Deciphering Crypto-Fascism

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ABSTRACT: Fascism is a virulent historical social pathology that presents itself as a political ideology or a component of general ideology. It is historical in a double sense. It is actualized at specific times and places. It is also a recurring feature of history itself. Crypto-fascism is the manipulation of the ambiguity of language for the purpose of fascistic actualization. Crypto-fascism is often an early "tell" or warning of the presence of more widespread fascism. There have been several powerful and deep studies of fascism and its co-optation of the ambiguity of language. Two of these approaches are of particular importance. In both instances fascism is addressed as a potentiality or susceptibility tied to the human condition per se. The first is Freudian and the second is existential. These approaches both meet the historical criteria noted above. In this essay I follow the work of Erich Fromm and Jean-Paul Sartre to understand the ground of fascism and its crypto variant. Camouflage is the hallmark of crypto-fascism, and it is exactly this that Fromm's analysis and that of Sartre discloses.

KEYWORDS: crypto-fascism, bad faith, existentialism, Erich Fromm, Jean-Paul Sartre

A few years ago I asked students in a class on social movements if they thought the rise of fascism like in Europe in the 1930s could happen in the United States. The question was met with curiosity and incredulity, if not to say a bit of smugness. "Not with the type of media coverage we have here!" was a typical response. When I reminded them of the fascism of the Afrikaners and others in South Africa, the view continued to be one of denial. It was as if to say, "Oh those Afrikaners *over there, back there*, you know in history, there was something

wrong with them." The same was true of other historical instances of fascism such as the Inquisition. "Well, the Church had too much power back then; thank God for the Enlightenment." Others opined that Americans, too politically sophisticated and culturally savvy, could not and would not succumb.

Yet, the words of post-World War II philosophers like Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Jean-Paul Sartre left me unconvinced. The Nazis came to power, some never tired of reminding us, through democracy. I also recalled an episode from my youth. I had gone to the Midwest to attend college. The town could not have been more remote. I overslept one day and arrived in the cafeteria late, just as the servers were putting things away from lunch. A kindly woman reminded me that I was late but served me anyway. As I took my tray and sat down, an older man approached me and asked if he could join me. When I said sure, he explained to me that what brought him to campus was that he was telling students about his experiences under the Nazis. I think about him a lot now.

Holocaust survivors like the man I met in an empty college cafeteria in a remote corner of the United States wanted us to know that fascism was not an exceptional event. It wasn't something "out there" in Germany, or back there as an historical artifact. Instead it is always nearby as a potentiality. As philosophers, we need to know why.

The study of fascism presents an unusual challenge to philosophers of history. There is an extraordinary amount of information about twentieth-century fascism. This very information and its specificity can cause us to overlook the deeper historical underpinnings of fascism. I will argue that these underpinnings are not historically specific. Instead, they are tied to the human condition. For one thing, the emphasis on twentieth-century fascism focuses, perhaps understandably, on the leaders—Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini. This top-down approach occludes a more troubling reality: the role of ordinary individuals. This aspect of the problem is expressed in the title of Daniel Goldhagen's work, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Similarly, Ali Abdullah Ahmida's work on the fascist war against colonial Libya disturbingly recounts the complicity and ongoing denial of ordinary Italians of the horrors of the fascist war there.

A second challenge is the paradoxical tendency to treat fascism ahistorically, even while undergoing an historical study of a specific instance of fascism. Here again, as in the example noted above, it is reassuring to think that fascism was a product of the twentieth century—something "back then." Are we really prepared to say that the Inquisition, the devastation wrought by the Conquistadors, the campaigns against Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the ethnic cleansing of Tamils, and the existence of apartheid and

caste systems are not instances of fascism? Yes, it is true, as Adorno and others argue, that fascism is often accompanied by a cult of personality—but what if that cult is tied to an ideology and not an individual?

The other difficulty with defining fascism from the perspective of leadership is that it tacitly assumes that fascism is only such if it succeeds in taking power. It is often too late at that point. A better approach is to define fascism from the level of culture.

Over the past few years, especially during the Trump presidency, there have been a number of scholarly conferences and papers on the rise of neo-fascism domestically and globally. Many of these approaches focus on presidential rhetoric, a mainstay of political analyses. Again though, the question arises, is this really a question of the use and misuse of a leadership style? Is there a deeper wellspring? Fascism is an historical ideology that presents itself in religious and political institutions and culturally. Its institutional form is characterized by *an obsession with tradition*, national or religious identity, and a visceral hatred of universal solidarity, as found, for example, in socialism. It is often accompanied by adherence to a cult of personality. There is a caveat here. The cult of personality is the result of fascism, not its cause. Culturally, it often manifests itself in a co-optation of symbols and language.

Philosopher Roger Scruton notes that Mussolini was the first to use the term. It is derived from the Latin "*fasces*—a bundle of rods with an ax head that was carried before the consuls as a sign of Roman authority" (Scruton 1984: 169). It would be a mistake, though, to overemphasize fascism's modern expression. Certainly earlier and simultaneous instances abound such as Imperial Japan and the Inquisition. More contemporary examples—such as Slobodan Milošević and his pursuit of a greater Serbia and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his effort to establish the Islamic State—underscore that it is common to many cultures.

Fascism in the twentieth century tended to emphasize activity coupled with deep suspicion of discursive institutions. Euromodern fascism is also persistently antisemitic. The usual explanation for historical antisemitism is the early Christian lie that the "Jews killed Christ." Although it is true, as Sartre observes in his study of antisemitism, that this certainly was a component of Christian propaganda, there may be a more significant tie to early and modern forms of antisemitism and even fascism. The principal place of Jewish law in Jewish culture is a direct contradiction of one of the main tenets of fascism. Because of its universality, the very idea of a law that is transcends time and culture, strikes at the heart of the fascistic idea of identity—it is always particular. Historically, that identity only applies, here to the Spartan, here to the true

believer, here to the "real" American, here to the "Greater Serb," here to the "law abiding citizen," and so forth. The idea that there should be a universal code of ethics that supersedes individual identity is a fundamental threat.

For the self-same reason, socialism is equally threatening, as indeed are all forms of universal solidarity. How can one be a "special" Aryan when I am a member of the same club as "Them"? This "special" identity—so important to the fascist, is grounded in an historical narrative that is forever reaching backward. Thus, fascism places an extraordinary emphasis on an imaginary tradition. Even here, though, it is necessary to ask: Does this imagined narrative and the identity it supports rest on something more fundamental?

There are two approaches that take up this question. The first is Freudian. Freud's emphasis on early experiences in the family and his radically non-essentialist account of psychic life is universal and historical. The psychological challenges faced by an individual are more or less the same today as they were in earlier periods in history. At the same time, there are excellent studies of the ways in which primary relationships and the paradigms they exemplify engender political susceptibilities (Barratt 2019).

The second approach is existential. Intersubjective encounters in the social world are a major feature of the human condition. Intersubjectivity implies an important question. Sartre was never tired of posing this question: Will one recognize or validate the freedom of the Other, or will one negate it? For human beings this is always and everywhere an open question. As Sartre describes it, this is an encounter that is immediate; it is primary and pre-reflective. The mere appearance of another human being in my day-to-day world alters my world. My field is shrunk, Sartre maintains. The same happens to the Other. If I see Sam, a person I know or may have met, and he does not acknowledge me, it is eerie—my reality has been negated at an immediate and deep level. I may say, "What's wrong with Sam!? He looked right through me! As if I didn't exist!" Lewis Gordon (forthcoming 2022) describes the phenomenology of invisibility as a feature of this existential negation. It is, as he argues, an informing principle of reality in the lives of people of color.

My students in the Seeds of Peace Program, an educational outreach program for college students from countries and regions fractured by civil strife, understood Sartre's point right away. For them, the reality that Sartre described in his philosophies, novels, essays, and plays was their day-to-day reality. The camouflage of posture, roles, and formal speech and statements obscures an underlying malice. As Sartre put it, *One plus one equals one, there it is, our mystery*! This mathematics of the Other and the camouflage that hides it is writ large in fascism everywhere and at all times.

Sartre's exploration of the Other is among the deepest accounts of the basis of fascism. His depiction unfolds through most of his works and is most directly considered in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. It is important to say that Sartre's novels and plays also take up this most basic human reality—the encounter with the Other. One question that arises here is: How is it that the mathematics of the Other becomes a social reality? Perhaps a few words on defining fascism may help.

Fascism differs from totalitarianism in important ways. One is the scope of societal control—totalitarianism, as its name implies, seeks total control as evinced in Mao's Cultural Revolution. Second, totalitarianism frequently exploits claims of national solidarity as a component of its ideology. It is actually the negation of solidarity since the claim itself is grounded in the politics of the Other. Fascism's extreme nationalism often takes the form of populism—often using socialist critiques of political economy to undermine existing institutions and actors. On this point, philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy tied the global rise of populism to antisemitism.

There is a particular form of fascism that tips its hand in terms of its malice. It may be thought of as akin to the Freudian idea of a slip of the tongue. It is crypto-fascism. One of the first to identify it was Adorno in his studies of the Nazi use of rhetoric.

What makes crypto-fascism "crypto" is the fact that it shares general language characteristics. Like fascism generally, it is able to hide when necessary or provide a plausible deniability of its true nature. It exploits the ambiguity of language—a necessary and sometimes enchanting feature that is so much a part of the arts. Likewise, this ambiguity often serves more practical purposes. For example, diplomatic language involves the use of specific words and phrases for the purpose of parsing controversial positions and goals. It is widely accepted and is a discipline of study for members of the diplomatic corps—historically and globally.

It is well-known in the scholarly literature and popular press that political campaigns test market words or strings of words and phrases to gauge their efficacy with different demographic groups. There is also a long and disturbing history both domestically and globally wherein this crypto function has been a part of the politics of race, and especially white supremacy.

Black political activists, leaders, and scholars have long condemned the practice of "dog-whistle" rhetoric. Often there is a string of such words that are woven together to convey coded references about minoritized peoples. Adorno noted that it is often sufficient merely to use a Jewish name for an audience to pick up on an antisemitic reference. Dog-whistle rhetoric manipulates ambi-

guity—a feature of language that is important for human relationships. It is, at the same time, a vulnerability that can be exploited for violent purposes.

Ted Lowi underscored the significance of ambiguity in the political realm. In his work, *The Personal President*, Lowi describes how significant the psychology of projection is for presidential leadership. The individual may project onto the president whatever is missing or hoped for in their lives. This is a commonplace feature of politics. Crypto-fascism shares this plasticity and ambiguity that is part of language. What is to be camouflaged is a call to discipline, harass, and, in extreme cases, commit violence against a targeted group.

Ordinary language seeks to explain reality or provide information of some type—entertaining, persuading, schmoozing, identifying, and so on. Crypto-fascists use language stealthily to send specific messages to those who share their worldview, or who potentially may share that view. Adorno and other scholars who studied the rhetoric of fascism view this as an essential component of fascist rallies. There are other uses of rhetoric that might meet this definition. What distinguishes crypto-fascism is its target—an ethnic, racial, national, gender, or other identity group. This is the *raison d'être* for crypto-fascism . It is *that without which* crypto-fascism would not be. Why this is so is because the establishment of identity on the part of the fascist is a binary in which the fascist is such in relation to the Other. Put otherwise, qua fascist, the Other is a co-relative.

Fromm's Analysis and the Contemporary United States

Long before Trumpism, or QAnon, there was the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, the Presidential campaign of George Wallace, and the widespread popularity of Father Coughlin. What this suggests is that our current iteration of fascist ideology sits atop a baseline of susceptibility to such ideologies. Along these lines, critics of contemporary culture have pointed to changes in media technology as a leading cause of political fragmentation. In particular, the blurring of the distinction between fiction and reality has had major consequences.

In his seminal work on political spectacle, Bruce Miroff cites a work by Roland Barthes on the differences between the spectacle of pro-wrestling and professional boxing. Barthes underscored the importance of gestures in wrestling. Gestures are symbolic and, one might add, resemble today's photo-ops. They are famously staged events, unlike actual contests wherein the outcome is unknown. Thinking of these distinctions and the age of social media and the current state of politics and culture, one sees the proliferation of staged events wherein social media users are invited to create their own daily, or even hourly, photo-ops. This has the effect of amplifying symbolism and allows for

the widespread use of dog-whistles both within social media and in the wider media universe (Miroff 2003, 278–302). It makes it appear that "real" things are happening, when they are fiction.

It is a technique of social control and dominance that Fromm documented in his study of Nazi propaganda. It is chilling. Fromm describes Nazi propaganda as nothing less than the breaking of the will of the audience by the power of the speaker's rhetoric (Fromm 1965, 221). What sets the stage for the weakening of the will to resist and the acceptance of unreality often starts in childhood. In a more mundane form, Fromm describes children who recognize the insincerity or meanness of their parents but, because of their dependence on them, suppress this knowledge.

Fromm tells us that, as time goes on, the child will lose the ability to think critically, as it seems both hopeless and dangerous (ibid., 191). This pseudo-thinking then also happens with one's emotions. In fact, it can engulf the self as a whole: "This substitution of pseudo acts for original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing leads eventually to the replacement of the original self by a pseudo self" (ibid., 202).

The details of this are spelled out by Fromm. He describes the consequences of the unlived life that has been replaced by a pseudo-life (one informed by a demonstrably false view of reality) as one fraught with an almost constant, intense state of insecurity. As he puts it, "In order to overcome the panic resulting from such loss of identity, he is compelled to conform, to seek his identity by continuous approval and recognition by others" (ibid., 203). Here one thinks of the perfectly edited and photographed depictions of one's self—the pseudo self that defines the social media persona of so many millions.

The experience of Germany and the rise of Hitler is the paradigmatic case study of the technique of what is often referred to as gaslighting. Fromm, like many other scholars, focused a great deal on the history of the interwar years. Recently, some scholars have revisited the cultural expressions of crypto-fascism. Of greatest interest here is the promulgation of what is known in Germany as the *stab-in-the-back*. After the psychological and material devastation of Germany after World War I, members of the aristocracy and the officer corps perpetrated the lie that the wreckage of the war was due to social democrats and Jews (Bittner 2020). What is striking about this is the extent to which this palpably false narrative grew in acceptance among ordinary Germans during the inter-war years.

Former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger delivered a speech condemning the propaganda and gaslighting that informed the assault of the U.S. Capitol. What was so powerful about his statement was the connection he

drew between ordinary Germans and their ego death after the wreckage of the Nazis. He compared this to the contemporary U.S.-American and the far-right culture of propaganda.

The Familial Roots of Fascism

The compelling truth of the Freudian account of fascism is that it is historical. It is so because it is non-essentialist and rooted in a historical universal experience—the family as an institution.

   As Fromm highlights, this is fertile ground for the transformation of authoritarian family susceptibilities to outright social pathology. Because the ground of this personality is the simultaneity of sadism and masochism, individuals who exemplify these tendencies become macabrely attractive. He writes: "It is characteristic of Hitler's relationship to the German masses whom he despises and 'loves' in the typically sadistic manner, as well as to his political enemies towards whom he evinces those destructive elements that are an important component of his sadism." In speaking of the masses, Hitler writes that what they want above all else is domination. Their disgust for weakness is a reflection of early childhood experiences of anxiety they loathed—"What they want is the victory of the stronger and the annihilation or the unconditional surrender of the weaker" (Fromm 1965, 220).

   For Erich Fromm, the Nazis's rise to power was established on the basis of patterns of development. The process starts when the child moves from early symbiosis with its mother toward increasing individuation. As a child moves through the developmental phases it encounters a dialectical resistance from the mother in the form of opposed goals and interests. This normal antagonism, Fromm argues, leads to the establishment of a normal dichotomy of I-and-Thou. This tension is exacerbated in certain circumstances when a child attempts individuation beyond a certain level. The result is an increase in insecurity. This may be followed by greater submission—but the child, in doing so, establishes what can be termed an "unhappy consciousness." There is nothing in this part of Fromm's analysis that is exceptional, given the discussion thus far. Instead, Fromm is recalling just how essential these early conflicts and potential complexes are for the subsequent development of an individual's psychology.

   That part of Fromm's analysis is found when his attention turns to a later conflict:

   Once the primary bonds which gave security to the individual are
   severed, once the individual faces the world outside of himself as a

completely separate entity, two courses are open to him since he has to overcome the unbearable state of powerlessness and aloneness. By one course he can progress to "positive freedom"; he can relate himself spontaneously to the world of love and work, in the genuine expression of his emotional, sensuous, and intellectual capacities; he can thus become one again with man, nature and himself, without giving up the independence and integrity of his individual self. The other course open to him is to fall back, to give up freedom, and to try to overcome his aloneness by eliminating the gap that has arisen, between his self and the world. (Fromm 1965, 139)

One method of this escape is authoritarianism. Here the individual attempts to fuse his or herself with something outside of the self that will restore the original strength that is lacking. "Secondary bonds" are sought to replace the lost primary ones, which, Fromm argues, takes the form of a striving for submission and domination. This may be more aptly termed a striving for masochism to compensate for feelings of powerlessness and inferiority. Although outside of the limitations of this paper, psychologist R. D. Laing also underscored the early experiences of the child this way. In the *Politics of the Family*, for example, Laing maintains that the family represents the individual's first exposure to sadomasochism. One question that arises here is the following: Most individuals do not succumb to the dynamics of insecurity described by Fromm or to Laing's more radical version. Instead, they often have wonderful memories of their parents and other family members. How is this explained?

Fromm tells us that healthy individuals balance the tension between insecurity and autonomy in a way that allows them to develop emotionally and intellectually. There is more, though. For this we need to recall the writings of nineteenth-century political theorists who studied the family. Answers emerge from the pages of authors and activists such as Emma Goldman and, to a lesser extent, Dorothy Day. In healthy families the child becomes healthy despite the family, not because of it. That is, the parents supersede their "roles" as parents and encounter the child as a "Thou." Left to the devices of familial roles and not the humanity of the I-Thou relationship, the family as institution can be a source of mental illness. By contrast, when viewed as a Thou, the child is no longer a property to be managed—but a person who is recognized.

In *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm devotes considerable energy to discussion of an oft-overlooked part of Freudian psychology—destructiveness as a mechanism of escape. For Freud, destructiveness is an expression of the death instinct—the opposite drive of the libido. This was a core aspect of Fromm's fellow Frankfurt School member, Herbert Marcuse. In *Eros and Civilization*,

Marcuse spells out how the repression of the libido facilitates social alienation and violence. What interests Fromm, however, is that, all things considered, one should expect that the destructiveness associated with the death instinct would be uniform across cultures and nations. Instead, he argues, it is not. Destructiveness is greater among different groups.

For Marcuse, the implications of this are that some societies create what he terms "surplus repression." For Fromm, the emphasis is on the individual:

> The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less the strength of destructiveness. *Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life*. Those individual and social conditions that make for suppression of life produce the passion for destruction that forms, so to speak, the reservoir from which particular hostile tendencies—either against others or against oneself—are nourished. (Fromm 1965, 182)

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud devotes considerable discussion to the individual's specific strategies for dealing with this conflict. Fromm is primarily interested in the cultural aspects of these adaptations in early childhood cognitive dissonance; the child observes one set of behaviors and attitudes but is compelled, owing to their dependence, to repress these observations in favor of the parental narrative.

It is this persistent dialectic between individuation and submission that serves as the often-unacknowledged basis for susceptibility to authoritarian personalities. "Thus the result of submission is the very opposite of what it was to be: submission increases the child's insecurity and at the same time creates hostility and rebelliousness, which is the more frightening since it is directed against the very persons on whom the child has remained—or become—dependent" (ibid., 29).

Familial sadomasochism is active—the dependency is more pronounced for the sadist. This point is driven home by Fromm in this account of the Nazi propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels. He quotes Goebbels, "Sometimes one is gripped by a deep depression. One can only overcome it if one is in front of the masses again. The people are the fountain of our power" (ibid. 222). For Fromm, the difficulties faced by democratic societies on these questions are perennial. This is because of the very structure of the family.

The Existential Ground of Fascism: Sartre's Account of Bad Faith

For those in the Freudian tradition the institution of the family rests atop a more fundamental reality—the vast inequality between children and adults. This inequality or disparity in power consists not only in the ability of parents to regulate behavior, but also to compel children to sign on to their view of reality. This includes the reality and definition of their own familial relations. The child that is able to overcome this by balancing the telos of their development with a baseline of insecurity must surmount significant obstacles. But are there other aspects of this dynamic that need to be considered?

Might, for example, the development of a healthy child rest not on their own qualities but on the ability of the adults to adopt an authentic perspective and praxis toward children? In other words, is the question of bad faith an issue here?

The concept of bad faith remains one of the most powerful and astute windows into the human condition. It was developed by Sartre most powerfully in his work *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre amplified it in his other philosophical treatises, novels, and plays. Nowhere is the force of the concept more acutely presented than in his *Anti-Semite and Jew*. It is a work particularly apt for the study of fascism.

There is a significant distinction to be made between Sartre's account of antisemitism and the ordinary view. Most definitions of antisemitism are fairly straightforward. Antisemitism involves malice toward Jewish people and everything associated with Jewish life and culture. There is nothing wrong with this definition, of course, and it can serve as a useful trip-wire for positive law and politics.

However, when viewed from the perspective of Sartre's analysis of intentionality, this definition is one step removed from the actual basis of antisemitism. We can formulate this in another way and say that, in *Anti-Semite and Jew,* Sartre is interested in the ontology of antisemitism. Again, we want to reiterate that a fairly strong case can be made that a de-ontological approach, as evinced in positive law and politics or a liberal approach to public policy, seems to work fairly well in democratic theory and practice. However, it remains the case that, at another, historical level of analysis, it appears that antisemitism is about more. It is not only a problem of law and politics. Instead, it seems to represent a deeper problem within social ontology, one that requires a philosophical, ontological analysis. This is what Sartre provides.

Sartre's Definition of Antisemitism

For Sartre, there are three aspects to antisemitism that, if accurately delineated, underscore the central role of human agency. Each of these three aspects of antisemitism reflects slightly differing vantage points on the intentionality of consciousness. Sartre developed his account of intentionality through his engagement with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Famously though, it also reflected his rejection of some aspects of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The latter was unconcerned with the issue of one's social being except insofar as it undermined the awareness of the question of the meaning of Being.

For Sartre this was a grave omission. In response, he posited social being—*Being-with*—at the crux of his exposition of the Other. For Sartre there are three components of social being that are involved in negating the Other. The first is the comportment of bad faith. The second is the denial of the Other as an independent Other, or, what is the same, the subsuming of the *Being-with* of the Other within one's own self-identity. Third, the establishment of an ideology that is tantamount to a stance of "moral superiority." This can often take the form described by Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* as "the democrat." We should now say a few words about each of these aspects of antisemitism.

Without question bad faith represents the initial malice that sets in motion the chain of events that result in antisemitism. As we will see it also involves the structure of *Being-with*. We should say though that, for Sartre, the actual initiation of bad faith is a self-infection brought on as a denial of the void at the center of one's being, or a fundamental "lack." One is not, Sartre famously said, what one is. Also, one is what one is not. This statement conveys Sartre's view that we simply have no essence.

One formulation that Sartre uses for bad faith is the state wherein one depicts one's transcendence as an immanence and one's immanence as a transcendence. For Sartre, this is exactly a negation of what is the truth about the individual, and that is why it is bad faith. In place of this, Sartre wants us to think of consciousness as existentially and phenomenologically free without a substrate, a structure, or an essence that can serve as the basis for denying that freedom.

Sartre then considers the role of *Being-with* in antisemitism. Sartre argues that the antisemite negates the recognition of the *Being-with* of the Other. They establish or reconfigure themself as an entity that is superior. It is a false move though since it seeks to establish a solidity—that of superiority in place of nothingness. It denies the reality of the Other but, at the same time, it negates the perigrinal of the individual with bad faith. It is, in other words, a simultaneous definition of the antisemite as "not-Jewish," even while defining the Other.

An historical example may be useful. In his essay, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," Cornel West makes the point that when "Irish," "Sicilian," and "Lithuanian" immigrants came to the United States they had to learn they were white principally by adopting a U.S. interpretation of white positivity and black negativity. In other words, they underwent defining themselves as not the identity of the Other as a requirement for their new identity.

Scholars and activists often look back on their upbringing and recall instances when their parents or relatives sought to fit in by establishing their "whiteness." One colleague recalled that, as a young person, she was extremely happy to have landed a position at an old and established securities firm in New York. Shortly after arriving and getting settled in, one of the partners came by and, after greeting her, suggested that perhaps she could "clean off the ethnic look of her desk."

These instances bespeak the often-pathetic attempt of immigrants and their children to fit in and to prove their "whiteness." They certainly do not rise to the level of the systematic racism and violence that defines life for so many African Americans and other people of color in the United States. They do underscore the ways in which imputed identity is an expression of power, perhaps, as Sartre expresses it, the ultimate exercise of power.

The third component of Sartre's depiction of antisemitism involves his identification of a disquieting form of what appears to be political discourse but which is, in fact, a negation of actual political discourse. Sartre discusses this in the context of his portrayal of the so-called "democrat." We should say that this appellation is strange since Sartre was perhaps one of the most vocal proponents and activists on behalf of democracy during the last century. The explanation for this apparent confusion owes to the fact that, if a political discourse is grounded in bad faith, then it follows that the speech that expresses it will also be infected with the same malediction.

Thus, by the term "democrat," Sartre is alerting us to something that is well-known by victims of bad faith generally, in which one can harm the Other with what appears to be "concern." For example, homeless advocate Theresa Funiciello's work, *Tyranny of Kindness*, describes the toxic "I'm O.K, You're Not" moral superiority that Sartre explicates in his account.

Sartre describes the democrat as an individual who, for example, is "concerned" about the possibility that the explicit expression of Jewish politics will engender antisemitism. Along these lines, the so-called democrat, Sartre argues, thinks it best if his or her Jewish acquaintances keep their cultural and religious identity a private affair. Thus, Sartre's indictment here is not of democracy but, instead, of the attempt on the part of the seeming "democrat" to

infect others with bad faith or, more precisely, to encourage others to infect themselves with bad faith. Similar "concern" was expressed during the civil rights era about U.S. activists being too active.

For Sartre, antisemitism is a fear of the human condition: "We are now in a position to understand the anti-Semite. He is a man who is afraid" (Sartre 1948, 53). But what exactly is the antisemite afraid of? Ultimately, for Sartre, it is existence itself. In fact, the antisemite is afraid of everything except the Jew: "Of himself, of his own consciousness, of his liberty, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitariness, of change, of society, and of the world—of everything except the Jews" (ibid. 53). But what afflicts the antisemite is not just fear but bad faith. He or she desires to become an object, an entity among entities "who does not simply adopt an opinion, he chooses himself as a person. He chooses the permanence and impenetrability of stone. . . . " (ibid.). In his early analysis of the topic, antisemitism is depicted by Sartre as grounded in bad faith, and, as such, it is interchangeable with other instances in which bad faith is mixed with a falsifying of *Being-with*:

> The Jew serves him only as a pretext. . . . The existence of the Jew merely permits the anti-Semite to stifle his anxieties at their inception by persuading himself that his place in the world has been marked out in advance, that it awaits him, and that tradition gives him the right to occupy it. Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition. The anti-Semite is a man who wishes to be a pitiless stone, a furious torrent, and a devastating thunderbolt—anything except a man. (Ibid. 54)

Especially, we would add, a person as defined by Sartre.

So, although bad faith is the foundation of antisemitism, it often makes use of a pseudo-political discourse of concern. As noted above, Sartre issues critiques of the phony support that the so-called "democrat" infected with bad faith has to offer. In the case of virulent and explicit antisemitism the target of destruction is a nation with all that that implies: culture, history, and politics. The situation is otherwise in the realm of the "democrat." In the latter case it amounts to a failure to recognize *this particular Jew*. It seeks to encompass Jewish identity within a "citizen of the world" concept, and works toward the destruction of Jewish identity *per se*.

> The democrat, like the scientist, fails to see the particular case; to him the individual is only an ensemble of individual traits. It follows

that his defense of the Jew saves the latter as man and annihilates him as Jew. (Ibid. 56)

Thus, in effect, the individual is subsumed under the posited aggregate: a falsification of the actual status of *Being-with* in place of an *a priori Being-with* that is infected from without. On this score, Sartre further notes that:

In contrast to the anti-Semite, the democrat is not afraid of himself; what he fears is the great collective forms in which he is in danger of being disintegrated. Thus he has chosen to throw in his lot with the analytic spirit because it does not see these synthetic realities. Taking this point of view, he fears the awakening of a "Jewish Consciousness" in the Jew; that is, he fears that the Jew will acquire a consciousness of the Jewish collectivity—just as he fears that a "class consciousness" may awaken in the worker. (Ibid. 57)

Sartre's account of bad faith and antisemitism, its pseudo-discourses, and so forth underscores the ubiquity of bad faith. His explication of bad faith stands in contrast with ordinary interpretations of fascistic behaviors.

More often than not, contemporary approaches rely on positive law and politics. For this reason, they seem unequipped to account for the "unanticipated" success of right-wing crypto-fascists and continuing violence against Jewish people globally. Among the interesting and disturbing elements of the rise of fascism is that it is frequently already present, exhibiting various levels of dormancy.

It is for this reason that it is so important to focus on crypto-fascism. It is the initial manifestation of fascism and, as noted earlier in our discussion, appears in camouflage. Yet activists, who have been among the first to point to it, are quick to note its presence and the malice on which it rests.

Sartre famously does not ask, "What is a Jew?" but, instead, argues the question to ask is: "What have you made of the Jews?" In doing so, Sartre is drawing attention to the actual history of antisemitism. This involves an insistence on politics in place of the ideology of religion. At the same time, he is also underscoring the psycho-social role played by an historical Other:

Primarily, as we have seen, anti-Semitism is the expression of a primitive society that, though secret and diffused, remains latent in the legal collectivity. We must not suppose, therefore, that generous outpouring of emotion, a few pretty words, a stroke of the pen will suffice to suppress it. That would be like imagining you could abolish war by denouncing its effects in a book. (Ibid. 69)

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