

JOSE BLÉGER: JEW, MARXIST AND PSYCHOANALYST¹

Mariano Plotkin, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Psychoanalysis, Jewishness and progressiveness seem to be components of the same cultural system. Freud, the liberal Jew, invented a system of thought that was perceived by many as a 'Jewish science'. Not only were elements of the Jewish culture prominent in the development of Freud's ideas, but he himself was worried by the fact that psychoanalysis could be perceived as a 'Jewish national affair'. This is why he was so keen to anoint an Arian 'dauphin' (C. G. Jung) for the young psychoanalytic movement. Freud's own Jewish identity has been much debated. Although he never denied his (secular and godless) Jewish identity – quite the opposite – in his 'public' writings (such as his autobiographical pieces), he nonetheless emphasized his distance from the Jewish tradition. Yosef Yerushalmi, however, has imaginatively explored Freud's proximity to Jewish traditions, a proximity apparent in Freud's 'private' writings and in his

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MARIANO PLOTKIN is senior researcher at IDES (Director until July 2011) and professor of history at the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero. His publications include *Freud in the Pampas* (Stanford University Press, 2001), translated as *Freud en las Pampas* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003) and *Histoire de la Psychanalyse en Argentine* (Paris: Campagne Première, 2010); and many articles on topics related to the history of psychoanalysis and more in general, on transnational circulation of ideas. In 2010 he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship. Address for correspondence: IDES, Aráoz 2838, 1425 Buenos Aires, Argentina. [mplotkin@ides.org.ar]

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controversial last book: *Moses and Monotheism* (Yerushalmi, 1991).² For scholars such as Élisabeth Roudinesco, Stephen Frosh and others Jewishness is a constitutive element of psychoanalysis (Frosh, 2005; Roudinesco, 2009).³

Early psychoanalysts also developed strong connections with the progressive social democratic culture of Vienna and later of Germany and Hungary (Danto, 2005). There were some attempts to combine psychoanalysis with different forms of Marxism – most notably by Wilhelm Reich. Alfred Adler (who was married to a Russian socialist and who knew Trotsky), Paul Federn and others were also interested in possible combinations of psychoanalysis and Marxism. Moreover, during the immediate post-revolutionary years, the Soviet government, in particular Trotsky, became very interested in psychoanalysis (Chemouni, 2004; Etkind, 1997, pp. 228 ff.). Nevertheless, most of those attempts ended in failure. After the fall of Trotsky the practice of psychoanalysis was repressed in the Soviet Union, and Reich was expelled both from the psychoanalytic community and from the Communist Party. Later, the Frankfurt School and its heirs would be more successful in critically integrating both unorthodox psychoanalysis and unorthodox Marxism. Although psychoanalysis has been a very complex system of thought and beliefs that has been appropriated and interpreted in different and sometimes incompatible forms throughout its history, it could be said that its theory if not its practice, generally speaking, has continued to be associated with Jewishness and with some forms of progressive politics.

However, in Argentina, a country that in the last decades has become one of the world capitals of psychoanalysis, the connection between psychoanalysis, Jewishness and progressive politics has been very complicated for reasons that will be discussed later. This is why the figure of Dr José Bleger (1922–72), who explicitly tried to articulate his triple identity as a Jew, a Marxist, and a psychoanalyst, stands out. He played a central role in the constitution of the ‘psy movement’ and, in more general terms, in the diffusion of a ‘psy culture’ in Argentina.⁴ He was a psychoanalyst affiliated to the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association

2. Yerushalmi goes as far as suggesting that Freud’s attachment to Lamarckism is associated to his Jewishness since the possibility that acquired characters were transmitted through generations would explain what is left of Jewish identity for Jewish atheists like Freud.

3. In Roudinesco’s view, ‘Psychoanalysis is a continuation of Jewishness, this godless Judaism’ (Roudinesco, 2009, p. 8). Peter Gay (1988), on the other hand, denies any influence of Freud’s Jewish identity on the creation of psychoanalysis.

4. Sherry Turkle (1992, p. xiv) defines psychoanalytic culture as ‘the way psychoanalytic metaphors and ways of thinking enter everyday life’.

(APA), a popular teacher in the psychoanalytically oriented programme of psychology at the University of Buenos Aires and, until the beginning of the 1960s, a card-carrying member of the Argentine Communist Party.⁵ During his short but productive life he was also a very active militant in the progressive Jewish movement. However, his trajectory showed not only the limits of his projects in the increasingly polarized Argentine political atmosphere of the 1960s, as well as their internal contradictions, but also the difficulties of articulating different identities in those agitated years. Bleger proposed a self-reflective psychoanalysis in permanent dialogue with Marxism and with the social sciences. This project, however, ended in failure, and in recent decades psychoanalysis (particularly its Lacanian version which is today hegemonic in the country) developed in Argentina as a self-referential discipline incapable of establishing links with other forms of social knowledge (Plotkin & Visacovsky, 2007). Bleger's legacy became appreciated only very recently. Through an analysis of Bleger's trajectory this article explores larger issues of Argentine political culture and their relations with the emergence of a psychoanalytic culture.

Jewishness, Politics and Psychoanalysis in Argentina during the 1950s and 1960s

In Argentina, unlike in the US, institutionalized psychoanalysis was not perceived as a 'Jewish' discipline. From the late 1910s on, psychoanalysis was known by Argentine doctors and intellectuals not through German, but mostly through French and Spanish sources. Before the creation of the APA, affiliated to the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in 1942, very few of the doctors, writers and intellectuals who, since the 1920s, had been active in writing on, discussing, and even practising forms of 'wild' psychoanalysis, were Jewish.

The connection between psychoanalysis and political progressiveness has also been complicated. In the intellectual climate existing in the country until the mid-1930s, a climate that could be described as 'pacific coexistence', both right-wing and left-wing doctors – sometimes collaborating in the same institutions – showed interest in psychoanalysis giving sometimes incompatible readings and interpretations of the Freudian system. Thus, while Communist Party members or 'fellow traveller' doctors such as Gregorio Bermann, Jorge Thénon, or Emilio

5. Although the strong psychoanalytic orientation of the psychology programmes at the University of Buenos Aires was in part the result of the students' pressure, it is interesting to note that Ángel Garma, a leading analyst who represented the most conservative line within the APA, was rejected three times by the powerful student movement when he applied for a teaching position at the university.

Pizarro Crespo saw in psychoanalysis not only a tool for the modernization of the obsolete Argentine psychiatric system but also a methodology and instrument for social reform, others such as Catholic right-wing forensic doctor Ramón Beltrán, close to semi-Fascist military circles, found in psychoanalysis the basis of a mechanism for social control. Unlike in Republican Spain, where psychoanalysis was associated with left-wing (or at least liberal), anti-clerical movements, and in Brazil, where the early reception of psychoanalysis was associated with the need to question racially deterministic ideas, in Argentina – as in France – it admitted of different ideological interpretations and appropriations (Carlés *et al.*, 2000; Glick, 1982, 1988; Plotkin, 2009).

This ‘pacific coexistence’ of people who were in many cases at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum came to an end during the 1930s as a result of historical processes taking place both in Europe (the Spanish Civil War, the radicalization of Fascism, the emergence of Nazism, World War II, and later the Cold War) and locally (the emergence of a strong right-wing nationalist movement, the radicalization of the working class, the philo-Fascist coups of 1930 and 1943 that ended 80 years of continuous constitutional system, and the subsequent emergence of Peronism). Gradually, politics permeated all spaces of public interaction, including scientific discourse and practice.⁶ Psychoanalysis was also affected by this rarified environment. Following the dictates of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (and perhaps, more importantly, of French communists, who were very influential in Argentina), local communists who had been interested in psychoanalysis suddenly discovered that it was nothing but a bourgeois idealistic pseudo-science and a tool for the penetration of American imperialism. On the other hand, by the late 1930s, right-wingers had also abandoned psychoanalysis when they discovered in Freud’s ideas a Jewish, semi-pornographic discipline.

Unlike the US, Argentina did not receive a wave of prestigious exiled (Jewish) psychoanalysts from central Europe. With the exception of Spanish émigré Angel Garma, who arrived in the country in the late 1930s, and Marie Langer, a former member of the Austrian Communist Party who had had analytic experience in Europe but not a complete training, the few European analysts who arrived in Argentina during the 1940s and 1950s, such as Polish-born Heinrich Racker, or the French couple Willy and Madeleine Baranger, either discovered psychoanalysis in Argentina (Barangers) or underwent most of their analytic training locally (Racker). Of the six founding members of the APA, only two were Jewish (Arnaldo

6. Telma Reca, a renowned child psychiatrist, wrote to an officer of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1944: ‘The present [political] situation . . . exerts its influence upon all our activities’ (cited in Plotkin, 2001, p. 54).

Rascovsky and Marie Langer). The two most senior members of the recently born association, Ángel Garma and Celes Carcamo (a member of the Argentine Catholic landed elite who trained in France), had no connections whatsoever with the Jewish community. Although, in the next decades there was to be an increasing Jewish presence in the APA, many of the most visible and prestigious members of the psychoanalytic community, including the idiosyncratic Enrique Pichon-Rivière, Emilio Rodrigué (who would be elected vice-president of IPA), Ricardo Etchegoyen (the first Latin American to become president of IPA), Eduardo Pavlovsky and many others, were non-Jewish. Even for those who were Jews the Jewish identity was problematic, for the APA official line conceptualized any religious identity as a form of neurosis. This is what a young (Jewish) candidate said in a symposium on ‘Relations among Analysts’ in 1959:

It’s difficult for me to accept the teaching of those who don’t share the idea that having religious beliefs, no matter what they are, is evidence of a more serious neurosis than an analyst can tolerate; that to circumcise or baptize a child is to enter into a kind of submission that we fight against in our patients. (Lustig de Ferrer, 1959, p. 335)

Ángel Garma (many times president and long-time leader of the association) expressed similar sentiments:

Tolerance of such ideologies [as those taught by organized religions] within a psychoanalytic association implies at least some acceptance of ideas that fight against psychoanalysis. Of necessity, that has to lower the psychoanalytic level, generating internal tensions and intensifying sadomasochistic behaviour among colleagues. (Garma, 1959, p. 360)

Similarly, after its consolidation in the 1950s the APA could hardly be conceived as a politically progressive institution. Although some of its members supported a progressive vision of society, they were gradually marginalized (or marginalized themselves) from the official institution which defined itself as a purely professional and ‘scientific’ – and therefore apolitical – association. In the politically charged and violent environment of the early 1970s a group of leftist analysts would find their political allegiance incompatible with their permanence in the APA and would quit the association and, in some cases, psychoanalysis altogether. José Bleger, however, chose to stay in the APA.

José Bleger: Marxism and Psychoanalysis

Born in an agrarian community in the province of Santa Fe, José Bleger was the child of Jewish European immigrants. He studied medicine in the city of Rosario and later moved to the northwestern province of Santiago del Estero. While a student he was active in Jewish leftist and anti-Fascist

movements, giving public talks on the British policies in Palestine. In 1947 he joined the 'Sociedad Israelita de Rosario' as a doctor providing free assistance to the poor. For him, following the Bundist tradition, the Yiddish language constituted the basis of the Jewish identity. In a talk given in the late 1940s he opposed a religious idea of Judaism based on the use of Hebrew to a rational concept of Jewishness based on Yiddish culture. 'The Jews who have abandoned their faith in the God of the Torah, how can they continue to be united [as a people]? . . . [The Jew] has not disappeared and we owe that to Yiddish, to the culture that this language has begotten. . . That is to say, a religious culture can be replaced by a rationalist culture' (Bleger, n/d[a]).

After his graduation as a physician, Bleger started working at the psychiatric clinic that Gregorio Bermann (who by then had renounced psychoanalysis) had established in his native province of Córdoba. Interested in the works of the Hungarian-French Marxist philosopher Georges Politzer, it was through his reading of this author's early works that Bleger became interested in psychology and psychoanalysis. (On Politzer, see Roudinesco, 1990[1986], pp. 56–66). Thus, he travelled to Buenos Aires where he entered into contact with Enrique Pichon Rivière who by then led the most progressive tendency within the APA. Bleger joined the APA as a candidate in the mid-1950s. More or less at the same time he also became a member of the Communist Party which had then a strong presence in progressive Jewish circles.⁷ From then on, Bleger would try to articulate Jewishness, Marxism and psychoanalysis. Following Politzer's incomplete project of the late 1920s, Bleger attempted to create a dialectical 'concrete' psychology based on the elements he deemed useful from psychoanalysis, that is to say, on the portions of it that were compatible with dialectical materialism, that is to say, a psychoanalysis shorn of its 'idealistic-mechanistic components'.

In 1958, the same year of his promotion to the rank of associate member of APA, Bleger was appointed a professor in the newly established programme in psychology at the University of Buenos Aires and member of the National Advisory Committee on Mental Health. In that year he also published a book which would be re-edited several times, entitled (inverting the title of Reich's famous piece), *Psicoanálisis y dialéctica materialista* (Bleger, 1958).⁸ The publication created an agitated discussion

7. According to his son Leopoldo, Bleger joined the Party in order to integrate his Jewish feelings into a leftist struggle. Telephone interview with Dr Leopoldo Bleger, Paris, 27 September 2009.

8. The change in the order of the words of the title suggests that, for Bleger, psychoanalysis took precedence over dialectical materialism.

within the Communist Party, and was one of the factors that later would determine Bleger's separation from it.

According to Bleger, Marxist denunciation of psychoanalysis as an idealistic system of thought was valid, but only if this denunciation was directed against the right target: the ideological contents of Freud's theory. Psychoanalysis was a form of psychology and should therefore be studied and understood in its practice and concreteness. To understand psychoanalysis, Bleger claimed (paraphrasing Mao's idea on revolution), it was necessary to 'enter into it'. It was not enough to make an ideological criticism of psychoanalysis as orthodox communists were doing, because psychoanalytic practice did incorporate dialectical elements.

Following Politzer's early works, Bleger distinguished between psychoanalytic discoveries and practice, on the one hand, which were the basis of the true Freudian revolution; and psychoanalytic theory, on the other, which was based on idealistic and mechanistic concepts. It was, therefore, upon the practice, where the valid and useful elements of psychoanalysis could be found, that a concrete psychology could be built. As Bleger pointed out: 'Extracting the real from psychoanalysis is still a difficult task for dialectical materialism [because] what is concrete [in psychoanalysis] is submerged in a theoretical building firmly inserted in philosophical idealism' (Bleger, 1958, p. 34). Bleger also rejected Freud's theory of instincts as well as the 'reified' theory of the libido.⁹ It is noteworthy that, whereas the German Freudian Marxists of the 1920s and 1930s had found in the instinct theory the most revolutionary aspects of psychoanalysis as well as its link to materialism, Bleger wanted to strip psychoanalysis of it. Following Politzer, Bleger also rejected the idea that the unconscious could have an ontological reality.

Bleger utilized Politzer's idea of 'drama', meaning that psychological facts are segments of each particular and concrete individual's life and his/her relationship with the external world. The concept of 'drama' superseded both the notions of an abstract 'interior life' and of a mechanistic behaviour considered only in its physiological dimension. Although Bleger conceded that 'in the last instance' the economic conditions determine the psychological facts, this determination was never mechanistic and, therefore, permitted the existence of an autonomous psychological science within Marxism. However, in Bleger's view, after introducing 'drama' into psychology, in his later works Freud replaced it by a dynamic theory, thus reverting to the classical psychological conceptions that it had previously superseded. Whereas the object of drama is the individual, the objects of the dynamic theory are the

9. An earlier discussion of Freud's instinct theory can be found in Bleger and Pichon-Rivière (1956).

reified instincts and abstract entities like the ego, the superego and the id. Only psychoanalytic practice continued to focus on the drama; its theory was displaced towards the dynamic.

Bleger addressed his book to two different audiences. To psychoanalysts he showed that Freud's theories must not be read naively, and that its ideological (idealistic and mechanistic) contents had to be made explicit. To his fellow communists he showed that their criticism of psychoanalysis was misdirected. Instead of focusing only on its ideological aspects, they should direct their critical efforts to its epistemological foundations. Such an analysis would show that psychoanalysis contained the elements necessary to form the basis of a dialectical-materialist psychological theory, but only after it was shorn of its idealistic components.

Showing the author's intellectual curiosity ('eclecticism' his fellow communists would say, contemptuously) *Psicoanálisis* combined canonical citations from both Communism (Marx, Engels, Lenin) and psychoanalysis (Melanie Klein, Fairbairn, etc.) together with others who were not yet part of the canon in Argentina (Kurt Lewin, Karen Horney, and even the young Michel Foucault who was virtually unknown in Argentina in those years). Bleger was confronting at the same time the two orthodox institutions (the APA and the Communist Party) he belonged to, and he had to bear the consequences of his daring attitude.

The book caused an immediate splash within the Communist Party. By the time Bleger wrote it, there was already a solid body of communist psychiatrists who were well integrated into the psychiatric establishment and also into the programme of psychology at the University of Buenos Aires.¹⁰ They promoted the use of 'reflexology', a form of psychotherapy based on Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes, as opposed to psychoanalysis, which was becoming very popular among the middle class.¹¹ The first to react to the publication of *Psicoanálisis* were precisely the Communist psychiatrists. One of them, Dr Adolfo Lértora, wrote a comment on the book, which was published as a letter to the editors in *Acta Neuropsiquiátrica Argentina*, a prestigious psychiatric journal (Lértora, 1959). Lértora accused Bleger of being a Freudo-Marxist – an impossibility since Marxism and psychoanalysis were absolutely incompatible. His condemnation of Bleger's book was based on three facts: First, that Bleger established continuities in Politzer's thought where there were none. In fact it is true that Politzer's ideas changed after

10. A discussion on Bleger at the school of psychology and Garma's failed attempts to become a professor there can be found in Dagfal (2009, chapters 6 and 7).

11. The relationship between the psychiatric establishment, the Communist Party and the more general intellectual field in Argentina during the late 50s and early 60s still needs to be studied.

he joined the French Communist Party. When Politzer was trying to use psychoanalysis as the basis for his concrete psychology, he was a Marxist influenced by existentialism but not yet a communist. When he joined the Party in 1929 he openly denounced psychoanalysis and abandoned the project of a concrete psychology altogether.¹² In order to use Politzer to legitimize his intellectual enterprise, Bleger needed to construct a Politzer who was both a communist and a supporter of psychoanalysis. Bleger tried a way out of this dilemma by claiming to find a continuity in Politzer's thought. The pre-Communist Politzer tried to base his concrete psychology on what in psychoanalysis was acceptable, and the Communist Politzer was simply following that line, exposing the unacceptable portions of the Freudian system (Bleger, 1958, pp. 46, 55). The other two lines of Lértora's attack were that Bleger had not considered that the only dialectical materialistic psychological theory was reflexology, and that he had confused psychology with psychoanalysis.

Bleger responded in the pages of the same journal and refuted one by one the points made by Lértora (Bleger, 1959a). It is interesting that Bleger used psychoanalytic concepts to disqualify his opponent, something that was common practice within the APA. He pointed his darts to the 'paranoid, counterphobic and aggressive' structure of Lértora's review. As opposed to those who (like Lértora) had a dogmatic and narrow concept of Marxism, Bleger, citing Engels, pointed out that Marxism should enrich itself with the contributions of other progressive ideas like psychoanalysis. Bleger also – and this would be one of his obsessions throughout his career – made the point that there must be a clear distinction between politics and science. 'Scientific work implies an ideology, but the examination of an ideology does not substitute for the scientific work' (1959a, p. 232).

Bleger also mentioned a debate on the book that had been published in *Cuadernos de Cultura*, the official journal of the cultural commission of the Argentine Communist Party. In that debate Bleger says: 'They made me appear arguing in an infantile fashion and suggested things that I did not say. They even made me appear as if I were about to retract the things I said in the book, which is not true' (1959a, p. 233). In fact, the meeting at the Party had ended – after harsh criticisms on the part of Communist psychiatrists and leaders – with a ritual recognition on the part of Bleger that a more active militant participation in the Party would help him overcome ideological weaknesses and deviations present in the book. However, at the end of the discussion, Bleger also said that he was not convinced by the arguments presented against the book. It was clear that

12. The text in which Politzer tried to create a 'concrete psychology' based on psychoanalysis is Politzer (1928). Projected volumes II and III were never published.

the objections were ideological and political and not merely technical. Psychoanalysis was characterized as an instrument of imperialism. Bleger insisted on the need to approach dialectical materialism from a non-dogmatic point of view. Obviously Bleger and the other Party members were speaking different languages (*Cuadernos de Cultura*, 1959).¹³

If the publication of *Psicoanálisis* generated debates within the Communist Party because it questioned elements of the Party's orthodoxy – other critical reviews by communist psychiatrists and one by Gregorio Bermann were published in different professional journals – the APA responded with silence (Bermann, 1960; Bleger, 1959b; Cabral, 1959). Some of Bleger's claims also contradicted some of the orthodox analysts' basic assertions since he put into question the whole body of Freud's theory, which he contrasted with psychoanalytic practice. However, the APA's silence was not innocent. *Revista de Psicoanálisis* published reviews of all the books produced by its members, and the fact that it failed to discuss Bleger's work (given that Bleger was a member of the association in good standing) was considered a statement in itself. The only (very favourable) review of the book written by a member of APA (Fernando Ulloa, who would become a close collaborator of Bleger) was published not in the official journal of the APA but in the same journal that published Lértora's criticism and Bleger's response: *Acta Neuropsiquiátrica Argentina* (Ulloa, 1959).

Summing up: the Communists accused Bleger of not understanding the dialectical materialistic method, of confusing psychology with psychoanalysis, and of defending an idealistic and, therefore, indefensible system of thought. On top of everything, psychoanalysis was a flawed therapeutic technique whose efficacy could not be proved and which had a scope of application limited to the patients' ability to pay high fees. On the other hand, Bleger defended himself by insisting on the separation between psychoanalytic theory, which contained elements that were both idealistic and mechanistic, and psychoanalytic practice, which was dialectical; as well as in the distinction between the 'drama' which constituted the basis of the analytic session, and the dynamic conception of the mind, which contained the unacceptable elements of psychoanalysis. However, Bleger also included one more element in his reply: the autonomy of scientific thought. To one of his critics he said: 'Our

13. Héctor Agosti, the director of *Cuadernos de Cultura* and a highly respected (not only by communists) Argentine intellectual, noted in his diary: 'Is there any right to waste a sunny Sunday afternoon discussing psychoanalysis?' He mentions that the discussion had become aggressive because of Bleger's pedantic attitude. Agosti says that in his final remarks he tried to show the kind of 'eclectic soup' that the book was, from the philosophical point of view (Agosti, Héctor, *Diario*. Archivo Héctor Agosti, CedinCI). I thank Adriana Petra for giving me access to this document.

discrepancies originate in that I work within the field of psychology and my chief interest is, more and more, scientific research [and not ideological discussion]' (Bleger, 1959a, p. 234). It is clear that his method of reasoning collided with that of the Party members. Years later, when some Communist psychiatrists tried to approach the most progressive members of the psychoanalytic community in support for their common struggle against what they perceived as the reactionary forms of psychiatry used in the big asylums, Bleger continued to be seen as a controversial character. He and the group to which he belonged were characterized as 'Kleinians who tried to emphasize the importance of the social environment but who failed to distinguish the difference between social classes and therefore ended up working for capitalism' (Bleger, n/d[a]). In particular Bleger was singled out as someone who got involved in 'ignoble tasks for a revolutionary' by training capitalist entrepreneurs in the formation of human resources' (Partido Comunista Argentino, 1964).

Bleger's interest in Politzer continued after his split from the Communist Party. In 1965 he supervised, and wrote prologues and appendices for, the Spanish translation of Politzer's complete psychological works (Politzer, 1965). In the prologue, Bleger returned to some of the topics he had discussed in his book of 1958. However, now free from the constraints of Party discipline, he could express himself more freely, and some of his earlier points of view were revisited. The main problem addressed by Bleger continued to be the same as before: how to articulate the relationship between Marxism, psychology, psychoanalysis and, in general, the human sciences (Bleger, 1962). Politzer's early writings could provide a starting point for addressing this issue. However, where Bleger the Communist had been forced to see a continuity in Politzer's thought (a claim that had been criticized by Lértora), now Bleger admitted that Politzer's joining of the Communist Party implied a rupture in his thought, a rupture that, following Henri Lefèvre, Bleger characterized as a self-mutilation. Bleger now admitted that the Politzer who wrote the *Critique des Fondements de la Psychologie* (Politzer, 1928) was not Marxist but Existentialist. And yet he was able to make a substantial contribution to a criticism of psychoanalysis from the point of view of dialectical materialism (Bleger, 1965, p. 31). After joining the French Communist Party Politzer ceased being a psychologist and became a militant (he joined the French Resistance and ended his days shot by the Nazis). Although such a transformation might have been justified by the circumstances – the fight against Fascism – this was not the only way out of the dilemma between intellectual and political work. French psychologist Henri Wallon had also joined the Resistance but continued his work on psychology. Politzer's self-mutilation was, in Bleger's view, similar to the self-mutilation that Marxism suffered under Stalinism. Bleger's main point was that within Marxism there should be a space for autonomous scientific reflection and that it was

up to the scientists and not up to the politicians to evaluate it. Obviously, according to Bleger, this could not happen within the rigid structure and mental framework of the Communist Party.

The 'Politzerian project' of creating a 'concrete psychology' based on the dialectical elements present in psychoanalysis was not Bleger's only attempt at articulating Marxism and psychoanalysis. When he died in 1972, Bleger left unpublished a manuscript titled 'Enajenación, alienación, objetivación: sus aspectos psicológicos'. Only one chapter of this work was published posthumously in *Cuadernos de Psicología Concreta*, a leftist psychological journal (Bleger, 1972a). This project consisted in articulating the categories of objectivation, alienation and 'enajenación' inspired by the young Marx with Melanie Klein's concept of 'positions' (schizo-paranoid and depressive, to which Bleger added an earlier one: the 'glischro-cárica'). Bleger does not cite Marx's Manuscripts of 1844 (he cites *Das Kapital*) and introduced a distinction between 'alienación' and 'enajenación' that originated in psychoanalytic experience, not in Marxist theory (Bleger, 1972a, p. 20).¹⁴ According to him, (Kleinian) psychoanalysis provided the possibility of studying the psychological dimension of Marx's categories. Thus, objectivation corresponded to the depressive position; alienation to the 'schizo-paranoid' one, and 'enajenación' to the 'glischro-cárica' one. In Bleger's view, this interrelation between social and psychological phenomena had been recognized neither by psychoanalysts nor by Marxists. However, it was possible to illuminate Marxism by the light of psychoanalysis and vice versa. In this project, the Kleinian positions appeared closely associated to characteristics of the capitalistic mode of production: private property and the division of labour which led to alienation and, therefore, to a fixation of individuals in the schizo-paranoid position. Unfortunately we do not know where this project would have led Bleger and to what extent it would have been successful.

Bleger questioned some of the foundations of the two institutions to which he belonged. His multiple and problematic identities led him to some unresolved contradictions. As a leftist militant, for instance, he focused on the social dimension of alienation and neuroses. Even when he used the same terms in his psychoanalytic writings and in his other public interventions, he gave them a different meaning. Concepts like 'syncretism', 'ambiguity' and 'dependence' were used both in his psychoanalytic and in his non-psychoanalytic writings and oral presentations. However, while in the former they were tightly linked to the psychic life of the patient, in the latter, he introduced more explicitly a social dimension, associating those issues to social class and social

14. For Bleger, 'alienación' is associated with dissociation whereas 'enajenación' is associated with ambiguity (Bleger, 1972a, p. 22).

conditions. Social and political questions, however, had no place in Bleger's consulting room. Even when patients brought concerns that were explicitly linked to political situations, Bleger's interpretations voided the political content of the session's material. Thus, Bleger considered that a patient who was afraid of a revolution (a *coup d'état* was taking place at that moment) was in fact projecting the fear of an internal revolution (Bleger, 1975, pp. 135, 141 and *passim*). Thus, there was a tension in Bleger's thought. He insisted that the dialectical dimension of psychoanalysis resided only in its practice, in what happened in the session. However, his practice seemed to be based on strict object-relation theory, leaving aside whatever happened outside the consulting room.

During the 1960s, many intellectuals inspired by the Cuban, but also by the Chinese and recent African experiences, and affected by the Communist Party's failure to provide adequate interpretive instruments to come to terms with the '*bête noir*' of Argentine politics, that is to say, Peronism, split from the Communist Party, giving rise to an heterogeneous 'New Left'. In the late 1960s, when violence became one of the central components of Argentine political culture, some of them became members of armed guerrilla organizations. At the same time, for others, Louis Althusser and his structuralist version of Marxism became a new intellectual beacon replacing the strong influence that Jean-Paul Sartre had had on Argentine intellectuals. These developments also had an impact within the 'psy' community that in part materialized in the rapid reception of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan that would later become hegemonic in the Argentine 'psy' culture. Bleger stayed out of these movements; he continued promoting a reformist, humanist version of Marxism partially inspired by the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre. Moreover, confronting those who thought that intellectual and political work should be one and the same thing, and that the role of the scientist in a bourgeois society was to introduce changes in society as a whole, thus not leaving space for specialized knowledge, Bleger continued promoting the idea that there must be an autonomous space within Marxism for scientific research and for psychology as a human science.¹⁵

In the agitated environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, some senior analysts started questioning the political neutrality of the APA and the role of psychoanalysts in society. Marie Langer (1968), for instance, rediscovering her ancient leftist sympathies, linked the origin of neuroses to the political and social conditions of the country. According to her, the main problem affecting psychoanalysis was that many analysts did not know how to integrate 'our political conscience with our scientific knowledge and with our everyday life professional activity' (Langer,

15. See also Vezzetti (2004, p. 307).

1968, p. 620). Another analyst went even further, considering that conceptualizing aggression and violence (two of the main problems of Argentina at that time) from a psychoanalytical point of view could only reinforce the analysts' isolation and would lead them to evade their social responsibilities (Boyer de García Reynoso, 1970). In 1971, a group of leftist psychoanalysts from APA led by Langer and Gilou Boyer de Reynoso among others quit the institution and therefore their rank at the IPA. Many of them had been Bleger's students and collaborators and expected him to join them. Bleger failed to do so; instead, he wrote two pieces that were published in *Revista de Psicoanálisis* after his death (Bleger, 1973a, 1973b). In both articles he addressed once again the question of the autonomy of science: 'In the last instance, in the construction of socialism, technicians and scientists had a revolutionary role to play. And this is a role that is more revolutionary than the one played by politicians or ideologues' (Bleger, 1973a, p. 512). The second article was an open criticism directed at both the APA and at those who had left the institution. While he acknowledged that the APA, by turning itself into a purely professional association, had betrayed psychoanalysis, his most acid criticisms were directed at those who had left the institution. Bleger accused the rebels of 'intellectual terrorism'. According to him the APA had been taken over by the right, but some leftists also used Fascist methods to impose their ideas. Moreover, they were also abandoning psychoanalysis: 'to renounce psychoanalysis is the symbol of a twisted form of Marxism, without seeing that political and revolutionary activity, as well as the new socialist order, require more humanistic knowledge ...' (Bleger, 1973b, p. 525). By remaining faithful to his programme Bleger was out of place in the rarified political environment of the late 1960s. At the same time he was marginalized at the APA. He never occupied a prominent position in the institution.

Bleger and the Jewish Question

Although the publication of *Psicoanálisis* and the reaction it received from within the Communist Party was probably the beginning of the end of Bleger's commitment to the Party, the final reason of his separation was probably linked not to psychoanalysis but to Judaism. In 1962 Bleger visited the Soviet Union. Upon his return, he wrote an article on the conditions of Jews in that country which he submitted to *Nueva Sion*, a journal of Zionist-socialist orientation (Bleger, 1968).¹⁶ The fact that

16. *Nueva Sion* was the publication in Argentina of the socialist-Zionist movement *Hashomer Hatzair*, which was close to the Israeli Zionist socialist party MAPAM. It started publication in 1948. On Jewish publications in Argentina, see Dujovne (2008).

Bleger chose *Nueva Sion*, a Zionist paper and not *La Tribuna*, the organ of the ICUF, published by members of the Communist Party, which opposed Zionism and promoted assimilation, is significant in itself.¹⁷ In the letter to the editor of *Nueva Sion*, Bleger, probably still a member of the Party, pointed out that he had decided to publish the article there because, while the journal showed a permanent interest in all things Jewish, it did not sustain anti-Soviet positions. Bleger explicitly expressed his interest in not being associated with any such position.

What Bleger saw in the Soviet Union forced him – in his own words – to revive and reformulate his interest in the ‘Jewish question’ within socialism. As he would point out almost a decade later:

I always felt a Jew, and it never occurred to me that I would stop being so. I never denied my Jewishness. Even more, I never thought that [stopping being a Jew] was something that depended on me, on a decision that I could make . . . I always was, let us say, a quiet Jew [*judío tranquilo*]. The visit to the Soviet Union made me a militant Jew. (Itzigsohn, 1972, p. 8)

He described the effect of his visit to the Soviet Union as a ‘conversion’. According to Bleger, even though until the 1930s the Soviet Union had carried out a progressive and respectful policy towards the national minorities existing within the country – including those who, like the Jews, were not attached to any specific territory – since the rise of Stalin, the situation had changed dramatically: the policies of cultural promotion of minorities came to an end. Publications in Yiddish were discontinued, Jewish cultural centres were closed and the promoters of an autonomous Jewish culture were persecuted and in many cases executed. Assimilation of the Jewish population became the official policy of the Soviets, although they were much more tolerant towards other national minorities.

In Bleger’s view the main issue at stake was the policies of forced assimilation of Jews carried out by the Soviet government, which not only were not required by Marxism, but were incompatible with it. Therefore, by discouraging Jewish cultural identity, the Soviets were deviating from Marxism itself. More serious than that, anyone who tried to confront the problem of the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union was accused of favouring imperialism.

Bleger’s article was responded to by Rubén Sinay, the director of *La Tribuna*, in a 64-page pamphlet entitled ‘La invención del antisemitismo

17. ICUF was the acronym of *Idisher Cultur Farband*, a federation of cultural Jewish organizations linked to the Communist Party. The article was later reissued in a collective volume published in Uruguay on the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union (Russell *et al.* (1968). The article is characterized by the editors as ‘the revelation of a combative position of someone who visited the Soviet Union and confronted the Jewish reality of that country’.

soviético' ('The invention of Soviet Anti-semitism') (Sinay, 1963).¹⁸ The fact that Sinay considered it necessary to publish such a long piece to refute a less than 10-page article by Bleger shows the centrality of Bleger's standing in the debate on Jewishness within progressive sectors and, particularly, within the Communist Party, whose relationship with the Jewish progressive community was becoming complicated in the 1960s as the conflict in the Middle East progressed and the Soviet Union deepened its commitments to the Arab countries.¹⁹ Sinay claimed that Bleger's supposed inaccuracies originated in his utilization of second-hand information. Sinay accused Bleger of plagiarizing the words of Naúm Goldman, the President of the World Jewish Congress and of the World Zionist Organization. In more general terms, Sinay also argued that assimilation of Jews in the Soviet Union, far from being the result of a state policy (as Bleger claimed), was the natural outcome of the evolution of socialist society and the emergence of the 'new man'. He also criticized Zionism and Israel's imperialistic policies. In his view, and following the Party line, the existence of the state of Israel was not the result of Zionism, but was made possible by the Soviet victory over the Nazis.

Although Bleger's article was not publicly discussed within the Party as his book on psychoanalysis and Marxism had been, it became obvious not only that Bleger's point of view could not be accepted by the Communists, but also that what he saw in the Soviet Union was not what he had expected and that his Jewish identity took precedence over his Communist one. The result was Bleger's final separation from the Party. However, as we saw earlier, his commitment to Marxism (a 'Sartrean version of Marxism') continued over time.

While the question of assimilation (and the importance of Yiddish as a chief factor in defining Jewish identity) seemed to be Bleger's main preoccupations, he had another concern: the fate of the state of Israel. The Soviet Union had voted in the UN in favour of the creation of Israel and supported it during the War of Independence of 1948. However, it quickly changed its policies towards the Jewish state. According to Bleger, if and when the Soviet Union reverted back to its previous tolerant policies

18. My thanks to Luciano García for giving me access to this piece.

19. The Communist Party had a strong presence in Jewish progressive sectors. By the mid-1950s, the Party had established a 'Comisión Israelita' which published several journals. It also had schools, vacation camps for children, and cooperatives. Moreover, the Party had a strong presence in the 'Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina' (AMIA) and in the Hebraica Association. In the 1960s, as a result of the Soviet Union's policies in the Middle East conflict, the relationship between leftist Jews and the Party became conflictual and several prominent Jewish members of the Party quit. See García, 2010.

towards Jews, it would also have to revisit its attitude towards Israel and towards Zionism in general. The Soviet Union should support progressive Zionism because it concerned not only Jews but also socialism. Therefore, it was necessary to distinguish between Israel and its government, between progressive Zionism and the reactionary forces within that state in order to put an end to the stereotyped vision of Zionism promoted by the Communists. For Bleger, the two issues that defined 'the Jewish question' were, thus, the permanence of a Jewish cultural identity based on the use of Yiddish, and the situation of the state of Israel and of Zionism in general in the context of the war in the Middle East. His later Jewish activism would turn around this latter issue and he would participate in international forums for peace in the Middle East. He was a founding member of the Argentine Pro-Peace Committee for the Middle East created by leftist intellectuals before the Six Day War, participated in the Colloquium organized by European leftist intellectuals on the situation of the Middle East that took place in Paris in 1969 and became member of the International Committee for Peace in the Middle East. He also lectured and published widely on these issues. During the 1960s Bleger became an internationally recognized leftist public intellectual on things related to the situation of the Middle East. According to him, the crisis of the Middle East, and particularly the unconditional support that the Soviet Union gave to the Arab countries as well as its characterization of Israel as an imperialist power, provoked (and was evidence of) a general crisis of Marxism. The Soviet attitude forced Israel to seek support from the Western imperialist powers. The truth was that neither the Soviet Union nor Marxism had 'offered solutions to the Jewish problem' (Bleger, 1968, p. 93). Bleger made clear that, in his view, 'the suffering originating from the war is not due to Israeli victory, but to the Arab leaders and to the errors committed by the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries' (Bleger, 1968, p. 94). Given this situation, 'all Jewish and non-Jewish progressive forces are left with one single position to choose: the defence and unconditional support for the state of Israel'. Peace in the Middle East would be possible only when the Jewish and Arab anti-imperialist sectors united in opposition to the intervention of the Great powers (particularly the Soviet Union) in the region.

With the purpose of reversing the bad image of Israel on the Left, in 1969 he gave a lecture at the 'Asociación Camilo Torres' in which he defined the goal of the International Pro-Peace Committee as building bridges between the Israeli and the Arab left (Bleger, 1973c). But the main point of his talk was to show that the history (and nature) of Zionism was linked to imperialism no more than the history of those Arabic countries which were enemies of Israel. 'The weight placed on the imperialist connections of Zionism in order to portray the Arabic countries as anti-imperialist lacks foundations' (Bleger, 1973c, p. 541). Bleger also

denounced the presence of former Nazi experts and the diffusion of anti-Jewish literature in Arab countries.

Bleger's Jewish activism did not sit well with the APA either. In the year when Bleger published his article in *Nueva Sion*, the theme of the Annual APA symposium was, precisely, 'The Psychoanalysis of Anti-Judaism'. The topic was a sensitive one at that time since, in 1960, Adolf Eichmann had been kidnapped in Buenos Aires by agents of the Israeli secret service and executed in Israel in 1962. The Eichmann affair generated a wave of violent anti-Semitism in Argentina. The three main topics addressed by the symposium were: psychoanalysis and the philosophical, historical and religious aspects of anti-Judaism; the contributions of psychoanalysis to the analysis of social, political and economic aspects of anti-Judaism; and prophylaxis and therapy of anti-Judaism.²⁰

The organizing committee, of which Bleger was a member, consisted of 17 analysts, 11 of whom were Jewish. Three publications were intended to result from this symposium. The first consisted of reviews of articles and books published in Argentina and abroad on anti-Judaism; the second was an analysis of Jewishness in Freud's texts; and the third consisted of summaries of the papers presented by members of the APA. Unfortunately the complete papers were never published and are not available at the APA archive. Nevertheless, the summaries and reviews provide us with some insight of how APA members conceptualized Judaism and anti-Judaism, a conceptualization that originated in a simplified reading of Freud's own writings on the topic.²¹ As Stephen Frosh has pointed out, psychoanalysts have failed to provide a thorough analysis of anti-Semitism. Generally speaking, psychoanalytic explanations of anti-Semitism consist of a reductionist psychologization of the phenomenon (Frosh, 2005, ch. 6). However, by the time of the APA symposium, there had been some noteworthy attempts, based on clinical evidence, to address the social dimension of anti-Semitism. Only Bleger seemed to be aware of this work. For most Argentine analysts there were two issues that defined the 'Jewish question': circumcision and the question of guilt. As (non-Jewish) child analyst Arminda Aberastury pointed out, racial prejudices set in in what she called the '*fase genital previa*', a pre-anal

20. It is noteworthy the use of the term anti-Judaism as opposed to anti-Semitism. Years later Marie Langer, one of the leaders of Plataforma would say: 'I believe that, in choosing this unusual word, instead of anti-Semitism, we tried to establish a distance from the political and social reality' (Langer, 1968, p. 638).

21. For other (more sophisticated) psychoanalytic interpretations of anti-Semitism, see Frosh (2005) and Ackerman & Jahoda (1948), which was available in a Spanish translation published in Argentina in 1954 and reprinted in 1962.

genital position that she had 'discovered' (Aberastury, 1963).²² The object of the anti-Jewish phobia was the circumcised Jew, because circumcision actualized the fear of castration. According to this author, 'it is to the credit of the Argentine psychoanalytic group' to have insisted on the pathological consequences of circumcision (a claim that was not true). The Jews repeat the trauma by imposing circumcision on their male children and this is why, in Aberastury's view, the Jew becomes at the same time persecuted and persecutors. The first and most important measure of prophylaxis for the phobia against the Jews would be, therefore, the abolition of circumcision.

Circumcision and its consequences were the main topic of four other papers. For Arnaldo Rascovsky, a founding member of the APA, circumcision was evidence of the filicidal tendencies of culture.²³ Instead of killing the newborns, Jewish parents performed circumcision on them. Circumcision had as a consequence the intensification of schizo-paranoid mechanisms, of sadistic-masochistic tendencies and an hypertrophy of the superego (Rascovsky, 1963).²⁴

Eduardo Salas agreed with Rascovsky but added that circumcision accentuated masochistic characteristics among the Jews and sadistic ones among the anti-Jews (Salas, 1963). For S. Wenceblat and H. Pastrana, on the other hand, clinical material showed that patients who underwent circumcision suffered prenatal regressions as a form of recovering the prepuce. Finally, Moisés Tractenberg dealt with the psychical consequences of circumcision in Jewish women. Paternal circumcision provoked a melancholic elaboration in Jewish women who tried to repair the paternal penis by generating a compulsion to marry only Jewish men (Tractenberg, 1963). Angel Garma, the long-time leader of the APA, pointed out that both Jews and Christians belonged to the same 'ideological sect'. They identify themselves with the submissive child of a family of miserable servants whose mother was forced to become a prostitute. In consequence, among the Jews, a tendency develops towards genital mutilation and sado-masochism.

If circumcision was one of the main issues at stake when discussing the origin of anti Jewish feelings, the guilt (of the Jews!) was the other one. According to León Grinberg (who gave an idiosyncratic reading of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*), for instance, by denying Christ's sacrifice, the Jews generated among themselves a sense of guilt for denying the death of the

22. The paper was based on a series of lectures given by the author at the Medical School of the University of Buenos Aires and on a talk given at the APA.

23. Filicide, the idea that parents have a philogenetic tendency to kill their children comes to light in any form of children mistreatment was Rascovsky's pet theory. See Plotkin, 2001.

24. Filicide and foetal psychism were Rascovsky's two obsessions.

Father; this explained their submission and masochism (Grinberg, 1963).²⁵

Bleger's concerns, however, lay elsewhere. The reviews he wrote for the symposium all dealt (with one exception) with the condition of Jews in the Soviet Union.²⁶ He did not present a single-authored paper at the symposium, but was rather the senior member of a group of analysts who worked on the methodology of analysis of anti-Semitism and who also presented clinical evidence showing the appearance of anti-Jewish feelings in patients in moments of distress.²⁷ Unlike most of the other APA analysts, Bleger and his group proposed a multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of anti-Semitism.

However, more interesting was a paper presented by Bleger and a group of self-defined Jewish analysts on the organizing committee of the symposium itself (Bleger *et al.*, 1963). In their presentation, the authors emphasize that the group saw itself as 'the Jews of the symposium'. This self-perception was reflected both in their own attitude and in the attitude of the other participants. They felt themselves to be a minority, an isolated group chosen to shoulder the mission of the symposium. Thus, the symposium on anti-Judaism was seen as a Jewish symposium although non-Jewish analysts also participated. By 1963 the Jewish members of APA still saw themselves as belonging to a 'minority'.

Unlike many of his colleagues in the APA (both Jewish and non-Jewish) who tried to elaborate psychoanalytic theories that explained anti-Semitism as the result of certain features of the Jewish culture transmitted to the unconscious (most notably circumcision and the question of guilt), Bleger was interested in the actual situation of Jews in the Soviet Union and in the clinical analysis of anti-Semitism.

Throughout the 1960s and up until his death in 1972, Bleger continued articulating his leftist sympathies with his Jewish activism, both considered

25. It is worth noting that Grinberg shared some of Bleger's concern regarding the state of Israel. In 1967 he and Bleger tried to establish a psychological research institute in Israel that would help the Israeli population to stand the ever stressful situation of the country. 'Project for the Creation of an Israeli Institute for the Research and Teaching of Psychological and Psychotherapeutic Sciences' (Mimeo, n/d). My appreciation to Dr Leopoldo Bleger for giving me access to documents related to this project from his personal archive.

26. Bleger reviewed Goldberg, B.Z., *Los judíos en la Unión Soviética*; Goldman, N, 'La situación de los judíos en la Unión Soviética', and Salzberg, I.B., 'Mi misión en Moscú'. These three works addressed the same problems Bleger had dealt with in his article for *Nueva Sion*.

27. Bleger, José, Lily S. de Bleger, Ernesto Liendo, Benito López, Sheila N. de López, Jaime Schust, 'Aportes a una metodología del psicoanálisis del antijudaísmo'; also, 'Antijudaísmo y teoría de la alienación'; 'Aporte clínico al problema del antijudaísmo'; 'Material clínico'.

as an idiosyncrasy by many of his colleagues at the APA who called him the ‘red rabbi of the APA’. In his intervention at the Symposium organized by the World Jewish Congress, Bleger, who characterized the situation Argentina was living through as a ‘civil war’, wondered about the future of Jews in post-revolutionary Argentina. Bleger was worried about contacts between some leftist groups and former Nazis, fascists and pro-Arabic movements. This was particularly problematic, according to Bleger, in a country like Argentina, where leftism took a populist (and in many cases anti-Semitic) form (Bleger, 1972b, *Intervenciones en el simposio*).

* * *

In an unpublished manuscript that he left unfinished when he died, Bleger defined himself as a Jew, as a Marxist, and as a psychoanalyst, in this order. He opened the manuscript by mentioning that someone had pointed out to him that he (Bleger) ‘was involved in too many things’. This ‘involvement in too many things’ meant that he was trying to articulate his various identities, a task that was particularly difficult in the polarized Argentina of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when ‘everything was politics’, and most politics was violent. Citing Sartre as an intellectual source, Bleger criticized Marxism for not taking into consideration the subjective dimension of reality. ‘[Judaism, Marxism and psychoanalysis] cannot exist without human beings or without social life . . . They are not entelechy or objective spirits in the Hegelian sense This ‘nude’ objectivity was deformed by Marxism through its pretentious and vacuous definitions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘materialism,’ through two of its ‘champions’: Engels and Stalin, and even Lenin himself.’ Immediately, he also criticized psychoanalysis for ‘committing the same error although from the opposite side’. Neither psychoanalysis nor Marxism could furnish an adequate theory of subjectivity that could provide the theoretical instruments for answering his crucial, existential question: ‘what is it to be a Jew?’ (Bleger, n/d[b]).²⁸

His ideal of generating an autonomous space for social science within Marxism also collapsed at a time when, for most leftist intellectuals, the gun took precedence over the pen as a tool of expression. His disciples and close collaborators abandoned him, the APA and, in many cases, psychoanalysis. A few of them joined armed guerrilla groups. His three allegiances, to Marxism, to Judaism and to psychoanalysis, were in constant tension and interfered with each other in a context that could hardly accept multiple identities. Moreover, his attempts at identifying multiple

28. My thanks to Dr Leopoldo Bleger for giving me access to this manuscript. Eli Zaretsky (2006), in a provocative article, suggests that psychoanalysis in fact does offer a contribution ‘to a perennial question – what does it mean to be a Jew?’

mediations (between science and ideology; between psychoanalysis and Marxism) was also condemned to failure in a political environment that could hardly accept nuances. This was Bleger's tragedy.

In 2001 Argentina was affected by a deep social, political and economic crisis, probably the most devastating one suffered by the country since 1890. In a conjuncture when most social actors and discourses were losing legitimacy, psychoanalysts were sought out by the media to provide explanations for the crisis (Plotkin & Visacovsky, 2007, 2009). Exceptions notwithstanding, what psychoanalysts (and psychoanalysis) offered was a narrow, self-referential discourse, full of obscure jargon, which could only conceptualize the crisis in terms of its own categories, without the possibility of establishing any kind of dialogue with the social sciences or with any discourse external to psychoanalysis. In other words, in the early 2000s psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts had very little to offer to the Argentine society as a public discourse in relation to other discourses.

It is dangerous to establish clear lines of continuity between the 1970s and the 2000s. Much has changed not only in social and political terms, but also in the political culture of the country which by 2000 had known its longest period of relatively peaceful continuous democracy since 1930. However, I would like to propose – as a hypothesis that deserves further research – that the origins of the situation of psychoanalysis in Argentina today can be traced to the same conditions that made impossible Bleger's project. The failure to implant an ample conceptualization of psychoanalysis which could engage itself with broader social issues, for the reasons discussed above, left an empty space that was occupied by a much narrower version of psychoanalysis, a version that in Argentina has been associated with the hegemonic implantation of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Of course, I am not arguing here that Lacan's psychoanalysis has these characteristics. What I am saying is that the *particular reception* of Lacanian psychoanalysis *in Argentina*, for reasons that fall well beyond the scope of this article and that, in any case, still deserve further research, has been associated with the isolation of psychoanalysis from other forms of social analysis.

Only today is Bleger's thought appreciated and recovered as an alternative to the bloody 1960s and to the self-referential psychoanalysis of the 2000s. In any case, his intellectual and personal trajectory, as well as his own contradictions, provide an excellent starting point to analyse the possibilities and limits of a more open psychoanalysis in Argentina.

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses the trajectory of Dr José Bleger (1922–72), an Argentine psychoanalyst who tried to articulate his triple identity as a Jew, a Marxist and a psychoanalyst. Bleger played a central role in the constitution of the ‘psy movement’ and, in more general terms, in the diffusion of a ‘psy culture’ in Argentina, a country that today is considered as one of the ‘world capitals of psychoanalysis’. However, his trajectory showed not only the limits of his projects in the increasingly politically polarized Argentina of the 1960s, as well as their internal contradictions, but also the difficulties of articulating different identities in those agitated times. Through an analysis of Bleger’s trajectory this article explores larger issues of Argentine political culture and their relations with the emergence of a psychoanalytic culture.

Key words: psychoanalysis, Marxism, Jewishness, Argentina, José Bleger