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AGAINST THANATOPOLITICS: A MARRANO
INTERVENTION

I witnessed one of my friends energetically pursuing death with a real passion, rooted in his mind by many-faceted arguments which I could not make him renounce; quite irrationally, with a fierce, burning hunger, he seized upon the first death which presented itself with a radiant nimbus of honour.¹

I deliberately chose the epigram from Michel de Montaigne to enter into a gentle polemic with Arthur Bradley, which I will conduct under the triple auspices of Montaigne, Spinoza, and Derrida. I associate this line with a specific apology of *life as survival*, locating itself as far as possible from the Robespierrian thanatopolitics. While contesting Bradley's claim that the political agency of the "dead-already" (*deja-mort*) can be seen in some cases as liberating – like with the Zapatistas or the Palestinian resistance² – I would like to oppose it with a very modest plea for the ordinary life which, as Montaigne puts it bluntly, always has a lot to lose and, because of that, "always prefers itself," i.e., chooses survival instead of a glorious heroic death. This is what I would like to call here a *Marrano politics*: while it avoids high moralising ground, rightly ridiculed by Bradley, it sticks firmly to the anti-thanatic value of survival as a rudimentary self-assertion and resistance to sovereign rule, precisely as Montaigne in Derrida's description: "he preferred to love life, to live while loving, and to die while loving, to die while loving life, to die alive, in short, to die in his lifetime, to die while preferring life."³ Why Marrano? Because the Marranos – or the Spanish *conversos* and their descendants – were the first modern subjects, the "Hebrew citizens of Toledo,"⁴ who challenged the martyrological imperative of *kiddush-Hashem*, the sanctification of the Name, by choosing to survive in the dangerous element of the foreign Christian faith

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. A. M. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 61.

² Bradley describes his intention in this chapter as an "exploration of Robespierre's politics of the 'already dead,' from the Revolutionary Terror up to contemporary revolutionary movements like the Zapatistas," the goal of which will be to "offer a new conjugation of the politics of unbearable life, which transforms it from an apparently passive and abject fate to be endured into a new revolutionary subject position to be affirmed and mobilized": Arthur Bradley, *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Erasure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 120.

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Death Penalty*, vol. 1, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 277.

⁴ On the significance of Toledo for the history of the baptised Jews, from the 7th to the 15th century, see: Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos – Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 7-9.

with which they could never fully identify. In this manner, they became a non-identitarian remnant: alive yet excluded from all traditions, falling out of the sovereign grid. I find their choice of life as survival – ordinary, unheroic, tainted with guilt and a sense of betrayal – a foundational event in the history of modern politics: a fact well spotted by Derrida, who famously declared himself to be “a sort of a Marrano of the French Catholic culture,”⁵ but not paid yet enough attention even in the Derridean circles.

In my response, I would like to strike a connection between the two chapters of *Unbearable Life*: Chapter 4 on Hobbes and Chapter 5 on Robespierre. While there is a good reason to treat Hobbes as the inventor of modern biopolitical sovereignty, the way it was done by Michel Foucault – defined as the mastery over life for the sake of life’s conservation and perpetuation – there is also a reason to perceive Hobbes’s theory of the state as an aporetic moment in the modern process of departure from the idea of sovereignty. It was certainly not Hobbes’s own intention: he was, after all, the architect of the modern double bind the role of which was to legitimize the sovereign rule, and which was aptly described by Adorno as “losing life in order to preserve it.” In his essay on Odysseus as the prototype of the bourgeois ego, opening *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno attacks “modern life which does not live.”⁶ The reason for this lack of vivacity lies in the fact that modernity followed the Hobbesian obsession with self-preservation, completely disregarding the other – creative, zetetic, individuating – aspect of life, which makes it truly alive. Thus, if modern life does not live, it is precisely because it *only* wants to live. The figure of Odysseus demonstrates this paradox in the paradigmatic manner: his is the life which defers living infinitely for the sake of the self-defensive maintenance of its own existence and, in consequence, loses itself. The modern life, therefore, is spent in the toil and labour of *conservatio vitae*, meticulously storing life in reserve for its future consumption. Firmly tied to the mast of his *ego*, the modern Odysseus resists the temptation of the syrens, which, for Adorno, represent the forgotten aspect of life: hazard, adventure, but most of all a cause which cannot be pursued without taking risk. His instinct of self-preservation is so strong that, paradoxically, it makes him unable to live: no longer ready for any living exchange with the world, he is already entering “his own path to death.” He thus embodies the main aporia of the enlightenment which, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, consists in “the transformation of sacrifice into

⁵ *Circumfession*, in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 170.

⁶ See the epigraph to Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, deriving from Ferdinand Kürnberger’s novel, *Der Amerika-Müde, amerikanisches Kulturbild* (1855): *Das Leben lebt nicht* [Life does not live].

subjectivity.”⁷ Although enlightenment initially promised to put an end to the mythic practice of sacrifice, it ended up propagating *self-sacrifice* in terms of a modern hyper-disciplined subject, blindly following the path of self-preservation:

The self rescues itself from dissolution into blind nature, whose claim is constantly proclaimed in sacrifice [...] The immense though superfluous sacrifice is required – against sacrifice itself. Odysseus, too, is the self who always restrains himself and forgets his life, who saves his life and yet recalls it only as wandering. *He also is a sacrifice for the abrogation of sacrifice.*⁸

According to the Frankfurt duo, therefore, survival not only does not fall out of the sovereign grip: it is the privileged locus in which the new sacrificial logic of the Hobbesian state realizes itself. This is also Arthur Bradley’s position: the apparent ban on sacrifices, on which modern biopolitics relies (he analyses it beautifully in the chapter on Rousseau), hides in its folds an aporetic affirmation of sacrifice as a continuous self-offering of one’s life for the sake of self-preservation. His way out of this aporia is to rescue sacrifice from its modern meaningless service to life and – via rehabilitation of the thanatopolitics – put it in the meaningful service to a cause.

But there are also other ways to get out of the Hobbesian “unbearable” double bind of giving up on life in order to live on. One of them – in my opinion most promising – consists in rethinking the notion of survival: no longer in the privative terms of “less life” – according to the basic rule of the social contract: you must limit your life in full, in order to keep your lessened life safe and protected – but in more affirmative and non-sacrificial terms of *conatus* and *sur-vie*. While Adorno and Bradley tend to denigrate survival as a *lesser life* that, as Hegel put it, clings to life slavishly and at all costs,⁹ Montaigne,

⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 56.

⁸ Ibid., 54-56; emphasis added. This diagnosis has been recently confirmed in a powerful way by Roberto Esposito who – in a similar manner, although with no reference to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – criticized the Hobbesian subject as the one who overprotects himself against the dangers of nature (both biological and social) and because of that loses life: “What is sacrificed is nothing other than the *cum*, the relation among men, and for that reason as well, in some way men themselves are sacrificed. *They are paradoxically sacrificed to their own survival*. They live in and of their refusal to live together [convivere]. It’s impossible not to recognize here a *remnant of irrationality* that is subtly introduced into the folds of the most rational of systems: life is preserved through the presupposition of its sacrifice, the sum of refusals out of which sovereign authorization is made. *Life is sacrificed to the preservation of life*. In this convergence of the preservation of life and its capacity to be sacrificed, modern immunization reaches the height of its own destructive power [potenza]”: Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14; emphasis added. Arthur Bradley refers to Esposito’s argument about the “sacrificial dynamic” of survival in Chapter 4, “Uncommon: Hobbes’ Martyrs.”

⁹ The Hegelian Master and Slave dialectics, in which Hegel disparages the Slave for his ‘attachment to life,’ constitutes the foundation of all thanatopolitics, where the bold confrontation with death determines the essence of subjectivity: “The pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common

Spinoza and Derrida – a great line of the Marranos who knew what it means to choose life instead of martyrological death – attempt to rehabilitate it as an ordinary finite life which, for the first time, escapes the theological framework, still very much operative in Adorno's critique. Within that framework, the only life worth living is the infinite immortal eternal life of the divine sovereign – while the finite life appears merely privative and, because of that, always already sacrificed on the altar of infinity. The desire to live forever, based on the ideal image of life eternal, can take a purely religious form of self-offering (when, in the Pascalian manner, one gives up on her life here and now in order to gain immortal after-life) or seemingly secular (when, in the Hobbesian manner, one sacrifices living in the moment in order to store for the indefinite future). In both cases, however, it is grounded in the theological contrast between the infinite and the finite.

It is precisely this politico-theological framework – the assymetrical relation between the Sovereign ruler (as holding privileged access to infinity) and the self-sacrificial martyr-subject (as reduced to her finitude) – which the Marrano trio wishes to evade in order to, in Derrida's last words, “always prefer life and constantly affirm survival.”¹⁰ From their point of view – which I share unreservedly – any attempt to bring back the spectre of sovereignty versus martyrdom or, as will be the case with Robespierre (backed by the whole Hegelian line of Kojève, Bataille, Blanchot, Lacan, and Žižek), sovereignty *in* martyrdom, reverses the most promising tendency of the modern era, which is an attempt to get *beyond sovereignty*.

Granted, there is something oppressive in Hobbes' insistence that we all assume a precarious finite mode of life in the need of constant protection (where only the ruler constitutes a sovereign exception), but this leveling, forming the modern principle of the *univocity of life*, has also political implications that should be endorsed – as it is done in Derrida's concept of *universal survival*, which forgoes the idea of a sovereign as exempt to the finite fate. For, this univocal flattening of all lives can truly get us beyond the sovereign paradigm: where there is no above and no below – just one horizontal plateau of the ordinary finite life – there is also no room for metaphysical hierarchy on which every political sovereignty relies (even the Hobbesian-biopolitical one). This collapse of the hierarchical mode is the main theme of Walter

to existence as such, that *it is not attached to life* [...] And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness [...] The individual, who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness": G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 113-14; emphasis added. In Chapter 5, Bradley brilliantly discusses the consquences of Hegel's Master and Slave dialectics in the doctrine of Alexandre Kojève and Maurice Blanchot.

¹⁰ The last words of Derrida, which he scribbled right before his death, were: “Always prefer life and constantly affirm survival” (*Preferez toujours la vie et affîmez sans cesse la survie*): Jacques Derrida, “Final Words,” trans. Gila Walker, in *The Late Derrida*, eds. W. J. T. Mitchell and Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 244.

Benjamin's sobering intervention against Carl Schmitt's modeling of sovereignty on the omnipotent and immortal divine ruler; the overwhelming sadness of the German Baroque *Trauerspiel* consists precisely in the ruler's intense awareness of his own mortality, which makes him equal with his subjects and thus deprives him of the legitimacy to rule. We all die, we all are in the precarious mode of *conservatio vitae* (or *conatus-survie*, if we wish to see it more positively), we all are "structurally survivors"¹¹ – and this sense of finitude, as Martin Hägglund nicely argues in his book on Derrida, is the basic affect of democracy, closely connected to mortality and survival.¹² No one, therefore, can usurp the status of more-than-life – the untouchable and incorruptible absolute – which, in fact, always already means death: "the idea of immortality [...] is inseparable from the idea of absolute death."¹³ The Blanchotian "right to death" is thus denied as the right to sovereignty, and this prohibition forms a *sine qua non* of a horizontal community of mortals or what Derrida calls the "*Khora* of the political"¹⁴: a democratic arrangement precluding any political representation of the beyond and merely keeping an impersonal law as a regulatory convention which does not call for any transcendental sanctions, apart from the generally accepted "right to life."

Arthur Bradley is very captivated by the transcendence of the "dead-already" (*deja-mort*) – extolled by the Hegelian-Kojevian praise of the life-risking Master and becoming flesh in Robespierre, the Incorruptible – but on one important proviso: that it comes from below and thus avoids "legitimizing totalitarian political violence as the expression of a thanatological political spirituality of martyrdom."¹⁵ For, this *lowly beyond* – disenchanted and thus no longer implicated in

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally. The Last Interview*, trans. Pascal-Anne Brault (New York: Melville House, 2011), 51.

¹² The idea that the pro-democratic transformations of early modernity are rooted in the rediscovery of mortality and finitude and the waning of middle ages' belief in eternal absolutes – the experience of death as simultaneously a threat of destruction and a promise of radical equality, as well as a trigger of the "violent affirmation of survival" – is well confirmed by Hägglund's interpretation of Derrida's "democracy to come": "If one desires democracy, *one cannot desire a state of being that is exempt from time*. To desire democracy is by definition to desire something temporal, since democracy must remain open to its own alteration in order to be democratic": Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism. Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 204-5; emphasis added.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 44. In *Death Penalty*, Derrida turns against Blanchot, whom he otherwise admired, by calling his idea of the "right to death" (explained in "Literature and the Right to Death" in *The Work of Fire*) reactionary and his writings done under the thanatic auspices a *literaterror*: "No one has the right to a private life any longer, everything is public, and the most guilty man is the suspect, the one who has a secret, who keeps a thought, an intimacy to himself alone. And, finally, no one has a right to his life any longer, to his actually separate and physically distinct existence. This is the meaning of Terror. Every citizen has a right to death, so to speak: death is not a sentence passed on him, it is the essence of his right; he is not suppressed as guilty, but *he needs death so that he can proclaim himself a citizenDeath Penalty*, 117; 115; emphasis added.

¹⁵ Bradley, *Unbearable Life*, 138.

the sublime spiritual ritual – gives a subject a chance to escape the sovereign verdict from above, which defines who's alive and who's dead within the sphere of the social immanence:

Why must the revolutionary assume *the sovereign position of a dead man*? Is it a 'totalitarian' reversal of means and ends, the sacrifice of human life to the absolute idea, the pathos-laden dream of world-purifying divine violence? Or can we offer a more "positive" (or at least less clichéd, complacent, or triumphantly moralizing) reading of this thanatopolitical imaginary? [...] What if the absent cause – the missing "why" – that enables the man in revolt to prefer the risk of death to life in servitude is that *he is already dead*?¹⁶

The sober *deja-mort* which Bradley wants to defend is not a sublime hyper-consciousness of the Hegelian Master who, in the instant of his death, becomes deified and thus capable of unleashing divine violence upon the corrupt world. The dead-already of the lowest and most despised constitutes the reverse of their absolute loss due to which they have *nothing* to lose anymore:

If the bullet that kills a Zapatista kills no one, in other words, it is because they have turned their very weakness into a new locus of political strength: they become unkillable, indestructible, incorruptible precisely because they have nothing to live for because they have already lost everything because they are already dead. In the struggle of the nonexistent Subcomandante Marcos, Robespierre's politics of the already dead still live – and die.¹⁷

This proviso, however, seems very hard to keep, and Bradley honestly admits it: the sovereign beyond which positions itself over the land of the living, and the subversive beyond which makes itself immune to the sovereign decision constantly swap places in the vertiginous oscillation between the Beast and the Sovereign (as analysed by Derrida in his last seminars¹⁸). The Beast of today – a revolutionary excluded from the democratic order of the "mere life" – can always become a new Sovereign of tomorrow, who will use his former subversive beyond to legitimise his future position in power. Alexandre Kojève explicitly recommends such reversal: the revolutionary symbiosis with death, which goes beyond the bourgeois "attachment to life," should be transformed into a new sovereignty taking the form of a permanent revolution and the rule of terror.¹⁹ Robespierre is just one case here, even

¹⁶ Bradley, *Unbearable Life*, 136.

¹⁷ Bradley, *Unbearable Life*, 140.

¹⁸ See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1 &2, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009/2011).

¹⁹ In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève repeats now and again that the true realization of human life as *human* "is not possible without a Fight, without a social war, without the risk of life. This is true for reasons that are in some sense 'metaphysical'." The Slave, therefore, if he is to emancipate himself from the condition of slavery, "must become a Warrior – that is, he must introduce death into his existence, by consciously and voluntarily risking his life, while knowing that he is mortal [...] It is in the Terror that the

if the paradigmatic one: an ascetic marginal figure, disgusted with the bourgeois worldly hedonism of those who take pleasure from the act of living (hence Danton, and not the aristocrats, is for him the main enemy of the people), eventually turning into a powerful priest of a new transcendental order based on the desire of “more-than-life.” Exactly the same can be said of Gyorgy Lukacs, once an aspiring Jesuit who simply changed his ecclesiastical vocation – from the Catholic to the Communist Church; indeed, his famous declaration of joining the latter explicitly invokes the state of dead-already as, in Derridean terms, immunisation against the seductions of the world and an absolute determination to pursue the cause, at all costs, no matter what.²⁰ Or Felix Dzierżyński, another convert from Catholicism, who founded the Soviet Bezpieka (Secret Service) – the perfect instrument of the permanent rule of terror, as advocated by Kojève. Or, why not, Stalin himself, who left the Orthodox seminar in order to join the forces of revolution against the “corruption of the West.” Or, on the other side of the ideological barricade, all the right-wing rebels against the democratic *status quo*: from the Spanish Frankists with their slogan, *viva la muerte!* – to Mr Jarosław Kaczyński and his ominous declaration when he seized power in Poland six years ago after the catastrophe of the presidential plane: “From now on, I am already dead, like my twin brother” (who died in it). Always the same model: the sublime pristine dead-already to this world, a thanatic sublimation of the Hegelian Master and his “right to death,” versus the “mere life” of the despised biological process which keeps the bourgeois Slave in its thrall. And always the same persistence of the theological framework which denigrates finite life *a priori* as a “mere survival” and, *nolens volens*, reinstates the sublime “spirituality of martyrdom.” The fact that martyrdom, even if coming from below, cannot escape sublime connotations, is perfectly demonstrated by Žižek in his thanatopolitical appropriation of St Paul:

Insofar as “death” and “life” designate for Saint Paul two existential (subjective) positions, not “objective” facts, we are fully justified in raising the old Pauline question: *who is really alive today?* What if we are “really alive” only if and when we engage ourselves with an excessive intensity which puts us beyond “mere life”? What if, when we focus on mere survival, even if it is qualified as “having a good time,” what we ultimately lose is life itself? What if the Palestinian suicide bomber

State is born in which the ‘satisfaction’ is attained”: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ Assembled by Raymond Queneau*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 69.

²⁰ Lukacs’s praise of death in his early “Metaphysics of Tragedy” (1914) already prepares his future leap into the Communist thanatopolitics: “Real life is always unreal, always impossible, in the midst of empirical life [...] One has to deny life in order to live”: Georg Lukacs, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), 153; emphasis added.

on the point of blowing himself (and others) up is, in an emphatic sense, “more alive” than the American soldier engaged in a war in front of a computer screen hundreds of miles away from the enemy, or a New York yuppie jogging along the Hudson river in order to keep his body in shape?²¹

I am afraid that pace Arthur Bradley’s hope in the possibility of avoiding errors and distortions in “this thanatopolitical imaginary,” Žižek is painfully right (being at the same time terribly wrong): the already-dead men (even if they falsely imagine themselves as more alive than all the sheer bread-eaters) are as cruel and indifferent to others, as they are to themselves. They cannot represent any *real* people, who, in their ordinary lives, usually feel that they have a lot to lose, not just their chains of servitude – so they eventually turn against the people as their first and foremost enemy. There is something very deceptive, perhaps even patronising, in claiming that the victims of unjust social orders have *nothing* to lose, so they are already dead (Montaigne constantly reminds us that even in the midst of the worse misery people are still attached to life and unwilling to lose it). The contempt for those clinging to even most miserable form of survival, therefore, is not a distortion, it is the very essence of the *deja-mort* position. Whether it is a priest demanding sacrifice for the sake of the divine sovereign or a revolutionary who first sacrifices himself in order to impose the glorious “right to death” on others, the pattern remains the same: Orthodoxy and Revolution shake hands.

Arthur Bradley, himself a great Derridean scholar, avoids confrontation with Derrida in *Unbearable Life* – for the reasons which now should become clear. The whole of Derrida’s late oeuvre, especially the last seminars, the *Death Penalty* as well as *The Beast and the Sovereign*, is devoted to the thorough deconstruction of the “thanatopolitical imaginary” which may, on a surface, seem nobly subversive towards the hegemony of liberal democracy, while in fact it harbours an incurable infatuation with the most archaic model of sovereign power (which Bradley duly notices, while referring to Derrida’s critique of Blanchot as a reactionary type of a revolutionary, yet does not pursue this objection any further²²). And, as I have already indicated, the Derridean patron and precursor in this deconstructive enterprise is Montaigne: the first thinker to resist the denigration of sheer survival and made it a *thema regium* of his *Essays* which are precisely the “attempts” to rethink the idea of *survie* as a positive content of *vita nuova* that will eventually begin to dictate different politics, beyond the

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 94.

²² “According to Derrida, Blanchot’s essay belongs to a long tradition of ‘right-wing’ philosophy in support of the death penalty”: Bradley, *Unbearable Life*, 138.

deadlock of sovereignty and martyrology. For Derrida, Montaigne is the beginning of a truly subversive political solution: not anti-modern, but *hyper-modern*, demanding further advancements into modernity and pressing towards a true “democracy to come” in which the vertical transport towards the beyond of “more-than-life” will have been blocked for good, whether to the sovereign above or to the *homo sacer*’s below. The goal of this true – Marrano, non-reactionary subversion – would be to expel the last traces of the thanatic sovereignty to which “anyone who wants to live, to survive, to cling to their animal existence, becomes suspect,”²³ and turn those previously suspect, guilty, shadowy, and “beastly” *voyous* into new citizens of the horizontal space of survivors: “*Khora* of the political.” Thus, while Robespierre, extolled by Blanchot, states in his speech condemning Deputy Philippe Briez, a survivor of the Siege of Valenciennes, precisely because he dared to survive – “I would have wanted to share the fate of those brave defenders who preferred an honourable death to a shameful capitulation”²⁴ – the Marrano Derrida replies, after Montaigne: you, Robespierre and the likes of you, are just one of those “energetically pursuing death with a real passion [...] with a fierce, burning hunger to seize upon the first death which presented itself with a radiant nimbus of honour.”

By siding with the Marranos, Derrida daringly opposes the whole sublimatory tradition, indelibly marked with the contempt for sheer *conatus*, the simple drive of life to preserve itself, which, non incidentally, became elevated into a philosophical concept for the first time by Spinoza, himself a descendant of the Iberian *conversos*.²⁵ This reflexive elevation of *survie* constitutes the gist of Derrida’s *Marrano politics* which subverts the fundamental tendency of the Western thought, both religious and philosophical, to denigrate survival as a merely biological – lowest – process unworthy of any symbolic investment, reduced to the “stupid self-contended life-rhythm” and an “imbecilic particularity of one’s immediate existence.”²⁶ Slavoj Žižek’s succinct definition of human subjectivity – “I am precisely *not* my body: the Self can only arise against the

²³Ibid., *Unbearable Life*, 134.

²⁴ Quot. in Bradley, *Unbearable Life*, 134-5.

²⁵ On the centrality of Marrano survival for Spinoza’s ethics based on the notion of *conatus*, see the great commentary of Edward Feld: “Spinoza sees the effort to survive to be the fundamental energy pushing the universe through time. Surely this view – seeing survival itself as the essential motivating force of all activity and especially descriptive of human behavior – represents a translation of the Marrano experience to universal dimensions. Life under the Inquisition meant that one’s daily concern as a Marrano centered on the question of survival. One had given up one’s religious practice, and outward manifestation of Judaism in order to continue to live in the land of one’s birth. Spinoza understands the instinct for survival as the central principle around which we construct even our ethics, and it is clear that this principle is derived from the central experience of Marrano life”: Edward Feld, “Spinoza the Jew,” *Modern Judaism* 9, no. 1 (Feb., 1989): 101–19, 115.

²⁶ “Every authentic revolutionary has to assume this attitude of thoroughly abstracting from, despising even, the imbecilic particularity of one’s immediate existence”: Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Robespierre, or the ‘Divine Violence’ of Terror,” in *Maximilien Robespierre, Virtue and Terror* (London: Verso, 2007), xviii.

background of the death of its substantial being”²⁷ – could thus serve as an epitome of the sublimatory sacrificial logic – used by both, the Schmittian Right in its defense of the Sovereign and the Hegelian Left in its apology of the Revolutionary – against which Derrida’s Marrano politics protests the loudest. In his last interview, *Learning to Live Finally*, Derrida dispels all the claims that deconstruction locates itself on the side of death – be it the Heideggerian *Sein-zum-Tode* or the glorious death of *pereat vita, sed fiat iustitia*, advocated by the Incorruptibles of all traditions – and in the spirit of the universal Marranism declares that:

We are structurally survivors [...] Everything I say [...] about survival as a complication of the opposition life/death proceeds in me from an unconditional affirmation of life. This surviving is [...] the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and thus surviving to death, because *survival is not simply that which remains but the most intense life possible.*²⁸

The Marrano politics, therefore, would be “life-affirming,” but not in the vein of those thinkers who require of life to transcend the bare necessities of survival (from Adorno to Esposito): it would say yes to life in a very down-to-earth manner, by reclaiming the filthy stupid mere living-on as a basic value which cannot ever be denigrated or discarded from above as *unlebenswertig*.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 905.

²⁸ Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, 51-52; emphasis added.