Introduction

There is already a very large – and impressive – literature focused on the Frankfurt School, the Institute of Social Research (the institutional framework within which the Frankfurt School developed), or on particular members of the Institute. Key figures associated with the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, have been the subject of any number of full-scale monographs.[1] Groundbreaking histories of the Frankfurt School, including books by Helmut Dubiel, Martin Jay, Rolf Wiggershaus, and Thomas Wheatland, have described and analyzed the School's genesis and development.[2] There is a significant body of scholarly literature centered not on the history of the Institute or on the lives of its members but on the sources, content, and importance of the Western Marxist–influenced approach that they created and embraced, which has come to be known as Critical Theory.[3] Why, then, write yet another work on these thinkers and their thought?

It is the intent of this book to demonstrate that the Jewish origins of key members of the Frankfurt School, and the differing ways in which the Critical Theorists related to their origins, shed light on the development of the School, on specific works written by its leading figures, and even on differences that emerged among these figures over time. It is manifestly the case that Critical Theory has multiple roots. I vigorously reject any attempt to explain Critical Theory per se solely, or even primarily, via biography. And yet, it is my contention that the history of the Frankfurt School – in the Weimar Republic, in exile, and in the decades following the Holocaust – cannot be fully told unless due attention

is paid to the relationships of Critical Theorists in all three of these periods to their (Jewish) family backgrounds.

The Institute of Social Research was, of course, never an explicitly Jewish institution. Created in the city of Frankfurt am Main in 1923 by a decree issued by the Prussian Ministry of Culture, the Institute initially concerned itself primarily with such subjects as the labor movement, socialism, and economic history.[4] In the period beginning in 1931 during which Horkheimer served as the Institute's director – the era during which Critical Theory crystallized – the Institute was characterized first and foremost by a desire to promote interdisciplinary research on major questions. "Today. . .," Horkheimer proclaimed in his inaugural address, "all depends on organizing research around current philosophical problematics which, in turn, philosophers, sociologists, political economists, historians, and psychologists engage by joining enduring research groups in order to . . . pursue their philosophical questions directed at the big picture with the finest scientific methods, to transform and to make more precise these questions as the work progresses, to find new methods, and yet never lose sight of the whole."[5] Hardly any of the articles published in the Institute's most important periodical, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, which first appeared in 1932, touched on explicitly Jewish subjects. While those who launched the Institute mentioned antisemitism[6] as an example of the kind of issue to which an institution dedicated to social research could devote itself when they conducted their initial negotiations with Hermann Weil (who was Jewish and who provided the Institute's endowment) and with the University of Frankfurt (with which the Institute was formally affiliated when it was created), these allusions to the need for studies of antisemitism seem to have been lures and disguises – designed, on the one hand, to attract funds, and, on the other hand, to deflect political criticism – rather than actual indications of the core interests of the Institute's founders.[7] The Institute per se did not devote sustained attention either to Jewish matters or to antisemitism during the Weimar years.

Nevertheless, the backgrounds of those affiliated with the Institute, and certain elements of the theory developed by the Institute's members, have led a number of commentators to inquire as to whether there may have been a connection between Jewish identity and affinity for the work of the Institute of Social Research.[8] Among those who were – in whole or part – of Jewish origin and who were formally associated with the Institute before its core members went into exile in 1932–1933 were Erich Fromm, Henryk Grossmann, Carl Grünberg (the Institute's first

director), Julian Gumperz, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Friedrich Pollock, and Feliks J. Weil.[9] These men formed the overwhelming majority of those formally associated with the Institute in the Weimar Republic. There were, to be sure, individuals who were of non-Jewish origin affiliated, in a variety of ways, with the Institute before the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, such as Karl August Wittfogel[10] (a full-time research associate at the Institute beginning in 1925) and Paul Massing[11] (who began his dissertation, under Grünberg and at the Institute, in 1927). The number of such individuals, however, was rather small. Moreover, Massing, for one, eventually came to feel that his non-Jewish background was a factor preventing him from being fully accepted by what ultimately became the inner circle of Institute members.[12]

The preponderance of men of Jewish origin in the Institute of Social Research became particularly noticeable after 1930. Lowenthal was promoted to the rank of chief assistant in that year, alongside Grossmann, who held the same rank.[13] This was also the period during which Fromm became a member of the teaching staff of the Institute. While members of the Institute were definitely not chosen on the basis of their family backgrounds, all of the full members of the Institute in residence in Frankfurt and actively involved in its affairs in the period immediately preceding the Institute's relocation out of Germany – Horkheimer, Pollock, Grossmann, Fromm, and Lowenthal – were Jews.[14] The Leftist Jewish intellectuals attracted to the Institute had an elective affinity for others like themselves.

The ancestries and early lives of the most significant Critical Theorists have certainly been explored in the past. The studies of antisemitism written by members of the Institute of Social Research in the post-Weimar periods have also been repeatedly analyzed and critiqued.[15] I have benefitted enormously from my reading of works on this latter theme by sterling scholars, including Dan Diner, Martin Jay, Anson Rabinbach, and Lars Rensmann. However, I know of no work which grapples adequately with the variety of ways in which Jewishness and antisemitism impacted on the careers and thought of the first generation of Critical Theorists over the course of their lives. It is my intent to fill this gap.

Chapter 1 will focus on describing the backgrounds of the major members of the Institute of Social Research in the years immediately before the Nazi seizure of power, and the importance of these backgrounds. The differences in the families of Horkheimer, Pollock, Grossmann, Fromm, and Lowenthal notwithstanding, all five of these men had Jewish life paths. It is not my intent to demonstrate that the backgrounds of these five figures provide keys to explaining the works that they created

in the Weimar years, nor is it my intent to demonstrate that the works of these writers which were produced in pre-Nazi Germany were infused with Jewish ideas. It *is* my intent to explore *how* these men arrived at the Institute, and to explain why I contend that all of them did so via recognizably Jewish roads.

In Chapter 2, I will demonstrate that a growing awareness of the importance of antisemitism in the period during which the members of the Frankfurt School were living in exile in the United States had a profound impact on the work of the School, and even, to some degree, on the development of Critical Theory itself. Both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality* – arguably the most important works associated with the Critical Theorists and written while they were in America – are deeply colored by the desire to elucidate and confront hatred of Jews. Indeed, neither of these two classic works can be understood without an understanding of how and why Horkheimer and Adorno (who was only partially of Jewish origin, and who had not been a full member of the Institute during the Weimar years) came to believe that explaining antisemitism was a crucial task. A growing fear that anti-Jewish sentiment was both dangerously strong in the United States and might grow stronger, and a dawning comprehension of the nature and implications of Nazi antisemitism – both of which were affected by their family backgrounds and their experiences – shaped the views of Horkheimer and Adorno during this period, and led to major alterations in their ideas. In addition, Adorno, who had not been involved in Jewish life while living in Germany, seems to have come, eventually, to think of himself as a Holocaust survivor, and even, to some extent, as a Jew. Though raised without a positive Jewish identity, Adorno's Jewish roots ultimately impacted his sense of himself and his analysis of the world in which he lived.

The final portion of this book will focus on the years following Horkheimer's return to Germany in 1950. The Institute of Social Research was re-established in Frankfurt after the defeat of the Nazis, and Horkheimer served as Director of the Institute in the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany. Pollock and Adorno, the latter of whom succeeded Horkheimer as Director of the Institute in 1958, also returned to Frankfurt after the Second World War, and maintained warm relationships with Horkheimer throughout this era. However, a substantial portion of those who had been closely associated with the Institute during the Weimar and/or exile periods – including individuals who had, at various points, been part of Horkheimer's inner circle, and who had played major

roles in the creation of Critical Theory per se – did not maintain comparable ties with Horkheimer in the post-war decades. Fromm, Lowenthal, and Herbert Marcuse (who, like Adorno, had not been a member of the Institute during the years of the Weimar Republic, but who, like Adorno, became closely tied to the Institute during the Nazi years) each developed his own grievances with Horkheimer. These grievances were of very different kinds. The issues that ultimately separated Fromm, who parted ways with the Institute in 1939, Lowenthal, and Marcuse from Horkheimer had nothing to do with Jewish matters. But it is precisely by examining the attitudes of one-time members of the Horkheimer circle towards the State of Israel – an issue that had emotional resonance for key members of the Frankfurt School – that I hope to shed new light on the range of opinion that emerged among the Critical Theorists over time. Horkheimer, Fromm, Lowenthal, and Marcuse ultimately arrived at their own, individual, attitudes towards Israel. These attitudes were intimately related to the (differing) relationships of these men to Jewishness and Judaism. Thus, by exploring the attitudes of these four one-time colleagues towards Israel, I hope to clarify how their relationships to their Jewish origins continued to have an impact on their thought and on the history of the Frankfurt School, not only early in their careers but also in their later years.

The "Jewish question" had markedly different content in Weimar Germany, in the years of the Third Reich, and in the decades following the end of the Second World War. For the Critical Theorists, history is marked by rupture, not by continuities.[16] And yet, in all three of these very different eras, Jewish matters had a significant effect, directly or indirectly, on key individuals who were, or had been, members of the Institute of Social Research. At some points, the Jewish family backgrounds of leading members of the Frankfurt School clarify their life paths. At other points, these backgrounds help us to understand the issues on which the leaders of the School chose to focus, and the content of some of their ideas. In the decades following the Second World War, the differing relationships of Critical Theorists to their Jewish origins help to explain their stances towards Israel, and the distinctive natures of their modes of analysis of that topic.

I hasten to ensure that my readers understand that I write not from the perspective of philosophy, but rather from that of the history of ideas. I do not intend either to explain or to critique Critical Theory as a whole. These tasks have been performed by superb scholars. I stand on the shoulders of giants, and see no need to rehearse their insights.

I do not believe that Critical Theory is a Jewish theory, any more than psychoanalysis is a "Jewish science." The latter assertion was a Nazi calumny. The former is deeply suspect. And yet, I intend to argue that the lives of key members of the Frankfurt School's founding generation are illuminated by situating these men in multiple contexts – including that of Jewish history.

Chapter 1

Jewish Life Paths and the Institute of Social Research in the Weimar Republic

In an introduction to a series of articles on prominent intellectuals of Jewish origin, Leo Lowenthal – who was associated with the Institute of Social Research beginning in 1926 – once commented:

> It is of no fundamental significance whether or not these persons were members of their religious communities or congregations. Nor is it decisive whether or not the topics to which these Jews devoted themselves were substantively Jewish. The great Jewish names of our epoch – Maimon and Heine, Börne and Moses Hess, Marx and Lassalle, Einstein and Freud, Landauer and Trotsky – are essentially not associated with specifically Jewish topics. It is for this reason that questions of biography take over the place of the evolution of questions within Judaism, so that this very substitution becomes one of the important problems of Jewish history.[1]

The better part of a century after the establishment of the Institute of Social Research, it is apparent that the Institute's key members, including Lowenthal, ought to be considered precisely as Lowenthal dealt with those in his pantheon. The pre-history of the Horkheimer circle is considerably clarified by examining its members' lives through a Jewish lens. Study of the biographies of the five full-time members of the Institute who were actually in residence in Frankfurt in the years immediately following Horkheimer's accession to the position of Director – Horkheimer, Pollock, Lowenthal, Fromm and Grossmann – demonstrates that each and every one of these men had distinctively Jewish life paths, and that these paths help to explain how and why they came to be associated with the Institute.

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Max Horkheimer, who eventually became the single most powerful figure in the Institute,[2] was cognizant of and affected by his Jewish

background. Born near Stuttgart in 1895, Horkheimer was raised in a somewhat observant household. Horkheimer's parents were members of Stuttgart's Jewish Community, and were described by Horkheimer as having been "strongly attached" to that Community.[3] The family abided by Jewish dietary laws when Horkheimer was a young child. However, the dietary laws ceased to be observed in the Horkheimer household not because of a growing secularization or assimilation on the part of the Horkheimer family, but because of a suggestion from Max's physician, when Max was around seven years old, that a change in Max's diet would improve his somewhat fragile health. Upon receiving instructions from Max's doctor to feed her son non-kosher food, tellingly, Max's mother, Babette Horkheimer, née Lauchheimer, contacted the family's rabbi – who told her to follow the doctor's advice.[4]

Max's father, Moses [Moritz] Horkheimer, who owned textile factories and who was a prominent businessman, attended synagogue services on the Sabbath.[5] Max reminisced, during a later period in his life, about the times when he had gone to such services together with his father.[6] Moses Horkheimer was also a "devoted member" of B'nai B'rith [Sons of the Covenant], a Jewish service organization, and participated in its events. Max once asserted that his father's affiliation with B'nai B'rith had been a "contributing determinant" of Max's youth.[7]

Horkheimer had a Bar Mitzvah in a synagogue in Stuttgart, and, it can be safely presumed, received at least as much of a Jewish education as would make possible his participation in that coming of age ceremony.[8] In general, the Horkheimer family continued to practice Judaism during Max's childhood years, though not in a strictly Orthodox manner. According to Max, his family had been "neither Orthodox nor Liberal," but rather somewhere in between the two in its religious practices.[9] The provisions of Jewish law were adhered to "as far as possible," Horkheimer has noted, though not as "pedantically" as was the case in Orthodox circles. Like most Jews in Germany of his generation, Moses Horkheimer could aptly be described as a patriotic German citizen of the Jewish faith. Max, in turn, was raised to think of himself as Jewish by religious affiliation, and to think of Germany as his homeland.[10]

When he was sixteen years old, Max met Friedrich Pollock, who became a life-long friend. Pollock, who was born in Freiburg in 1894, was closely tied to the Institute from the time of its foundation in Frankfurt in 1923, and wrote primarily on economic issues in the Weimar years.

Like Horkheimer, Pollock was of Jewish origin, was the son of a businessman, and was initially expected by his father to eventually take over the family business. Friedrich Pollock's parents, however, were far more acculturated than were Horkheimer's. Indeed, according to Horkheimer, Pollock's father "belonged to those assimilated Jews, who transformed their unease [with Jewishness] into a certain negative attitude towards Jews."[11] As a result, Pollock, unlike Horkheimer, was not raised with a Jewish consciousness. Indeed, Pollock was raised to disdain Judaism.

Pollock's attitude towards Jewish matters was known to Horkheimer as early as 1911, which was the year during which Horkheimer and Pollock first became friends. In the fall of that year, Horkheimer invited Pollock to participate in a dance class for young members of the Jewish community. Pollock declined the invitation, on the grounds that he suspected "cliques" of all sorts, whatever the basis for their formation[12] – a response, it is worth noting, which apparently surprised Horkheimer. While Pollock ultimately acceded to Horkheimer's repeated requests that he give the class a chance, Pollock attended only once, and never returned.

Pollock's indifference to Judaism and Jewish life apparently made an impression on the young Horkheimer. The latter's eventual rebellion against his parents, seemingly encouraged by Pollock, included, at one point, rebellion against his family's observance of (specific) Jewish rituals.

Horkheimer's rebellion also manifested itself, from 1916 onwards, in Horkheimer's romantic involvement with a non-Jewish woman, Rose Christine Riekher. While Riekher's background and economic status – she was the daughter of a bankrupt, one-time hotel proprietor and worked as a private secretary to Moses Horkheimer when Max first came to know her – seems to have predisposed Moses against his son's girlfriend, the fact that Riekher was not Jewish particularly distressed Max's mother.[13] Max Horkheimer's relationship with Riekher led to years of estrangement between Max and his parents. "It was apparently much harder," Martin Jay concludes, "for his parents to get used to the idea that Horkheimer was marrying a gentile than that he was becoming a revolutionary."[14]

Horkheimer's serious involvement with a non-Jewish woman, and the tension that this involvement caused between Horkheimer and his parents, however, should not be taken as indicating that Horkheimer ceased to worry about matters affecting the Jewish community after 1916. He was, for example, as Zvi Rosen has demonstrated, concerned with antisemitism even in his earliest writings, which date from the period of the First World War.[15] I do not mean to suggest that Horkheimer's concern with antisemitism was the result of his having been scarred by

this phenomenon in his childhood. He reports that the existence of antisemitism was mentioned in his parents' household and that rude youngsters sometimes shouted "Jew" at him as he walked home from school, or, somewhat more rarely, when he was in class. But Horkheimer insisted that these incidents did not leave any "great wounds."[16] "He did not recall any of his teachers being anti-Semitic, and the occasional prejudiced remarks he heard from his schoolmates he dismissed as a sign of their envy."[17] Why then did Horkheimer manifest concern about antisemitism in his First World War writings? Abromeit suggests that "Horkheimer was probably confronted with overt anti-Semitism during his period of military service," which took place in the course of that war, and cites, in support of this idea, a letter by Horkheimer written in August 1917 in which Horkheimer, while describing his return to military service following a leave, notes "I was regarded with spiteful apprehension because I am Jewish."[18]

Horkheimer's experiences in the German military do in fact help to explain his apparent concern with antisemitism in the era in question – a concern which is evident in several pieces. In July 1917, for example, Horkheimer wrote a sketch entitled "Jochai," which revolves around a young Jew who had been ordered to execute the daughter of a general, and which contains a prescient passage in which a mob, while screaming "Vengeance! Vengeance!" sets on fire "the house of wealthy Jews," and in which, despite the "pale corpses" that result from its actions, the mob is not satiated.[19] Horkheimer returned to the theme of antisemitism several months later, at the beginning of November 1917, in his short story "Gregor." In one scene, a street agitator, addressing a vast crowd, rhetorically asks for whom those in the crowd and their families have sacrificed in the course of the war, and replies to his own question by underscoring that those responsible were "Not even people of our own clan, not even people of our own faith, not Germans, not Christians: *Jews* are responsible for everything; *Jews* pocket the profit from our wounds; the same villains that struck our Lord on the cross – Down with the Jews!"[20] Horkheimer, in these passages, is clearly worried about antisemitism. Julius Carlebach's conclusion, apparently resting not on "Jochai" or "Gregor" but rather on altogether different, and somewhat later, work, that Horkheimer's "early writings on the Jews" reflect a feeling on Horkheimer's part that his "Jewish origins were an embarrassment and a handicap," therefore, is not supported by the currently available evidence.[21]

Horkheimer's concern with antisemitism did not disappear during the Weimar years. Moreover, though Horkheimer's Marxism colored