



Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos; Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*

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Sephardic diaspora served to facilitate the mechanisms of collaboration that resulted. Trading diasporas were thus not as insular and self-contained as they have sometimes been represented as being.

The golden age of Livorno Jewry ended around the middle of the eighteenth century. The further growth of European colonial empires, diplomatic influence, and naval power during the late eighteenth century appears to have been instrumental in causing a general decline in the importance of the world Sephardic and Armenian (although not the Greek) Mediterranean trading diasporas.

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The Other Within: The Marranos; Split Identity and Emerging Modernity.

By *Yirmiyahu Yovel*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. Pp. xviii+490. \$35.00.

Yirmiyahu Yovel's new book is a historical and philosophical exploration of the experience of the Marranos—Spanish and Portuguese Jews who, after the anti-Jewish riots of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, converted to Christianity. Once baptized, they had taken a step that could hardly be reversed. Some of these New Christians wished either to revert to Judaism or to observe certain Jewish customs but could not do this since Judaizers, like any other heretics, were subject to the unpleasant treatment of the Inquisition. The result was the creation of a clandestine culture of Christians of Jewish descent who secretly observed some Jewish customs.

The book is composed of three units. The first ten chapters tell the story of Iberian Jewry from late antiquity until the 1492 expulsion. The second unit (chaps. 11–18) discusses the religion and political culture of the Marranos. The last two chapters present the book's main, and astonishingly simple, thesis. According to Yovel, Hegel was wrong to claim that the distinctively modern "principle of subjectivity" appeared on the stage of history only with Lutheran Protestantism. "I think we can identify an earlier and more distinctive source in the Marranos," he announces (xiv). The Marrano culture was one of split and multiplied identity. Modernity is the culture of mixed identities. Hence, Yovel concludes, the Marranos are the source of modernity (344).

Hegel's claim itself can hardly be taken seriously. Hegel knew virtually nothing about Islamic and Jewish-Rabbinic cultures; hence, his claim should be considered in the context of European Christianocentricity rather than as anything close to a serious historical investigation. Yovel's "improvement," however, outdoes Hegel's unfortunate ignorance by far.

Yovel openly admits that he "discovered no new information" and that he merely engages in the "reinterpretation of existing materials" (xv). Indeed, the bulk of the book consists of summaries of secondary literature. Most of Yovel's claims are poorly documented. In many other cases, references to lengthy books appear without page number or chapter (see, e.g., 405 n. 3). The book is replete with essentialist and broad-brush generalizations and has strong didactic undertones. Time and again, we encounter ideological and anachronistic translations of the present into the past.

Yovel characterizes many modern figures as later-day Marranos: Kant, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Freud, and Isaac Deutscher are just a few names in this long and glorious list (351, 366). Similarly, Yovel claims that "Derrida considered himself a kind of Marrano" (367). No support is provided for any of these claims, apart from

announcing that since Freud called himself a “godless Jew,” “What could be more Marrano!” (366).

The book’s main argument, the alleged similarity between the Marranos and the moderns, is as vague as one can get. “The modern situation produces a Marrano-like, partly self-alienated subject whose identity was plural and nonintegral from the start,” argues Yovel (344). We shall not raise the obvious question whether the Marranos were the first in human history to undergo forced conversion and as a result produce a culture that mixed elements from the old and the new traditions. (Have we never heard about the forced conversion of other—Jewish and non-Jewish—cultures?) But let us stop for a moment and ask an even simpler question: Was there ever a human subject whose identity was integral and free from self-alienation? Was, for example, the identity of the Inquisitors so solid, flat, and one-dimensional? Was the Inquisition not torn between various forces, ideologies, and sources of authority (e.g., the Spanish Crown and the Pope). Has the Inquisitor (just like the Jew) no “organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions”? And if he does, are we to conclude that “the source of modern subjectivity” is perhaps the mixed identity of the Inquisitors? Of course, one can and should make a claim about identity by providing concrete and nuanced characterizations, but this is precisely what Yovel does not do. Instead, he resorts to a method of fabricating premodern integrities against which he can present the Marranos as unique in their multiplied identity.

According to Yovel, “in the Jewish Middle Ages any attempt at difference or deviation . . . ended in expulsion outside the Jewish pale” (364). This is a pretty outlandish claim. Kabbalists and anti-Kabbalists, Maimonideans and anti-Maimonideans, fought fierce and dirty battles that included bans, book burnings, and similar measures, yet neither camp was “[expelled] outside the Jewish pale.” Yovel’s discussion of classical Jewish literature, both philosophical and Rabbinic, exposes a superficial acquaintance with this corpus, yet this does not stop him from making self-confident, sweeping generalizations (and we ignore the numerous anachronisms, such as the description of Maimonides “approaching his *bar mitzva*” [26], a custom that was established two centuries after Maimonides’s death). Discussing a certain Marrano prayer in which one’s blood is represented as an offering, Yovel argues that “this is unknown in Judaism, where human blood does not save” (233). It might be unknown to those unacquainted with the issue of the blood of circumcision, the binding of Isaac, and a few dozen other examples (some of which were recently discussed in *Jewish Blood*, ed. Mitchell Hart [Routledge, 2009]). I cannot avoid the temptation of providing one more example. “Images were anathema to Judaism, at least in theory,” Yovel claims (229). Are we to excommunicate the Kabbalists whose theories are sated with images and anthropomorphisms? Perhaps it is not “Judaism” but only some Jewish trends that strongly object to any kind of anthropomorphism?

One of the most disturbing claims of the book is that, unlike the lazy hidalgos, “Jews possessed the required *talents and almost hereditary* experience in finance and administration” (64; my emphasis). As usual, no supportive data—neither genetic tests nor historical studies—are provided for this racial characterization.

One locus, where Yovel’s ideological creativity reaches its peak is in his discussion of Spinoza. According to Yovel, Spinoza’s “world-class expertise in the Bible . . . would have destined young Baruch to the Rabbinate, as Saul Levy Mortera, his chief teacher, must have hoped” (334). Apart from an apparently unique access to Mortera’s mind, no support is provided for this claim. May we note that knowledge of the Bible (as opposed to Talmud and Rabbinic codes) has nothing to do with Rabbinic ordination?

Yovel’s Spinoza is “*the* philosopher of toleration and a founding father of political

liberalism" (336). Indeed, for Yovel, Spinoza demonstrates the quintessential spirit of the Marrano, which supports religious pluralism and rejects any notion of state religion (339). Consider, however, the following passage from Spinoza's *Political Treatise* (chap. 8): "And so those who are devoted to another religion ought to be allowed, indeed, to build as many houses of worship as they wish, provided they are small, modest, and somewhat dispersed. But it is very important that the temples which are dedicated to the national Religion [*patriae Religioni*] be large and magnificent, and that only Patricians or Senators be permitted to officiate in its chief rituals. So only Patricians should be permitted to baptize, to consecrate a marriage, lay on hands, and without exception, to be recognized as Priests."

Oddly enough, "the philosopher of toleration" seems to support an attitude that is not very different from the one according to which medieval Muslims, Christians, and Jews related to one another: official, systematic discrimination against minorities who are tolerated as long as they are clearly designated as inferior. Even worse, the passage seems to provide an unequivocal endorsement of an official "State Religion." Are we to excommunicate Spinoza from the new Church of Later-Day Marranos?

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Treason in the Northern Quarter: War, Terror, and the Rule of Law in the Dutch Revolt. By *Henk van Nierop*.

Translated by *J. C. Grayson*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Pp. xii+297. \$39.95.

Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt. By *Peter Arnade*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. Pp. xvi+352. \$69.95 (cloth); \$26.95 (paper).

A heroic narrative of political and religious liberation has shrouded the Dutch Revolt since its inception in the late sixteenth century and has wielded considerable influence on the Netherlands' national identity almost ever since. Protestant and nationalist writers into the early twentieth century cast the uprising as a united response to an illegitimate king and tyrannical church. Historians writing since World War II have made great progress in wading through the nationalist and confessional thickets to reconstruct the conflict within its contemporary contexts. Recent scholarship views the revolt, at least in its early phases, as a civil war more than anything else, since rebellion and reformation divided regions, cities, neighbors, and families against one another. Standard interpretations these days focus on the Dutch defense of local privileges against the Hapsburg assertion of royal prerogatives in the midst of religious upheaval and economic crisis. *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* by Peter Arnade and *Treason in the Northern Quarter: War, Terror, and the Rule of Law in the Dutch Revolt* by Henk van Nierop build on the advances in recent scholarship to examine the revolt from two very different vantage points. Arnade parses ceremonies, processions, symbolic destruction, and depredation in pursuit of political identity, whereas van Nierop takes the war down to its terrifying ground level in the cities and villages of Holland's Northern Quarter.

Arnade explains the development of the revolt by examining the iconic political