected, in particular, a *collective defensiveness* to questions of Germany’s national guilt and political responsibility. Such defensiveness was also displayed

by those discussants who were evidently personally “innocent.” In sum, the study suggests a broad readiness to fiercely refuse German guilt and collective responsibility to deal with the Nazi crimes across generational cohorts. It also indicates prevailing patterns to employ defense strategies that blame others while exonerating the German nation. The following reactions were exhibited by the participants: the cognitive incapability to judge and evaluate the historical processes, or even to get the historical facts straight; strong national identification and high levels of affective aggressions against “others”; prevailing stereotypes and stereotypical thinking; and, a general lack of empathy toward the victims, accompanied by a high degree of national and individual self-pity putting the Germans into the position of alleged “true victims” of Nazism and World War II. This defensive reaction toward the Nazi crimes and their legacy, the lack of introspection and critical self-reflection in response to one’s feelings and national identity, Adorno concludes, needed to be seen as a “transsubjective factor.” It points to, in Horkheimer’s terminology, the collective “force of forgetting.”¹⁸ The “wish to be released from all burdensome responsibility” was, Adorno argues, omnipresent. It was extraordinarily difficult for many participants, “and certainly not just for the nationalist and fascist leaning ones, to complete the thought that they had something to make up for.”¹⁹

DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN REACTION TO THE HOLOCAUST
AND NATIONAL GUILT: SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS AND
CORRELATIONS

Defensive reactions towards national guilt were found among all German participants. However, while it is “almost impossible to expect the population that experienced the catastrophe to generate a spontaneous feeling of guilt . . . the desperate defense against any feeling of guilt represents the symptom of an extremely dangerous socio-psychological and political potential.” Moreover, the Critical Theorists see the aggressive defense against the whole issue of guilt in postwar Germany as a symptom of broader initial societal

failures, including the failure to deal with the relevant legacy of Nazism despite institutional democratization.²⁰

Of all those who participated and found themselves on the defensive, to be sure, no one was prepared to say: “[I]t was right that they were killed. Instead, it is most often a matter of trying to reconcile one’s own excessive identification with the collective to which one belongs with the knowledge of the crime: one denies or minimizes this knowledge so that one does not lose the possibility of identifying with the collective, which is the only thing that allows countless people to overcome the unbearable feeling of their own powerlessness.” The psychoanalytic idea of “repressed guilt” should therefore “not be taken too narrowly . . . defense mechanisms are only brought into play insofar as the awareness of the injustice that was committed is conscious of it as an injustice.”²¹

Adorno points out that there are also notable differences among the subgroups. From a psychological perspective, among personalities that are bound to authority, and who are thus without a fully integrated superego, the dimension of “punishment and the need for punishment are much more significant than for individuals who are structured differently.” The unmastered conflict between unconscious guilt feelings, residues of bad conscience, and the desire to display defensive reactions is then superficially “resolved” by the “externalization of guilt” and “externalization of the superego”—and thus by the projection of guilt problems on to others. This may have the same origins as social authoritarianism in general, and the specific dynamic of defense aggression in relation to the Holocaust may follow patterns similar to the externalized superego functions typical for the authoritarian syndrome at large. In general, Adorno observes that attempts to deny collective national responsibility are peculiarly much more affectively loaded than the rejection of individual guilt. Therefore, the stronger one’s national identification, upholding the “blind identification with the nation as collectivity,” the less likely is one’s readiness to question aspects of this collective identity—and the more threatening such questions may appear to the collective self-image and the individual who depends on the former’s strength and power.²²

Adorno thus differentiates between two major groups and patterns of reaction. On the one hand, there is the vast majority of participants, whom Adorno classifies as nationalists who are highly identified with a nationalist identity. They react defensively and aggressively toward addressing German crimes; consequently, in the group process, Adorno encounters astonishingly affirmative comments about Nazism that are openly articulated by many group participants. On the other hand, there are those who identify less with the collective. Rather, they are ready to communicate or come to an emotional understanding of German guilt. They, too, show defensive reactions, but to a lesser degree, and they are more likely to support compensation for the victims. From a sociological perspective, then, the defensive reaction towards issues of guilt and the “interest in redeeming oneself and Germany at any cost is much lower in the case of non-nationalists than in the case of nationalists.” However, “[b]y no means is this to say that the question of guilt is not significant for non-nationalists. But they appear to be better able to internalize problems of conscience, to come to terms with themselves and to act accordingly, than the others. With these others, the reaction of striking out, putting oneself in the right, emerges right away, and with such an effort they can hardly escape from the critical theme because they could never quite believe themselves.”²³

In turn, the social psychology of the complex of guilt shows that those individuals who display the readiness to tackle the moral issues of the Germans’ crimes and to seriously work upon the Nazi legacies—and thus internalize guilt and make the problem a matter of their own responsibility—do not only show a capacity to develop substantive solidarity with other people. They also appear to be stronger, less neurotic, personalities less likely to strike out against others. They seem altogether better suited to cope with an ultimately unmasterable past: “Perhaps one can say that the only one who is free from neurotic feelings of guilt and is capable of overcoming the whole complex is the one who experiences himself as guilty, even of those things for which he is not guilty in any immediate sense.”²⁴ However, as Adorno

concludes after subsequently reflecting on the *Group Experiment* and the socio-psychological dynamics it displays, “there is much that is neurotic in the relation to the past: defensive postures where one is not attacked, intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation, an absence of affect in the face of the gravest matters, not seldom simply a repression of what is known or half-known.”²⁵

The most striking elements of this relationship are, as pointed out, shaped by defense mechanisms. They seemed to be persistently present in postwar Germany. Defense mechanisms displace issues of historical national guilt and responsibility as well as associated moral and superego problems. Some specific socio-psychological elements and configurations of defense mechanisms are particularly noteworthy in our context. First, defensive reactions toward issues of guilt are mostly stereotypical in character. Despite at times observing some creativity in evading the problem among participants, the Frankfurt scholars find recurring standardized patterns in responses driven by the compulsion of defense. Stereotypical reactions, which block conscious self-reflection, are epitomized in both the defensive perception of the global historical event and in the perception of outgroups who allegedly use and manipulate it for their own purposes—Allied winners and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, who are mostly seen as external “accusers.”²⁶ With regard to the Nazi genocide, the Critical Theorists find recurring stereotypical patterns downplaying, relativizing, and minimizing its nature and scope in order to deny or “reevaluate” national guilt—so one can exonerate the German nation and “close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory.”²⁷ These stereotypical perceptions of history and guilt range from outright denial of the crimes to formalistic “empty reference[s]” and acknowledgment that crimes have happened only to cast off responsibility from oneself.²⁸

Defensively and aggressively attacking the legitimacy of criticisms of German guilt often invokes stereotypical perceptions and ways to discredit the actual or perceived critics—for instance, by pointing to the alleged interests and envy of “the others,” of

“mysterious powers,” or by directly pointing to the presumed interests of Americans and Jews. All criticisms of Germany’s past actions, guilt, and legacies are thereby often seen a priori as raised from outside, as “propaganda” with a specific purpose, whereas guilt is viewed solely as “internal,” subjective, and thus relative. Such subjectivist relativization, of course, may help to prevent the discussion of actual facts and objective responsibility.²⁹

Either by finding facts inaccessible or by deliberately refusing to deal with them, participants display subjective opinions that are regularly stereotypical perceptions in outright contradiction to historical reality. The stereotypical views of the past and national guilt which the Frankfurt School faced are cloaked in “expressions of subjective opinion and opinion formation” but stand in striking “contradiction to objective reality” so that their “irrational character” literally demanded the use of psychoanalytic categories.³⁰ Disputing individual feelings of conscience, “denying one’s own guilt and German guilt in general, get mixed up together associatively, with ornate illogic.” Adorno thus argues, “[u]nder the compulsion of defense, logic falls apart.”³¹

When dealing with guilt related to the Holocaust and Nazism, the prevailing pattern of stereotypical and irrational reaction formations also applies to references to “others.” Guilt and responsibility are hardly perceived as a reflection of historical actions but as a charge raised from outside. When contrasting one’s own collective to “others,” rigid dichotomies are employed. Frequently using the singular indicating false generalizations, these “others”—the Jewish victims or the Americans or the Allied forces—are often stereotyped and negatively collectivized. They are presented as a homogenized, ultimately evil force of accusers when German guilt is discussed. Whereas when “one generalizes about foreign peoples [and Jews] without any inhibitions, every criticism of German actions is rebutted by pointing out that these are false generalizations.” What frequently follows is the manifest striking out against the perceived accusers.³²

Second, defense mechanisms are not just expressed in open Holocaust denial, overt historical revisionism, or in the outright

rejection of any German guilt, which have been typical for the neo-Nazi extreme right in postwar Germany. Defense aggressions can also use “subtler, especially more rational means, among which reckoning the accounts of guilt (*Aufrechnung der Schuldkonten* [as in balancing assets and liabilities in a ledger]) is arguably the most important.”³³ Trivializing and downplaying the Holocaust by drawing up a balance sheet—a widespread defense mechanism—is especially evident among the majority who continue to strongly identify with Germany as a superior nation.³⁴ Tropes present in the discussions of the *Group Experiment* include the attempt to historically “situate” the crimes (for instance as a “response” to “Bolshevism”) or to compulsively refuse the Shoah’s genocidal singularity and unprecedented nature. The historical distortion of tracing Nazi policies and deeds “back to the ‘corner’ into which the others ‘rounded’” Hitler is thereby often accompanied by the search for relief from the burden of guilt by means of equating the Holocaust and German crimes with the “crimes committed by others.”³⁵ Distorted, downplayed, and trivialized by the “silliest of rationalizations,” the “murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance.”³⁶

Strategies to downplay German guilt, in cases where it is somewhat conceded, also entail reducing the responsibility for the crimes to a small minority of perpetrators (“Hitler did it”). This is captured in the popular image of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who magically and tragically seduces people. Applied to the manipulative power of Hitler, this common trope is “used to remove responsibility from the people, who faced such supposed magic powerlessly.”³⁷ The mythologized image of Germans as an infantile, helplessly seduced mass logically contradicts the equally common trope of “the Germans” as mere victims of brute dictatorial force who still “emigrated internally” and refused blind obedience where they could. The unifying element of both tropes, to be sure, is the exculpation of the German nation.

The third most striking expression of defense mechanisms in relation to national guilt is projection. It absorbs both the

aforementioned stereotypical thinking and drawing up of a balance sheet with the victims of Nazism. Adorno repeatedly observes “blatant example[s] of projecting guilt for wrongs committed onto others.” Projection in this context functions by means of a psychosocial inversion of perpetrators and victims that turns things upside down, while “the German people are supposed to have been oppressed and to have had bad experiences,” participants partake in the “shifting of their own guilt onto others.”³⁸

Defense here indeed functions first and foremost by projecting guilt—and thereby simultaneously providing an opportunity to unleash and rationalize one’s aggressive drives: “When the truth or at least elements of the truth are processed by the defense mechanisms, a displacement takes place throughout. One transforms one’s own guilt into the guilt of others by taking the mistakes these others have made or are supposed to have made as the cause of what one has done oneself. This mechanism, however, has a well-known psychological side: that of projection.” One’s own unconscious and repressed urges are, says Adorno, “projected to the other. One thus lives up to the expectations of one’s own superego, and at the same time has the opportunity to release one’s own aggressive inclination under the heading of legitimate punishment. The projection mechanism is manifest in paranoia, in the persecution complex. The inclination to project, however, extends far beyond the psychotic sphere and occurs in all possible degrees in normal everyday behavior.”³⁹

Adorno later analyses German public discourse, wherein the “victors are made responsible . . . and responsibility for the atrocities is shifted onto those who tolerated this seizure of power and not the ones who cheered him on. The idiocy of all this is truly a sign of something that psychologically has not been mastered, a wound, although the idea of wounds would be rather more appropriate for the victims.”⁴⁰ The counter-factual inversion of victims and perpetrators, according to which “the Germans” are the true, collectively innocent, victims and “the Jews” are ruthless culprits, engenders free-floating projections of guilt. The self-pitying focus on allegedly suppressed German suffering through bombs, hunger, and the “mistreatment of German prisoners of war,”⁴¹ is combined

with anti-Jewish images in which powerful Jews epitomize crime and conspire to take revenge against a German nation construed as innocent in the first place.

THE IMAGINARY “POWER OF THE VICTIMS”: THEORIZING
SECONDARY ANTISEMITISM

The mechanisms of inversion and projection are driving what the Frankfurt School ultimately conceptualizes as secondary antisemitism: a new form of Jew-hatred that originates in the need to split off, repress, and downplay the memory of the Holocaust, which threatens the unhampered identification with one’s national identity. As indicated, Adorno observes that the hostility toward dealing with Nazi atrocities against European Jews and with national guilt often goes hand in hand with displacing and projecting guilt onto Jewish victims and survivors—a process resulting in such secondary antisemitism discriminating against Jews and also in the use of anti-Jewish stereotypes when doing so.⁴² Motivated by the desire to erase the unwanted memory of the unprecedented crimes against humanity tainting Germany and the unprocessed, diffuse, or disintegrated feelings of guilt associated with them, guilt and conscience (or superego functions) are externalized and displaced. They are identified with the very victims of these crimes, or their successors. Many participants thus project guilt onto Jews as living collective representatives of this unmasterable past, or their reified image.

Adorno argues that a key underlying factor of this is a persistent collective narcissism motivating defense reactions and aggression, and an ongoing identification with an idealized image of the nation: “On the subjective side, in the psyche of people, National Socialism increased beyond measure the collective narcissism, simply put: national vanity. . . . This collective narcissism was severely damaged by the collapse of Hitler’s regime, but the damage occurred at the level of mere factuality, without individuals making themselves conscious of it and thereby coping with it.”⁴³ As there were no signs that this nationalist identification ever fell apart, Adorno suggests

that “secretly, smoldering unconsciously and therefore all the more powerfully, these identifications and the collective narcissism were not destroyed at all, but continue to exist.”⁴⁴

Shielding the self and the nation from the threat caused by the tremendous, indeed unbearable, guilt undermining such narcissism, the antisemitic projective delegation of the “guilt complex” in relation to Holocaust memory may stereotypically attribute to Jews a variety of qualities. First, as indicated, unconscious guilt feelings are identified with and projected onto Jews so that they become the guilty group. The latent, diffuse elements and awareness of guilt that are present in the weakly internalized superego are rejected and externalized, i.e., turned outward, by projecting guilt onto the victims.⁴⁵ In this view, Adorno points out, “it was not the SS people who were brutal, who tortured the Jews, but the Jews who supposedly forced the Germans to acknowledge the crimes of the SS.”⁴⁶

Second, as psychologically displaced representatives of the past, Jews are also made responsible for the collective remembrance of the Holocaust. Thus, they are turned into an externalized, moral superego (or moral authority) that appears to persecute and punish the individual and the nation by constantly reminding the Germans of their crimes and their guilt.⁴⁷ Charging them with being responsible for Holocaust memory that is split off from the individual and collective self, these superego or conscience functions attributed to Jews may make non-Jewish Germans initially look up to Jews as moral guides. By being morally elevated, “the Jews” (and other outgroups like the American victors) are “psychologically maneuvered into the position of the parents, on whom the child depends . . . and from whom it expects forgiveness.”⁴⁸ Yet, this projective identification of moral superiority is difficult to sustain, especially if forgiveness is not easily delivered—this simultaneously instigates feelings of inferiority, envy, and the desire to find opportunities to dismantle the projected moral authority: to turn the others and particularly Jews into a tainted, guilty party as bad as oneself or one’s nation.⁴⁹ Both the projection of a punishing, sanctioning conscience or superego, and the projection of guilt feelings against which one can aggressively exercise one’s own punishing

superego, are driven by the defense against individual and national guilt, against its unqualified recognition and (societal and psychological) internalization. Seeking to exonerate the burdened self and a tarnished national identity, these projections ultimately motivate the denigration of, and antisemitic discrimination against, Jews.⁵⁰

Such secondary antisemitism, to be sure, combines with primary motives and classical stereotypes, and in reality, they may be difficult to distinguish. While adding new meanings, contexts, and layers to antisemitic tropes and also creating new ones, secondary antisemitism also absorbs and reproduces old stereotypes. Thereby, antisemitism might not just be a projective outlet for the split off guilt issue and blind defense in relation to the Nazi crimes; the denial or relativization of the Holocaust and of German guilt can also simply or primarily be a reflection of persistent antisemitism. Jews are often made responsible for unwanted Holocaust remembrance, and perceived as ruthlessly persecuting the German nation because of the country's past, which may be analyzed as secondary antisemitism. Yet, the common inversion that imagines the "persecution of the antisemites by the Jews," and which makes the persecuted Jews "responsible for the most horrible deeds of the persecutors" (Löwenthal), is much older than Nazism; this inversion has been part of the arsenal of antisemitism all along. At any rate, primary modern antisemitic stereotypes are absorbed and reproduced in forms of secondary antisemitism.

Antisemitisms of the past and of the present are thereby rationalized as the consequence of Jewish behavior and guilt—and thus resentments against Jews are constructed as the responsibility of Jews who allegedly *cause* Jew-hatred. This inversion, of course, is as old as antisemitism itself. Everywhere where we find defense aggressions and relativizations of the Holocaust, Adorno suggests, the "sheer urge to collective defense is likely to treat the antisemitism of the Third Reich apologetically."⁵¹ In this way, antisemitism may be "retrospectively made into a consequence" of Jewish behavior. Adorno points out, "on the one hand, the existence of a German antisemitism in the period in which the worst happened is discussed away; on the other hand, the antisemitic tendencies

that are noticeable today are justified with supposed Jewish guilt. Only today, according to the argument, is there even anything like antisemitism in Germany, and the accusations against the past appear at the same time to be nothing and legitimated *ex post facto*.”⁵² Openly antisemitic participants blame the Jews anyway for “everything that happened to them. The legend of ritual murder, Jewish unscrupulousness, the shirking of physical work—no antisemitic accusation against the Jews is too absurd to not be repeated with this intention.”⁵³

THE ANALYSIS OF ANTI-JEWISH TROPES IN SECONDARY ANTISEMITISM

From Adorno’s qualitative analysis in *Guilt and Defense* and his later reflections, we can isolate three anti-Jewish tropes and their specific variations in the context of guilt and post-Holocaust antisemitism that are particularly striking. They feature in contexts in which issues of Holocaust memory and national guilt are salient or surface, and according to the Frankfurt School they point—although not necessarily exclusively—to secondary antisemitic motivations among those articulating or reiterating these stereotypes, even if unconsciously.

The “Revenge” Trope

First, there is the trope of the presumed Jewish desire for revenge and lack of forgiveness, which goes back to early Christianity. It is a classical antisemitic stereotype that Jews are “naturally” driven by a thirst for revenge. Several participants of the *Group Experiment* interpreted the behavior of Jews after the end of the war as “a thirst for revenge, and this thirst for revenge is frowned on in the name of humanity that was not exactly highly regarded during the Third Reich.”⁵⁴ Interestingly, this classical antisemitic stereotype often occurs in combination with a desire for forgiveness that points to the guilt complex, but also to the externalization of superego

functions. In fact, the expectation for Jews to forgive the Germans and forget the crimes, to reconcile with German society, has been raised since the last days of World War II, when the killing was still ongoing. Typical is the proposed “reconciliation committee” by the high-ranking Nazi perpetrator, German Labor Front leader and antisemite Robert Ley, who continued to lament about “the Jew” while drafting it before his suicide in prison shortly after the war. The attitude “that everything should be forgotten and forgiven, which would be proper for those who suffered injustice,” is especially “practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice.”⁵⁵ Anti-Jewish attitudes can then be rationalized by the lack of forgiveness that is expected: Jews are blamed for being unforgiving because they are not forgetting about German guilt and not willing to erase the living memory of the past. Jews are charged “for insisting on the appearance of justice because one does not want to make up for the wrong, especially when it is a matter of returning Jewish property.” Criticizing them for being “Holocaust-centered,” Jews are seen as regressive, backward-looking, and blocking progress. However, the “most obvious thought never occurs” to some of these participants, namely, that it is presumptuous to ask Jews “to forgive and forget the horrors that exceed all imagination.”⁵⁶

The “Jewish Power” Trope

The revenge trope is closely related to the second trope—fantasies of presumed Jewish power to exercise such revenge. The perceived threat of revenge only becomes relevant because—in line with antisemitic fantasies of Jewish conspiracy and hidden world power—some secret power is oddly attributed to the surviving Jewish victims and their successors; indeed, even dead Jews buried in cemeteries may be perceived as a powerful threat.⁵⁷ Absorbing the “manipulation” power stereotype, Jews allegedly control the media, manipulate public opinion, and issue taboos on criticizing Jews in democratic society. In the German context, this paranoid perception—just years after Nazi rule—is of course itself a continuation of Nazi thought. However, this trope, on the one

hand, turns mentioning the Holocaust in the media into a supposed expression of Jewish media power. The negative sanctioning of articulations of overt public antisemitism in post-Holocaust Germany, on the other hand, is often used to portray oneself as the genuinely “persecuted” victim; to act as if the public, which disables open manifestations of antisemitism, “would direct the sting of society against the antisemite, while it is generally the antisemites who use the society’s sting most brutally and successfully.”⁵⁸ This inversion remains powerful and persistent, Adorno argues in 1963, even though in reality the defamed German media continue to reproduce coded forms of antisemitism, for instance, in hateful images of the intellectual.⁵⁹

The Trope of “Jewish Money and Greed”

Third, the antisemitic trope of Jewish money and greed is also notable. The old antisemitic resentment of the “money Jew” is frequently employed in rationalizing defense mechanisms. Jews are thereby seen as profiteers from the Holocaust who exploit the past for their own benefit, status, interests, and especially for material gain—until this day a very common, widely shared belief in German society. But even in the American context, Löwenthal observed the occurrence of this propagandistic antisemitic resentment, evident in the existing perception that Jews are so shamelessly greedy that in their pursuit of money, they even “exploit their position as a persecuted minority to secure special privileges.”⁶⁰ Another antisemitic trope is closely linked and often mobilized in this context: Jews are “dishonest and cheat,” and thus their interest in Holocaust remembrance is disingenuous. This image ascribes immoral motives to Jews when it comes to German guilt, and thus can psychologically serve as an effective defense mechanism, for it devalues Holocaust memory and questions of national guilt by insinuating bad faith. Raising the subject is then construed as merely the product of illegitimate motives on the part of the victims. In so doing, the desperate search for “evidence” of material gains for victims or their successors serves the purpose

of dismantling the moral superiority and superego functions also ascribed to Jews. Whereas the Germans just want to go on living a normal life and might be forced to cheat in order to make a living, it is suggested, Jews cheat because of their greed and even want to materially benefit from their own persecution and demise—and that is why they do not leave the Germans in peace. “The Jews,” it is presumed, want to “get rich,” no matter what, whereas Germans, even if they cheat, only want “to live.”⁶¹

Antisemitic stereotypes that attribute to Jews the ruthless thirst for revenge, the threatening power of memory, the conspiratorial power to manipulate the media, and the exploitation of the Holocaust for their material interests all feature prominently in secondary antisemitism. These resentments, to be sure, are hampered by profound logical inconsistencies. They require a social and psychological explanation. Once again, as with modern antisemitism at large, rationalization mechanisms often employ logically implausible arguments that serve socio-psychological functions—here especially of relief from national guilt and responsibility—and make sense only as such. Anti-Jewish stereotypes thereby serve a collective self-victimization, portraying the national collective as an innocent victim of Jewish conspiratorial power, interests, and manipulations—a binary, Manichean, and collectivist view that is typical for both modern “primary” and secondary antisemitism.

In addition to the simultaneous yet contradictory delegation of guilt and superego functions (or moral authority)—and the dynamics of projection and inversion—denied motives of envy and feelings of ambivalence can also motivate specifically secondary antisemitic tropes. No matter how thin or obscure, ultimately, “the rationalization mechanism has to resort to the most drastic means to defend against them, even if these also give up the slightest hint of reason.”⁶² As with antisemitism in general, those who are rigorously nationalistic are the most susceptible to secondary antisemitism, just as they also tend to be among those who cannot cope with national guilt and therefore seek to defend their main source of collective narcissistic gratification by all socio-psychological means available.⁶³

GUILT, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND ANTI-JEWISH RESENTMENT:
ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANTISEMITISM AND
POST-HOLOCAUST DEMOCRACY

The Frankfurt School's groundbreaking work on social beliefs in postwar Germany toward Nazi Germany's criminal past provides crucial findings on the meaning of deep-seated political and cultural legacies after Nazi rule and the genocide against European Jewry. The Critical Theorists' studies also advance critical insights into specific new dynamics of secondary antisemitism. Such new antisemitism absorbs various anti-Jewish tropes—from presumed revenge fantasies to myths about conspiratorial Jewish power and control over media and images of Jews ruthlessly pursuing their own material benefits. These tropes emerge in ever new configurations. They are itself the product of modern antisemitic legacies (and as such point to an unprocessed Nazi past), *and* they can be linked to specific socio-psychological needs—namely, the pressing wish to split off and trivialize Holocaust memory, to whitewash Germany's national history, and to downplay the country's crimes, guilt, and responsibility.

In this context, Jews once again become the target of hatred. Jews often become identified with the whole murderous complex of the Holocaust and the unpleasant, unwelcome feelings it may cause. By splitting feelings of guilt and superego functions from one's self, one may project these feelings onto Jews. According to Adorno, this projection, which is not just an individual perception but carries social force, represents a particular socio-psychological defense mechanism: the wish to repress the memory of the German atrocities helps reproduce the resentment that has caused these crimes. Such a wish may be especially strong among citizens harboring unprocessed guilt feelings, among nationalists, and among citizens who are incapable of dealing with the implications of such guilt and the damage it does to any glorified image of the German nation, as the recognition of national guilt undoubtedly undermines the collectivized grand self-image that serves as a source of collective gratification. Thus, those who represent this memory become the

subject of aggression: Jews are viewed as the living embodiment of an unmastered and unwanted memory of murderous crimes that is rejected, devalued, and combatted. The history of the Holocaust and its memory are thereby psychologically projected onto the surviving victims and their families. In the projective delegation of guilt, moral authority, and responsibility in relation to the Shoah, the Critical Theorists thus identify a powerful defense mechanism that motivates the denigration of Jews and serves as a source of antisemitism and social hatred.

In so doing, Critical Theorists took research on Judeophobia in new directions after the war. Their work helps illuminate new and subtle forms of anti-Jewish exclusion and discrimination. They show the role of unprocessed guilt feelings, persistent nationalistic identification, and a lack of democratic responsibility in generating antisemitism after the genocide. And they disclose the underlying dynamics and antisemitic nature of Holocaust denial, even in its “soft” variants of trivialization. The Critical Theorists expose the drive and desire to destroy the memory of the Nazi crimes that tarnish the German nation, and to erase the negative guilt feelings associated with them, while mocking the victims of this unprecedented terror.

The Frankfurt School’s initial work can also help explain some distinct aspects of contemporary antisemitism in Germany, Europe, and beyond. By extension, the phenomenon of secondary antisemitism may be observed in other delegations and projections of guilt, such as colonial guilt.⁶⁴ The wish to negatively portray Jews in the Middle East and Israel as representatives of a “white,” colonial, demonic evil empire ruthlessly exterminating the indigenous Arab population, then, may also be explained by the need of citizens of former colonizing countries to be relieved of their nation’s historical guilt and complicity in colonial crimes—or to make up for it. In displaying hatred of a demonized Jewish state, and in the process of proclaiming “solidarity” with its presumed victims, antisemitic images may be employed. Moreover, the socio-psychological dynamics of historical guilt projection, as we can learn from Critical Theory, can also be part of the motivational complex

driving prejudice in other contexts, for instance, in relation to forms of racism and resentment that attribute alleged “privileges” to minorities who have been the victim of past discriminations or persecutions.

Diffuse, unconscious remorse feelings may thus partly motivate the rise of “post-colonial” forms of secondary antisemitism on the European continent. Creating or reproducing the demonized image of Jews as the collectivized “white colonizers” and “alien bodies” who do not belong in the Arab world has become a common trope in European discourse and public opinion since the late 1960s.⁶⁵ While colonial guilt may be motivating these binary discourses, such tropes unwittingly replicate ethnic-nationalist and antisemitic Nazi ideologies portraying Jews as “parasitic,” “alien,” and homeless people who threaten European nations and their autochthonous populations—ideologies from which one allegedly seeks distance.

The equation of the democratic Jewish State of Israel with Nazism’s anti-Jewish terror regime is another marker of such peculiar secondary antisemitism. It demonizes Israelis as it simultaneously downplays the horrors committed against Jews in the past, whereby Israel serves as a “collective Jew” onto which classical antisemitic stereotypes are frequently projected.⁶⁶ Commonly invoked Nazi references and inversions vis-a-vis Jews as a collective entity are displayed in phrases like Palestinians are the “victims of the victims,” or “Muslims are the Jews of today” (implying that Muslims are persecuted on the same level today in Western societies as Jews were in Nazi Germany). Such inversions may also point, following Critical Theory, to the deep wish to turn the persecuted victims of European history into today’s perpetrators. These constructs collectively denigrate Jews and turn them into a morally reprehensible, guilty party by demonizing Israel as a unified, evil entity that represents Jews. These tropes relativize the genocide and the still unmastered legacy of the Holocaust as well as the historical guilt associated with it on the European continent.⁶⁷

The Frankfurt school’s analysis of collective defense mechanisms, Holocaust relativization, and tenacious old and new

resentments exposes how anti-democratic attitudes and social hatred have lingered on—indeed have even been reinforced by new motives—in the institutionally democratized context of post-Holocaust Germany. Part and parcel of this observed social trend that signifies the failure to democratize society at large is the inability to seriously confront the past and to address the denial of German guilt and the legacy of Judeophobia. Even if institutions have profoundly changed, the depth and scope of the denial of guilt and of secondary antisemitism are an expression of Nazism’s political and cultural longevity. Adorno summarizes the outcomes and symptoms of this failure in 1959 in “The Meaning of Coming to Terms with the Past,” arguably his most influential essay and a biting critique of German postwar society’s “destruction of memory” and urge to “break away from the past.”⁶⁸

To be sure, significant political and cultural transformations, which Adorno and his colleagues could not anticipate, did take shape later on. They were partly induced by institutional democratization and its long-term effects, but they were especially the product of a belated cultural opening, a changing social climate, and belated public debates and controversies since the first Auschwitz Trials in the 1960s.⁶⁹ When analyzing the complex intersections of memory, politics, and democratization in the subsequent evolution of post-Holocaust Germany, controversies like the “Historians’ Debate” and the “Bitburg Controversy” in the 1980s and the “Goldhagen Debate,” the “Wehrmacht Exhibition Debate,” as well as the “Walser Debate” in the 1990s stand out as public discussions critically reshaping Germany’s self-understanding and relationship with its past.⁷⁰ Still, these are belated debates, often polarized and hostile in nature, and do not represent a one-directional success story. They are marked by, in the words of Saul Friedlander, “a constant seesaw between learning and forgetting.”⁷¹ The urge to repress and downplay the past remains powerful, while negative sanctions in relation to public manifestations of antisemitism have recently even begun to erode.

However, even though the postwar processing of guilt and of the particular legacies of Nazism and antisemitism may at times be

overrated in national and global public perceptions of Germany as a “world champion” of coming to terms with past, Germany’s political culture has indeed profoundly democratized since Adorno’s days. There is even a public “dialectic of closure” at work. By this I mean, all efforts that are made by politicians, journalists, and others to shut down the conversation on Germany’s Nazi past do not work. They are doomed to failure. Instead, these efforts reinforce Holocaust memorialization and ongoing public confrontations with the history of German atrocities. At any rate, the public processing of the legacy of antisemitism, Nazism, and guilt—even if slow and arduous—has been crucial for the evolution of postwar Germany’s democratic political culture.⁷²

The postwar work of the Institute for Social Research also raises broader questions about the societal impact of processing guilt and responsibility in relation to crimes against humanity and how coping with legacies of mass murder influences the success or failure of democratization. From these empirical studies, and especially Adorno’s subsequent theoretical and analytical reflections, we can generate general hypotheses about the specific negative effects of unprocessed authoritarian and antisemitic legacies, and the denial of national guilt, on democracy. While economic progress, the rule of law, and democratic institutional reform are crucial elements in establishing democracy, Critical Theory shows that much more is required for post-totalitarian democratization to be successful and lasting, and for democratic social value change to take place. Citizens need to take responsibility and process national guilt and responsibility as well as work through legacies of hatred for democratic culture to take hold and be anchored in society. Critical public debate, especially on historical guilt and destructive authoritarian legacies, is an integral part of this process. Also important is breaking with the authoritarian “inability to identify with others.”⁷³ In post-Holocaust society, crucial indicators for the state of democratization are therefore the way society deals with antisemitism after the Shoah and the status of the Jewish minority.⁷⁴

These insights may also point to multiple policy implications on a variety of levels: individual, collective, and governmental.

There is a responsibility on an individual and family level to recognize and address the legacies of totalitarian antisemitism and national or individual guilt. Moreover, there is the need to invest in critical educational programs and curriculum reforms engendering spaces for self-reflection on historical national guilt, past and present anti-Jewish resentments, and democratic values. Governments share a responsibility to facilitate and enable a culture of memory against collective amnesia. This may entail legal tools to address Holocaust denial or relativization that defames the victims of the Shoah, as well as measures against institutional discrimination of Jews and against the spread of contemporary resentments against Jews and Israel in public education, society, and politics—especially in post-Holocaust societies.

The work of Critical Theory suggests more broadly that liberal democracy ultimately cannot work without an underlying democratic political culture that is profoundly at odds with forms of social and political authoritarianism. Indeed, as Oskar Negt argues in Adorno's spirit, democracy is the only form of governing society that needs to be learned and acquired; it is not just about an institutional design or the separation of powers, it cannot be established overnight, and it can never be taken for granted.⁷⁵ In other words: democracy requires active, autonomous citizens capable of reflective judgment and a broader public culture of critique, rational debate, and self-reflection. Post-Holocaust democracy, in particular, requires a self-reflective political culture that critically addresses and processes past crimes. Such a political culture is supportive of both civil rights and public freedom—and thus not only a democratic or republican institutional and constitutional framework.

In their theoretical reflections and empirical studies, the Frankfurt School demonstrated how little the past was processed in post-Holocaust German society, and how this reality contributed to the reproduction and indeed reinforcement of antisemitism. In so doing, the Critical Theorists have also demonstrated the relevance of such processing of a national past and guilt for post-Holocaust democratization—and the need for a self-reflective cultural environment that consciously breaks with previous authoritarian,

antisemitic, and racist legacies hostile to egalitarian and universal principles of freedom.

NOTES

1. The Frankfurt School has originally been (self-)identified with “Critical Theory” and later on, to avoid confusion with a broader array of critical theories, with “first generation” Critical Theory or “critical social theory.” See Stephen Eric Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994); and, Richard Wolin, *The Frankfurt School Revisited* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

2. A few studies have addressed the development of the Frankfurt School’s work on anti-Jewish resentment: Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, the Jews, and Antisemitism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Mark P. Worrell, *Dialectic of Solidarity: Labor, Antisemitism, and the Frankfurt School* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); and, Eva-Maria Ziege, *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaftstheorie: Die Frankfurter Schule im amerikanischen Exil* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).

3. Theodor Adorno, “Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute,” in Theodor Adorno, *Guilt and Defense: On the Legacies of National Socialism in Postwar Germany*, trans. and eds., Jeffrey K. Olick and Andrew J. Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 108. The recent publication of Adorno’s qualitative contribution to the Institute’s empirical study, the *Group Experiment*, may initiate more research in this area. Also noteworthy is the recent work by Jan Lohl and Sebastian Winter, who have initiated a research project in which they use the empirical material of the *Group Experiment* to reinterpret and further develop Adorno’s hypotheses about secondary antisemitism “after Auschwitz” by psychoanalytic and hermeneutic means. See Jan Lohl, “‘Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht.’ Zur Konstruktion des Antisemitismus nach Auschwitz im Alltagsdiskurs der 1950er Jahre,” *Psychoanalyse: Texte zur Sozialforschung* 17, no. 2 (2013): 204–225.

4. First and foremost, the Frankfurt scholars did so in the aforementioned major early research project, the *Group Experiment*. In the context of the resettled institute in Frankfurt, this research was conducted by Horkheimer and Adorno (in the *Group Experiment*, Pollock also took a leading role). The findings from this empirical work also influenced subsequent essays

and reflections by both authors. Particular attention, however, will be paid here to Adorno's aforementioned social research contribution to the *Group Experiment*, later published as *Guilt and Defense*, and to his prominent critical public intervention against the restorative and resentful climate of post-Holocaust Germany, published under the Kantian title *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (The Meaning of Working Through the Past).

5. Friedrich Pollock, *Gruppenexperiment: Ein Studienbericht* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955).

6. Jeffrey K. Olick and Andrew J. Perrin, "Guilt and Defense: Theodor Adorno and the Legacies of National Socialism in German Society," in Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 19.

7. See Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

8. For a brief overview of the study's empirical approach and results, see Lars Rensmann, "Collective Guilt, National Identity, and Political Processes in Contemporary Germany," in *Collective Guilt: International Perspectives*, eds., Nyla Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 204–223.

9. Pollock, *Gruppenexperiment*, 34. Cited in Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

10. Olick and Perrin, "Guilt and Defense," in Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 22.

11. Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

12. Ibid.

13. Pollock, *Gruppenexperiment*, 276. Cited in Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

14. Pollock, *Gruppenexperiment*, 60. Cited in Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

15. Lohl, "Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht," 206.

16. Ibid., 207. Yet Lohl argues that even Adorno's work, as important as it is, ultimately falls short of achieving the goal of thoroughly researching individual collective and defense mechanisms. Adorno oriented his work toward the categories that had been created by the preceding quantitative analysis, which arguably limits the open qualitative approach to the material. Moreover, for his qualitative analysis, Lohl points out, group discussions were not analysed in their speech and social contexts as the methodology of the study had envisioned. Only 25 protocols were read in context, and ultimately Adorno did not analyse the group discussions in

their entirety, only dynamic but short excerpts, which were interpreted with regard to their latent meanings. Contrary to the scholars' methodological ambitions, Lohl argues, Adorno examined these articulations in isolation. This plausible objection, however, does not take into account that the empirical material of these group discussions, in themselves generated in social contexts, allows for findings that may be profoundly different from mere public opinion surveys.

17. Olick and Perrin, "Guilt and Defense," 29.

18. Max Horkheimer, "Zur Ergreifung Eichmanns," in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol.8 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985), 157.

19. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 94, 138

20. *Ibid.*, 70, 138. See also Lars Rensmann, "Returning from Forced Exile: Some Observations on Hannah Arendt's and Theodor W. Adorno's Experience of Postwar Germany and Their Social and Political Theories on Totalitarianism," *Leo Baeck Yearbook* XLIX (2004): 182–183.

21. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 53.

22. *Ibid.*, 72, 76, 82, 54. To be sure, there is no unqualified, "straightforward relationship" between national consciousness and defense against guilt. Citizens who strongly identify as a member of the national collective may also accept its negative history, such as a woman who feels pride about Goethe's German heritage yet is also "burdened with guilt because of the crimes committed against Jews." Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 182.

23. *Ibid.*, 72.

24. *Ibid.*, 182. Adorno himself experienced, and was haunted by, the common phenomenon of "survivors' guilt." Those who were designated victims but survived the Nazi extermination campaign—not the perpetrators—often felt guilty for, as Adorno puts it, being "spared." As Adorno reflects: "But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. . . . By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum), 363.

25. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans., Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 90.

26. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 71.

27. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," 89.

28. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 89.

29. *Ibid.*, 126, 72, 75.

30. Adorno, "Schuld und Abwehr," in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 9.2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 136, my translation. Unfortunately, this important introduction has neither been translated nor included in the volume *Guilt and Defense*, edited and translated by Olick and Perrin. In referring to one especially twisted and contradictory statement, Adorno comments that apart from "the telltale slip 'we are not at all ashamed of the Jews' (instead of: of the crimes against the Jews), apparently once again at the bottom of it is the opinion that guilt is so internal that it cannot be demanded from outside." Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 75.

31. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 76, 85.

32. *Ibid.*, 105, 72.

33. *Ibid.*, 72.

34. Subsequent studies in postwar Germany have confirmed time and again the Frankfurt School's finding that the strongest call for a *Schlussstrich*, for drawing a line under the past and moving on, can be found among those who have never really confronted or processed the Nazi crimes in the first place. See Klaus Ahlheim and Bardo Heger, *Die unbequeme Vergangenheit: NS-Vergangenheit, Holocaust und die Schwierigkeiten des Erinnerns* (Schwalbach am Taunus: Wochenschau Verlag, 2002). In 1985, Löwenthal still diagnosed the persistently broad public resentment that "it must finally stop," the talk about "what we have done in the past"—alongside the desire "to repress, relativize or even deny" the past. Leo Löwenthal, "Calibans Erbe," in *Löwenthal, Judaica, Vorträge, Briefe: Schriften*. Vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 140.

35. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 109, 115.

36. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," 91.

37. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 99.

38. *Ibid.*, 124, 94, 126. In a slightly milder variation, Germans and Jews are equally guilty and "both parties must be to blame" (Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 163). This is, of course, another way of distorting history, denying German guilt, and making Jews responsible for the terror they suffered and their own extermination at the hands of Germans and their collaborators. If everyone is existentially "guilty," no one is. This trope of a universal guilt that is part of everyone's existence is present in

Heidegger and was later adopted by the German writer Martin Walser, among others, in his infamous *Paulskirchenrede*. Walser also employs the trope that guilt is an entirely subjective and internal matter, which Adorno describes as relativism and “false internalization.” Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 72.

39. Ibid., 114.

40. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 91.

41. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 123.

42. This attitude correlates, Adorno suggests, with a strong tendency to employ deep-seated resentments and collectivist perceptions of virtually every minority.

43. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 89–104, 96.

44. Ibid.

45. See Lohl, “Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht,” 221.

46. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 124.

47. Ibid., 129.

48. Ibid., 92.

49. See Lars Rensmann, *Demokratie und Judenbild: Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2004), 161.

50. Analyzing the empirical material of the *Group Experiment*, Lohl discovers what he views as a third dimension of secondary antisemitic guilt projection onto Jews in addition to guilt feelings and punishing parts of the super ego. Participants also project aggressive and narcissistic self-representations, which are, on the one hand, psychologically attractive but are later experienced in the form of burdensome guilt. See Lohl, “Die Deutschen wurden bestraft, die Juden nicht,” 221.

51. Adorno, “Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute,” in Adorno, *Kritik: Kleine Schriften zur Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 105–133, 108. My translation.

52. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 132.

53. Ibid., 153.

54. Ibid., 134.

55. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 89.

56. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 136.

57. See Hajo Funke, “Bitburg und die ‘Macht der Juden.’ Zu einem Lehrstück antijüdischen Ressentiments in Deutschland,” in *Antisemitismus nach dem Holocaust: Bestandsaufnahme und Erscheinungsformen in*

deutschsprachigen Ländern, eds., Alphonse Silbermann and Julius H. Schoeps (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1986), 41–52.

58. Adorno, “Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute,” 109. My translation.

59. *Ibid.*, 132.

60. Leo Lowenthal, *False Prophets: Studies on Authoritarianism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987), 84.

61. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense*, 108.

62. *Ibid.*, 152.

63. Adorno, “Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute,” 107.

64. On guilt and remorse as a constituent force in regressive binary thinking about America, the West, and post-colonial societies, see Pascal Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

65. On anti-Zionist antisemitism within anti-racist and anti-colonial discourses in the European left, see David Hirsh, *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism: Cosmopolitan Reflections* (New Haven: YIISA Working Papers, 2007). On antisemitic tropes in European discourses, including the trope of Israel as a “colonial” “apartheid” state and Israeli Jews as Western colonizers of the Arab world, see also the comparative and country-specific analyses in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); and, Lars Rensmann and Julius H. Schoeps, eds., *Politics and Resentment: Antisemitism and Counter-Cosmopolitanism in the European Union* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

66. Irwin Cotler, *New Anti-Jewishness* (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2002), 5.

67. In some countries, like France and Austria, Nazi collaboration has become the subject of public debates only as of late, while in others, like Hungary, antisemitic collaborators under the Horthy regime, like Bálint Hóman, the author of anti-Jewish legislation and a Nazi sympathizer, are now even publicly celebrated with government-sponsored memorials.

68. In 1959, the time had come for Adorno to put his accumulated frustration with the postwar German political climate, the cold or hostile behaviour of his fellow citizens and professors, and the personal resentment he encountered into this single essay that dealt with Germany’s failure to come to terms with the past. The essay became possibly the most radical and best known critique of post-Holocaust German society and its failure

to deal with Nazism, society's repression of Holocaust memory and public debate about German responsibility, and society's reactionary spirit of political and social restoration. Adorno criticizes a society in which there was apparently no place for émigrés, survivors, and "outsiders" who had not collaborated in the Nazi system and shared its value system and closely knit bonds. In his lecture and essay, Adorno observes a society in which "National Socialism lives on, and even today we still do not know whether it is merely a ghost of what was so monstrous that it lingers on after its own death, or whether it has not yet died at all, whether the willingness to commit the unspeakable survives in people as well as in the conditions that enclose them." Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," 89–91.

69. The literature on this belated dealing with the Nazi past and German guilt and responsibility is vast. See David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Thomas U. Berger, *War, Guilt, and World Politics after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); David Bathrick, "Totems and Taboos: Debating Nazi Legacies at the Turn of the Century," in *The Many Faces of Germany: Transformations in the Study of German Culture and History*, eds., John A. McCarthy, Walter Grünzweig, and Thomas Koebner (Oxford: Berghahn, 2004), 22–33; and Caroline Pearce, *Contemporary Germany and the Nazi Legacy: Remembrance, Politics, and the Dialectic of Normality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Pearce directly challenges my concept of "dialectic of closure" by employing the concept of "dialectic of normality." For her, Germany's dealing with the past is thoroughly and unambiguously a success story.

70. See Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory Since the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and, Karin Stoegner, "Secondary Antisemitism, the Economic Crisis and the Construction of National Identity in the Austrian Print Media," *Critical Sociology* (August 7, 2016).

71. Saul Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

72. Rensmann, *Demokratie und Judenbild*, 334–481.

73. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," 201.

74. Hajo Funke calls the level of antisemitism the "central indicator for tolerance and democracy" in post-Nazi Germany. See Funke, "Bitburg und die 'Macht der Juden,'" 51.

75. Oskar Negt, *Der Politische Mensch: Demokratie als Lebensform* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2010).

LARS RENSMANN is Professor and Chair of European Politics and Society at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He is also Visiting Professor at John Cabot University in Rome, and a Permanent Fellow at the Moses Mendelssohn Centre for European-Jewish Studies in Potsdam, Germany. He has published extensively on the subject of antisemitism, including *Politics and Resentment: Antisemitism and Counter-Cosmopolitanism in the European Union*, edited with Julius H. Schoeps (2011), and *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (forthcoming 2017).