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## Orobio de Castro and the Problem of Crypto-Judaism: Materials for a Reflection

### Abstract

The ideas of Isaac Orobio de Castro are addressed in light of the intellectual context of the hardships experienced by Portuguese Jews of the Iberian Diaspora, and thus as reflecting on the key topics of exile and redemption. We seek a philosophical understanding of the difficulties presented by the condition of the converso to those who, like Orobio, embraced normative Judaism. We have elaborated on the work of this author, particularly on the text titled *La observancia de la divina ley de Mosseh* (*Observance of the Divine Law of Moses*, Amsterdam, c. 1670), with the purpose of adducing those elements of his thought we deemed of value to address the issues at hand.

**Key words:** Diaspora; Conversos; Crypto-Judaism.

**Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Authors:** Orobio de Castro.

### Resumo

As ideias de Isaac Oróbio de Castro serão abordadas à luz do contexto intelectual dos judeus portugueses que vivenciaram as agruras da Diáspora ibérica, a partir de uma reflexão sobre os temas cruciais do exílio e da redenção. Buscamos uma compreensão filosófica das dificuldades que a condição de converso apresentou àqueles que abraçaram, como Oróbio, o judaísmo normativo. Debruçamo-nos sobre o trabalho deste autor, particularmente sobre o texto intitulado *La observancia de la divina ley de Mosseh* (Amsterdam, c. 1670), com a intenção de aduzir elementos do seu pensamento que consideramos valiosos para o tratamento da problemática.

**Palavras chave:** Diáspora; Conversos; Criptojudaísmo.

**Autores antigos, medievais e do início da Idade Moderna:** Oróbio de Castro.

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper we will focus on the thought and context of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese author Baltazar<sup>1</sup> Alvares de Orobio, or Isaac Orobio de Castro, as he would come to be known upon joining the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam. In our approach, we shall probe the intellectual atmosphere of the Portuguese Jews, whose legacy expresses a religiously inflected thought, historically rooted in the *galuth*, the long exile from *eretz Israel*, and the metaphysical significance of the difficulties imposed on the people along the «tortuous paths»<sup>2</sup> of the Iberian Diaspora. Exile and redemption – two major problems inseparable from Jewish thought and experience – make up, as Y. Kaplan has pointed out, fundamental concepts, «distinctive threads», and structuring elements in the thought of these authors, in whose circle Orobio de Castro moved<sup>3</sup>. The Scholastic education received in Spain prepared him to philosophically ground his positions so as to achieve what we may imagine to have been his purpose: to congregate, under the authority of the law and the agreement of reason, a religious community, upon which a thoroughly regulated conduct was enforced, and that was threatened by a not always tolerant Christian majority, as well as internal dissension. The work Orobio de Castro left us emerged in a context where tacit compromises were unavoidable; that context, in which the Iberian dispersion took place, is perfectly illustrated by the author's biography. Orobio may have been a wandering Jew in search of a safe haven; his took him across a variety of places. But it was also a path treaded from the inside outwards, from Baltazar, the crypto-Jew, to Isaac Orobio, illustrious thinker of the Jewish condition, of notable skill and speculative sobriety. *Inner* and *outer* are, in virtue of that fact, two poles guiding the controversies in Orobio's time, marking also the historiographical and literary tradition brought about by the figure of the converso<sup>4</sup>, and unveiling the idiosyncrasies

<sup>1</sup> Also written: Ishac / Ishak Orobio de Castro, «alias Don Balthasar», cfr. Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, EH 48 A 12.

<sup>2</sup> The expression is from the poet Daniel Levi (Miguel) de Barrios. Cfr. the poem titled *Uma carta ao que trilha caminhos tortuosos*. Daniel Levi de Barrios, *Triumpho*, Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, EH 20 E 61, apud Y. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, Oxford University Press, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford 1989, p. 334 [ed. port. Imago, RJ 2000]. See Miguel (Daniel Levi) de Barrios, *Complete Works in 3 Volumes*, ed. M. Lazar – F.J. Pueyo Mena, Labyrinthos, Lancaster 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Y. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> «The term 'converso', used in medieval Christianity to refer to Christian neophytes, went on to point out within the Iberian Peninsula the Jews baptized in the Catholic Church during the mass

that aroused from the most unexpected *intersections*<sup>5</sup>. Here we shall elaborate on some of the senses those two reference points assumed and what overlapping spaces they allowed to project.

The Western Sephardic Diaspora<sup>6</sup>, on which we will primarily focus, has seen the sprouting of heresies and peculiar orthodoxies, conceived under a Christian academic tradition of great eclecticism, that of the Iberian universities, thenceforth open to those of Jewish blood and Christian creed. I. S. Révah, one of the pioneering authors on these subjects, signals the importance of the phenomenon, strikingly effervescent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting its place both in the intellectual history of Judaism and in the history of European thought<sup>7</sup>. The philosophical and exegetical base comprising the work of many of these authors is aimed at yielding an agglutinating speech in defence of a religiously grounded identity, as well as to provide a horizon of hope, *la speranza*, beyond martyrdom and dispersion: that which is symbolised by the redemption of Israel. To the chaos of circumstances, the authors respond with a certain vision of the world, involving the prediction and overcoming of disorder, suffering, and death: «L'esilio e dunque il fondo permanente di pericolo, di inquietudine e di morte [...]»<sup>8</sup>. If the itinerary seems, at first, the same, the path traversed points us towards substantive differences and diversity emerges as an exciting characteristic of this period's literary production.

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conversions of the years 1391-1497, as well as their descendants in the Iberian kingdoms and their respective in America», cfr. Y. Kaplan, «Conversão, Conversos», in L.L. Mucznik – J.A.S. Tavim – E. Mucznik – E.A. Mea (coord.), *Dicionário do Judaísmo Português*, Presença, Lisboa 2009, pp. 174-176. These conversos were also referred to as «New Christians» by contrast with the «Old Christian» majority who had no Jewish ancestry. In Portugal, the term «New Christian» (*cristão-novo*) was abundant in the inquisitorial sources and carried the heavy stigma of the impure blood of Jewish descent: cfr. E.A. Mea, *A Inquisição de Coimbra no século XVI*, Fundação Eng.º António de Almeida, Porto 1997. We should also allude to two other designations, «crypto-Jew» and «marrano»: the first semantically invokes the hidden bond with Judaism; the latter holds a pejorative though imprecise meaning and its use, applied to the conversos, is traceable to the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Castile (C. Stuczynski, 2009). An interchangeable use of these terms is often found. How they all articulate more extensively than this is subject of a prolific historiographical debate. We intend to share here some of the perspectives.

<sup>5</sup> See Y. Kaplan, (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Neetherlands in Modern History*, Brill, Leiden 2008, pp. 33 and ss.

<sup>6</sup> J. Israel, *The Diasporas within: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World of Maritime Empires (1540-1740)*, Brill, Leiden 2002.

<sup>7</sup> I.S. Révah, *Des Marranes a Spinoza*, Vrin, Paris 1995.

<sup>8</sup> H. Méchoulan, «Menasseh ben Israel e l'esperienza dell'esilio», *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 49 n° 5/8 (Aug. 1983) 522-30.

Evidently, this and other theoretical perspectives, in the relentless rereading of the sources, raises several key questions, implying a continuous critical examination of the terms, namely those concerning our approach to the Jewish legacy, in articulation with the wider topic of identity. This paper is a reflection on the polemic and apologetic writings of Orobio de Castro, with a special emphasis on the text titled *La observancia de la divina ley de Mosseh* (*Observance of the Divine Law of Moses*, Amsterdam, c. 1670), attempting to identify the ideas present there and the arguments of which the author avails himself in order to prove, against a variety of sceptics, that Judaism contains the sole interpretation of the divine law and the key to understand the destiny of the Jewish people. We shall inquire into the author's premises, trying to discern his singular contribution to the debate with the culture of that period. It would also be relevant, though beyond the scope of this paper, to examine in detail the impact of the disaggregation of the mythical *Sepharad* on Jewish philosophy – highlighting the authors of Lusitanian origin, who henceforth became prominent –, either on theoretical issues or on the literary genres and reference sources, in permanent confrontation with the Christian philosophical context which, like the Islamic one, has unequivocally shaped it. It is precisely the reality subsequent to the edicts of expulsion of 1492 (Spain) and 1496 (Portugal) and the enforced baptism of 1497 (Portugal) that we set out to research from the work of Orobio de Castro. In other words, the matter at hand here is the meaning given by its protagonists to what Immanuel Aboab will refer to as the «banishment from Portugal» (*desterro de Portugal*)<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Preliminary bio-bibliographical aspects

*There can be no doubt that, already in his childhood, Baltazar had already experienced the double life of the crypto-Jew – secret adherence to his faith in the Mosaic law, beneath a scrupulous attention to publicly maintaining a Christian appearance in every detail*<sup>10</sup>.

Orobio de Castro was born in Bragança, northeast Portugal, circa 1617, having been given the name Baltazar Alvares de Orobio, in the midst of a family of

<sup>9</sup> Aboab, *Nomologia o discursos legales*, Amsterdam, 1629. See M. Orfali, «O desterro de Portugal na historiografia de Imanuel Aboab», *História, Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* 3/1 (2000) 211-338.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 6.

conversos of likely Spanish provenance<sup>11</sup>. The lesser inquisitorial pressure exerted in Spain, from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, determined that Orobio's family was to join the flux of Portuguese immigrates in that country. In Spain, Orobio de Castro was able to get academic training, concealing his place of birth in order to thwart any suspicions of belonging to those of the *nation (nação)*<sup>12</sup>, who were known to be many in that region of Portugal. His academic curriculum lies in obscurity. In 1633, he takes up medicine at the University of Osuna (Andalusia)<sup>13</sup>; we find him afterwards at Alcalá de Henares, in 1635, where he continues his studies on medicine and theology (Colegio de la Madre de Dios)<sup>14</sup>. His poem, *Epílogo de lo que pasó en la peste de la ciudad de Málaga en este año de 1637*<sup>15</sup>, dates from this period.

However, during the school year of 1640-41, his signature disappears from the records of that institution, which suggests an unfinished degree in medicine, a fact that should be understood in the context of vicious inquisitorial harassment to his family<sup>16</sup>. Thereafter, he has probably forged the documentation in order to submit his candidature to the University of Seville (1641, to the chair of medical method)<sup>17</sup> and, afterwards, to Toulouse (where he registers in 1660 and is known

<sup>11</sup> The author's biographical elements were taken from the reference work of Y. Kaplan.

<sup>12</sup> Expressions like «gente de nação hebraica», found at the documentation of the Portuguese Inquisition, constitute another way by which the New Christians were labeled in Portugal. Nonetheless, the horizon of the «Nação» exceeds this context and ultimate significance, designating the Portuguese Jews of the Diaspora, the «nação portuguesa». See J.A.R.S. Tavim, «Jews in the Diaspora with *Sepharad* in the mirror: ruptures, relations and forms of identity: a theme examined through three cases», *Jewish History* 25 (2011) 175-205.

<sup>13</sup> «It seems clear that Baltazar would also have studied arts at Osuna, since any student intending to read medicine there was required first to receive a bachelor of arts degree», cfr. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> «[...] Baltazar received his licentiate degree in arts at Alcalá as early as 1636, i. e. immediately on completion of his first year there», cfr. *ibid.*, «In this same year Baltazar was admitted to one of the theological schools of the university», cfr. *ibid.*, p. 12. «[in 1636] he was registered for an additional year in the faculty of medicine», cfr. p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> «The poem is part of the public face of Baltazar the university student, but between the lines we may catch a glimpse of his position *qua* crypto-Jew [...]», cfr. *ibid.*, p. 19 (see also pp. 21-23). «Between the lines» is an expression used by L. Strauss in his reference work «Persecution and the Art of Writing», *Social Research* 8/4 (Nov. 1941) 488-504.

<sup>16</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> «It is not clear what certificate of professional qualifications Baltazar laid before the university authorities when he entered himself as a candidate for the professorship. [...] he left Alcalá without a medical degree, and it is not to be assumed that he would have found opportunity thereafter to complete his studies in another institution», cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 64-65. The possibility of having used

to be occupying, in 1661, the position of teacher of surgery and pharmacy)<sup>18</sup>. While still in Spain, and after quitting the university of Seville, his reputation as a physician appreciably grows amongst the elite, considering he managed to become, since 1643, the physician of don Antonio Juan Luis de Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli, a condition that would be registered in the frontispiece of his works. Some years later, in 1653, he published a medical work (which was part of a polemic) in Seville, although he had by then moved and become married to Isabel Pérez de la Peña in Cádiz<sup>19</sup>.

Already in Amsterdam, around 1662, he enrolls in the *Collegium Medicum*, with a diploma from the University of Toulouse, of September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1660, which he uses as support for a degree in medicine in that institution, an achievement for which, once more, no reliable basis is known<sup>20</sup>. Behind him are miles of persecution and the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition, where Orobio was taken in 1654. His patrimony was confiscated and inventoried at the residence in Cádiz, by officers of the Inquisition. Some books are mentioned but, sadly, no complete list of his library is extant. In prison, both the physical exam, carried out in September 1654, attesting that he had been circumcised, and, in January 1656, the information obtained under torture, seemed unequivocal evidence of his crypto-Judaism<sup>21</sup>. Crypto-Judaism, the mask and dissemblance which, precisely, make up the

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a forged certificate is also one of the hypotheses raised by Revah, as explained by Kaplan. Also: «We have already seen that Baltazar had graduated as a bachelor of medicine at Alcalá in 1636 but never attained the doctor's degree there [...]», p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> A document in the archive of the University of Toulouse, dating from September 9<sup>th</sup> 1660, certifies the degree of doctor conferred to Orobio de Castro, of which he would have given proof by presenting the respective certificate, of 14<sup>th</sup> June 1640, with the stamp of the University of Alcalá de Henares. The absence of a documental reference corroborating this information in the archive of Alcalá raises, to the researcher, a serious concern about the authenticity of the testimony, especially considering the mishaps and omissions in the polemicist biographical journey. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., pp. 101-102.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 67. The work was composed in Latin and titled *Controvertitur, utrum materialibus morbis in choantibus sang[ui]nis missio revulsiva juxta Hippocratis et Galeni dogmata per distantissimas venas effici debeat?*, Hispali [Seville], 1653.

<sup>20</sup> «At any rate, when later he was registered at the *Collegium Medicum* of Amsterdam he produced his Toulouse diploma dated 9 September 1660, which was, in point of fact, no more than the «certificate» purportedly emanating from Alcalá», cfr. *ibid.*, p. 102. «The entry for Isaac Orobio records that he originated from Seville and was licensed at Toulouse on 9 September 1660, but we have already seen that Isaac in fact held no degree from the university of Toulouse», p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> Orobio himself shared details on this period with the Arminian theologian Phillip van Limborch, who preserved his testimony on his work *Historia Inquisitionis*, Amsterdam 1692, Book IV, cap. 29, pp. 323-24.

guiding thread in the dissertation by Kaplan, the Brigantine physician's biographer. In June 11<sup>th</sup> 1656, Orobio de Castro is reconciled with the Christian faith, in an *auto-de-fé* (act-of-faith) that took place in the Church of Saint Paul, Dominican convent of Seville. He is forced to use the *Sanbenito*, subject to perpetual confinement and banished<sup>22</sup>. From the second half of 1658 onwards, we virtually lose track of Orobio and his family in Spanish territory<sup>23</sup>. We find him again in France, in 1660, and afterwards in Amsterdam, in 1662, as was mentioned. There, he definitively strips the garment of Baltazar and emerges as Isaac Orobio de Castro, an individual of consecrated authority, scholar of the Jewish sources, provided by the thriving Sephardic intellectual environment. But does Orobio's crypto-Judaism enclose the possibilities of his unveiling as an author?

On the problem of the identity of the conversos, namely those of Portuguese origin, there is a vast bibliography where theoretical contributions divide according to two fundamental orientations «[...] between those who located identity in the deep “inner selves” of conversos, and those who perceived New Christian identities as reactive byproducts of these subjects' environment», as C. Stuczynski explains<sup>24</sup>. One interesting analysis of the topic was given by Spinoza himself, in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670, chap. 3: “On the vocation of the Hebrews [...]”), who distinguished between Portuguese and Spanish conversos, highlighting the Portuguese as a group living apart<sup>25</sup>, a trait he derived from the «Iberian political structures», observing the question through a political angle that the aforementioned historian seeks to clarify and expand in its «identity-construction» implications<sup>26</sup>. Concerning their entry into the Jewish communities of

<sup>22</sup> The perpetual confinement was revoked after several appeals, in 1657. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> There's a short reference to the birth of his daughter Hannah on her marriage register-entry as having occurred in Lorca, around 1660. *Cfr. ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> C. Stuczynski, «Harmonizing identities: the problem of the integration of the Portuguese conversos in early modern Iberian corporate polities», *Jewish History* 25 (2011) 229-257, p. 229: «Among the latter, António José Saraiva claimed that the stereotypical identification of the *conversos* as Judaizers by the Holy Office was a determining factor in framing their identities, sometimes creating a paradoxical phenomenon of 'self-fulfilling prophecy'». Also: «At the same time, Rivkin argued that these 'fabricated' identities, were, in fact, byproducts of these subjects' environment», *cfr. ibid.* This scholar points out to I.S. Révah, as «the main opponent to these approaches», adding that «after Révah, a highly «depoliticized» perception of the phenomenon was born that was increasingly concerned with New Christian subjectivities», *cfr. ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>25</sup> C. Stuczynski, «Harmonizing identities», *cit.*, p. 230. As regards Spinoza's accuracy, see Kaplan, «Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora», in Y. Kaplan, (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection*, *cit.*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>26</sup> «Instead of denying the reality of Portuguese crypto-Judaism by questioning the reliability of in-

the Diaspora, Stuczynski<sup>27</sup> explains that the transfiguration of a New Christian identity into a «new Jewish» one – see Y. Kaplan<sup>28</sup> – did not as much imply a return to the faith of the ancestors as a «conversion»<sup>29</sup>. This «rejudaization», he adds, involved integration, within normative Judaism, of disparate identities (including proselytes of Catholic provenance), religiously separated from the Mosaic *nomos*, and it happened at different rhythms and not «monolithically», as he is keen to point out<sup>30</sup>. It was not, consequently, the chrysalid's metamorphosis. The «production of a *collective amnesia*», he emphasises, addressing a text by D.

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quisitorial sources, I will claim that the corporate politics as a whole was a major obstacle to the integration of the New Christians into Old Christian society». cfr. *ibid.* p. 230. Also: «Stuczynski's contribution adopts a rather different socio-historical approach, reframing the central *problematique* in terms of the conversos as both actors within and byproducts of Iberian politics. [...] The result was that Portuguese converso identities were beyond the question of personal negotiations. Rather, these identities were structured – but not determined – by profound political considerations», cfr. D. Graizbord – C. Stuczynski, «Introduction», *Jewish History* 25 (2011) 121-127.

- <sup>27</sup> C. Stuczynski, «Notas de investigação: Cristãos-novos e judaísmo no início da época moderna: identidade religiosa e «Razão de Estado». Nota a propósito da publicação de *L'Identità Dissimulata: Giudaizzanti Iberici nell'Europa Cristiana dell'Età Moderna*, org. por Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini. Florença: Leo S. Olschki, 2000, 398 p.», *Lusitania Sacra* 2/2 (2000) 355-66 (tradução de Pedro Cardim). The author recommends the works of C.L. Wilke (1996) and Y.H. Yerushalmi (1980).
- <sup>28</sup> About the expression «New Jew», applied by Kaplan to the study of the Western Sephardic Diaspora, see e.g., «Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: The Shapping of a Jewish Identity», *Jewish History* 8/1-2 (1994) 27-41. As regards this concept, F. Trivellato writes: «The historian Yosef Kaplan has called the Amsterdam Sephardim «New Jews» not only because they or their progenitors had been raised as Christian converts but also because they devised a new, less orthodox form of Judaism». F. Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2009, p. 18.
- <sup>29</sup> The author refers to the study of C.L. Wilke, «Conversion ou retour? La métamorphose du nouveau chrétien en juif portugais dans l'imaginaire sépharade du XVIIe siècle», in E. Benbassa (org.), *Mémoires juives d'Espagne et du Portugal*, Publisud, Paris 1996, pp. 53-67. Wilke ends his text with the following words: «Le prosélyte et le Juif caché s'affrontent comme deux figures littéraires créés après coup. L'image de la conversion avait censuré la continuité de l'autorité familiale dans le passage du christianisme au judaïsme. En revanche, celle du retour s'applique à effacer la rupture qui s'était avérée nécessaire. Si l'homme, selon l'adage de Stendhal, possède le langage pour mieux dissimuler sa pensée, parfois c'est pour mieux dissimuler son passé qu'il dispose de la mémoire», p. 67.
- <sup>30</sup> This scholar matches these observations with those of Y. Kaplan for the Northern contexts, cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 356-57.

M. Swetschinski<sup>31</sup>, was a necessary condition for the institution of a «Sephardic Jewish present», the time of the community – Y. Kaplan will, in his turn, speak of «remorse» about the past, in the case of Orobio de Castro (as of those other «repentant Jews» of his congregation), quoting yet the words of the poet Daniel Levi (Miguel) de Barrios, in the sonnet *Words of a penitent Sinner*: «Lord, not with tears shall I wash clean the stain»<sup>32</sup>. The tension with normative Judaism, unbearable to many, lead to the emergence of several other «intermediate religious identities, which included the adoption of a critical, partial and selective Judaism»<sup>33</sup>. The diversity that wasn't solved by relinquishing the Christian skin spreads now in waves of unequal length, not all of them structured as alternative trends, for sure, but all involving the element of «dissidence». Simulation, dissimulation (Stuczynski) or ambiguity<sup>34</sup> (Ruderman) are the words that express, with variations made relevant by historical research, the complexity underneath the phenomenon of the conversos as well as the hermeneutic effort to conceptualise it (J. Faur's typological study represents an attempt to overcome this difficulty by presenting a synthesis established on contemporary Jewish perceptions, as it was already a subject of reflection in the writings of Isaac Abravanel<sup>35</sup>). The handling

<sup>31</sup> D.M. Swetschinski, «Le refus de la mémoire: Les Juifs portugais d'Amsterdam et leur passé Marrane», in E. Benbassa (org.), *Mémoires Juives*, cit. of the same author, see: *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-century Amsterdam*, (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization) Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 330. See also Y. Kaplan, «The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and Their Relation to the Alien and the Stranger», in B.R. Gampel (ed.), *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardi World*, Columbia University Press, New York 1997, pp. 121-145. And Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», *Studia Rosenthaliana* 15/1 (March 1981) 37-51.

<sup>33</sup> C. Stuczynski, «Notas de investigação», cit., p. 356. The author refers to the Venetian case, presented by P.C.I. Zorattini in the mentioned volume, chapter titled «*Derek Teshuvah*: la Via del Ritorno», pp. 195-248.

<sup>34</sup> In the historiographical reflection he dedicates to R. Bonfil, D. Ruderman writes: «The conversos are a novum in Jewish history because they received a form of citizenship unprecedented even among Italian Jews. The ambiguity of their Jewish identity, their status as Jews defining themselves as they wished instead of accepting a traditional definition imposed by either Christian or Jewish society, surely implies a radical break from the past». Cfr. D. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011, p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> «Ideologically, the *converso* population may be divided into four classes [...]», cfr. J. Faur, «Four Classes of Conversos: A Typological Study», *Revue des Études Juives*, 149/1-3 (1990) 113-124. Kaplan also presents the point of view of Isaac Ben Sheshet Perfect (the Ribash), going back to the period that followed the events of 1391. Cfr. Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», cit., p. 37.

of this entanglement of past and present by the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam was, in its turn, and as Y. Kaplan states, accompanied by ambivalence before the theological embarrassments introduced by crypto-Judaism in its intricate formulations<sup>36</sup>.

At last, the analysis by Stuczynski allows us to frame the problem of Marranism<sup>37</sup>, bringing into close consideration the *leitmotiv* of the «divided soul». Can the obstinacy of identity's «conflictedness» and «heterogeneity» find its base in Marranism? Considering the data provided by research in the Italian case, collected in the volume organized by Zorattini<sup>38</sup>, the author argues that the reference to Marranism should, above all, be widely understood as a New Christian ethnicity, while its identification or reproduction of an Iberian crypto-Judaism somehow lacks solidity (e.g., indisputable evidence of liturgic parallelisms)<sup>39</sup>. Another aspect mentioned by Stuczynski relates to the motivation underlying the «return» of these conversos, pointing out possible economical (from Swetschinski) or political (from A. Toaff and B. Ravid<sup>40</sup>) factors, rather than just the impasses of a fractured identity<sup>41</sup>. In this sense, see the considerations by Kaplan and his refer-

<sup>36</sup> The author also writes: «Crypto-Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula brought about in many of those concerned a new address to the question of Jewish identity – an approach which is, to some extent, a harbinger of the contemporary difficulty in determining who, and what, is a Jew», cfr. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 380.

<sup>37</sup> «It is possible to find three different interpretations for Marranism: 1 - Marranism as Jewish religiosity [I. S. Révah]; 2 - Marranism as a specific religion [C. Roth]; 3 - Marranism as a by-product of a meta-religious identity condition [N. Welch]», cfr. C. Stuczynski, «Marranismo», in Mucznik et al. (org.), *Dicionário do Judaísmo Português*, pp.341-43.

<sup>38</sup> As this scholar underscores, the contributions in the mentioned work focus on the Italian context, most particularly the Venetian one.

<sup>39</sup> We transcribe here the original passage: «[...] até que ponto é possível descobrir, nos processos de adesão ao judaísmo normativo, em Itália, os vícios de um «Marranismo» que alguns trouxeram da Ibéria natal? Pessoalmente, não me oponho a aceitar esta hipótese, mas apenas se por «Marranismo entendermos etnicidade cristã-nova». Stuczynski, «Notas de investigação», cit., p. 358. Also: «Enquanto esperamos pela apresentação de provas conclusivas, não podemos deixar de considerar a hipótese avançada por Herman Prins Salomon, um dos maiores cépticos da realidade cripto-judaica em Portugal, para quem foi no exílio, e não na Ibéria, onde tiveram lugar as interseções religiosas, «sincréticas» ou não, entre o catolicismo ibérico do exilado cristão-velho e o judaísmo que foi encontrado na Diáspora sefardita», cfr. p. 359.

<sup>40</sup> See also B. Ravid, «A Tale of Three Cities and their *Raison d'État*: Ancona, Venice, Livorno and the competition of Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century», *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6/2 (1991) 138-162.

<sup>41</sup> For a comprehension of these determinants in the Dutch case, see Y. Kaplan, «Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora», in Y. Kaplan, (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection*, cit, pp. 33-62.

ence to Rivkin, Sonne and Gebhardt, concerning the explanation of the heterodox tendencies that would mark the Western Sephardic Diaspora in the Early modern period<sup>42</sup>. Still, no matter how the oscillation between the Jewish and Christian «poles» worked, «the new Jewish identity of the conversos» was, nonetheless, unique «because it was based on choice, on personal autonomy», argues D. Ruderman<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, the value of the «Hispanic inheritance» in the development of the contributions from «crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal» is likewise undeniable: «They continued to write in Spanish and Portuguese, and they took note of every new creative development in the Iberian culture of their time»<sup>44</sup>, thus nourishing their own libraries and literary academies but also giving rise to a surge of printing press activity in these vernacular languages<sup>45</sup> (see H. den Boer and D. Ruderman on the assessment of this topic). J. Tavim further investigates the reasons (and benefits) underneath the prevalence of these languages as well as of «‘Ibero-conscious’ forms of self-identification» amongst the «diasporic Sephardim», through a reexamination of the diachronic paradigm that traverses the work of e.g., M. Kayserling, C. Roth, Y. Baer, S. Baron, H. Beinart, and J. Baroja, to follow this scholar enumeration<sup>46</sup>, with rather interesting conclusions<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, cit., p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. Y. Kaplan, «Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora», in Kaplan, (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection*, cit, p. 34. See also Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., chapter 11.

<sup>45</sup> For the purposes of this paper, we leave aside the literary and philosophical elements of this inheritance. However, the Iberian inputs would also manifest at other levels: «One of the most pronounced identifying traits of the apologetics promulgated by the former New Christians was the emphasis upon the superiority of the Jews over other nations [...]. The New Christians living as crypto-Jews had seen how their persecutors sought to deprive them of their status as the chosen people and tried to the best of their ability, after returning to the faith of their fathers, to reclaim its lost glory and restore chosenness to its original bearer. The apologists among them did not hesitate to make generous use of the Iberian terminology of the days of the Statutes of Purity of Blood (*limpieza de sangre*)». See in particular the author’s remarks on the proselytes life at the Sephardic community of Amsterdam. Y. Kaplan, «The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and Their Relation to the Alien and the Stranger», cit., p. 125.

<sup>46</sup> J.A.R.S. Tavim, «Jews in the diaspora with Sepharad in the mirror», cit., p. 175: «The classic historiography on the Jews of Sepharad, including the work of Meyer Kayserling, Cecil Roth, Yitzhak Baer, Salo Baron, Haim Beinart, and Julio Caro Baroja, among others, presents a diachronic approach according to which the expulsion of Iberian Jews and the establishment of the Inquisition were stages in a larger process of rupture whose chief consequence was the definitive expulsion of Jews and Judaism from the Iberian Peninsula».

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195: «The case of Dona Gracia and Joseph Nasi reveals that Iberia remained a potential destination these supposedly heroic and ultra-Jewish exiles, and hence a viable alternative to

Finally, in what other contexts may one speak of dissimulation<sup>48</sup>? An attentive study of the specialised bibliography and sources allows us to ascertain important subtleties when considering these categories, with which we inevitably operate. All these elements, if properly developed, might provide some clarification about Orobio's apologetical zeal<sup>49</sup> and polemicist commitment, and its likely importance in strengthening communal cohesion, or at least as a galvanising force, if we wish to extract topics for more elaborate historical and sociological considerations, as those provided by Y. Kaplan's work on the history of the Dutch Jewry. J. de Carvalho would characterise these aspects as the fundamentalism proper of the neophyte. He writes: «Orobio de Castro, however, was more than an observer of the religious conscience of the immigrants, for as well as describing and denouncing the seeds of heterodoxy, he tried to cut and eliminate them, with the spite proper of the converted»<sup>50</sup>. Y. Kaplan, in his turn, warns us of a certain subtlety in the author, whose rationalist sobriety we may confirm in the lines he devotes, for example, to the coming of the Messiah (a topic we shall discuss in the last point) or the explanation of anti-semitism, according to a passage selected from Orobio's *Divine Warnings* or *Prevenções divinas contra la vana idolatría de las gentes* (c. 1668-75), in which the apologete «steps aside from the theological scheme» to «dissect [...] with the scalpel of rational criticism»<sup>51</sup>: «The fact of [the Jews] being hated corresponds to the natural order of things, inasmuch as they are everywhere foreigners, belonging nowhere, and wherever they do live an unmolested life it is only by the agree-

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the havens in which they had assumed a Jewish identity. This meant, of course, that the possibility of returning to a Christian identity was there for them». The author focuses on three cases throughout his digression: Joseph Nasi (João Micas), João Baptista D'Este (Abraham Bendanan Serfatim) and the Portuguese Jews in Salé, Morocco.

<sup>48</sup> The relevance of extending this analysis outside the religious field is signaled by Stuczynski (cfr. «Notas de investigação», cit., p. 362) and demonstrated in his mentioned work «Harmonizing identities», cit. Another contribution to be found in the work of Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, cit., from the study of the Livorno Jewry.

<sup>49</sup> According to Kaplan, «the apologetic element is relatively circumscribed in the writings of Orobio, in comparison with the work of other authors who shared his environment and also entered upon disputation with Christianity, e. g. Menasseh b[en] Israel and Isaac Cardoso», cfr. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 371.

<sup>50</sup> J. de Carvalho, *Oróbio de Castro e o espinosismo*, Seara Nova, Lisboa 1940. Available online at: <http://www.joaquimdecarvalho.org/artigos/artigo/76-Orobio-de-Castro/-pag-3>.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 366. See I.O. de Castro, *Prevenções [...]*, vol. I, M. Silvera (critical edition, introduction and notes) Leo S. Olschki Editore, Florence 2013.

ment and goodwill of others», writes Orobio in the Part I of this work, Chapter 1952.

In their struggle for an «unmolested life», however, the conversos seemed to have been inevitably hoovered by an aura of suspicion, as the words of Daniel Levi de Barrios express: «You are not liked by one people / Because you abandoned it; / The other people do not regard you as faithful / Because it saw you pretending»<sup>53</sup>. Such suspicion inspired the procedures of the Inquisition, which sniffed «Judaizing» traces amongst their converted flock. The impact of inquisitorial persecution and racist prejudice in Iberia may have helped to determine, as I. S. Révah argued, the option for a Jewish life abroad, which would be the accomplishment of a “potential” Judaism; a crucial idea, which resonates in the historiography, inferred from his reading of João de Barros’s *Ropicapnefma*<sup>54</sup>, and stated in the following words: «En réalité, [...] le «Judaïsme» des Marranes était essentiellement un Judaïsme *potential* que l’entrée dans une communauté juive transformait le plus souvent en Judaïsme *réel*»<sup>55</sup>. According to this author, the Judaizing practices of the «authentic marranos»<sup>56</sup>, despite a diversity resulting from the fluidity of the context and the secrecy they were bound to, consisted, in face of normative Judaism, of a set of suppressions and additions, resulting in a syncretism between the two credos, fundamentally experienced «dans le secret des consciences» but traceable in their attitudes. The rejection of Catholicism,

<sup>52</sup> I.O. de Castro quoted by Kaplan, *ibid.* See the full text in M. Silvera critical edition, *cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Levi de Barrios quoted by Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», *cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> «Retraída a Vontade do segundo grao de suas heresias: entram em o terceyro que trata da fêe cristaã e daqueles que andam per diversas opinioes e sectas»: «[Razam] Se eu te provar Cristo per Moses defenderás esta causa que tomaste, como procurador, ou como cada huñ dos circuncisos? [o que tu nam es.] [Vontade] Que o nam seja em acto, estou loguo em potencia pera receber a cerimonia tanto por as causas que ora disse, como por ver precederem a todos nas bem aventuranças da vida». J. de Barros, *Ropicapnefma*, German Galharde, Lisboa 1532, s/p. [edited by I.S. Révah, t. I, Lisbon 1952, p. 123].

<sup>55</sup> I.S. Révah, *Des Marranes a Spinoza*, *cit.*, p. 55 [39]. About this, D.L. Graizbord wrote: «In light of relatively credible instances of reluctant Christianization and crypto-Judaism among New Christians, the position is hardly debatable that a number of first – and second – generation conversos were potential «Jews». [...] The phenomena of recidivism that I have surveyed here, however, are evidence that by the late sixteenth century several conversos were as much potential Christians, so to speak, as they were potential Jews». Cfr. D.L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: converso identities in Iberia and the Jewish diaspora, 1580-1700*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 171-72. Also, C. Stuczynski, «Miriam Bodian. *Dying in the Law of Moses: Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom in the Iberian World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007...», *AJS Review* 33 (2009) 399-404.

understood as idolatrous, and a feeling of belonging to the Israel of the diaspora are its central elements, and these make up the first expression of a compound which we will try to analyse.

From the crucible of many authors of the Portuguese dispersion, it is also important to point out the relative oblivion of the fundamental texts of Judaism, given the context of persecution at the time, an aspect underlined by the more recent contribution of N. Muchnik, in the essay «Being against, being with: *Marrano* self-identification in inquisitorial Spain (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)»<sup>57</sup>. To this author<sup>58</sup>, «Crypto-Judaism was more related to a social practice than a theological corpus; it was based on a culture of mobility (geographical, socio-economic) that constantly reshaped the markers of difference». Muchnik's work develops around two main «styles of self-ascription», «two strategies of differentiation» found in Spain among these Marranos or «Portuguese»<sup>59</sup>, as they were known: «the «being-against», in opposition to a highly proximate Other, and the «being-with», as member of a collective body bound together by secrecy».

<sup>56</sup> Defined by the author as the crypto-Jews of Hispanic origin. Cfr. I.S. Révah, *Des Marranes a Spinoza*, cit., p. 29 [13]. He further writes: «Le marranisme n'est pas seulement un refus du catholicisme, il est également un désir obstiné de se rattacher à la tradition juive», cfr. p. 328 [64]. The author distinguishes between the group of «authentic marranos» and those New Christians who sincerely integrated into the Catholicism or those who didn't seem to be oriented by any religious conviction but, «for one reason or the other», decided to join the Jewish communities to leave them afterwards and return to their previous condition, perhaps driven by economic reasons, cfr. *ibid.*, p. 53 [37].

<sup>57</sup> N. Muchnik, «Being against, being with: *Marrano* self-identification in inquisitorial Spain (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries). An essay», *Jewish History* 25 (2011) 153-174: «The absence of normative and doctrinal texts specific to crypto-Jews meant that crypto-Judaic instruction and ritual were principally dependent on the spoken words, uttered face to face», cfr. p. 169. To contrast other elements on the topic, see M. Rustow, «Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy», *Past and Present* 197 (2007) 463-74: pp. 52 and 53.

<sup>58</sup> The author explains the use of the word *marrano* as a synonym of crypto-Jew, given the fact that the term «converso» does not draw a sharp line between «New Christians» («regardless of whether they were Judaizers»), «crypto-Jews» («declared or otherwise») and converted from other creeds like the «Moriscos». Cfr. p. 171.

<sup>59</sup> As Miriam Bodian writes: «Since the Judaizing tendencies of the families who crossed the border from Portugal to Spain were notorious, the term 'Portuguese' became virtually synonymous with "Judaizer". Collectively, the Portuguese *conversos* were known as *la nación portuguesa* or *la gente portuguesa*. These terms were adopted in European countries outside the Peninsula as well. The Portuguese Jesuit theologian Antonio Vieira wrote that «in popular parlance, among most of the European nations, 'Portuguese' is confused with 'Jew'», cfr. M. Bodian, «*Men of the Nation: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe*», *Past & Present* 143 (1994) 48-76, p. 60.

This digression confronts also the specular projections built upon the «eye of the Other», the Old Christian and the non-Iberian Jew, as well as the ensemble of the Western Sephardic Diaspora: because «the «Other» existed at the same time within the majority culture and within the Diaspora, on different scales»<sup>60</sup>. Following, among others, the work of Georg Simmel, Muchnik identifies a common trait between the «*marrano* group» and secret societies: «The «awareness of being a society» and in consequence the centrality to its members of their collective identity», articulating, in this manner, a wide range of interpretative possibilities (difference/resemblance, but also core/periphery, and important aspects regarding the network of sociability: «the centrality of reputation», the role of secrecy, the importance of «shared solidarities»<sup>61</sup>, etc.).

These and other elements, in relation to specific historical contexts, may have contributed to a certain intellectual hybridism – more than that, to something inherently valid –, whose impact proves to be worthy of analysis, as this was the background of Uriel da Costa, Juan de Prado and Baruch Spinoza. And this would be susceptible of fruitful development, especially among those who sought to accurately determine the kernel of Spinoza's philosophy or discuss whatever assumptions such determination involved, as Gebhardt but also Révah have done through different approaches<sup>62</sup>. Regarding the problem at hand, the synthesis proposed by D. Ruderman in the work *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*<sup>63</sup> introduces a profusion of elements connected through five hermeneutical

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>61</sup> On the dynamics of these networks, See Y. Kaplan, «La Diáspora Judeo-Española-Portuguesa en el siglo XVII: Tradición, Cambio y Modernización», *Manuscripts* 10 (1992) 77-89.

<sup>62</sup> «Le déisme des hétérodoxes sefardim, variété du déisme européen du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, avait fourni à Spinoza le climat où devait d'opérer son propre développement spirituel [...]». Révah, *Des Marranes a Spinoza*, cit., p. [218].

<sup>63</sup> Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, cit. Ruderman works out a cross-regional interpretive framework, of the whole Jewish culture and society in the designated period. In the origin of his work are authors such as J. Israel, J. Bentley e S. Subrahmanyam. In his view, the period between the close of the 15th century and that of the 18th century can be interpreted from five central elements of categories (which presuppose «general patterns of cultural formation»; «a shared cultural experience» and the dialectic relation between local particularisms and global patterns, cfr. pp.11-12), not necessarily unheard of, but unusually intense then: 1) the mobility of peoples, «Jews on the move»; 2) the communal cohesion of the Jewish world; 3) the explosion of knowledge, especially that related with the invention of press and its impact on the diffusion of Jewish culture; 4) the crisis of rabbinic authority (and the frenzy of messianic movements); 5) the «mingled identities», including that which he labels «ambiguity of the converted». See the «Historiographical Reflections» on the Appendix of this work, pp. 207 and ss.

axes, allowing to place the Jewish, Sephardic and Ashkenazy worlds in close relationship, emphasising the vital core of the conversos (and their ambiguity, rather than dissimulation), with the cultural landscapes mapped through their journey across modern times, thus making possible an image of Jewishness' coming-to-be, in a continuous dialectic between identical and diverse, closure and openness, conservatism and originality, and accepting the inevitable rise of paradox from the intersection of all these forces.

### 3. Isaac Orobio de Castro and the problem of crypto-Judaism: elements for a reflection

Soon after entering the Congregation Talmud Torah<sup>64</sup>, Orobio de Castro addresses five questions of exegetical and Halachic nature to the Rabbi Moses Raphael d'Aguilar. The questions posed by Orobio, preserved in manuscript and part of the catalogue of Ets Haim Library<sup>65</sup>, illuminate this Rabbi's masterful knowledge of the corpus of rabbinic Judaism, but also the angst born of the crypto-Jewish experience (and persistence), particularly concerning the salvation of the soul, reward and punishment, problems which were amplified by the proximity to Christian doctrines<sup>66</sup>.

The «moral scissure» and «duplicity», in the words of Joaquim de Carvalho, or «l'insincérité», as stated by Révah<sup>67</sup>, were a heavy burden to carry on a religious and spiritual path, with the demands imposed by Judaism. Orobio de Castro became, in this framework and general outline, the countenance, prevailing though inevitably tinged, of normative Judaism in Holland, in contrast to Juan de Prado, Uriel da Costa, or Spinoza, who represented the heterodox face of rupture and the spirit of modernity<sup>68</sup>. Révah, as Kaplan later on observed, also points out

<sup>64</sup> Formed in 1639, from the merger of three smaller congregations: Bet Yahacob (c. 1602), Neveh Shalom (c. 1608-1612) and Bet Israel (1618).

<sup>65</sup> Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, MS EH 48 A 11.

<sup>66</sup> Cfr. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., chap. 6. See also M. Beltrán, *Un espejo extraviado: Spinoza y la filosofía hispano-judía*, Riopiedras, Barcelona 1988, cap. VII. The author contrasts his analysis on the presence of Christian problematics in the debates around the topic of free will with the position of H. Méchoulan (1987), cfr. p. 156.

<sup>67</sup> Révah, *Des Marranes a Spinoza*, cit., p. 335 [71]: «L'activité publique, religieuse ou philosophique des Marranes était, avons-nous dit, condamnée à l'insincérité».

<sup>68</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 166: «What is so astonishing in Isaac Orobio's

as a defining element in the genesis of heterodox bent Marrano reflection, particularly in the deistic currents, the influence exerted by late Averroism amongst the Jews of Spain, concerning the thesis of the immortality of the soul and criticism of the authority of biblical sources, particularly prominent in Uriel da Costa and Prado<sup>69</sup>. In his reference work, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, Révah presents us with Orobio's own «diagnostic» of the heretic sprout<sup>70</sup>, arguing that it contemplates the ideas of Uriel da Costa, as manifested on the *Exemplar humanae vitae*, in three moments: i) «the refusal of the rabbinic practices»; ii) «the refusal of traditional exegesis»; iii) «the refusal of the Ancient Testament»<sup>71</sup>. In his characterization of the individuals arrived to the Provinces from the «Lands of Idolatry», and in spite of his own background, Orobio explicitly attaches importance to the influence exerted by Christian universities, referring to the study of Logic, Physics, Metaphysics and Medicine, and criticising the inflated vanity and arrogance which lead some impious men, invested in the knowledge of these «profane sciences», to dispute with those whose mission was to properly instruct them in the doctrine. The notoriety of philosophy as a driving force for heresy appears also in the sermons of Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira, who counts «three kinds of heretics [*kofrim*] who diverge from the path of faith of God's Torah. [...] The first are the philosophers, who follow the path of logical deduction, deriving from it what they apprehend and nothing else [...]»<sup>72</sup>. Despite these declarations, both Orobio and Morteira

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rejoinder is his own complete adherence to the religion of Israel as understood in rabbinic tradition».

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, the treatment of this problem given by L. Machado de Abreu, «O deísmo ético de Uriel da Costa», *Revista da Universidade de Aveiro* 1 (1994) 119-130.

<sup>70</sup> The explanation is part of the second version of the introduction to the polemics against Prado, the *Epistola invectiva*, and can be read from Révah's transcription of the Paris manuscript, cfr. I.S. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, Mouton, Paris 1959, pp. 89-90; p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, cit., pp. 18 and 19. Révah quotes the French translation of A.-B. Duff & P. Kaan, Paris 1926 (respectively, pp. 104, 106 and 110). An interesting detail in this edition is the use of the term 'marrano', at page 112, when Uriel recalls a conversation that took place in Amsterdam, with two men of Italian and Spanish origin: «C'étaient deux chrétiens, et nullement des *marranes* [...]». Limborch's first known edition of Uriel's text, in Latin, presents the same passage in the following way: «[...] qui Christiani cum essent, nec ex Judaeis originem ducerent, [...]», cfr. Limborch, *De veritate religionis christianae. Amica collatio cum erudito judaeo*, Apud Justum ab Hoeve, Gouda 1687, p. 348; Basilea, 1740, p. 661 – in fact, the Jewish interlocutor of Limborch's «amica collatio» is precisely Orobio de Castro. The Portuguese translation of A.E. da Silva Dias (1901), on the other hand, uses the expression «cristãos velhos» (p. 23).

<sup>72</sup> S.L. Morteira quoted by M. Saperstein, «The treatment of «Heretical Views» in the Sermons of Saul Levi Morteira of Amsterdam», in D. Frank & M. Goldish (eds.), *Rabbinic Culture and Its*

were exceptionally knowledgeable of the philosophical sources – Orobio mostly underpinned by the Christian tradition and Morteira by the Jewish<sup>73</sup>. Concerning Orobio's analysis, two elements contribute to understand the heterodox seeds of the heretic *milieu*, as Révah puts it: i) the role of the philosophical and medical culture; ii) the disregard for the pillars of rabbinic Judaism. To these, he adds a third: iii) the influence of Jewish medieval philosophy and the sceptical tendencies of Hispanic Judaism and later crypto-Judaism. Y. Kaplan considers, nonetheless, that «Révah failed to see the connection between conflicts of ideas within western Sephardi communities and similar phenomena affecting the intellectual climate of Europe in general at the time», as well as between those specific to the Iberian context «at the period of Spain's imperial decline», such as the ongoing «doctrinal struggles» and the «concrete historical situation» of the crypto-Jews<sup>74</sup>, aspects he will develop throughout Orobio's biography, particularly in Chapter 11, addressing the works of R. Popkin and Y. H. Yerushalmi<sup>75</sup>, amongst others.

Having consolidated his vision far beyond the spectrum of orthodoxy, from the exegetical investigations of the *Examination of the Pharisaic Traditions* (1624)<sup>76</sup> to the autobiographical or confessional *Exemplar* – Uriel depicts himself,

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*Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, Wayne State, Detroit 2008, p. 317.

<sup>73</sup> About this, Orobio further adds: «Yo tambien estudié en Alcalá, y era buen estudiante, y enseñé en España y algun tiempo en la mas insigne Universidad de la Francia, [...] y disputé en quantos actos publicos se hizieron en mi tiempo en Tolosa, que son los mas celebres de la Europa, sin encarecimiento, arguyendo en Theologia Escolastica, Philosophia, Metaphisica, Medicina, Mathematicas: aunque no todas eran de mi profession, me oyan com gusto y aun con aplauso», de Oróbio Castro, *Carta apologetica del Doctor Ischak Orobio de Castro al Doctor Prado*, in Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, cit., p. 136. About Morteira's Jewish philosophical affiliation, with authors like Maimonides, Albo or Gersonides, see M. Saperstein.

<sup>74</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 163.

<sup>75</sup> E. g., «From the mid-sixteenth century onward, the Spanish Inquisition turned increasingly from the prosecution of Judaizers to that of Protestant and other heresies. Those nonconformist impulses which still retained some vitality among the offspring of the Conversos seem to have found an outlet in mystical or Erasmian currents within Spanish Catholicism itself», cfr. Y.H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*, Columbia University Press, New York & London 1971, pp. 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> Concerning this work, H.P. Salomon and I.S.D. Sassoon argue that Uriel and his opponent Semuel da Silva were essentially focused on the scrutiny of the problematic of the immortality of the soul from an exegetical perspective. Cfr. Da Costa, *Examination of the Pharisaic Traditions*, Salomon-Sassoon, (translation, notes and introduction), Brill, Leiden 1993, p. 42. Albiac, on his turn, considers this exegetical approach an obsolete option, not fully emancipated from the tex-

in this last work, in a way that meets many of those who joined the community of Amsterdam: «Natus sum ego in Portugalia, in civitate eiusdem nominis, vulgo Porto. Parentes habui ex ordine nobilium, qui à Judaeis originem trahebant, ad Christianam Religionem, in illo regno, quondam per vim coactis. Pater meus verat erat Christianus [...]»<sup>77</sup>. A portrait further enriched by Y. Kaplan's characterization of the Jewish community of Iberian «honorable extraction»: a multifaceted entity constituted separately in the «uniqueness» of its diasporic condition: that of the Spanish-Portuguese «Nation»; a separate Jewishness within the *species hollandia Judaica* (S. Seeligman, 1923) or the Dutch Jewry: «for they are very particular and do not mingle ... with the Jews of other nations»<sup>78</sup>.

Some of the problems flourished from this peculiar and «unprecedented» condition<sup>79</sup> were voiced by Orobio, who sought to clarify with the above-mentioned Rabbi whether a Jew, born and raised among gentiles and living according to the Christian mores and religion could aspire to salvation – a Jew similar to him, who, while in Spain, «pretended to be Christian» although «not well» and thus was exposed in his Jewishness, as he explains in his *Carta apologetica* to Prado<sup>80</sup>. It strikes one as a terrifying question, from the existential point of view,

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tual authority; an option that he contrasts with the rupture operated by Spinoza and even with the awareness of the later Uriel, in the *Exemplar humana vitae*. Cfr. G. Albiac, *La Sinagoga Vacía*, Tecnos, Madrid 1997, pp. 312-313.

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. *Exemplar humana vitae*, in Limborch, cit. 1687, p. 246; 1740, p. 657.

<sup>78</sup> Isaac de Pinto quoted by Y. Kaplan, «The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews...», cit., p. 121. The quoted expressions are from Kaplan's text: pp.144-145. Pinto explicitly writes: «M. de Voltaire ne peut ignorer la délicatesse scrupuleuse des Juifs Portugais et Espagnols à ne point se mêler [...] avec les Juifs des autres nations», cfr. *Apologie pour la nation juive ou reflexions critiques sur le premier chapitre du VII Tome des Oeuvres de Monsieur de Voltaire au sujet des Juifs*, Amsterdam 1762, p. 15. See also Kaplan & Brasz (eds.) *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, Brill, Leiden 2001.

<sup>79</sup> Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», cit., p. 40: «Ishac Orobio himself, even though he regarded the Conversos as part of Jewry, did not overlook the fact that they were immersed in idolatry to an extent that, in his opinion, was unprecedented in Jewish history». Concerning the contemporary impressions on the topic, M. Saperstein presents S.L. Morteira position, collected from his sermons, as being the following: «No matter what contemporary historians may conclude, Moreira apparently did not conceive of the heretical views circulating in his community as something new or unprecedented. [...] To the contrary, through his typological mode of reading and preaching about the Bible, Morteira presents the phenomenon of doctrinal challenge to tradition as an ancient and recurring threat to the Jewish people. The threat is serious – more so than that which comes from Christian polemicists. Yet is familiar», cfr. M. Saperstein, «The Treatment of «Heretical Views»», cit., p. 327.

<sup>80</sup> We transcribe the original text as registered by d'Aguilar: «Hum Israelita que naceo e se criou entre os gentios e não tem origem e obrigação da observança da Ley Divina, e assi viveo e morreu

and was widely debated by converted authors, for the implication of having incurred in apostasy<sup>81</sup>. But not only: let us remember the familiar and economic ties still bounding the «New Jews» of Amsterdam to their New Christian counterparts of Iberia<sup>82</sup>. To d'Aguilar, the salvation of crypto-Jews, in virtue of their Jewish descent, was ultimately dependant on ethical conduct and should be understood as regarding the situation of a captive Jewish child or a proselyte (unable, by ignorance of his obligation, of fulfilling the precepts of the Torah) which could have served Orobio, who did not draw a distinction between Jews and crypto-Jews, referring to them all as «Israelites»<sup>83</sup>: «la esparcida Nación de los Israelitas» amongst and *versus* the «Gentes», the gentile nations of the earth (*Prevençiones*, Part I, Chap. 19). As regards this aspect, N. Muchnik's essay brings closer the apologetic works of Orobio de Castro to the legitimation discourse (that includes the «Diaspora martyrologies»<sup>84</sup>) in a community of «New Jews», much different in its *abstractum* from the communities of the first generation of exiled Jews from the Eastern Sephardic Diaspora, as Kaplan had already observed<sup>85</sup>. Quoting

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obrando como gentio perguntase, se salvara ou não». MS EH 48 A 11, f. 131r. See also Orobio's *Carta apologetica*, in I.S. Révah, *Spinoza et Prado*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>81</sup> Y. Kaplan, «La Diáspora Judeo-Española-Portuguesa en el siglo XVII», cit., p. 81.

<sup>82</sup> Cfr. Y. Kaplan, «Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora», cit., pp. 34 and ss. A deeper analysis of the ambivalent attitude towards those who remained in the «lands of idolatry» and the Jewish commitment to rescue them from this condition, can be found in Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», cit., p. 43: «Indeed, the efforts of the Portuguese Jews to bring the Conversos back to Judaism were great and unceasing».

<sup>83</sup> Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, cit., p. 120. See also Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», cit.

<sup>84</sup> On the crypto-Jewish conceptions of the martyrdom, we shall note that Kaplan registers the use of the expression «Kiddush Hashem», by the Rabbi Moses Raphael d'Aguilar, to refer the victims of the Iberian Inquisition. See Y. Kaplan, p. 39. That is to say that the «Jews» who died in the «sanctification of God's name». See also M. Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses: Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom in the Iberian World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2007.

<sup>85</sup> While the Eastern communities were formed by Iberian Jews who fled right after the edicts of expulsion of 1492 and 1496, the Western Sephardic Diaspora had as its protagonists (ex)conversos who had lived for generations as Christians. Cfr. Y. Kaplan, «La Diáspora Judeo-Española», cit., pp. 78 and 79. Consequently, regarding the Amsterdam case, M. Rustow explains: «It was a congregation of Jews who had only recently begun practising Judaism, and who also tended to define themselves in terms not of religious practice but of origins: Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam felt more connection to conversos on the Iberian peninsula who openly practised Catholicism than to their neighbouring Ashkenazi Jews in Amsterdam». Cfr. M. Rustow, «Karaites Real and Imagined», cit., p. 59.

Orobio's *Observance of the Divine Law*, Muchnik writes: «Despite their idolatrous lifestyle, he [Orobio] saw the *conversos* as part of the Jewish people (and of the *nação*), «. . .because Israel does not designate a spiritual thing [*cosa espiritual*], but a nation, whether it be good or bad.» «New Jews» such as Castro often observed, proclaimed the concept of the *nação* as a people, a community of ethnic identity independent of the sacred; hence they considered the *marranos* of the Iberian Peninsula to be full members of it»<sup>86</sup>. And here Muchnik seems to agree with Kaplan's remarks when the historian mentions Orobio's «scalpel of rational criticism» to refer his views on anti-semitism.

Besides salvation, discussion ranged over the eternity of divine punishment in the hereafter. As narrated by Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira, a false doctrine was being spread by the Kabbalists and stirring the community. Contrary to proper interpretation of the rabbinical sources, it assured that, regardless of the severity of his sins, every Jew was granted «a share in the world-to-come», thus incautiously appropriating the Mishnaic phrase «All of Israel has a portion in the world-to-come» (*olam ha-ba*)<sup>87</sup>. The situation escalated to the point that Morteira had to face an assembly of protests during the preaching of a sermon in which the topic of the duration of punishment was addressed. In the midst of this turbulent climate, there was an intellectual outburst, whose contours are known to us thanks to A. Altmann's reference work «Eternality of Punishment. . .» (1972). There, the author presents a critical edition of Isaac Aboab da Fonseca's treatise, *Nishmat Hayyim*, as part of the controversy that irrupted circa 1635 and is documented in three texts (1635-36) all of which were published for the first time by this scholar. The dispute is said to have caused «a rift within the Amsterdam rabbinate itself»<sup>88</sup>. The «faction» led by Rabbi Aboab, born in the Portuguese village of Castro d'Aire, was the rebellious one and ultimately sought to defend

<sup>86</sup> N. Muchnik, «Marrano self-identification in Spain», cit., p. 157. See I.O. de Castro, *La observancia de la divina ley de Mosseh, manuscrito do século XVII publicado pela primeira vez com um estudo prévio de Moses Bensabat Amzalak*, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra 1925, p. 83. Similarly, Y. Kaplan, «The Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam. From Forced Conversion to a Return to Judaism», cit., p. 39.

<sup>87</sup> See B. Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, Brill, Leiden 2009, p. 294.

<sup>88</sup> A. Altmann, «Eternality of Punishment: A Theological Controversy within the Amsterdam Rabbinate in the Thirties of the Seventeenth Century», *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972) 1-89: p. 2.

the «inalienable Jewishness of all Marranos»<sup>89</sup>. On the other side was the aforementioned Saul Levi Morteira – an eminent personality of the Amsterdam congregation, born in Venice, of remarkable Askhenazi descent, but obscure upbringing: although he's referred to as a disciple of Leon de Modena, no solid evidence has yet confirmed this connection<sup>90</sup>. Supporting him were two Venetian Rabbis: Shema'ya di Medina and Azarya Figo (disciple of Leon de Modena). As Altmann explains, based on the epistolary contribution of these Rabbis, the case required the community leaders to submit the controversy to a rabbinical court (*Beth Din*) in that Italian city, although with little effect<sup>91</sup>. Aboab's plea is unknown and should not be confused with his treatise *Sefer Nishmat Hayyim*, which constitutes a *pesak*<sup>92</sup>, enriched with biographical data, such as references to his affiliation with the Lurianic Kabbalah or mentions to his teacher, Abraham Cohen Herrera (disciple of Israel Sarug), whose kabbalistic works in Castilian, *Casa de la divinidad* and *Puerta del Cielo*, he translated to Hebrew and published in Amsterdam (1655)<sup>93</sup>. As Altmann explains, *Nishmat Hayyim* represents a *responsum* to the question of whether there is eternal punishment of souls and the answer it offers raises up against «the strict Talmudists and philosophizing rabbis», aiming at Morteira, whose arguments were grounded on Maimonides and Joseph Albo. The work further asserts the role of the Kabbalah as the only valid

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Morteira was the grandson of Rabbi Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, author of a work titled *Sheneim Asar Derashot* (Venice, 1594), cfr. M. Saperstein, «Italian Jewish Preaching», in D. Ruderman (ed.), *Essential papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York University Press, New York 1992. Both H.P. Salomon and M. Saperstein have extensively dedicated to the study and edition of Morteira's work.

<sup>91</sup> Years later, a short note of Menasseh ben Israel in his treatise of the same title, *Nishmat Hayyim* (1651), reveals the prudence of the author in such matters: «Because this issue is of great importance, I will deal with it in the shortest possible manner». N. Rosenbloom, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 60 (1994) 241-262, p. 248.

<sup>92</sup> Hebr. decision, judgment, verdict. Cfr. S. Steinmetz, *Dictionary of Jewish Usage: Guide to the use of Jewish Terms*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Toronto 2005, p. 138. As regards its meaning as a literary genre, see J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: The Middle Ages*, vol. II, Jason Aronson, New Jersey 1998.

<sup>93</sup> According to N. Rosenbloom, «[...] he altered the texts of those works, which makes his rendition less of a translation and more of an exposition», cfr. «Menasseh ben Israel and the Eternality of Punishment Issue», cit., p. 246. Also, «It is also highly significant to note that Isaac Aboab da Fonesca, the proponent of the Lurianic doctrine of metempsychosis, had been tutored in kabbalah by Abraham Herrera, one of the disciples of Israel Saruq who incorporated several fundamental elements of Italian Renaissance Neoplatonic thought into his own kabbalistic theories», cfr. Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, cit., p. 295.

authority because «truly speaking, matters of this kind have been entrusted only to the Kabbalists, illumined as they are by the light of truth»<sup>94</sup>.

In his defence, and employing his Lurianic expertise, Aboab argues for the existence of metempsychosis, a *gilgul* or cycle, and of a temporary impregnation, *ibbur*, allowing sinners to gradually become free of their faults, rejecting, in this manner, the eternity of punishment, which would be incompatible with the concept of a just and merciful God. In addition to a detailed inventory of the Jewish texts, Altmann establishes a parallel with the 17<sup>th</sup> century English and German Christian mystics influenced by Jacob Boehme, and their revival of the doctrine of *apokatastasis pantōn*, from a tradition that goes back to Origen. He writes: «[Aboab's treatise] represents a seventeenth century Jewish attempt to break the spell of the traditional eschatology of hell by publicly embracing the Lurianic doctrine of *tikkun* (the Hebrew equivalent for *apokatastasis*) through the transmigration of souls»<sup>95</sup>.

Summarizing, Altmann considers the controversy Aboab-Morteira to have developed from both a theological and a pragmatic prism, the latter associated to the «Marrano sentiment» of fully belonging to the body of Israel. To this scholar: «What is clearly implied in this answer [Aboab] is the recognition of all Marranos as actual or, at least, virtual Jews». Thus, he quotes the end of Aboab's treatise – «Though he sinned, he is still an Israelite» – as a «mystically inspired «halakhic» recognition» that meets «Yerushalmi's view that «even before he began to Judaize, every New Christian was a potential Marrano, whom any of a variety of circumstances could transform into an active Marrano»»<sup>96</sup>: a formulation that took up Révah's thesis after João de Barros' *Ropicapnefma*<sup>97</sup>.

The approach to the «Converso problem», in its identity construction process, poses a challenge to how historians shape their discourses, shifting paradigms that ultimately connect to particular trends of social sciences and philosophy. By trying to give intelligibility to the reasonings around identity, such as those raised by the sources (we have mentioned a few), these discourses also articulate perspectives on Jewishness. If historiography seems to evidence a turn from perceptions of identity predominantly «essentialist» (and 'self-evident', to paraphrase M. Rustow) to others of a more relational type (and «constructed, multivalent and un-

<sup>94</sup> I.A. da Fonseca apud A. Altmann, «Eternity of the Punishment», cit., p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>97</sup> Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto Isaac Cardoso*, cit., pp. 39-40.

stable»<sup>98</sup>), such aspect – according to D. Graizbord and C. Stuczynski – expresses more than an «outgrowth of post-modern thought»<sup>99</sup>: it manifests the scholars' longtime «awareness» of the «peculiar position» New Christians occupied in between diverse spheres of human action, from intellectual to religious, etc<sup>100</sup>. F. Trivellato's study further enriches this picture by continuing «to chart what Jonathan Israel has called the «diasporas within a diaspora», that is, the evolution of different and overlapping Sephardic networks»<sup>101</sup>. Nonetheless, an assessment of the subject is a complex task that exceeds the scope of this paper, in which we merely wished to collate some brief ideas. Addressing the *writings of History*, namely the major works of G. Scholem and Y. Baer, M. Rustow adverts to «a certain reading of Jewish history that has created the false impression of a hermetic seal between Jews and others» and its implications<sup>102</sup>. That these (or other) views inevitably determine the comprehension of matters that lay somewhere on the margins of any normativity is almost redundant to observe. On the other hand, on the final remarks of the essay devoted to the Marranos in Spain, N. Muchnik writes: «Should the Judaizers only be – and be conceived of as – «dual» beings with a life of perpetual inner conflict? Or were they not, rather, the prototype of human beings torn between contradictory identities? In fact, however, what they really were was an extreme case of the fragmentation of self and, hence, a proof of the illusion of the self's indivisible unity»<sup>103</sup>. It is thus pertinent – as well as

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<sup>98</sup> D. Graizbord – C. Stuczynski, «Introduction», cit., p. 122.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> To which, these scholars add: «Despite their essentialism and teleological leanings, however, Gebhardt's and Révah's assessments must be read as tacit admissions that the identities of *conversos* were actually far from settled. We may thus view these admissions as paving the way for the more flexible perceptions of New Christian phenomena that are at the center of scholarship on *conversos* today. At the same time, we believe that engaging the historiographical legacy to which we have referred, which combines progressive views of *converso* identities and the use of conservative cultural and religious categories of analysis, may also help to avoid what one might call an «over-hybridization», depolitization, and therefore dissolution of the Portuguese *converso* phenomenon into generic concerns about the indeterminacy and plurality of identity», cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

<sup>101</sup> Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> M. Rustow, «Karaites Real and Imagined», cit., pp. 70 and ss.

<sup>103</sup> N. Muchnik, «Being against, being with», cit., p. 170. On the review of Y. Yovel's work *The Other Within*, this scholar observes: «Y. Yovel retrouve l'emploi du concept de «Marranité» dans les sciences sociales contemporaines, notamment chez le philosophe Jacques Derrida, pour qui

an epistemological requirement – to investigate the complexity of these problematics and the multiple streams that feed the historiographical construction of the fragmentary features of the conversos that were perpetuated in the «New Jews» of Amsterdam, to better approach Orobio's exegetical and philosophical legacy.

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le Marrane est celui que se «déconstruit» toujours lui-même, se confrontant à l'excès de secret et dont l'identité est un perpétuel «devenir», ou bien chez le sociologue Shmuel Trigano: la Marranité y est un instrument heuristique, une matrice interprétative pour penser le politique; [...]. Pour lui [Yovel], le Marrane témoigne d'une dualité inhérente à tout être humain et, par là même, de l'illusion dans laquelle se trouvent ceux qui envisagent la possibilité d'une identité homogène». Cfr. N. Muchnik, «The Other Within. The Marranos. Split Identity and Emerging Modernity by Yirmiyahu Yovel», *Critique Internationale* 54 (2012) 195-198.