

Fidelity to Absence: Marrano Memory as Counter-History

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Abstract. This article theorizes Marrano crypto-Judaism through the lens of Walter Benjamin's messianic philosophy, proposing the Marrano condition as emblematic of "objectless anamnesis", a memory stripped of content yet charged with ethical exigency. Engaging the Jewish imperative of *Zakhor*, it contends that Marranos sustain redemptive potential not through codified ritual but through gesture, narrative, and silent transmission. Benjamin's concept of *Eingedenken* frames this as a form of political-theological resistance, fracturing historicism's "homogeneous time" and sustaining the "weak messianic power" to redeem historical ruins. Marrano secrecy, mirroring Benjamin's hidden theology, calls for an allegorical hermeneutics capable of decoding their silence, exile, and transmission without substance. Ultimately, Marranism reconfigures exile as a site of counter-historical threshold, where silence becomes an indictment of triumphalist temporality. Through Benjamin's "secret appointment", this intergenerational memory opens onto a radical, diasporic cosmopolitanism, in which justice, perpetually deferred, remains insistently imminent.

Keywords: Marranism; anamnesis; Walter Benjamin; messianism; *Zakhor*; secrecy; counter-history; remembrance; crypto-Judaism; temporality.

Riassunto. Il presente contributo propone una rilettura del cripto-giudaismo marrano attraverso la lente della filosofia messianica di Walter Benjamin, assumendo la condizione marrana come figura paradigmatica di un'anamnesi senza oggetto, una memoria spogliata totalmente di contenuti positivi, ma intensamente investita di urgenza etica. Alla luce dell'imperativo ebraico *Zakhor*, si sostiene che i Marrani preservino un potenziale redentivo non mediante ritualità codificate, ma bensì attraverso il gesto, il racconto e la trasmissione silenziosa. Il concetto benjaminiano di *Eingedenken* configura questa forma di memoria come pratica politico-teologica capace di infrangere il "tempo omogeneo" dello storicismo e di mantenere attiva la "debole forza messianica" cui il passato rivolge la propria istanza. La segretezza marrana, in risonanza con la teologia occulta di Benjamin, esige un'ermeneutica allegorica capace di interpretare il silenzio, l'esilio e la trasmissione svuotata di contenuto non come mere assenze ma come forme attive di significazione. In questa prospettiva, il marranismo si configura come soglia contro storica, entro la quale l'esilio diviene il luogo in cui la frattura della tradizione genera aperture inedite nella linearità del tempo storico. Attraverso la "segreta intesa" tra le generazioni evocata da Benjamin, la memoria marrana si declina come vincolo trans-temporale, inaugurando una forma radicale di cosmopolitismo diasporico in cui la giustizia, per quanto eternamente procrastinata, insiste come possibilità messianica latente.

Parole chiave: Marranismo; Anamnesi; Walter Benjamin; messianismo; *zakhor*; segretezza; controstoria; ricordo; cripto giudaismo; temporalità.

The Marrano Condition

The term "Marrano," of debated etymology, designates the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula who were forcibly converted to Catholicism, initially on a massive scale following the pogroms of 1391, and subsequently after the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which mandated their expulsion from the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. This decree presented the Jews remaining in Spain with the trilemma of exile, death, or baptism. In those tumultuous days, while many chose exile, dispersing throughout North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy, thousands became "baptized while standing" (*battezzati in piedi*; Silvera 2013, 120) after enduring days of imprisonment without sustenance. Cecil Roth, in his *History of the Marranos* (Roth 1932, 41), reconstructed the principal etymological hypotheses surrounding the term, highlighting how the very plurality of interpretations reflects the profound

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Submitted on August 8, 2025, accepted on December 23, 2025, published on January 18, 2026.

ambivalence inherent to Marrano identity. The Judaizing *conversos*—those who, while presenting a Christian façade in public, continued, despite their baptism, to maintain a distinct form of Jewish life in private—incarnated this Marrano duality, thereby exposing themselves to forms of exclusion from both sides: from the Jewish community, on grounds of their perceived betrayal, and from Christian society. These *conversos* thus embodied a paradoxical existential condition: formally integrated into Christian society, many secretly continued to practice various elements of Judaism, giving rise to the complex phenomenon of crypto-Judaism. From this perspective, Marranism was not merely a matter of forced conversion but rather a laboratory of identity transformation wherein secrecy and memory played a foundational role.

In his studies on the crypto-Jews, David Gitlitz emphasizes how the isolation of the *conversos'* descendants from traditional Judaism and their immersion within a Christian context precipitated profound transformations in the fundamental principles of their faith. Stripped of access to texts for educating new generations, the possibility of attending Talmudic schools to deepen their understanding of Jewish law, and the communal framework for Sabbath study, the crypto-Jews were compelled to rely exclusively on memory to preserve their religious practices (Bielik-Robson 2019). In this context, secret prayer became an essential component of their devotion. However, they continued to direct their worship solely to the God of Israel and to consider themselves followers of Mosaic law; they at times incorporated Christian elements into their invocations, which were often recited in Latin or Spanish. Indeed, Marrano religiosity was characterized by a creative adaptation to persecutory conditions, developing what Donatella Di Cesare terms a "faith by subtraction" (Di Cesare 2020, 52)—a faith constituted by simplified rites, focused on easily concealable practices such as fasting, and marked by a heightened attention to a more intimate form of devotion, a religiosity described as "intimate religiosity characterized by secrecy – one that was confined to the private and interior sphere." (Di Cesare 2020, 49). Latin prayers, rituals transformed into daily gestures devoid of explicit explanation, and Hebrew names preserved only within the family sphere all became signs of a memory persisting in silence, of a past surviving solely in an encoded form. Where transmission is interrupted and words can no longer be spoken openly, the past ceases to be a guaranteed inheritance and becomes instead a task – something that can be recovered only through a labor of decipherment and reinterpretation. In this sense, we argue that this dynamic prefigures a central problem: namely, the relationship to the past in an era of discontinuity. When history can no longer be lived or conceived as an unbroken line, it transforms into a field of fragments, a fragmented collective memory that, in the case of the Marrano, was transmitted through family narratives and concealed symbols.

The studies of Yosef Yerushalmi and Nathan Wachtel have demonstrated precisely how Marrano memory was transmitted through a hybrid linguistic code, wherein the unspoken and the implied became essential instruments of communication, capable of forging an invisible community founded upon complicity and the sharing of an esoteric knowledge. Encryption became a mode of existence, a practice that establishes an oblique relationship with truth and transforms clandestinity into a form of thought. In this sense, we can conceive of Marranism not only as a condition endured but also as a potential for rupture in the face of every dogmatic system. Marrano memory functions not as a mere act of preservation, but as an act of resistance against a dominant power that sought to erase their identities. It is within this context of persecution, secrecy, and submerged transmission that the "memory without content," which is the object of our inquiry, takes shape.

Ritual Time and the Ethics of Remembrance

Within the Jewish tradition, remembrance transcends mere mnemonic exercise, constituting instead a divine imperative, a constitutive practice that underpins communal cohesion. Far from a passive or sentimental retrospection, it operates as an active reenactment, materialized through discursive, ritualistic, and narrative modalities, as well as through a hermeneutic of temporal justice (Di Cesare 2020, 108). To comprehend the resilience of Marrano memory, one must first recognize that remembrance functions not as a mere individual or psychological faculty, but as a social fact in

the most profound sense of the term. This foundational insight, articulated by Maurice Halbwachs, posits that memory is constructed and sustained within specific "social frameworks" (*cadres sociaux*) - institutions like family, religion, and class - which provide the necessary structures and contexts for recollection. The Jewish tradition of *Zakhor*, with its ritual repetitions and liturgical calendar, constitutes a powerful, highly structured example of such frameworks. The historical predicament of the Marranos, however, represents the paradoxical limit-case of this very principle: it is the social fact of memory persisting through the systematic demolition of its visible social frameworks. Stripped of the synagogue, the public community, canonical texts, and open transmission, the Marranos were forced to reconstitute their mnemonic social frameworks within the clandestine sphere of the household and the shared secret of the family. Their collective memory thus became a concealed social fact - a fragmented framework kept alive by the pure form of intergenerational relation and obligation, demonstrating how the social imperative to remember can endure even when all its institutional supports have been obliterated.

As Donatella Di Cesare underscores, "Recollection is not contingent but is the hinge around which the community revolves" (Di Cesare 2020, 107). This mandate to remember reverberates insistently throughout the Torah, functioning as a bulwark against the inexorable pull of oblivion.¹ Di Cesare delineates a critical distinction between remembrance (*zakhor*), a collective mandate, and memory as an individual cognitive faculty. Memory can fade; it is "instinctive and unreflective, left up to the spontaneity of the individual" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). Remembrance, by contrast, is institutionalized through the community's ritual repetitions: a dialectic wherein "one remembers by observing, one observes by remembering" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). The imperative *Shamor*² ("guarding" or "observing") thus assumes a politico-theological dimension, urging those who did not directly experience the founding events to recall them, to keep their trace alive, and to transmit their meaning. Ritual observance, the recitation of the *Haggadah*, and the cyclical celebration of festivals thereby transcend commemoration, emerging as mechanisms of cultural endurance and as practices through which a community defiantly negotiates the erosive currents of history.

The Jewish tradition, through this hermeneutic mechanism, liberates the liturgical calendar from natural cyclicity, reinscribing it with the irruption of historicity. Major festivals, such as *Pesach* or *Yom Kippur*, are not reducible to calendrical markers but function as temporal thresholds through which the past erupts into the present to reorient the future. As Yerushalmi contends, Judaism does not merely archive the past; it reactivates it. During *Pesach*, the Exodus from Egypt is not commemorated as a distant event but relived performatively through the *Haggadah*, transfiguring liberation into an eternally open horizon (Yerushalmi 1982, 44). Jewish liturgical time thus eludes both linearity and circularity, embodying instead a repetition with difference; each annual observance unfolds within altered contexts, refracting new generational traumas, hermeneutic exigencies, and redemptive possibilities. This temporal modality aligns with Benjamin's conception of messianic time, a differential repetition that fractures historical continuity, preserving the immanent potential for redemption.

¹ See, for example, the remembrance of the dead in Jewish liturgy (*Yizkor*, *El Male Rahamim*), tied to the conception of the soul (*nefesh*) as fragile and contingent. Memory does not merely preserve the past but opens onto an eschatological dimension: Gan Eden and the World to Come (*Olam Ha,ba*) are not simply consolatory representations but connect to the justice of remembrance and the hope of redemption.

² The two biblical verbs "*Shamor*" (to guard) and "*Zakhor*" (to remember) appear in the two Sabbath commandments, in Deut. 5,12 and Exod. 20,8, respectively. In Rabbinic exegetical tradition, these verbs are interpreted as having been spoken by God simultaneously (*shamor ve,zakhor be,dibur echad*), a formulation found in the *Lecha Dodi*, a liturgical hymn by the Sephardic kabbalist Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz. This signifies the dual nature of Shabbat: on one hand, *Zakhor*, active, liturgical memory tied to the remembrance of Creation and the Exodus from Egypt, expressed through festive rituals; on the other, "*Shamor*", silent guardianship and abstention from labour. These verbs are fundamental to biblical Hebrew vocabulary, both associated with the Sabbath commandment yet carrying distinct meanings and functions. In Jewish mysticism, "*Zakhor*" is linked to memory as openness and commemoration, while "*Shamor*" implies defensive, silent vigilance, akin to 'guarding' something that cannot be spoken. Notably, in the Marrano context, where "*Zakhor*", understood as public, liturgical, and festive remembrance, was forbidden or suppressed, only "*Shamor*" could endure: a secret, fragmented, silent observance entrusted to individual memory and concealed practice.

Memory without Content, Fidelity without Form

It is precisely here that Benjamin's philosophy converges with the historical predicament of the Marranos. His notion of *Eingedenken*, remembrance-with and for the vanquished, transcends mere commemoration, constituting a political-theological praxis of retroactive justice. Benjamin repudiates memory as inert preservation, advocating instead a mnemonic act that rearticulates and actualizes the past, detonating it into the present as a constellation of meaning. Such remembrance does not nostalgically recollect; it redeems. It transcends survival, gesturing toward the messianic "weak force" of redemption; "the recount is already to redeem, and history is already a reparation" (Di Cesare 2020, 108). The task is not to memorialize the defeated as relics of a concluded past but to think alongside them in the now, rupturing the triumphalist continuum of history. Through Benjamin's lens, Jewish memory³ is thus constitutively futural: every act of remembrance imposes an ethical demand to hold fast to what was lost so that it might yet become.

This responsibility constitutes an ethical imperative, for the past is not merely revived but reanimated through a hermeneutic of repetition, not as static recurrence but as "repetition-with-a-difference". Language, in this schema, becomes the medium through which remembrance evades oblivion; within its discursive matrix, the past is not petrified into inert imagery but sustained as a promissory note, a latent possibility of return. Within Jewish tradition, language operates not as a descriptive tool but as a performative act; it forges covenantal bonds, institutes communal identity, and perpetuates the dialectic of divine-human reciprocity. The recounting of Israel's liberation from Egypt, for instance, transcends mere chronicle; it reanimates the present through the axiomatic conviction that every oppression remains surmountable. Successive generations join in narrating the Exodus as though they had emerged from bondage, a mnemonic praxis that transposes the past into a transformative present, a now-time (*Jetztzeit*) charged with confronting and reconstituting historical contingency.

This conception of time crystallizes in Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*—a 'now-time' that blasts open the continuum of history. Benjaminian philosophy shatters this schema and forcefully asserts the idea that every moment contains within itself a revolutionary opportunity, a chance, provided it is seized as the opening of a new task irreducible to the mere continuity of the past. As suggested by Gershom Scholem, Benjamin here draws upon the Jewish mystical tradition that projected the messianic utopia into the present moment. Redemption was thus re-evaluated: from an event placed at the end of times, a passive expectation to be procrastinated into an uncertain future, to a real possibility that the Messiah could erupt at any moment. (Scholem, 1941, p. X). This radical immanence of the messianic is what charges the 'weak messianic power' of every generation with such urgent responsibility. The Marrano's secret observance, a punctual and hidden fidelity outside the linear flow of official history, becomes a lived embodiment of this very *Jetztzeit*—a perpetual, concealed readiness for redemption (Scholem 1986, 117).

³ Marc H. Ellis similarly emphasizes that, within the biblical tradition, memory is not primarily a relationship with the past but an act oriented toward the present and future. 'Its primordial bond is with a present that projects itself toward the future' (*Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Baylor University Press, Waco, 2004). Here, memory is conceived as an ethical and transformative force; to remember means not merely to retain in mind but to *take into account*, to assume active responsibility in the face of history and its wounds, and to respond to the call of justice. In this framework, memory becomes a praxis that transforms suffering into testimony, survival into resistance, and history into *theophany*, a revelation of the divine as justice that summons the subject to choose, as in the Deuteronomic tradition, between life and death, blessing and curse. This conception deeply intertwines with the Benjaminian idea of remembrance (*Eingedenken*), understood as a critical and revolutionary act capable of redeeming fragments of the past and opening a messianic breach in historical time. It reimagines the call to life against all forms of unjust death.

However, the Marrano condition is defined precisely by the foreclosure of this commandment's conventional fulfillment; rituals are proscribed, texts eradicated, dates encrypted, and language itself rendered illegible. Paradoxically, it is within this existential fissure that remembrance assumes its most radical valence. In such a state of clandestine ontology, memory mutates into a "recollection of the secret" (Di Cesare 2020, 111), a mnemonic act divested of ritual scaffolding yet bound by its unrelenting imperative. The Marrano becomes the custodian of an unknowable legacy, the witness to an unspeakable testimony, and the transmitter of an unpossessable inheritance. This memory is objectless, an anamnesis unmoored from content, grounded solely in the ethical exigency to remember *qua* remembrance, a fidelity to absence that, in its very negation, inscribes the trace of what has been effaced.

This form of memory, stripped of concrete content yet saturated with immanent imperative, finds resonant expression in a seminal Hasidic narrative attributed to the *Ba'al Shem Tov*.⁴ The tale traces the progressive erosion of ritual gestures, sacred spaces, and liturgical language across generations. Ultimately, only the narration of remembrance itself persists. Significantly, even this terminal act, the recounting of absence, retains vestigial efficacy, as though still channelling the ritual's primordial power. In this culminating gesture, remembrance crystallizes as hyperbolic fidelity; no longer directed toward specific content but toward transmission *qua* transmission. Memory thus severs its referential anchors, enduring as a pure remnant, an evacuated yet insistent structure whose indeterminacy becomes meaning generative. Herein lies the radicality of Marrano anamnesis, it conserves not tradition's substantive corpus but its empty form. This constitutes not remembrance of something, but rather remembrance of remembrance itself, a meta-mnemonic praxis where absence sustains ethical persistence.

The nature of this messianism, however, requires clarification. It deliberately oscillates between historical immanence and a force that shatters the continuum of history. To grasp its complexity, it is necessary to turn to the work of Gershom Scholem. He maintained that the messianic idea represented a fundamentally transformative and catastrophic power that erupts into history from without. Benjamin secularizes and radically reworks this theological concept. His is not a messianism that awaits a transcendent savior, but neither is it one that resolves entirely into the immanent flow of historical progress. Rather, it articulates what may be defined as an immanent messianism of interruption. The weak messianic force is a potentiality inherent to time, whose activation requires a rupture—one that blasts open the homogeneous and empty continuum of the victors' history. In this rupture, the unfulfilled past and the possible future converge in a charged constellation of now-time. This constitutes not a vertical transcendence pointing to an afterlife, but a horizontal and diagonal transcendence, sought in the fractures and folds of profane time itself, wherever the defeated of history advance their claim for justice. The secret of the Marrano, vibrating in the interstices of loss, becomes precisely a fracture of such magnitude.

⁴ See S.Y. Agnon, Preface to *The Stories of the Baal Shem Tov*, Florence: Giuntina, 1995: «When the Baal Shem Tov needed to fulfil a difficult task, something secret for the sake of creation, he would go to a place in the woods, light a fire, recite prayers, absorbed in meditation, and everything would be accomplished according to his intent. A generation later, when the Maggid of Mezritch faced the same task, he returned to that place in the woods and said: «We can no longer light the fire, but we can recite the prayers», and everything unfolded as he desired. After another generation, when Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to fulfill the same task, he too went into the woods and said: «We can no longer light the fire, nor do we know the secret meditations that once enlivened the prayers. But we know the place in the woods where all this happened, and that must suffice.» And indeed, it sufficed. Yet another generation later, when Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin faced the same task, he sat upon a golden throne in his castle and said: «We cannot light the fire, we cannot recite the prayers, and we no longer know the place in the woods. But we can tell the story of all this.» And his storytelling alone held the same efficacy as the actions of the other three.

Messianic Disruption and the Politics of the Secret

«Ruins and fragments become allegories of a redemptive possibility, one that concerns the awakening of consciousness [...]. Through its catastrophic apperception, a wound opens within historical time. It is the awareness of this wound that transforms catastrophic time into messianic time. But such a transformation is unthinkable without a memorial gesture of thought. In the act of remembrance, the anthropological and theological dimensions [...] are welded into a single figure» (Desideri 2018, 104).

Within the clandestine existence of Marranos, every gesture, every whispered utterance, every ritual fragment constitutes hyperbolic resistance. The secret, devoid of content, paradoxically sustains the very possibility of transmission, a concept resonating with Kabbalistic linguistics, where words function not as signifiers of fixed meaning but as generative forces, spiritual forms that enact creation. Here, language transcends referentiality, becoming a world-shaping praxis. What matters ceases to be communicable content, shifting instead toward relationality between concepts.

Benjamin inherits and transfigures this legacy into a theory of messianic purity, in which salvation emerges not from doctrine but from contentless tension, an intentionality divorced from outcome. What endures is not knowledge but the preservation of relation. Memory thus merges with secrecy; “the secret of recollection becomes the recollection of the secret” (Di Cesare 2020, 111). Through marranism persists the faintest thread binding present to past, an echo of covenant persisting beyond comprehension. Deprived of the canonical instruments of cultural transmission, the Marranos emerge as witnesses to void, bearers of an aporetic “secret of the secret” that binds them through silence, exile, dispersion. Nonetheless, within this radical dispossession resides messianic potential. When cognition dissolves and only the formal gesture endures, a rupture in historical continuity becomes conceivable, shattering modernity’s illusory linearity, which Benjamin relentlessly decried. In his Sixth Thesis, Benjamin evokes the possibility that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if the victor continues to triumph:

«Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious» (Benjamin 1968, 254).

Here, Marrano existence embodies Benjamin’s warning. Their fragmented remembrance, devoid of content yet saturated with obligation, defies the victors’ narrative. What persists is not doctrine but the trace of the covenant: a messianic charge vibrating in the interstices of loss. In this void, where tradition survives as pure form, history’s continuum fractures. The Marrano’s silence becomes counter-history; their secrecy, an unspoken indictment against triumphalist teleologies. For Benjamin, such tenuous fidelity harbors revolutionary force, the “weak messianic power” to redeem the past’s unredeemed claims through the sheer insistence of remembering (Benjamin 1968, 254). Thus, Marranism transforms deprivation into dialectical leverage. Where coherent testimony proves impossible, the refusal to forget becomes the last messianic spark, a formal resistance that, like Benjamin’s angel of history, gazes backward to gather the ruins while being propelled into a future unclaimed by the victors.

In this sense, the image proposed by Bielik-Robson (Bielik-Robson 2020, 11) of a Benjaminian theology that liquefies, through the ink of writing, lends itself well to rendering the image of a secret that remains in shadow to safeguard its purest essence. From this perspective, fidelity to the original message requires the betrayal of its institutionalized form, for it is only by immersing oneself within the hidden tradition that its revolutionary charge can be preserved.

The lament, as an expression of the unfulfilled and a demand for justice from the oppressed past, acquires a particular splendor in the act of remembrance. This idea was anticipated in an early text by Gershom Scholem, who asserted: 'Only in lament does darkness shine.' (Scholem 2005, 295) Remembrance, as a central element of the theological conception of Jewish history, is what would allow for the anticipation of the Messiah's coming, since «Every second is the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter. The hinge of this gate is recollection. » (Benjamin 2003, 397) For Benjamin, therefore, redemption is not something situated at the end of history, but an event that can erupt into the present at any instant. As Scholem suggested, Benjamin draws on the Jewish mystical tradition that awaited the Messiah's imminent advent, projecting utopia into the present moment. Redemption does not appear as something placed at the end of time - a passive expectation to be postponed into an uncertain future - but as a real possibility for the unexpected to irrupt at any moment. If for Rosenzweig, without the will to anticipate the Messiah's coming, the future appears merely 'as a past dragged out to an infinite length and projected forward,' for Benjamin, conversely, what is at stake is the past itself, wherein lie unexploded splinters of the future; in the disappointed hopes of past generations, Benjamin sees the very ground upon which humanity plants its dreams.

Emerging from this dialectic of secrecy and void, where tradition persists as trace rather than substance, the Marranos epitomize a messianic threshold: custodians of Judaism's "final sparks"⁵, not through salvific content but through the silent bearing of the unforgettable. Their secret, devoid of content yet charged with potency, operates as pure relationality; in the act of guarding without revealing, they unleash a force transcending conventional cultural transmission. This bond is simultaneously temporal and spatial, forging invisible continuity between generations who, though severed from dialogue, remain constitutively entangled in mutual expectation. Herein lies Benjamin's "secret agreement" (Benjamin 1968, 254), a transtemporal covenant unfolding in history's fractures, where the Marrano gesture inscribes itself as a meaningful interruption.

Within such broken temporality, memory reconstitutes itself not as linear continuity but as counter-historical expectancy. Where tradition lies shattered and time fragmented, Marrano existence sustains the possibility of rekindling, not through archives but through gesture and fragment. The past here orients itself toward redemption: an intergenerational encounter demanding radical responsibility. As Benjamin asserts: «Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim» (Benjamin 1968, 254). Thus, Marrano memory reconfigures not only temporality but spatiality, extending the intergenerational bond into a radical cosmopolitan horizon, where exile becomes the condition for a justice yet to come.

Focusing on the discontinuity of tradition and its relationship with memory, Stéphane Mosès contrasts the linear temporality of historical causality with the time of generations, a discontinuous, non-cumulative temporality marked by a transmission that does not follow a direct order from fathers to sons but instead unfolds in the oblique bond between grandparents and grandchildren. Mosès articulates this as follows:

«To the continuous and irreversible temporality postulated by historical causality is opposed the time of generations, discontinuous and reversible, symbolized by the double bond of the grandfather with the grandson and the grandson with the grandfather: discontinuity of a transmission that [...] immediately unites the ancestor with the generation of the grandchildren; reversibility of a non-cumulative time, in which the grandson, bypassing the generation of the fathers, reconnects directly with the teachings of the forebears» (Moses 1993, 97-98).

⁵ The reference to "final sparks" alludes to the Lurianic Kabbalistic myth of *nitzotzot* (divine sparks) scattered and imprisoned in matter following the "Shattering of the Vessels" (*Shevirat ha-kelim*).

This dynamic manifests with particular intensity in the reality of the Shoah, where the transmission of memory, frequently fractured between survivors and their progeny, appears to regain potency in the subsequent generation of grandchildren. It is as though the generational distance enables them to reactivate the memory in a distinct form, one less directly burdened by the immediate trauma and thereby capable of renewed resonance, narration, and preservation. In this sense, memory does not conform to a linear progression but instead advances through discontinuities, echoes, and reiterations.

For this compelling reason, the Marranos may be considered not merely as the final remnants of a historical Jewish continuity, but also, in a deeply Benjaminian sense, as the inaugural witnesses to an alternative, emergent history. A history that does not conform to the criteria of progress and does not submit to dominant chronology but that patiently awaits, within the quietude of silence and dispersion, the time of interruption, the time of redemption.

Benjamin's theological conception of redemption, especially in his Second Thesis, shifts the focus from individual salvation to a collective, historical task. Redemption is not retrospective nostalgia but an active, ethical demand inscribed within the structure of history itself. Every image of happiness bears a secret agreement pointing toward the unrealized hopes of past generations. Against any teleology that accepts defeat as final, Benjamin insists that the past remains open to justice; the "unfinished past" still demands to be redeemed. This messianic potential emerges through *Eingedenken*, a form of remembrance that interrupts the homogeneous flow of time and reactivates lost possibilities. In this framework, memory resists oblivion not by preserving content but by bearing witness to what was silenced. Recollection becomes a revolutionary gesture, redemptive not in spite of its fragmentary nature but because of it.

The imperative task of the present generation is thus to redeem the suffering of the ancestors by enacting a *Jetztzeit*, a messianic interruption of time capable of breaking the continuity of history. The very image of redemption intertwined with that of recollection (*Eingedenken*); Benjamin conceives redemption primarily as the remembrance of the victims of the past. In this practice, a peculiar form of theological experience emerges: in remembering, the human being performs a gesture that, while situated within the profane realm, nonetheless belongs intrinsically to the sacred.

Benjaminian recollection, though consciously detached from explicitly religious language, functions as a redemptive device insofar as it does not merely recover the past but also rescues it from oblivion and reactivates it in the present, charging it with a demand for justice and fulfillment. Through it, the unfulfilled may be fulfilled, suffering revisited with restorative intent, and history itself consequentially rewritten. As Benjamin writes, theology is like the "little hunchback" hidden inside the automaton that controls the puppet of historical materialism, enabling it to win. However, he must remain hidden. (Benjamin 1968, 253) To recollect is a revolutionary act, not merely to remember, but to engage critically and redemptively, for it fundamentally shatters the illusions of irreversible time and restores possibility to what was deemed a failure. Recollection opposes the homogeneous and empty time of propagated by historicism, aiming instead to reactivate the unrealized possibilities embedded within the past, giving voice to what has been forgotten or systematically repressed: «even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious» (Benjamin 1968, 255).

«Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology, but in remembrance, we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally a-theological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts» (Benjamin 1999, 471).

Concretely, in the act of recollection, the human being undergoes a genuinely theological experience: one in which history is conceived through a redemptive lens, where even "every echo of

lament” (Benjamin 2003, 401) may be overcome. Memory thus becomes the critical threshold upon which the Messiah can break in at any given moment. Indeed, Benjamin writes: «Every second is the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter. The hinge of this gate is recollection. » (Benjamin 2003, 397) Here, Benjamin draws from the tradition of Jewish mysticism, according to which every moment might become an occasion for redemption. For Rosenzweig, a failure to proactively anticipate the Messiah risks reducing the future to nothing more than a mere projection of the past. For Benjamin, on the contrary, shards of the future lie concealed within the past itself, and it is precisely within these fragmented remnants that the unfulfilled dreams of previous generations lie dormant, still awaiting their realization.

This seemingly theoretical gesture finds a concrete parallel in Marrano memory, a distinctive mode of recollection characteristic of Jews compelled into forced abjuration. In *The Faith of Remembrance: Marrano Identity and Sacred Memory*, Nathan Wachtel (2008) explores this diasporic and submerged memory, expressed through fragmentary ritual practices, clandestine oral traditions, and veiled gestures. As previously underscored, the Marrano cannot openly declare their theological commitment but preserves it through subterranean means. In both the Marrano paradigm and that of the historical materialist, recollection becomes a form of resistance against erasure; in Benjamin, a resistance to the oblivion imposed by official historical narratives; in the Marrano, a resistance to cultural and spiritual annihilation. Memory becomes an act that holds onto the past not as a static monument, but as a dynamic interruption of the present, an active gesture of justice.

Furthermore, a deeper, crucial connection fundamentally links these two modes of memory: both are characterized by their inherently cryptic nature. Just as Benjamin’s messianic theology hides within the folds of historical materialism, so too does Marrano memory conceal itself within the seemingly mundane forms of everyday life. In both instances, recollection does not express itself openly, but demands a code, an allegorical reading. Marrano memory thus resides in the shadowy zone between knowledge and theological faith; the Marrano no longer enjoys unmediated access to their past. For them, memory ceases to be an automatic inheritance and instead transforms into a future-oriented ethical and intellectual task. The past, consequently, becomes a cipher awaiting decipherment.

Where history can no longer be experienced as a linear continuity, it is instead transmuted into a field densely scattered with fragments, symbols urgently awaiting decoding. Both the Marrano and the historical materialist operate within broken time, seeking in the ruins of transmission something that might still be redeemed.

«Benjamin inherits this idea fundamentally from Judaism, from the Jewish religious tradition, which emphasizes: “It is well known that Jews were forbidden to investigate the future. The Torah and prayer instruct instead in remembrance.” An important element of Benjamin’s reception of Judaism lies in the notion of *trustworthiness*, of fidelity to a covenant that must be remembered, preserved, and maintained through an attitude of gratitude. Memory becomes charged with emotional resonance, directed toward an immemorial past, toward an originary pact through which humankind emerged from violence and the state of nature. Memory is thus the key to redemption, salvation, and hope, categories that Benjamin explicitly mobilizes» (Vinci 2013, 28).

Through memory, one may perform the tiger’s leap into the past to save the dead, linking moments of individual recollection with the community’s memory, an event that occurs profoundly within the festival’s framework. From this perspective, the festival itself becomes a revolutionary act since it facilitates profound communal participation. It is marked by calendrical time, by the leap of memory that forges a vital constellation with the past: the festive day, understood as such, becomes itself the small open gate through which the Messiah might enter.

As Giulio Schiavoni notes, this urgency to “save the people of memory” from the Kafkaesque oblivion that “steadily gains ground” simultaneously points to an inescapable task: that of remembrance (*Eingedenken*), the necessity of undertaking the journey of salvific memory. “Remembering as a task.” (Schiavoni 2001, 264) The theme of the task permeates all Benjaminian texts, signifying an operation both ethically charged and politically resonant, aimed at repairing what is shattered and thereby redeeming the sufferings and unfulfilled utopias of defeated generations.

The theoretical framework that emerges from the intersection of these perspectives - the Jewish mandate of *Zakhor* and Benjamin's philosophy of history - enables a deeper interrogation of the specificity of the Marrano experience. While the historical research of Nathan Wachtel provides an indispensable archive of crypto-Judaic practices, the philosophical work of Agata Bielik-Robson explores its consequences for a theory of tradition. Donatella Di Cesare, on the one hand, emphasizes the aspect of absence and “faith by subtraction,” viewing the Marrano as the custodian of a lack. Bielik-Robson, on the other hand, proposes a more productive reading of the Marrano crisis, interpreting it not as mere loss but as a cryptotheology that, through its very negation, innovates and preserves tradition in a new and paradoxical form. It is precisely in this space between the absence of content and the persistence of a pure form that Marrano memory, like a Benjaminian flash, erupts into the present with a redemption claim.

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