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Occultist Identity Formations
Between Theosophy and Socialism in *fin-de-siècle* France

[Postprint]

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In the last two decades, *fin-de-siècle* occultism has been the subject of a variety of valuable studies that have demonstrated the relevance of occultism for modern art, science, philosophy, and politics (e.g., Verter 1998; Owen 2004; Treitel 2004; Harvey 2005; Sharp 2006; Monroe 2008; Pasi 2009; Wolffram 2009). This led to a more nuanced and historically informed understanding of a subject that used to be regarded in rather suspicious, if not polemical, ways. However, there remain important questions with regard to the historical context of its emergence. The most important of these are related to the issue of a longer occultist "tradition." By taking up the notion of an "occult revival" (Webb 1971; McIntosh 1975), scholars have regarded *fin-de-siècle* occultism as the continuation of an older occultist or esoteric tradition — that is, something pre-existing that has been revived. For this reasons, studies of "modern occultism" almost exclusively focus on the period around 1900 and regard their subject as the "updated" version of an older occultism or esotericism. By doing so, they implicitly adopt certain narratives that have been constructed at the end of the nineteenth century, when occultists claimed to be the rediscoverers or continuators of an ancient esoteric tradition. However, this claim had more to do with legitimacy and authority than with historical accuracy. While the reception of older sources undoubtedly played a significant role for occultists, it was the specific historical context of the nineteenth century that formed both the background for the interpretation of those sources and the main repository of ideas that coined occultist identities. Occultism, as it is discussed here, was not an ancient doctrine that had been adopted to a modern context, but it was a product of the nineteenth century. In order to understand this point, contexts have to be taken into account that are usually not regarded as part of the history of esotericism. That they still tend to be neglected seems to be due to a prevalent focus on "occult traditions" or revivals thereof.

Within the study of Western Esotericism, it is widely accepted that the emergence of occultism should be seen as a modern phenomenon. Wouter Hanegraaff defined occultism as comprising “all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted world” (Hanegraaff 1994:422). In this sense, occultism had to be regarded as a specific development within an existing current of esotericism during in the nineteenth century. This is further emphasized in later publications, where occultism is defined as a new “type” of esotericism that had emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, as well as a set of French currents resulting from the writings of Eliphas Lévi, putting a heavy emphasis on the notion of “tradition” (2006:888, 2012:153–256, 2013:39–40). Alternatively, Marco Pasi has criticized the “disenchantment definition” as too imprecise and suggested a set of characteristics to describe occultism more accurately: the need to resolve the conflict between science and religion, a distancing from established forms of religion, the importance of the spiritual realization of the individual, and a demarcation from other contemporary heterodox movements (2006:1366–1367). It becomes clear that both Hanegraaff and Pasi situate occultism exclusively within the framework of esotericism. Althought Pasi emphasizes that the “boundaries between occultism in the strict sense and other contemporary phenomena were frequently blurred,” those other phenomena fall under the category of an occupation with an “occult dimension of reality,” such as spiritualism or psychical research. This isolation of esotericism, often dichotomously as “rejected knowledge,” from other contexts cannot grasp the complexity of the historical situation and significantly limits the spectrum of historical sources that are likely to be consulted for research (for a detailed discussion, see Strube 2016b:1-29). While the scope of this article can hardly suffice to elaborate this argument, it will provide a central example of a historical context that is often neglected in the history of esotericism: French socialism, which formed an important background of the emergence of occultist identities.

Frequently overlooked for a long time, several studies have demonstrated the importance of socialism for spiritualist, occultist, and Theosophical contexts in France.[1] However, scholars tend to perceive the history of occultism in the “traditionalist” sense and, consequently, discuss “exchanges” between two distinct contexts — that is, the interest of certain occultists in socialism — rather than investigating a deeper, diachronic entanglement of “occultism” and “socialism” (with the notable exception of Laurant 2006). As it has recently been argued that “occultism” emerged in the 1850s out of a socialist context (Strube 2016a; 2016b), the question arises what role “socialism” has played in *fin-de-siècle* identificatory discourses. It will be shown that French occultists had strong interests in socialism but were attempting to establish alternatives to what they regarded as “materialist” or “atheist” strands of socialism. By doing so, they polemically distanced themselves from exactly those contexts that had been fundamental for the emergence of their own identities.[2]

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[1] Since Viatte 1942 and Webb 1971, especially the special issue of *Politica Hermetica* about “Esotérisme et socialisme,” including Edelman 1995a and Seijo-Lopez 1995; see also Sharp 2006; Monroe 2008. Only some works about other national contexts may be mentioned here, such as Braude 1989; Goldsmith 1998; Owen 1990; Beaumont 2010; Linse 1996; Cyranka 2016.

This is also true for the arguably most relevant aspect of early occultist identity formations in France: a polemical distancing from the Theosophical Society. As will be seen, this distancing was highly ambiguous, because the Theosophical Society had stimulated a kind of “institutionalization” of esotericism in France. The native rejection of “Eastern” (or worse, Anglo-Saxon) Theosophy led to the construction of a decidedly French tradition of esotericism that entailed, most prominently, a separation between “East” and “West” (cf. Pasi 2010). As the resulting notion of “Western Esotericism” is in fact the very label of the study of esotericism, an understanding of *fin-de-siècle* occultist identificatory discourses is of immediate importance to current debates about the historical contexts of esotericism.[3] This can be illustrated by the pioneering work by Antoine Faivre, whose “classic” typology still remains influential. In his seminal *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (first 1986), Faivre defined “esotericism” in a decidedly Christian context. He distinguished between a vulgar and a true form of esotericism by referring to eighteenth-century currents that were known in France as *illuminisme*, *théosophie*, and *mysticisme* (Faivre 1994:10–15, 72).[4] This definition of a superior “western esotericism” is derived from an expressly French *théosophie* that was propagated by occultists as the authoritative heir of a “true” esoteric tradition. This “religionist” perspective, which was later nuanced by Faivre, has been criticized and revised repeatedly (Hanegraaff 2012:339–355; Stuckrad 2010:46–48). However, present discussions in the field rarely pay attention to the historical context when this notion of “western esotericism” actually emerged. For this reason, this article aims at giving insights into two major aspects that are relevant, not only for a historical understanding of the emergence of occultism but also for the emergence of the study of Western Esotericism.

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[2] For the following discussion, cf. Strube 2016b:591–607, 615–618.

[3] See Asprem 2014; Granholm 2014; Hanegraaff 2015; Strube 2016c; Bergunder 2016.

[4] For the pioneering and highly influential study, see Viatte 1928.

The Stimulating Role of the Theosophical Society

In the 1870s, the situation in France was characterized by a vast number of groups and individuals mostly belonging to the Spiritist or "magnetistic" camps. Many veterans and younger representatives of these heterogeneous strands were strongly influenced by socialist theories. They often belonged to the old generation of July Monarchy socialists that had to struggle with their political marginality after the coup d'état of 1851. Many of them were adherents of Fourierism and Saint-Simonism, the main representatives of what has been called "Romantic Socialism" (for a concise summary, see Beecher 2001:1-8). Those strands of socialism were characterized by outspokenly religious and "spiritualist" identities. They were highly critical of what they referred to as individualism or egoism, materialism, and atheism, as they sought to establish a final synthesis of religion, science, and politics. This universal synthesis would result in a perfect social order, the creation of a "Kingdom of God on Earth" (Strube 2016a:359-369). These ideas would prominently resurface in new movements like Spiritism and, later on, in occultist groups.

While the different Spiritist and magnetistic groups attained a certain degree of institutionalization, the formation of primarily "esoteric" or "occultist" identities, and the foundation of respective organizations, had not yet taken place in the 1850s and 1860s. The decisive impulse did not come from within the borders of France, but from the Theosophical Society that had been founded by Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and William Quan Judge (1851–1896) in 1875.[5] Rooted in Spiritualism, the Theosophists articulated an "esoteric" identity that was increasingly oriented towards "Eastern," that is (supposedly) "Buddhist" and "Hindu" knowledge. Blavatsky's famous *Isis Unveiled* (1877) can be considered to be the most important founding text of this new brand of "Theosophy." At that time, Hermeticism, "Egyptian" knowledge, Kabbalah, or Rosicrucianism ranked among the most important points of reference in Blavatsky's writings, and it was the French magus Eliphas Lévi (i.e., Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810–1875) who served as the authority for her definition of "occultism." While this is one reason for the initial attractiveness of Theosophy in France, the growing emphasis on "Eastern" topoi would hold much potential for arising conflicts.

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[5] Despite its outstanding historical relevance, the history of the Theosophical Society has long been neglected by scholarship (for pioneering studies, see Campbell 1980; Prothero 1993; Godwin 1994:277–379; and the journal *Theosophical History*). This has changed in the recent decades, thanks to a number of new studies: e.g., Bergunder 2005; Delalande 2007; Zander 2007:25–432; Hammer 2013; Bergunder 2014; Hammer 2015; Bergunder 2016.

As elsewhere, the history of the Theosophical Society in France is marked by the struggles of competing groups and individuals. Only some developments can be highlighted in the present context.[6] The first French members joined the Society as early as in 1876, although the first bigger wave only arrived in the 1880s. Among those individuals was Charles Fauvety (1813–1894), who became a member in December 1880 after he had been corresponding with Blavatsky about the compatibility of Spiritist and Theosophical ideas. He had been a prominent socialist and Freemason (Caubet 1893:1–13; Erdan 1855:492–503, 823–840; Combes 1995; Nord 1995:15–30). An early collaborator, political comrade, and lifelong friend of Alphonse-Louis Constant, who had begun to adopt the pen-name of Eliphas Lévi in the 1850s, Fauvety had become one of the most influential socialist Spiritists in France. In the 1870s, he presided over the Société scientifique des études psychologiques whose mouthpiece was the widely-distributed *Revue spirite* (Delalande 2007:320–338). Several socialist veterans were members of the Société, such as the Fourierist Eugène Nus and the Saint-Simonian René Caillé (1831–1896), who joined the Theosophical Society on June 22, 1880, and edited the journal *L'Anti-Matérialiste* from 1884–1886. Since her time as a medium, Blavatsky had cultivated relationships with influential French Spiritists, especially Pierre-Gaétan Leymarie (1827–1901), who had simultaneously turned to Theosophy and radical socialist ideas (Delalande 2007:253–261; Monroe 2008:152–153, 222–223). She was also friends with Dominique-Albert Courmes (1843–1914), one of the first French members of the Theosophical Society (Delalande 2007:261–277).

This Spiritist context was the breeding ground for the Society, but it held high potential for conflict as it was the Theosophists' aim to distance themselves from the established forms of Spiritualism.

It was not before 1884 that the Society actively attempted to gain a foothold in France. In this year, Blavatsky and Olcott travelled from India to Europe in order to deal with several internal problems. They reached Marseille on March 12, where they were welcomed by Courmes and Giuseppe Spedalieri (1812–1898), a former disciple of Eliphas Lévi. From there they travelled to Paris, where they arrived on March 28 (Godwin 1989:9–10). But it would take another couple of years before their efforts bore fruit. The first officially recognized branch of the Theosophical Society was the "Isis" Lodge (Delalande 2007:370–390). It was founded on July 19, 1887, and held its first session in the rooms of the *Revue socialiste*, a journal that had been created by Benoît Malon (1841–1893) in order to consolidate the fractured socialist movements (Vincent 1992:101–119). Several socialists, especially Fourierists, became interested in the Theosophical Society at that time (Andro 2011). Malon, who had frequented the salons of Fauvety after the socialist disaster of 1851, seems to have had a rather cursory interest in Theosophy. However, his collaborator Louis Dramard (1848–1888) had been responsible for the establishment of the Isis Lodge. He might well have become one of the most influential Theosophists in France, had he not died of lung cancer at only 39 years old while fighting for the rights of Arab workers in Algeria. On June 6, 1885, he had published an article about "L'occultisme à Paris" in the *Revue socialiste*. After summarizing different French reactions to the Society, he called for "a serious study of the occultist theories," because:

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[6] For a comprehensive discussion, see Delalande 2007; cf. Godwin 1989; Blech 1933.

> […] the theosophists have inscribed the universal fraternity into their program; their doctrine especially attacks egoism and proclaims the impossibility for anybody to progress in isolation, independently, towards human collectivity. From this point of view, whatever could be the intrinsic value of occultism, the study of this theory imposes itself on the *Revue socialiste*.

Additionally, Dramard highlighted occultism's "points of contact with contemporary science, as well as their divergences," with which he wanted to deal in more detail soon. Obviously he came to the conclusion that "occultism" was of great value for socialists. So did several socialist Spiritists from Fauvety's Société, including Nus and Courmes. This shows that Theosophy, as it was perceived by some French, resonated well with socialism in the July Monarchy vein, focusing on universal collectivism, a struggle against "egoism," as well as the claim for progress and a new "synthetic" science.

However, it proved to be a serious challenge for the Theosophical Society that the French had quite an own understanding of *théosophie*, which sometimes had very little to do with the Theosophy of the Anglo-Saxons. A good example for this is the Société théosophique d'orient et d'occident, founded on June 28, 1883, by Lady Caithness, the Duchess of Pomar (1830–1895). Born in London, Caithness had developed an interest in Spiritualism after attending the séances of the medium Florence Cook. She turned to the ideas of Allan Kardec and propagated a Catholic Spiritism. Next to Emma Hardinge Britten's *Art Magic* (1876) and Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877), her *Old Truths in a New Light* (1876) can be seen as one of the most important esoteric publications at the time (Oppenheim 1985:170–172; Godwin 1994:304–305, 338–339; Edelman 1995b). Her Société was briefly affiliated with the Theosophical Society but broke away soon to propagate a “Judeo-Christian” esotericism that rejected “Eastern” esotericism.[7] Caithness was a committed feminist and maintained close contacts to the Catholic socialist abbé Paul Roca (1830–1893), as well as to Malon (Laurant 1992:144–145, 148–149). Members of her society included the Countess de Mniszech, Dramard, Edouard Schuré, the socialist esotericist Albert Jounet (1869–1923), and the later winner of the Nobel prize for physiology, Charles Richet. This confluence of Catholicism, socialism, and Spiritism was characterized by a decidedly French self-understanding and an orientation towards the *théosophes* of the late eighteenth century. The attitude of many of its members towards the Mahatmas and the “Buddhism” or “Hinduism” of the Theosophical Society was marked by suspicion, if not outright hostility.

The Ordre Martiniste and the Division between East and West

Those tensions would intensify, not least because of the fact that many individuals were members of several groups simultaneously. Was the “true” esotericism to be found in the East or in the West? Was it supposed to be Christian or Buddhist, or a synthesis of all religious traditions? What about its relationship to Spiritism? And what was “occultism”? Such questions were the subject of increasingly intense debates. Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), who was making a name for himself using the pseudonym Papus, contributed decisively to the eventual escalation of the situation. After the untimely death of Dramard, a dispute had broken out over the leadership of the Isis Lodge, of which Papus had been a prominent member. An authoritarian intervention by Blavatsky in favor of a protégé resulted in the dissolution of the Lodge in July 1888. A new “Hermès” Lodge was founded on September 21, to which practically all former Isis members deserted (Delalande 2007:387–390). In the midst of those quarrels, Papus could further distinguish himself, although it would take some years before he finally turned his back on the Theosophical Society (André and Beaufils 1995:49–75). In a brochure about *L’occultisme contemporain* (1887) he still praised Blavatsky and defended her against critics (Papus 1887:34). In 1888, he published the first edition of his *Traité élémentaire de science occulte* under the banner of the Isis Lodge, which would become the most influential esoteric French writing since Eliphas Lévi’s *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, seeing no less than ten editions by 1926. The root of Papus‘s conflict with the Theosophical Society is already discernible in the *Traité*. Although he talked about the

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[7] Dramard’s article from 1885 still uses the name of Caithness‘s society, while clearly dealing with the Theosophical Society.

Society, Blavatsky, and "Buddhism" favorably, he began to expound an expressly French tradition of esotericism. Soon his rejection of "Eastern" esotericism would become more pronounced. This became obvious in the influential journal *L'Initiation*, which had been founded by Papus in 1888.[8] In February 1889, François-Charles Barlet (1838–1921, alias Alfred Faucheux), a leading figure in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor,[9] declared to the readers that they now had to choose between East and West. The following month, Papus attacked Blavatsky for not being familiar with French esotericists like Fabre d'Olivet or Wronski. He insisted that English Theosophy was inferior to the French tradition, not least because he saw it as lacking "method."

The final rupture with the Theosophical Society occurred in 1890. On January 29, Papus created a new umbrella organization named Groupe indépendant des etudes ésotériques, whose goal it was to disseminate "occultism." At its meetings, the texts of French "esotericists," especially Eliphas Lévi, were read. In a letter to Olcott from February 14, Papus explained that he would turn away from the Theosophical Society (Godwin 1989:22–26). A polemical circular, which began publication in May, laid the foundations for a new weekly newspaper, *Le voile d'Isis*, which began to be published on September 12. The October 7 issue featured a list of the propagators of the true esoteric tradition, including Saint-Martin, Fabre d'Olivet, Jean-Marie Ragon, Hoëné Wronski, Paul Lacuria, Eliphas Lévi, Louis Lucas, and Saint-Yves d'Alveydre. Writing in the January 1892 edition of *L'Initiation*, Papus maintained with reference to those thinkers that France had always led in occult studies. This new-found national pride was essential for French occultist identities (McIntosh 1975:157; Harvey 2005:94). The counter-model to Theosophy *à la française* had been established.

The success of this self-confident French esoteric tradition was largely due to two organizations that were created under the aegis of the Groupe indépendant: The Ordre Martiniste, founded in 1891 by Papus, and the Ordre kabbalistique de la Rose-Croix, founded in 1888 by Stanislas de Guaïta (1861–1897) and Joséphin Peladan (1858–1918).[10] The main difference between those groups was that the Ordre Martiniste openly advertised in *L'Initiation* and was generally open to everyone. As its name suggests, it invoked the secret societies founded by Martinès de Pasqually and Saint-Martin at the end of the eighteenth century, whose theories and rituals were taken up. In contrast, the Ordre kabbalistique maintained an aura of secrecy and made it difficult for applicants to become members. It is not surprising, then, that Stanislas de Guaïta had begun to publish earlier than Papus, but stayed in the background (Harvey 2005:26). The Ordre kabbalistique took a strictly Catholic stance and was firmly "anti-Oriental." Thanks to the flamboyant Peladan, who used to refer to himself as "Sar Mérodack," the Ordre kabbalistique exerted considerable influence on the contemporary world of art (Senior 1959; Webb 1971; McIntosh 1975:174–175; Beaufils 1993; cf. Papus 1887:32; Michelet 1977 [1937]:49–64). Most notably, the famous "Salons de la Rose-Croix" attracted around 230 artists from around Europe between 1892 and 1897, paralyzing Parisian traffic during its opening.

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[8] By 1897, the journal had 8,000 subscribers (Monroe 2008:241).

[9] Unfortunately, its role cannot be discussed in more detail here (cf. Godwin et al. 1995).

[10] Several founding dates for the Ordre Martiniste can be found, reaching back to the early 1880s. Papus only mentioned the Ordre in 1891, and it is likely that he exaggerated its age to emphasize its authority. For further information, see McIntosh 1975:157–176; Godwin 1989:23–27; Laurant 1992:139–143; André and Beaufils 1995:77–118; Monroe 2008:241–242; cf. the contemporary Michelet 1977 [1937]:11–42, 49–78.

The "Neo-Martinists" cannot be regarded as the successors of an unbroken tradition reaching back to the eighteenth century or even to the Renaissance.[11] The institutionalized Martinism of the *théosophes* had been practically extinct in the first half of the nineteenth century, although it should be noted that a study of international Martinist networks, as they become tangible in the circles surrounding individuals like Spedalieri, remains to be written. Everything indicates, however, that Papus and de Guaïta only began to rediscover the *théosophes* in response to the Theosophical Society, and that they came to regard the genuinely French tradition of Martinism as a markedly "Western," superior form of esotericism in the process. This led to a lasting division between two camps and made the establishment of the Theosophical Society in France especially difficult (Godwin 1989:29).[12] On the other side, leading Theosophists like Blavatsky had turned away from "Western Kabbalists" and "Catholics" (Pasi 2010). In her *Secret Doctrine* from 1888, she criticized Eliphas Lévi, the outstanding representative of this tradition, which she now declared as inferior to "Eastern occultism" (e.g., Blavatsky 1893b:533, 537-539, 617, 1893a:262-266, 453-454).

These quarrels clearly show that something like a uniform "occultist" movement did not exist. However, the Theosophical Society had provided some of the decisive initial impulses for the emergence of different identities such as "esotericist" or "occultist" in France. When it appeared, it opposed an "esoteric" model to the predominant *spirites*, which led to a clustering of numerous, usually independent individuals and small groups that occupied themselves with magic, Kabbalah, and the likes. In the present article, it is only possible to highlight one central example of those complex and often ambivalent identity formations. This is the reception of the writings of Eliphas Lévi, whose outstanding role has already been indicated.

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[11] Cf. Harvey 2005, where the "occultism" represented by Neo-Martinism is regarded both as the successor of "original" Martinism and the particularly French "revival" of a tradition of western esotericism that can be traced back to the Renaissance (with reference to Faivre's classic definition). Although Harvey also refers to this tradition as being "invented," this suggest a homogeneity and continuity that needs to be questioned in the light of what follows.

[12] A stable branch of the Society could only be established at the end of the 1890s, which, facing the severe criticism of René Guénon, saw a fatal crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century (Delalande 2007:449–474).

The Construction of a French Tradition: Eliphas Lévi

Most remarkably, it was only during the young generation's emerging rupture with the Theosophical Society that Eliphas Lévi would play a major role in the construction of a French esoteric tradition. This demonstrates the contingency of this process. The French esoteric tradition was formed in a concrete historical situation marked by polemical identity politics — it was not something pre-existing that could have been taken up or continued by a younger generation. In this regard, the reception of the writings of Eliphas Lévi was somewhat delicate. After all, it was a Frenchman who had obviously been a pivotal early influence on the ideas of leading Theosophists, so the French could easily turn to him as a figurehead and dismiss Theosophical teachings as degenerated and incomplete. At the same time, there was no "Lévian school" in France but only a number of scattered former disciples who began to coordinate their efforts to spread the master's teachings after the Theosophical Society had given the respective impulses — and they initially did so in Theosophical publications. As will be shown, the French magus virtually sunk into oblivion after his death in 1875, and would only be rediscovered by the young generation surrounded Papus in bits and pieces.

Both self-referential esotericists and scholars agree upon the fact that the term *occultisme* was first popularized by Eliphas Lévi prior to its appearance in other languages (e.g., Eliade 1976:49; Amadou 1987 [1950]:15; Riffard 1990:34, 85, 198; Laurant 1992:21; Faivre 1994:87–88). Blavatsky, in turn, first applied the English term *occultism* in an article entitled "A Few Questions to Hiraf" in 1875. It has been indicated above that she referred to Lévi in her *Isis Unveiled* in order to define the meaning of "occultist."[13] Her writings abound with references to his books, especially *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (e.g., Blavatsky 1877:113, 125, 137–138, 179, 247, 280–281, 395, 481, 484–485). There is no doubt that he was a towering figure among those influencing early Theosophy (cf. Zander 2007:85). It is no wonder, then, that the Theosophical Society functioned as a nodal point for the dissemination of his ideas in his own homeland. After he had passed away, his manuscripts and personal belongings were distributed among the few people that had been his disciples during his lifetime (Chacornac 1989 [1926]:283–284, 287, 290). The Pole Jerzy Mniszech, who had received a number of manuscripts, never realized his plans to edit the material and passed away in 1885. Spedalieri, who had been alienated from his master in the years preceding his death, also possessed several manuscripts and an extensive correspondence. Another disciple was Mary Gebhard, who became a founding member of the Theosophische Sozietät Germania, which was founded on July 27, 1884, at her house in Elberfeld under the chairmanship of Olcott (Zander 2007:109–110, 122, 118). Gebhard published a series of hagiographic "personal memories of Eliphas Lévi" in the major Theosophical journal *The Theosophist*, from February 1884 to April 1887. Spedalieri, who had joined the Society in 1881, commenced to publish his correspondence in *The Theosophist* in 1884. In the same year, he gave some of Lévi's manuscripts to the Theosophist Edward Maitland (1824–1897). In France, Lady Caithness started to edit some of his unpublished writings in her journal *L'Aurore du jour nouveau*, from December 1886 to April 1887. Charles Fauvety, the long-time comrade of Lévi, was deeply involved in those circles but is not known to have endeavored to spread his friend's doctrines. Their public collaboration ended in the 1850s, after the publication of a socialist journal called *La revue philosophique et religieuse*, where Lévi had first published his "Kabbalistic" ideas (Strube 2016a:370–372; 2016b:470–482).

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[13] Blavatsky 1877:XXXVII: „Occultist.—One who studies the various branches of occult science. The term is used by the French kabalists (See Eliphas Levi's works). Occultism embraces the whole range of psychological, physiological, cosmical, physical, and spiritual phenomena. From the word occult, hidden or secret; applying therefore to the study of the Kabala, astrology, alchemy, and all arcane sciences."

When the young generation surrounding Papus began to rediscover the writings of Eliphas Lévi, they faced great difficulties in obtaining any kind of information regarding his personal life. As Papus had to draw the image of the "great Kabbalist" from unreliable second-hand accounts, it is likely that he did not have any personal contact with Lévi's former disciples. This becomes especially evident with regard to Papus' first "contact" with Lévi. Originally, he had been fascinated by *La chimie nouvelle* by the French alchemist Louis Lucas (1816–1863) and the writings of the eccentric Polish expatriate Józef Maria Hoëné-Wroński (1776–1853). When he discovered their texts around 1885, he also came across those of the alchemist Cyliani, as well as those of Paul Lacuria (1806–1890), Paul Christian (i.e., Jean-Baptiste Pitois, 1811–1872), and Eliphas Lévi. After three months of research, he decided to write a letter to Lévi on January 11, 1886 — eleven years after he had passed away. What was more, he had not even been interested primarily in Lévi's writings but in the life of Louis Lucas, about whom he wanted to write a biography (Papus 1974 [1892]:178–

180; Buisset 1984:10; André and Beaufils 1995:29). It becomes clear that the memory of Lévi had faded so much by the middle of the 1880s that a "seeker" like Papus had not even been able to learn about his death.

It is revealing that Papus only mentioned Lévi in passing when he published *L'occultisme contemporain* in 1887. Therein, he dealt with the movements of magnetism and Spiritism which had prepared "the scientific, social, and religious synthesis" after 1848 — that is, after the eventual failure of the socialist revolution and the Second Republic — by "disseminating the occult sciences" (Papus 1887:10–11). In his eyes, the great torch-bearers of this synthesis were Lucas and Wronski, who were discussed in some detail, including a list of their publications. In contrast, Papus only mentioned the "occultist" Eliphas Lévi as "a disciple of Fourier and Wronski," next to Lacuria, Cyliani, and Paul Christian. Most remarkably, he emphasized that his writings could only be made fruitful together with those of the others: only then, he explained, one could read "the more modern writings of Madame Blavatsky" profitably (Papus 1887:28–29). It was only after 1890, after the foundation of the Groupe indépendante, that Papus began to focus on Lévi. However, as he stated in an article entitled "The doctrine of Eliphas Lévi" in 1894, one would know practically nothing about Lévi's life (Lévi 1894:263–329). He still referred to him as a disciple of Wronski in the first place, to whom he allegedly owed his "initiation" and his knowledge about the Kabbalah — a statement that was recently shown to be untenable, as Wronski's influence on Lévi had been brief and rather marginal (Strube 2016b:426–438). In his eyes, Lévi had first and foremost exerted an influence on artists, while the more "scientific" occultists would nowadays benefit from the teachings of Wronski, Court de Gébelin, Fabre d'Olivet, and Louis Lucas.[14] Consequently, he depicted Lévi as the founder of an "artistic" strand of occultism, while he clearly preferred the "scientific" pendant.

In Stanislas de Guaïta's *Au seuil du mystère* (1886), one reads a different assessment of Lévi.[15] He declared that the "synthetic" wisdom of the ancient mages, which had originally been taught consistently in centers of knowledge, had fractured over the course of the millennia and was passed to individual adepts who handed it down in different ways (Guaïta

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[14] "Parmi les littérateurs, élèves presque directs d'Eliphas, nous citerons Stanislas de Guaita, Emile Michelet, Alber Jhouney, Joséphin Peladan, René Caillié. Parmi les occultistes issus des écoles scientifiques et sur lesquels Eliphas a eu une influence réelle, mais secondaire, nous citerons F. Ch. Barlet, Julien Lejay, Albert Poisson, Marc Haven, Paul Sédir. Enfin, il faut aussi mentionner ceux que la personnalité intellectuelle d'Eliphas a particulièrement intéressés, le baron Spédalieri, Lucien Mauchel, MM. Montaut et Charrot, et M^{me} Hutchinson, élèves du Maître."

[15] The quote in the previous footnote suggests that de Guaïta had stimulated Papus' interest in Lévi (cf. Papus 1974 [1892]:218–219).

1890:13–65). After expounding a historical narrative that was clearly inspired by Lévi's writings, he explained that after a long time of isolation and "martyrdom," the time had now come for the rediscovery of occultism. Lévi had completed what earlier seekers like Wronski, Lacuria, Jean-Marie Ragon, or Lucas had only been able to prepare for: he was the unsurpassed "magiste complet" and "renovator" of "traditional wisdom" (Guaïta 1890:66). This completely inverted relationship between Wronski and Lévi exemplifies the heterogeneous and contingent character of the construction of the "true" esoteric tradition, which largely depended on personal preferences and circumstances.

Papus was at pains to establish a personal link to the lineage of true initiates. He later claimed to have been initiated into "Martinism" by Henri Delaage (1825–1882), a friend of Lévi's who had propagated the identity of socialist and magnetistic theories (Strube 2016b:464–467, 602). Papus' first "contact" with esoteric writings and the way he developed his own narrative clearly contradict this assertion. It is highly likely that he maintained this early "initiation" in order to distance himself from Theosophical influences and strengthen the credibility of his "Martinist" identity. In any case, Delaage would not have been able to confirm or deny the claim, as he had died in 1882. Papus later established contacts into circles that had been affiliated with Lévi. Since 1891, he had been in a relationship with the feminist Anna Wolska, who was the niece of Lévi's former disciples Aleksander (1822–1877) and Konstanty Branicki (1824–1884), and the daughter of Kalikst Wolski (1816–1885), the founder of the Fourierist commune in Texas, "La Réunion." An old friend of Lévi, Fernand Rozier (1839–1922), joined the Ordre Martinist. And Jean-Baptiste Bricaud (1881–1934), who became "supérieur inconnu" in 1903, had taken lessons from Jacques Charrot (1831–1911), a disciple of Lévi, and was in contact with Charles Fauvety's collaborator Fabre des Essarts, who ordained him as a bishop of his Eglise gnostique in the diocese of Lyon-Grenoble. This suggests that, following the publications in Theosophical journals and the efforts of a young generation of French occultists, a certain clustering of the recipients of Eliphas Lévi took place. However, this could not change the fact that the image of the "great Kabbalist" would remain very blurry for a long time.

The Role of Socialism in the Occultist Milieu

The strong socialist presence in these milieus will not have escaped the reader's attention. Indeed, the emergence of French occultism was deeply entangled with July Monarchy socialism. As it has been argued elsewhere, the "occultism" of Eliphas Lévi had been a direct result from his socialist ideas (Strube 2016a). This raises the question why he had not been regarded by the young generation of occultists as a kind of "socialist magus." The reasons for this circumstance will help to illuminate more general processes of occultist identity formations. This is, firstly, the poor state of knowledge regarding Lévi's past and the context of the emergence of his writings. It has been shown above that Papus depicted Lévi as a disciple of Wronski and Charles Fourier, the founder of one of the most important socialist schools under the July Monarchy. However, he only referred to one of his earlier, openly socialist writings once, and apparently without being aware of its content and context (Papus 1887:29). The 1894 summary of "The doctrine of Eliphas Lévi" contains a short section about his "social ideas," which are discussed only fragmentarily (Lévi 1894:297–298). Papus explains that Lévi's social ideas result from the "moral education" of the magus and are only expounded with great restraint ("avec quelle réserve !"). He mentions Lévi's idea of a "reign of sages" who are led by a "spiritual" Pope, and quotes from Lévi's *Fables et symboles* (1862). Therein, Lévi refers to republics as "social crises" and explains that the masses must first become masters before they do not need to be governed anymore (Lévi 1862:472, 378–379, 318). Due to this limited analysis, Papus had not been able to realize that those ideas were very much socialist, an insight that was further prevented by the fact that he had neither known Lévi's openly socialist writings (which notably stated the same ideas), nor had he realized that Lévi's "restraint" had been quite necessary in face of the repression of socialist ideas in the Second Empire.[16] Furthermore, some unpublished writings, where socialist language was employed with more frankness, had not yet been edited.[17]

Secondly — and this is more directly relevant for the present argument — the specific context of *fin-de-siècle* France must be considered. Those individuals cultivating socialist ideas in occultist and Spiritist circles were highly critical of the strands of socialism that were predominant in the Third Republic. As has been indicated repeatedly by now, the occultist milieu has adopted socialist ideas in the July Monarchy vein, especially Fourierism and Saint-Simonism, which were polemically opposed to current "materialist" or "atheist" socialisms. After 1848, a date that was mentioned by Papus as a decisive rupture, many veterans of the old socialist schools shaped the Spiritist and magnetistic landscape. As examples such as Fauvety have shown, many were intrigued by the new vogue stimulated by the Theosophical Society. A younger generation, consisting of different individuals such as Dramard, Papus, or

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[16] For a comprehensive analysis, see (Strube 2016b).

[17] Those were *Le grand arcane* as well as the increasingly radical *Le livre des sages*, *Les portes de l'avenir*, and *Le catéchisme de la paix*, which were published around 1900.

Jounet, was very much attracted by the "old-school" socialist criticism of materialism, atheism, or egoism, as well as by its enthusiastic call for "synthesis." In this way, the ideas of July Monarchy socialism, the "losers" of 1848, continued in occultist discourses at the end of the century. Similar to socialist veterans, young occultists attacked contemporary socialism for its alleged shortcomings and claimed to represent superior social teachings. Their "synthetic" or "organic" character, along with a frequent elitism, a "spiritual" agenda, and the radical rejection of secularism and contemporary materialist socialism led some observers to overlook the circumstance that those ideas were very much in line with July Monarchy socialisms. Most notably, David Allen Harvey focuses on similarities and differences between occultism and fascism, without discussing socialist ideas at all—although their influence appears to be much more significant and evident (e.g., 2005:182-183). Similarly, some relations to individuals belonging to the "integralist, protofascist new Right" are addressed, but not the abundant connections to socialists that will become further evident in what follows (153). This is not to say that French occultism around 1900 was an entirely left-wing, progressive movement—its heterogeneity has been highlighted repeatedly by now—but it must be stressed that a historical understanding of its emergence and its central ideas can only be understood in the light of pre-1848 French socialism.

Many occultists openly used "socialism" as an identity marker. For example, Caillé and Jounet founded the journal *L'Etoile* in 1889, which proclaimed to be a *Revue mensuelle de kabbale messianique, de socialisme chrétien et de spiritualisme experimental*. Jounet, who was also a member of the Eglise gnostique, published a monograph with the title *Esotérisme et socialisme* in 1893, using his pen-name of Albert Jhouney.[18] Therein, he picks up the old socialist theme of the original doctrine of Christ being the essence of socialism. Lost by the degenerated Churches, it had only survived in esoteric form and would now have to be rediscovered in order to create the ideal social order, as well as to establish the universal science that the ancient mages had already begun to unveil. The book stimulated a couple of responses. In March 1894, the abbé Alta (i.e., Calixte Mélinge[19]) began to publish a lengthy review in *L'Etoile*, discussing the relationship between "Esotérisme et socialisme."

Of primary interest, however, is a critical response by Jean-François Malan, a junior writer for the *Revue socialiste*. It is highly instructive about the ambiguous relationship between the occultists and the majority of socialists. Reviewing Jounet's book immediately after its publication, Malan explained that he had been very skeptical about it at first, but was quickly intrigued by its style and attractive ideas. At the same time, Malan identified as a member of the materialist camp, because "…we have thought that the foremost thing to discover and to produce was the physical, material amelioration of life. […] Thus we have preferred to focus on purely material problems […]" (Malan 1893:757). Nevertheless, he was captivated by the publication and did not dispute its value, although he addressed its practical shortcomings: "The book of M. Jhouney merits to be studied and, maybe, to be discussed in length. The esotericist forgets too often – in my opinion — the materiality of man." Malan did not polemicize against Jounet's esotericism per se, but he set clear priorities:

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[18] More information about Jounet can be found in Michelet 1977 [1937]:88-94; Laurant 1992:146-150, 171-173

[19] For more information, see Laurant 1992:173-174; Sharp 2006:166.

> Your role, however beautiful already, however grand, would become more elevated if you wanted to join forces with militant Socialism, if you walked with us in the rough struggle where we take on the dying society hand-to-hand, in order to bring it to heel, in order to force it to give us — to all of us — bread, to start with! … (Malan 1893:760)

What the oppressed people needs, Malan stressed, is food, security, and the ability to read in the first place. Only then one could afford the time and energy to instruct the people to read "beautiful" writings such as Jounet's. For now, "One must work to spread the social science, which is *Socialism* … not yet *Esotericism…*" Malan obviously doubted the practical value of the lofty ideas of the esotericists, an attitude that was shared by numerous other socialists.

This socialist "materialism," of which many much less favorable cases could be cited, prompted numerous occultists to look for alternatives with fervor. One example is another important contributor to *L'Etoile,* Lady Caithness' affiliate Paul Roca, who enthusiastically discussed feminist, socialist, and "gnostic" ideas. Like Papus and de Guaïta, he was an ardent propagator of a new political concept called *synarchie* that was of great importance for French occultists at that time. Synarchy had been shaped by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842–1909) in several books from 1882 onward. It strived for a "synthesis" of all human knowledge as the basis of a perfect social order, the "association of everybody with everybody." In his writings, Saint-Yves borrowed extensively from Fabre d'Olivet (1768–1825) and Court de Gébelin (1719–1784), to the point of sheer plagiarism (Cellier 1953; cf. Harvey 2005:204–212). At the same time, the influence of July Monarchy socialism and its doctrines of *synthèse* or *association universelle* is obvious, and deserves to be analyzed in more detail. With regard to this it is interesting that Saint-Yves had spent his formative period on Jersey, where disciples of the socialist veteran Pierre Leroux (1797–1871) — who had strongly been influenced by Fabre d'Olivet — had introduced him to Victor Hugo (Cellier

1953:371-396). It is possible that Saint-Yves also adopted some of Lévi's ideas, which would not be surprising: His wife, Maria Wiktoria Riznić, was the cousin of Anna Hanska, the wife of Lévi's disciple Jerzy Mniszech and the daughter of Ewelina Hanska, the widow of Honoré de Balzac and close friend of Lévi.

What is certain is Saint-Yves's great determination not to be associated with the young occultists. He did not want his ideas to be understood "esoterically" but as guidelines for the established political world (Laurant 1992:133–138). This did not reduce his popularity among the Neo-Martinists, especially Papus and Barlet, and later Caillé and Jounet. Dramard had discussed his teachings in an article, "La doctrine ésotérique," published on September 9, 1885, in the *Revue socialiste*. In *Au seuil du mystère* (1886), de Guaïta praised Synarchy as the direct outcome of the occultist tradition and, most remarkably, related it to pre-1848 currents in socialist thought:

> While the [Saint-Simonian leader] Enfantin cast a radiant but fleeting shine on the perishing Saint-Simonism; and while Victor Considérant [sic] rejuvenated the theory of Fourier — those efforts are not without interest — some indefatigable seekers, on the other hand, were digging their tunnels, in every sense of the word, through the collapsed catacombs of ancient magic (Guaïta 1890:65).

In his narrative, de Guaïta depicted the July Monarchy socialists as the loftier continuators of the incomplete "mystic schools" of the Restauration. Surpassed by "seekers" like Fabre d'Olivet, Wronski, Lacuria, Ragon, Lucas, and then especially Lévi, they were as much part of the French esoteric tradition as the most recent propagator of ancient magical wisdom, Saint-Yves. In this way, de Guaïta's history of occultism possesses a remarkable political dimension that can further be exemplified by a "Discours initiatique," supposed to be held during the initiation into the third Martinist degree. The initiate is to be prepared for the "superior and truly universal," that is "catholic" religion that is hidden behind the *ésotérisme* of "all really true and profound" religions:

> *Psychologist*, give to this sentiment the name which you want: *Love*, *Solidarity*, *Altruism*, *Fraternity*, *Charity*;
> *Economist* or *Philosopher*, call it *Socialism* if you want… *Collectivism*, *Communism*… Words are nothing!
> Honor it, *Mystic*, under the names of *divine Mother* or *Holy Spirit* (Guaïta 1890:163).

In this passage, the "esotericism" into which the candidate is supposed to be initiated is quite explicitly identified with socialism. Still, it would be hasty to label de Guaïta and other occultists simply as "socialists," or to assume an outright identity of socialism and occultism. The picture is more ambiguous, as de Guaïta regarded the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists as his ancestors, but maintained that the "subterranean" discoverers of the science of ancient magic were by far superior. The science of magic, according to de Guaïta and other occultists, is not about superficial politics but about the universal synthesis of science, religion, philosophy, and politics. It is true that the early socialists had propagated this very same idea, but they failed to realize it. From this perspective, present-day socialists were the ones who should learn from the occultists, and not vice versa.

A similar attitude can be found in the writings of Papus, for example in his *Bibliographie méthodique de science occulte* (1892). Under the category "Socialisme," we find a reference to Benoît Malon's *Socialisme intégral* (1890–1891), with an explanation that "social studies could benefit from the occult sciences very much" — not the other way around (Papus 1892:64). In 1894, Papus published a brochure with the title *Anarchie, indolence & synarchie*, wherein he declared his aim to harmonize "the physiological laws of the social order and esotericism," which he intended to give to the reader "next to the most learned studies about the socialist movement." He propagated Synarchy as an alternative to the "more or less utopian ideas of the socialists," because it would realize the perfect social order merely by applying scientific, organic laws. This, Papus explained, would be far from "the pacifist or violent revolution preached by the socialists and the destruction of the social machinery preached by the anarchists" (Papus 1894:6). This view was the exact opposite of Malan's call to take the class struggle to the streets and bring society "to its heels" by force. Its historical context gains in complexity when ones realized that it could as well have been formulated by a Fourierist or Saint-Simonian criticizing revolutionary and "anarchist" tendencies, and instead propagating an "organic" or "synthetic" science as the means to realize universal harmony and association.

This demonstrates how deeply occultists' identity formations have been entangled with socialism. In the light of the strong presence of socialist veterans in the respective milieus, this is anything but surprising. However, a key factor in those identificatory processes was the rejection of "lower" forms of socialism by the young generation and the propagation of occultist ideas as a superior approach to establish a perfect social order. It has been shown that occultists such as de Guaïta have included July Monarchy socialism in the history of esotericism, but asserted a profound rupture between the early socialist doctrines and their “materialist” and “atheist” successors. The construction of those narratives led to a historiographical separation of historical contexts that exerts an influence on the scholarship about occultism and socialism up to the present day.

Again, the perception of Eliphas Lévi is an instructive example for this. It shows how Neo-Martinist narratives brought about a separation of the socialist Alphonse-Louis Constant and the occultist Eliphas Lévi, a separation based on the notion of occultism being the superior alternative to contemporary socialism. It will be recalled that knowledge of Lévi’s past was extremely vague in the 1890s. When Papus published his summary of “The doctrine of Eliphas Lévi” in 1894, he mentioned the efforts of one “Chamuel,” who had started to collect material for a biography. This acronym was used by Lucien Mauchel (1867–1936), the owner of the Librairie du merveilleux, the main occultist publisher at that time. In *L’Initiation* of June 1891, he had published some vague essays about Lévi’s life. However, his studies would remain obscure for decades and can only be discerned in his editorial work: for example, when he edited Lévi’s last writing in 1902, *Le catéchisme de la paix* (written in 1875), Mauchel added excerpts of Lévi’s first radical writing, *La Bible de la liberté* (1841), and explained that a comparison of the beginning and the end of the “master’s” thought would be “both interesting and fruitful” (Lévi 1902 [1875]:179). This suggests that some of Lévi’s late recipients became well aware of the socialist roots of his ideas.

However, the project to publish a biography of Lévi would only be realized by Paul Chacornac (1884–1964) as late as 1926. Together with his brother Louis, he had taken over the Librairie générale des sciences occultes that had been founded by their father Henri Chacornac (1855–1907). Henri had been interested in both socialist and occultist literature and was married to the daughter of the socialist occultist Jules Lermina (1839–1915), whose works he published. From 1905 on, Albert Jounet was also published by him. When the two brothers took over the business, now under the name of Chacornac frères, they continued on their father’s course and turned it into a nodal point of the esoteric scene (Laurant 1992:144). It was Paul who was the driving force behind it and acquired Mauchel’s collection in order to write the biography that had been promised for over 30 years. The outcome is a hagiography. It is based on a wealth of source material but follows the teleological narrative of an “initiation” that had first been invented by Papus and de Guaïta. This can be illustrated by the preface by Victor-Emile Michelet (1861–1938), a symbolist poet who was an early member of the Ordre Martiniste.[20] Michelet made a clear-cut distinction between the socialist Constant and the occultist Lévi, who allegedly moved away from his "social polemics that did not have any value except for their generous intention" to his excellent occultist writings after he had seen the "initiatory light" (Chacornac 1989 [1926]:XII). Like Papus before him, Michelet declared that it was thanks to Wronski that Lévi had become the "rénovateur de l'occultisme." This Neo-Martinist narrative eclipsed the socialist context of the emergence of Lévi's occultism and its unceasingly socialist character. Effectively, a narrative that had originally been constructed without the slightest information about Lévi's life had become cemented in Chacornac's teleological hagiography. Against the background of the obvious socialist interests of the involved occultists, it is revealing how Michelet explained the way in which Lévi surpassed the "spiritualité" of the "uncertain schools":

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[20] Portions of this preface were later used in Michelet 1977 [1937]:107-115. For further information about him, see Knowles 1954.

> …the Saint-Simonians and their successors: the Fourierists, the Comtistes, others more obscure. Socialism in the crib, puerile, naïve, but still generous, would take on a vigor with Proudhon that soon dissolved it in low politics (Chacornac 1989 [1926]:XIII).

Here, Michelet equated the rupture between Constant and Lévi with the decline of a noble but immature socialism that had degenerated into the materialist, atheist anarchism of Proudhon. This reflects the view, already articulated by de Guaïta, that the early socialists had searched for the same truths as the "initiates," but due to their superficiality have not been able to lift the veil. Constant, like his comrades, had used a similar argumentation both in his openly socialist and in his occultist writings. Thus, we can find a very similar strategy in the writings both of veterans who had built on their socialist ideas in a Spiritist or occultist context, and in the writings of young occultists who faced the *fait accompli* of Proudhonist, Blanquist, or Marxist dominance. In several ways, an occupation with socialism was as prominent as an occupation with the ideas of the Theosophical Society among the occultists. For this very reason, the claim for superiority and the distancing both from Theosophy and from "low politics" was central to occultist identity formations.

Conclusion

The notion of "tradition" functioned as the central identity marker of occultists. This is the case with regard to rival occultist organizations, but also with regard to Theosophy, Spiritism, or Magnetism. Furthermore, the occultist insistence on tradition functioned as an important marker for legitimacy and authority in opposition to established religions, most notably Roman Catholicism. The numerous "heterodox Catholics" among the French occultists could not rely on a historically evident doctrinal tradition, supported by the manifest infrastructure of a clergy. Instead, alternative narratives had to be constructed that depicted the "official tradition" as corrupted and degenerate, while positioning a secret elite of adepts as the bearers of occult truth. As it had been done prominently by Eliphas Lévi, "true Catholicism" could be claimed to exist outside of the Churches, and occultists could present themselves as the "revivers" of it. The quarrels between different esoteric cohorts and individuals have indicated the broad variety of competing narratives at the end of the nineteenth century. Both the contingency of those narratives and their embedment in a specific contemporary context demonstrate that it is highly problematic for scholarship to accept such notions of occult traditions and their supposed revivals, as they first and foremost emerged in identificatory discourses marked by multifaceted polemics.

The French polemics parallel similar developments in other national contexts. But in the French case, the construction of a markedly "national" occultist tradition has been, at least to a large extent, the outcome of polemical encounters with the Theosophical Society. At the heart of this distancing stood a particular notion of true *théosophie* that was the most noble representative of a decidedly "western" tradition. This is not only relevant for an understanding of the emergence of occultist identities at the end of the nineteenth century. It is also instructing for the history of the study of western esotericism, as the occultist *ésotérisme occidental* has found its way into the pioneering works of the study of esotericism. Later approaches have critically addressed the "insider perspective" that stands behind this notion and presented practical arguments for the usefulness of the label "Western Esotericism." In this vein, Wouter Hanegraaff has recently argued for a strictly "historical" foundation of the label "Western" (Hanegraaff 2015). It appears to be important to pay closer attention to the historical separation between "East and West," for the simple reason that this separation was polemical. When the greater number of the French occultists broke with the Theosophical Society in the 1890s, they had already been influenced by the ideas of a movement that had long obtained a complex global dimension. This is not to suggest that there has been an "Eastern esotericism" that was encountered by "Westerners" in the nineteenth century. Instead, the very emergence of "esoteric" and "occultist" identities has to be seen against the background of globally entangled discourses that, in the cases presented above, prompted a "nationalist" or "regionalist" reaction. The occultists who distanced themselves from the Theosophical Society had not continued a tradition that could have been "revived." This was firstly illustrated by the diverging and highly contingent identificatory narratives that have been developed in the 1880s and 1890s. Secondly, this has been demonstrated by the “de-historicization” of a key figure like Eliphas Lévi, whose actual historical background has been eclipsed by the teleological narratives that were developed by Papus, de Guaïta, and other occultists. Consequently, the construction of an *ésotérisme occidental* was, by the very definition of the term, a globally entangled process that required “the East” as its Other.

Furthermore, a closer look at the trajectories of individuals like Lévi or Fauvety is relevant because they stand out as instructive examples for a continuation of socialist ideas in the July Monarchy vein, directly into Spiritist, magnetistic, and then occultist discourses. In the light of the source material, the major importance of socialist ideas for occultist identity formations is beyond any doubt. However, the relationship of the young generation of occultists towards socialism has been complex and ambiguous. Their “synthetic” approaches mirrored those of the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists, and while many occultists openly identified as “socialists,” almost all of them rejected “la basse politique” and sought to embrace loftier alternatives. It is telling that many occultists opposed their “occult sciences” to the “materialist sciences” in a very similar fashion to their opposition of true, esoteric, Christian, or spiritual socialism to “materialist socialism” (cf. Laurant 1992:119; 2006:130). Similar to Theosophy, socialism was an important context for the emergence of occultist identities. It was for this exact reason that many occultists polemically distanced themselves from their allegedly misled representatives and claimed the supremacy of their own teachings. A critical analysis of the respective identificatory narratives opens up new perspectives on historical contexts that have only been separated polemically. A revaluation of the entanglement of those contexts, such as occultism and socialism, allows for insights into historical processes that greatly exceed the supposed “Other” of European history.

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