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“The Cultural Heritage of Eurafrican Sephardi Jews in Suriname”

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THE JEWS IN THE CARIBBEAN



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CHAPTER TEN

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF EURAFRICAN SEPHARDI JEWS IN SURINAME

AVIVA BEN-UR

Introduction

Earlier scholars and researchers have argued that Caribbean Jewish society generally discouraged the conversion of people of African origins to Judaism and that the number of Eurafrian Jews, whether enslaved or free, was either nil or negligible.¹ However, ongoing archival research is steadily disproving these assertions for Suriname. Most recently, Natalie Zemon Davis has ascertained that the Surinamese physician, *philosophe*, and diplomat David Cohen Nassy (1747–1806) circumcised at least three of his mulatto slaves (Moses, Ishmael, and Isaac) and instructed them in the Jewish religion.² My own research shows that Nassy's infirm daughter Sara owned at least one Jewish slave, who appears in the records in 1790 as the manumitted mulattress Simha de Pina.³ Judging from his last name, the mulatto Joseph de David Cohen Nassy, accused of convening an illegal Eurafrian Jewish prayer gathering that same year, may have been the illicit son of David Cohen Nassy.⁴ Whether the senior Nassy's tendency to convert his slaves to Judaism was representative of Surinamese Jews in general or was symptomatic of local elite privilege remains to be explored. What may be said with certainty is

¹ Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004), 224; Nicolaas Hendrik Swellengrebel and Edwin van der Kuyp, *Health of White Settlers in Surinam* (Amsterdam, 1940), 31; *Surinaamsche almanak voor het jaar 1821* (Paramaribo, Suriname, 1821), 30.

² Natalie Zemon Davis, 'David Nassy's "Furlough" and the Slave Mattheus', in Pamela S. Nadell, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Jonathan Sussman (eds.), *New Essays in American Jewish History: To Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the American Jewish Archives Journal and the 10th Anniversary of the American Jewish Archives under the Direction of Dr. Gary P. Zola* (New York, 2010), 85.

³ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (Minutes of the Mahamad) (25 Aug. 1790), Nationaal Archief Nederland (NAN), Nederland-Portugees-Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname (NPIGS) 3. This example and the one in n. 4 are extracted from a database of enslaved and manumitted Eurafrian Jews I am currently compiling based, at this stage of my research, on a exhaustive study of the Minutes of the Mahamad until 1863.

⁴ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (21 Apr. 1790), NAN, NPIGS 2. Joseph de David Cohen Nassy may have been the husband of Pumba d'Avilar, who inherited and served as executor of his estate (Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (17 Sept. 1790), NAN, NPIGS 3).

that many—and probably most—cases of conversion of slaves to Judaism remain buried in the archives. Most importantly, arguments that seek to minimize the size of Suriname's Eurafrican Jewish population disregard alternative forms of communal membership. The autonomy of Suriname's Jews and their unprecedented New World environment allowed for the development of conversion practices and communal inclusion that often defied halakhah.

This chapter explores the religious and cultural identities of a number of enslaved and manumitted Eurafrican Jews who lived in or on the fringes of Suriname's Jewish community. Once their existence and sometimes liminal status as Jews have been verified, we can begin to ask thematic, substantive questions. Why is it valuable to study this group? What can they tell us about the Jewish community that members of the mainstream Jewish community cannot? What can they tell us about other slaves and free people that members of these populations cannot? It is too early to answer these broad questions diachronically for the whole of Suriname's Eurafrican Jewish population. But some headway can be made by focusing on a few dozen Jewish Eurafricans who lived in the Dutch colony over the course of the eighteenth century. Appraising the religious and cultural heritage of Eurafrican Jews is a start to answering some of these questions.

Culture is an evanescent concept, here defined as the tastes, attitudes, and manners of a social group, transmitted through generations, and manifested in language, name-giving practices, religion, and ancestral consciousness. As free-floating as culture may be, its concrete components tie it down to meaningful and assessable data. Culture, so defined, is a useful concept for understanding identity.⁵ A methodological parallel is found in Michael Gomez's treatment of ethnic identity among slaves of the southern USA. In his attempt to identify Muslim (or Muslim-influenced) slaves in North America, Gomez applied similar criteria, including names (which sometimes appeared in Anglicized form, such as Hammett for Hamid) and religious practices (for example, turning eastwards for prayer).⁶ Finally, David Biale has urged scholars to replace the concept of 'Judaism' with 'Jewish culture', because, among other reasons, the former focuses on one component of Jewish civilization, while the latter considers them all together.⁷ This paradigm makes particular sense for Suriname, where Jewishness was an ethno-religious, rather than a religious, identity.

⁵ For the challenges of defining and identifying culture, see Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago, 2001); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); William H. Sewell Jr., 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), 35–61. I would like to thank Amy Schalet for these sources.

⁶ Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), esp. ch. 4. As the latter example suggests, not all cultural manifestations are exclusive to a particular ethno-religious group. Culturally ambiguous traits (ambiguous because they are shared by more than one group), therefore, cannot serve as definite examples.

⁷ David Biale, 'Confessions of an Historian of Jewish Culture', *Jewish Social Studies*, NS 1/1 (1994), 40–51.

Tracking Eurafrican Jews: The Sources

There are three major sources for identifying Eurafrican Jews and their cultural orientations: burial grounds, conventional archival documents, and oral testimony (including genealogical research carried out by their descendants).

Jews in early modern Suriname established four cemeteries, two located inland, near or within the riverside settlement of Jodensavanne, and two in the capital city of Paramaribo. As recently demonstrated, these cemeteries reserved a section, usually situated along one of the fences, for Eurafrican Jews.⁸ Thanks to the surviving stones and archival descriptions of their location, the names and some biographical details of dozens of Eurafrican Jews have been preserved. One example is the individuals known to be buried in the Jodensavanne cemetery. Their identity and the whereabouts of their remains were verified through a combination of on-site research and burial records. Next to each other in the extreme north-east corner of the cemetery, from north-west to south-east, were buried: Miriam Nassy;⁹ Luna, daughter of David Haim del Monte;¹⁰ Abigail, daughter of the mestiza Simha de Meza;¹¹ the mulatto Ismahel Judeo;¹² the mulatto Matatia de Robles;¹³ Moses Rodrigues del Prado;¹⁴ Jacob Peregrino, a 'negro', 'molato', or 'karboeger';¹⁵ Joseph Pelengrino;¹⁶ the 'mulattresses' Simha¹⁷ and her

(43); id. (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York, 2002). The Eurafricans mentioned here obviously also embodied Creole or African cultures. The evidence I have amassed in this direction goes beyond the parameters of this chapter and will be discussed in my book on Eurafrican Jews in Suriname. On the historiographical trend towards exploring cultural mutuality in the Atlantic world, see Tobias Green, 'Equal Partners? Proselytising by Africans and Jews in the 17th Century Atlantic Diaspora', *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*, 12/1 (2008), 1–12, esp. the sources on p. 2.

⁸ Epitaphs of Jacob Peregrino (J [Jodensavanne cemetery] 460, d. 1750); Joseph Pelengrino (J461, d. 1751); Joseph, son of Gabriel de Mattos (J462, d. 1751), in Aviva Ben-Ur and Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *The Jewish Cemeteries of Suriname: Epitaphs* (Cincinnati, 2009), 277; Aviva Ben-Ur with Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. ii: *The Jewish Cemeteries and Synagogues of Suriname: Essays* (Cincinnati, 2012), 66.

⁹ Mirjam Nassy (*congreganta*) (d. 15 Sept. 1811), Register van begravenen op de kerkhoven van de Savanne (Register of graves in the cemetery of the Savanna) (1777–1833), NAN, NPIGS 423, p. 37.

¹⁰ Luna fa. de Dd. Hm del Monte (*congregante*) (d. 21 Sept. 1816), *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹ Hua Criatura Abigail fa d[illeg.] Simha de Meza [illeg.] (d. 13 Feb. 1788), *ibid.*, p. 14; Simha de Meza is identified as a 'mustiça' in the entry for Miriam Nassy.

¹² Ismahel Judeo (*molato congregante*) (d. 1 Dec. 1791), *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ Matha. de Robles (*molato congregante*) (d. 2 Nov 1793), *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Mosseh Rodrigues del Prado (*congregante*) (d. 3 Oct. 1797), *ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Epitaph of Jacob Peregrino (J460, d. 1750), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 277 (Hebrew and Portuguese); Wieke Vink, *Creole Jews: Negotiating Community in Colonial Surinam* (Leiden, 2010), 225; Jean Jacques Vrij to Aviva Ben-Ur (15 Aug. 2003), without archival attribution.

¹⁶ Epitaph of Joseph Pelengrino (J461, d. 1751), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 277 (Portuguese).

¹⁷ 'Hua molata livre chamada Simha . . . que foy escrava de Jos. Gabay Farro' (d. 1 May 1791), Register van begravenen op de kerkhoven van de Savanne (1777–1833), NAN, NPIGS 423, p. 19.

sister Jahel,¹⁸ both former slaves of Joseph Gabay Farro and both formally manumitted in 1767,¹⁹ and Joseph, son of Gabriel de Mattos.²⁰

Data from the cemetery provide in shorthand what the archival documents describe more fully. These documents, housed in the Dutch National Archives in The Hague, represent the richest and least mined source of information about Eurafrican Jews. The two major collections that inform the present chapter consist of records maintained by the Surinamese Jewish community and those kept by the colonial government.²¹ A collation of these sources suggests that by the second half of the eighteenth century, there were around 100 Jewish Eurafricans in each generation.²² References to Eurafrican Jews are scattered, usually unpredictably, throughout these records. Their identification, therefore, involves the careful scanning of each surviving will and court case, every page of communal minutes, and marriage, birth, and death records. They are recorded most often in Dutch and Portuguese, but Spanish, Hebrew, and French also make appearances.

Genealogical data collated by descendants of Eurafrican Jews and their extended families are crucial to the historian. Marriage patterns and family formation among Suriname's Eurafrican populations are exceedingly complex, and ancestry is often traceable or verifiable only through oral traditions combined with genealogical research. Family researchers and professional historians thus share the quest for information, and the resulting knowledge is the fruit of that relationship.²³

Names

As the Eurafrican section of the Jodensavanne cemetery illustrates, the first and last names of Eurafrican Jews, whether born enslaved or free, were usually Portuguese Jewish or Hebrew. Typically, first names were drawn from the Hebrew Bible and were usually no different from those bestowed upon legally white Jews. Luna, Abigail, Moses, or Joseph would not be identifiable as Eurafricans had they not been buried in the 'coloured' section of the Jodensavanne cemetery.

¹⁸ 'Hua molata livre, chamada Jahel, q foy escrava de Jos. Gabay Farro' (d. 19 June 1791), Register van begravenen op de kerkhoven van de Savanne (1777–1833), NAN, NPIGS 423, p. 19.

¹⁹ Three other Eurafricans are buried in unspecified parts of the cemetery: Jahacob Garcia (*congregante*), his brother Isaac (*ibid.*, p. 41), and 'hum morito, fo. De Ishak Naar Meza' (*ibid.*, p. 49). Many other Jews lie in the Eurafrican row, as the burial register attests, but I have not yet ascertained their social status. For the manumission document of Jael and Simha, see the undated will of Joseph Gabay Farro (NAN, NPIGS, microfilm reel 67a, n. 785, n.p. (following the 1767 will of Moses C. Nassy and Sarah Rodrigues Monsanto, p. 89)).

²⁰ Joseph de g[illeg.] de Mattos (n.d.), *ibid.*, p. 25; epitaph of Joseph, son of Gabriel de Mattos (J461, d. 1751), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 277 (Portuguese).

²¹ In this chapter I refer especially to NAN, Suriname Oud Notarieel Archief (SONA) and NAN, NPIGS.

²² Aviva Ben-Ur, 'A Matriarchal Matter: Slavery, Conversion, and Upward Mobility in Colonial Suriname', in Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800* (Baltimore, 2009), 152–69, 270–9, 161.

²³ I would like to thank Wadily Wijnhard for sharing with me information about his Surinamese ancestors.

However, a few Eurafrican Jews bore distinctive forenames. Of these, the most common for females was Simha, meaning 'happiness' in Hebrew. Simha is especially peculiar since it is not used as a personal name in the Bible. The name is not unique to early modern Suriname: it was also found among Jewish women living in eighteenth-century Amsterdam.²⁴ But in Suriname it appears to have been given exclusively to Eurafrican Jewish females. Only 10 per cent of the personal names recorded in the Hebrew Bible are female, and this paucity probably played a role in stimulating the invention of personal names for Jewish females. Moreover, there must have been a desire on the part of Suriname's Jewish ruling elite to distinguish between legally white and legally black or Eurafrican Jews. Those who bestowed the name Simha in Suriname must have understood its meaning. Perhaps 'joy' was ironically ascribed to a baby born into bondage, or perhaps calling a slave the Hebrew equivalent of 'happiness' underscored the sentiments of the master or mistress who wished to stress the bounty and gladness that slave labour could bring the owner.²⁵

In terms of frequency, the male counterpart of Simha among Surinamese Jews seems to have been Ismael or Ismahel, the name of Abraham's son through his concubine Hagar. Ismael was understood to be the progenitor of the Muslims and highlighted both the patrilineality of the child's Jewish descent and the status of the mother as a non-Jewish, subservient concubine. As we shall see, the name Ismael was sometimes coupled with the middle name Abraham, the first patriarch of the Jewish people. Simha and Ismael are among the earliest names in Surinamese Jewish culture representing a break from Portuguese Jewish tradition, where name-giving practices were strictly enshrined. Generally, the firstborn son was named after his paternal grandfather, the second after his maternal grandfather, and subsequent sons named after either great-uncles or great-grandfathers.²⁶ A similar rule applied to daughters and their senior female relatives. This meant that, among white Portuguese Jews, perhaps a dozen names, the vast majority biblical, were recycled until the late eighteenth century, when non-biblical names increasingly became a norm. Simha and Ismael, the two most

²⁴ Simcha, daughter of Israel Gompert, year of birth unknown, registered 1724, married Asser Levie; Simcha, daughter of Jonas, b. 1720, married Abraham Sacutto, registered 1742 (Dave Verdooner and Harmen Snel, *Trouwen in Mokum: Jewish Marriage in Amsterdam, 1598–1811*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1992), ii, 185, 194. Simcha was also a female name in the Ottoman Jewish community (see José M. Estrugo, *Los Sefardies* (Seville, 1958; repr. 2002), 56) and Iraq (see Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew* (Jerusalem, 2007), 158). In contemporary Ashkenazi communities it is typically a male name.

²⁵ This latter is a tentative idea inspired by Hagar Salamon's ethnographic research, carried out in the 1980s and 1990s, showing that Ethiopian polytheists converted by their Beta Israel masters were ceremoniously given names denoting gratitude to God for bestowing a gift, or joy at having a slave to work in the owner's place (Hagar Salamon, 'Slavery among the "Beta-Israel" in Ethiopia', *Slavery and Abolition*, 15/1 (April 1994), 87).

²⁶ Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London, 2000), 284.

common, distinctively Eurafrican Jewish names, set their bearers apart from mainstream Portuguese Jews even as they connected them to the broader Sephardi community.

Eurafricans with only a slight connection to Jewishness are a different matter. Some of their names, like those of non-Jewish slaves of non-Jewish masters, were drawn from Greek and Latin antiquity, Christian Europe, or Creole traditions. A small-scale, systematic survey of name-giving practices in Suriname's eighteenth-century Jewish community illuminates this trend. The survey examined the names of testators and legatees in all available wills filed by the colonial government between 1716 and 1805,²⁷ and found twenty-one testators who were either Eurafrican Jews or who had some connection to Judaism, as suggested by their contribution to a synagogue or their possession of Jewish names and close relatives who were Jews. About half of them had what were at that time conventional Portuguese Jewish names (Abigail, Blanka, Daniel, Dina, Gabriel, Hana, Joseph, and Sipora).²⁸ Two with distinctive Eurafrican Jewish forenames were Ismael and Simcha. Others, especially those with slight connections to the Jewish community, bore names that were either European Christian or Creole (Ammerentie, five Marias or Mariannas, Diana, Jaberie, Isabelle, and Loco).

Eurafrican Jews also possessed bynames, which were only coincidentally and intermittently recorded in archival sources. Whether or not all Eurafrican Jews had bynames (and how many they possessed) remains conjectural. These unofficial nicknames tended to be of Surinamese Creole rather than West African origin. One example is a housemaid belonging to her own aunt, the Eurafrican Jew Roza Judia (1705–71),²⁹ alias Roza Mendes Meza. The housemaid's official name, Ajaja, was Creole, and her byname, Luna, was Portuguese Jewish.³⁰

By comparison, the personal names inscribed in Suriname's rural Jewish cemeteries (Cassipora Creek and Jodensavanne), where most decedents were not, presumably, of African origin, are overwhelmingly biblical, running the gamut from Aaron to Solomon and Abigail to Yael.³¹ In the Cassipora Creek cemetery, whose stones date

²⁷ NAN, SONA. When I began my examination of these wills in 2002, the following eight registers were not available to the public: 1, 2 (before 1716), 10 (1729–32), 16–27 (1736–40), 33 (1763–5), 47–53 (1781–5), 71 (1794–5).

²⁸ However, Siporah, the name of Moses's wife, may be a distinctly Eurafrican Jewish name in Suriname, since she is described in the Torah as a 'Cushite' (Ethiopian) (Num. 12: 1), and Surinamese Jews may have been influenced by a variety of medieval Jewish exegetes, who identify her as 'dark' or 'black' (see Abraham Melamed, *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture: A History of the Other* (London, 2003), 176–8, 187, 191. It is also possible that Dina is a distinctly Eurafrican Jewish name, since I have not identified any who were white.

²⁹ The year of her birth is based on my conjecture that she was Moses da Costa's son (will of Isaac, son of Moses da Costa (8 May 1725), NAN, SONA 13, p. 245).

³⁰ Book of inventories, NAN, SONA 234, pp. 442–3.

³¹ Separate interment of Eurafrican Jews in the Jewish cemeteries at Cassipora Creek, Jodensavanne, and the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo was officially abolished in 1820 (Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen) (Minutes of the Mahamad (*parnasim*) and the Junta (*parnasim* and elders)) (30 Oct. 1820), NAN, NPIGS 11, p. 13). In the Ashkenazi community, a Eurafrican section existed since at least 1775 (Wink, 'Creole Jews', 157, 166–7).

from 1666 to 1873, no men and only five women (5 per cent) have vernacular names. Even these vernacular names, Luna and Branca or Blanca, are Portuguese and Spanish translations of Levanah, a Hebrew name meaning 'moon' or 'white'. Among males, David is the most popular name (17 per cent), followed by Isaac (15 per cent), Jacob (13 per cent), Samuel (12 per cent), Abraham (12 per cent), and Joseph (11 per cent). Among women, Sarah is the most popular (22 per cent), followed by Esther (16 per cent), Rachel (16 per cent), Abigail (15 per cent), and Rebecca (12 per cent). At the Jodensavanne cemetery, where ledgers date from 1685 to 1873, Abraham is the most popular among males (19 per cent), while among female decedents the most commonly recorded names are Rachel (10 per cent), Rebecca (9 per cent), and Sarah (8 per cent). Only females bear non-Jewish names (a fraction of 1 per cent). While some of these vernacular names are again translations of Hebrew words (Gracia for Hannah, Reina for Malkah, Blanka for Levanah), and were recognizably and distinctively Jewish, others have no early modern counterpart (Roza, Bemvenida, Mariana).³²

In the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo (where stones date from 1734 to 1904), non-Jewish forenames are more prevalent, reflecting a cultural shift beginning in the late eighteenth century. Three non-Jewish names for males are recorded: Rudolph, Isam Isam, and Samuel George. Non-Jewish female names occur in greater variety, though they are still rare (4.5 per cent): the more traditional Gracia, Luna, Reyna, and Blanca are joined by the uncompromisingly non-Jewish Anna (possibly a vernacular interpretation of Hanna), Selly, Violeta, Roza, Rosette, Esperane (possibly an error for Esperance), Sol, Clara, Louisa, Josephine, Mariana, Julia, and Maria Elisabeth Sophia, most likely a convert. By the second half of the nineteenth century, names had become a completely unpredictable gauge of communal membership, as evidenced by Adjuba Sara Wolff (1877) and Hendrick Christiaan Nassy (1890).³³

The predilection for the forenames Abraham and Sarah, regarded in rabbinical tradition as the first patriarch and matriarch of the Jewish people and, loosely, as the first Jews, was reinforced by a legacy of formal conversion to Judaism by both New Christians returning to their ancestral religion and slaves or former slaves. In the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, the names Abraham and Sarah suggest the shedding of a crypto-Jewish identity for a professing Jewish one and may indicate the Iberian peninsula as the birthplace of the deceased.³⁴ Abraham Gabay Izidro, who married Sara Oxeda and served as Suriname's *hakham* in the 1730s and who

³² Marianna was sometimes used as an equivalent of Miriam.

³³ Ongeïventariseerd archief van de Nederlands Portugees Israëlitische gemeente te Suriname (Uninventoried archives of the Dutch Portuguese Israelite community in Suriname), NAN, NPIGS 537. For a discussion of names in the early modern Jewish communities of the Caribbean, largely based on cemetery epitaphs and plantation inventories that enumerate slaves, see Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, 332–48.

³⁴ This trend is also evident in New York's oldest Jewish burial site (see David de Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682–1831* (New York, 1952), 196).

had fled Spain and returned to Judaism in London, is one example.³⁵ These names may have also held special appeal for manumitted slaves who embraced Judaism either during slavery or after their liberation. One possible example is Sarah Roldão, a Jewish slave (*escrava Judia*) who died in 1822 and was buried in the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo.³⁶ From the late eighteenth century onwards the names Abraham and Sarah appear to have become more common among free Eurafrikan Jews.³⁷

Languages

From its colonial beginnings, Suriname was a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual colony. Dutch people did not form a majority of the European population until the nineteenth century.³⁸ Besides the Ashkenazi and Portuguese Jewish communities, the colony's white population included non-Jews of British, Dutch, French Huguenot, and German descent. The vast majority of Suriname's population (96 per cent by the late eighteenth century) were both enslaved and of African origin.³⁹ Ewe was the major West African language spoken by slaves brought to Suriname,⁴⁰ but African languages ultimately gave way to Creoles, particularly Sranan Tongo, which was an autonomous language by the mid-eighteenth century,⁴¹ spoken by the majority native-born enslaved population.⁴² Sranan Tongo was variously, and probably polemically, known as the 'Negro English Language' or 'Negro English Speech' and very rarely, if ever, appears in wills or communal records.⁴³ Documents in the municipal archives are typically recorded in

³⁵ Abraham Gabay Izidro, *Sermon predicado neste K.K. de T.T. por Ribi Abraham Gabay Izidro. En Sabat Vaikrà en R.H. Nisán del Año 5484 En Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1724), 9–11; Cecil Roth, 'The Remarkable Career of Haham Abraham Gabay Izidro', *The Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions*, 24 (1974), 211–13.

³⁶ Registro mortuorio (Register of deaths), NAN, NPIGS 418, p. 113.

³⁷ See e.g. Abraham, son of Hana de Prado (d. 20 Oct. 1794); Abraham del Castilho (d. 29 May 1806); Abraham Abenacar (d. 3 July 1812); Abraham Haim, son of Hana Marcus Samson (d. 9 Sept. 1820); Isaac, son of Sarah Rodriguez del Prado (d. 14 Aug. 1800); Solomon de la Parra, son of Sarah Rodriguez del Prado (d. 3 Nov. 1799); Sarah, widow of Isaac Nunes Ferro (d. 18 Oct. 1785); Sarah d'Oliveira (d. 17 Aug. 1811); Sarah de Vries, daughter of Ribca Henriquez (d. 7 Sept. 1813); and Sarah, wife of Isaac de la Parra Junior (d. 3 Mar. 1822) (*Alfabetische staat van overledenen* (Alphabetical record of deaths) (1777–1812), NAN, NPIGS 418, pp. 3, 5–7, 55, 89, 95, 98–99, 113).

³⁸ Jacques Arends, 'The History of the Surinamese Creoles I: A Sociohistorical Survey', in Eithne B. Carlin and Jacques Arends (eds.), *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname* (Leiden, 2002), 115–30.

³⁹ Aviva Ben-Uri, 'Peripheral Inclusion: Communal Belonging in Suriname's Sephardic Community', in Alexandra Cuffel and Brian Britt (eds.), *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World* (New York, 2007), 186.

⁴⁰ Jacques Arends, 'Young Languages, Old Texts: Early Documents in the Surinamese Creoles', in Carlin and Arends (eds.), *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*, 193.

⁴¹ Arends, 'The History of the Surinamese Creoles I', 124–5.

⁴² Arends, 'Young Languages, Old Texts', 204; Norval Smith, 'The History of Surinamese Creoles II: Origin and Differentiation', in Carlin and Arends (eds.), *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*, 132.

⁴³ The terms are *negerder gelschtie*, *Neger Engelsche Taal*, and *Neger Engelsche Spraak* (see will of the free Diana van Adam (1788), NAN, SONA 59, pp. 154–6).

Dutch, with a few, such as wills, in English, French, and German. Colonial government records refer to Dutch as either the 'Lower German language' or as 'Hollandish'.⁴⁴ Records of the Portuguese Jewish community appear in Portuguese and, more rarely, in Spanish and Hebrew, while the Ashkenazi community favoured Dutch.

The main language of Sephardi Jews was called simply 'the Portuguese language'. In one case, the phrase 'the Portuguese Jewish language'⁴⁵ appears, either reflecting a colonial equation of Jews with early modern Portuguese or suggesting a Jewish dialect of Portuguese developed in Suriname. A distinctive Portuguese spoken by Sephardi Jews and heavily influenced by early modern Spanish seems to have been common among western Sephardim in their lands of exile. One scholar, who observed this dialect on the epitaphs of New York's western Sephardim, called it a 'Spaniolic mixture'.⁴⁶ Isaac Samuel Emmanuel, who documented the Sephardi epitaphs of Curaçao, concluded that the Portuguese spoken by the island's Jews was 'far from being pure', being substantially mixed with Spanish.⁴⁷ In the oldest New Christian cemetery of southern France, most epitaphs are in Spanish, but a number bear traces of Portuguese.⁴⁸

The overwhelming majority of Iberian New Christians who settled in the New World were of Lusitanian origin.⁴⁹ In Suriname, Portuguese was the dominant language among Sephardi Jews in both rural areas and the capital city well into the nineteenth century. This is readily apparent in Suriname's Sephardi cemeteries. In the two rainforest burial sites (Cassipora Creek and Jodensavanne), Portuguese appears on about three quarters of all tombstones, most of which date to the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ At the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo nearly 60 per cent of epitaphs include Portuguese.⁵¹ Portuguese epitaphs in Suriname's Sephardi cemeteries began to peter out in the 1840s and had almost entirely disappeared by the 1870s.

⁴⁴ The terms are *neederduitsche taal* and *Hollandsche* (see wills of the free Ammerentie van Hartog Jacobs (1 Nov. 1799), NAN, SONA 76, will no. 29; the free Amimba van Casper (14 Aug. 1799), *ibid.*, will no. 10).

⁴⁵ The terms are *de Portugeesche taal* and *Portugeesche Joodsche taal* (see will of Sarah Nahar, separated from Isaac Lopes Telles (24 Jan. 1803), NAN, SONA 82, p. 10).

⁴⁶ De Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 167; David de Sola Pool, 'The Use of Portuguese and Spanish in the Historic Shearith Israel Congregation in New York', in Izaak A. Langnas and Barton Sholod (eds.), *Studies in Honor of M. J. Benardete (Essays in Hispanic and Sephardic Culture)* (New York, 1965), 360.

⁴⁷ Isaac S. Emmanuel, 'El Portugues [sic] en la Sinagoga "Mikve Israel" de Curaçao', *A Treasury of the Jews of Spain: Towards a Study of the History of the Jews of Spain and Their Culture* [Otsar yehudei sefarad: leheker toledot yehudei sefarad vetarbutam], 1 (1959), 31.

⁴⁸ Gérard Nahon, 'Inscriptions funéraires Hébraïques et Juives a Bidache Labastide-Clairance (Basses-Pyrénées) et Peyrehorade (Landes): Rapport de mission', *Revue des Études Juives*, 127 (1968), 351.

⁴⁹ Nathan Wachtel, 'Marrano Religiosity in Hispanic America in the Seventeenth Century', in Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering (eds.), *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450–1800* (New York, 2001), 149–71: 150.

⁵⁰ 75.5 and 72.3 per cent respectively (Ben-Ur with Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. ii: *Essays*, 37 n. 160).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Precisely 58.7 per cent of the stones contain Portuguese.

But epitaph language, particularly when carved on stones, may be the result of linguistic prestige rather than a reflection of the deceased's fluency. A more convincing way to gauge the extent of spoken language is by considering legal and communal documents, where the mode of communication was practical rather than aesthetic. Wills and communal records suggest that perhaps the majority of Suriname's Sephardim spoke or at least understood Portuguese until the early 1800s. Of nearly 200 wills filed by Jews and dating from 1716 to 1805, the bulk (some 54 per cent) were written in Dutch, however Portuguese was the next language in terms of frequency (29 per cent). The content of these wills clearly indicates that for many Portuguese Jews—both men and women—Portuguese was their strongest or only language. Abraham Gabay Izidro (b. 1736) recorded his last will in Portuguese on his deathbed in 1785.⁵² Rebecca Jessurun (née de Pina, 1742), required a Portuguese translator when she and her husband, Aron Jessurun, wrote a joint will in 1777.⁵³ In 1780 Esther Baruh Louzada (b. 1760) claimed to know Portuguese, but not Dutch. Although her husband (b. 1751) knew Dutch, he nevertheless wrote a joint will with her in Portuguese.⁵⁴ The wills suggest that it was not solely or mainly Jewish women who preserved Portuguese as their strongest language. Rachel (1766–1803), wife of Isaac Fernandes Junior, required a Portuguese interpreter when she wrote her will in 1801 at the age of nearly 37.⁵⁵ But Joseph del Castilho, born around 1779, also recorded his will in Portuguese in 1802, two years before his death at the age of 25.⁵⁶ Several others wrote their wills in Portuguese around the end of the century, including Mordachai Fernandes in 1801.⁵⁷ Other Jews requiring a Portuguese interpreter around that time were Joshua de Abraham Hisquia Arrias, who was living at Jodensavanne in 1801,⁵⁸ and Sarah Nahar in 1803.⁵⁹ Even at the end of the century, there was a new generation of Portuguese-speaking testators, albeit much smaller than earlier ones. Judith Jessurun Lobo, probably in her late teens or early

⁵² Will of Abraham Gabay Izidro (23 Nov. 1785), NAN, SONA 55, p. 20.

⁵³ Will of Aaron Jessurun and Rebecca Jessurun, née Pinto (18 Feb. 1777), NAN, SONA 66; epitaph of Rebecca Jessurun (J372, d. 1812), in Ben-Uri and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 245 (Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁵⁴ Will of Joseph Hayim Baruh Louzada and Esther Jessurun (24 Nov. 1780), NAN, SONA 62, p. 459; epitaphs of Esther Jessurun, widow of Joseph Hayim Baruh Louzada, and Joseph Hayim Baruh Louzada (OS [old Sephardi cemetery] 191, d. 1813; OS571, d. 1789), in Ben-Uri and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 333, 436 (both in Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁵⁵ Will of Isaac Fernandes Junior and Rachel Gabay Fonseca (11 Mar. 1801), NAN, SONA 79, will no. 30; epitaph of Rachel, wife of Isaac Fernandes Junior (OS127, d. 1803), in Ben-Uri and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 317 (Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁵⁶ Will of Joseph del Castilho (27 Dec. 1802), NAN, SONA 84, will no. 6; epitaph of Joseph del Castilho (OS646, d. 1804), in Ben-Uri and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 456 (Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁵⁷ Will of Mordachai Fernandes (19 Nov. 1801), NAN, SONA 80, will no. 58.

⁵⁸ Will of Joshua de Abraham Hisquia Arrias (18 Dec. 1801), NAN, SONA 80, will no. 73.

⁵⁹ Will of Sarah Nahar, separated from Isaac Lopes Telles (24 Jan. 1803), NAN, SONA 82, will no. 10.

twenties, required an interpreter when she wrote her will in 1801. Her husband, David Jessurun Lobo Junior, son of Joseph Abarbanel, had died in 1800 at the age of 20.⁶⁰

The death knell for 'Jewish Portuguese' came in 1837, when the colony's Mahamad decided to abandon Portuguese as the official language of communal minutes.⁶¹ This pattern of use and decline closely parallels what transpired in Curaçao, whose Jewish population numerically rivalled that of Suriname during the last half of the eighteenth century. On Curaçao, Portuguese was the dominant language among the Sephardim until the mid-nineteenth century, when it ceded to Dutch. The last rabbi to preach there and correspond in Portuguese, Aron Mendes Chumaceiro, served from 1856 to 1868, and the last Portuguese epitaph in the old cemetery dates to 1865.⁶²

Throughout the generations, a small minority of Suriname's Jews spoke Spanish as their only or strongest language. Their linguistic preference (or the literary prestige of the language) is faintly reflected in death monuments: less than 10 per cent of epitaphs in the three oldest burial grounds (Cassipora Creek, Jodensavanne, and the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo) are recorded in Spanish.⁶³ Samuel Cohen Nassy, the founder of Suriname's Sephardi community, composed his military journal in Spanish while serving as a captain during the French attack on Suriname in 1689.⁶⁴ The presence of Hispanophone Jews was important enough to merit notice in mid-eighteenth-century *ascamot*, the earliest complete copy that survives. There, they are acknowledged as a component of the Sephardi community.⁶⁵ As late as 1788, David Cohen Nassy still identified his community's native languages as both Portuguese and Spanish.⁶⁶ Around the same time Suriname's Jewish communities included several official translators of Dutch, French, Portuguese, as well as Spanish.⁶⁷ Literary interest, if not ability, in these languages was partly influenced by Nassy, who in 1785 established a college of literature, Docendo Docemur (We are Taught by Teaching). There, students of both Christian and Jewish backgrounds would gather in the evenings to study a variety of topics, including literature. The languages of discourse included French and Dutch, and, in

⁶⁰ Will of Judith Jessurun Lobo, widow of David Jessurun Lobo Junior (9 Mar. 1801), NAN, SONA 79, will no. 29; epitaph of David Jessurun Lobo Junior (OS544, d. 1 June 1800), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. 1: *Epitaphs*, 426 (Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁶¹ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen) (Minutes of the Mahamad (*parnasim*) and the Junta (*parnasim* and elders)), (15 Nov. 1837), NAN, NPIGS 13.

⁶² Emmanuel, 'El Portugues [*sic*] en la Sinagoga "Mikve Israel" de Curaçao', 25.

⁶³ Spanish appears on less than 1 per cent of tombstones in the cemeteries of Cassipora and Jodensavanne, and on only 6.8 per cent of those found in the old Sephardi cemetery of Paramaribo.

⁶⁴ David Cohen Nassy, *Essai historique sur la colonie de Surinam* (Paramaribo, 1788; repr. Amsterdam, 1968), pt. 1, 50.

⁶⁵ *Ascamot* (1754), tractate 25, article 1, NAN, NPIGS 105.

⁶⁶ 'Elle [notre langue] est la Portugaise & l'Espagnole' (Nassy, *Essai historique*, pt. 1, p. vii); 'La langue qu'on parle généralement dans le pays, est la Hollandoise, & parmi les Juifs Portugais on y ajoute la Portugaise & l'Espagnole' (*ibid.*, pt. 2, 82).

⁶⁷ *Surinaamsche Almanach op het jaar onzes heere jesu christi anno 1789* (Paramaribo, 1789), 13.

deference to Sephardim ignorant of these tongues, also Spanish and Portuguese.⁶⁸ Like Portuguese, Spanish was to endure into the nineteenth century. When Esther de Leon (née Monsanto, 1770–1817) died at the age of nearly 47 years, she required a Spanish interpreter. Her gravestone bears a Hebrew biblical verse, followed by a Spanish epitaph, including a poem.⁶⁹ Sarah d'Anavia (née de Miranda, 1750–1803) also required a Spanish interpreter. For unknown reasons, her epitaph bears a Hebrew caption with a Portuguese, rather than Spanish, text.⁷⁰

Finally, a tiny minority of Sephardi Jews spoke English or French as their primary language. Some Francophone Jews may have originated in the New Christian settlements of France (such as Bayonne), which may help to explain the single Surinamese Jewish epitaph in French.⁷¹ Anglophone Jews may have arrived in the colony when it briefly came under British rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Among them may have been Luna Robles de Medina, née Monsanto (1746–1842), who died at the age of 96 and required an English interpreter to read her final will, which was recorded in Dutch.⁷²

By contrast, Ashkenazi Jews generally recorded their wills with the municipal authorities in Dutch, not Yiddish. The similarity of Yiddish and the other Germanic dialects they spoke to Dutch may partly explain why they so easily adapted to the colony's official vernacular. There are also indications that recent Ashkenazi immigrants to Suriname could understand Dutch even if they could not write it. Joseph Jacob Levy, whose siblings still lived in his native Bohemia, is one such example. The clerk recorded

⁶⁸ Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1991), 99, 101.

⁶⁹ Will of Abraham de Leon and Esther Nunes Monsanto (15 Feb. 1803), NAN, SONA 82, will no. 19; epitaph of Esther Monsanto, wife of Abraham de Leon (OS61, d. 1817), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 299.

⁷⁰ Will of Sarah de Miranda, wife of Emanuel d'Anavia (4 Apr. 1803), NAN, SONA 82, will no. 34; epitaph of Sarah de Miranda (OS52, d. 1803), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 295.

⁷¹ One author surmises that Jewish immigration from Bayonne to Suriname partially explains the 'surprising linguistic choice' of the author of the *Essai historique* (see Gérard Nahon, 'The Portuguese Jewish Nation of Saint-Esprit-Lès-Bayonne: The American Dimension', in Bernardini and Fiering (eds), *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West*, 262). However, only one tombstone bears a French epitaph (David Gabriel d'Anavia (OS610, d. 1781), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 447), and the only epitaph that mentions Bayonne is in Spanish (Abraham, son of Isaac Valery (OS554, d. 1803), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 431). David Cohen Nassy also wrote a political treatise and a medical tract in French, by no means unusual for an Enlightenment figure (see David Cohen Nassy, *Mémoire sur les moyens d'améliorer la colonie de Surinam* (Philadelphia, 1795); id., *Observations sur la cause, la nature, et le traitement de la maladie epidémique, qui regne a Philadelphia*, a bilingual work translated as *Observations on the Cause, Nature, and Treatment of the Epidemic Disorder, Prevalent in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1793)).

⁷² Will of Isaac Robles de Medina and Luna Robles de Medina, née Monsanto (10 Dec. 1790), NAN, SONA 64, p. 347 (only she needed an English translation); epitaph of Luna, widow of Isaac Robles de Medina (OS280, d. 1842), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 355 (Dutch). For the three Anglophone epitaphs, see Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 662.

Levy's last will in 1798 in Dutch, which the testator could understand. But Levy signed his name in Hebrew, the only alphabet he knew how to write.⁷³

Most Eurafrican Jews who filed wills favoured European languages. The four examples of Portuguese-speaking Eurafrican Jews who recorded their testaments are Hana Pelengrino, Daniel Pelengrino (probably her brother), the free mulattress Maria or Mariana del Prado, who was not in full command of Dutch, and Simcha Judia, all of whom wrote their wills in the 1780s and 1790s. Other Eurafrican Jews, or non-Jews whose close relatives were Eurafrican Jews, spoke Dutch and did not need a 'Negro English' translator, unlike most of their Eurafrican contemporaries. One of these Jews, Mariana van Musaphia, raised her children in the Dutch Reform religion.⁷⁴ Another, Abigail Abenacar, despite being illiterate, was in full command of Dutch when she filed her three wills, the last in 1803.⁷⁵ Only Simcha Pinto, who left a nominal bequest to the Eurafrican Jewish society Darhe Jessarim, spoke Negro English and no Dutch.⁷⁶ This evidence would seem to contradict the findings of historian Wieke Vink, who has argued that by the last quarter of the eighteenth century most of the colony's Jews were Sranan Tongo speakers.⁷⁷ As no systematic survey is cited, this statement is probably an inference based on the handful of examples cited in her study, but the implication is that Eurafrican Jews would have been in the vanguard of a linguistic shift from Portuguese (or Spanish) to Sranan Tongo. In fact, in my systematic survey of eighteenth-century wills, a narrow majority of Eurafrican Jews preferred either Dutch or Portuguese. In other words, Dutch and Portuguese were the strongest languages among precisely those Jews whom one might expect to be most creolized: Eurafricans.⁷⁸ The Pelegrinos, Maria del Prado, and Simcha Judia may have been exceptional in their Portuguese fluency, but, as the survey has shown, it is incorrect to assume

⁷³ Will of Joseph Jacob Levy (26 July 1798), NAN, SONA 75, p. 51.

⁷⁴ Will of Marianna van Musaphia (27 Sept. 1788), NAN, SONA 60, pp. 135–40.

⁷⁵ Will of Abigail Abenacar (Eurafrican Jew) (22 Oct. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, no. 190.

⁷⁶ Will of Simcha Pinto (17 Dec. 1790), NAN, SONA 64, pp. 376–7.

⁷⁷ Vink, *Creole Jews*, 63–4.

⁷⁸ The following six Eurafrican Jews or Eurafricans with some connections to the Jewish community filed their wills in Dutch: the free mulattress Dina Mussaphia or Musafia (17 Nov. 1780), NAN, SONA 44, pp. 237–9 (14 Aug. 1787), NAN, SONA 58, pp. 205–9; Gabriel Davilar (possibly the byname of Gabriel Judeu) (29 July 1788), NAN, SONA 60, pp. 42–3; Marianna van Musaphia (closely related to Eurafrican Sephardim) (27 Sept. 1788), NAN, SONA 60, pp. 135–40; Abraham Ismael Judeo (14 Mar. 1780), NAN, SONA 61, pp. 297–308; the free Isabelle van Polak (with perhaps familial Portuguese Jewish connections) (18 Nov. 1790), NAN, SONA 64, pp. 338–42; the free Abigael Abenacar (19 Aug. 1779), NAN, SONA 42, p. 307 (4 May 1792), NAN, SONA 67, p. 25 (22 Oct. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, p. 190. The following four filed their wills in Portuguese: Hana Pelengrino (23 Feb. 1786), NAN, SONA 57, p. 148; the free mulattress Maria or Mariana del Prado (not in full command of Dutch) (12 June 1787), NAN, SONA 57, p. 463; Daniel Pelengrino (17 Nov. 1787), NAN, SONA 58, p. 497; Simcha Judia (10 May 1790), NAN, SONA 75, p. 39. The following nine or ten filed in Sranan Tongo: the free Mariana van D'acosta (name and charitable bequest suggest Jewish identity) (21 June 1787), NAN, SONA 57, p. 430 (1 Nov. 1788), NAN, SONA 60, p. 224; the free Diana van Adam (apparent links to Jewish community or identity) (1788), NAN, SONA 59, pp. 154–6; the free Loco van de Britto (name and charitable bequest suggest Jewish identity) (28 Oct. 1789), NAN, SONA 62, p. 351; Sipora van Mercado (name and some social networks suggest

that all or most Eurafrican or white Jews spoke Sranan Tongo during the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. In fact, only 6 per cent of all wills studied in this survey were filed in that language.

Of course, one might argue that Jewish Eurafricans (and, for that matter, whites) wealthy and informed enough to leave their last wishes in writing were a select group with a tendency towards fluency in one or more European languages. For Eurafricans generally, especially former slaves, the use of a European language may have been a badge of pride and incontrovertible evidence of their association with white society (and, in some cases, their white Sephardi fathers). That is indeed my impression of a great number of wills filed by freed non-Jews fluent enough in Dutch not to require a Sranan Tongo interpreter.⁷⁹ But coupled with the earlier discussion of Dutch and Portuguese use among the colony's Jews, there is persuasive evidence that Surinamese Jews, whether Eurafrican or not, were generally slow to creolize. This does not necessarily mean that Portuguese Jews—Jewish Eurafricans included—were ignorant of Sranan Tongo. In fact, it may point to the possibility of bi- or multi-lingualism, since a polyglot testator might prefer to claim fluency in a prestigious language (Dutch, Portuguese, or Spanish) rather than Sranan Tongo. Modern sociologists claim that in multicultural environments, natal language is central to identity formation.⁸⁰ The foregoing discussion suggests that Eurafrican Jews may have grown up hearing more than one language spoken in their homes and communities. This may mean that ethnic identification through language use was a matter of option rather than a foregone conclusion.

The linguistic complexities of Suriname's Jewish community have not yet been fully appreciated. What defines Jewish languages as opposed to languages used by Jews, where these languages were spoken, and the importance of hard data to document the actual extent of language use are vital matters ignored by some scholars who have attempted linguistic analyses of Suriname's population. For example, a fairly recent volume on the dissemination of Atlantic Creoles includes various assertions

Jewish identity) (5 Feb. 1790), NAN, SONA 63, pp. 77–80; Simcha Pinto (17 Dec. 1790), NAN, SONA 64, pp. 376–7; the free Blanka van Abigael de Britto (name and charitable bequest suggest Jewish identity) (15 Apr. 1786), NAN, SONA 68, p. 10; the free Jaberie van Polak (connections to both the Ashkenazi and Portuguese Jewish communities) (27 Oct. 1799), NAN, SONA 76, p. 27; the free Ammerentie van Hartog Jacobs (Ashkenazi Eurafrican Jew) (1 Nov. 1799), NAN, SONA 76, p. 29; possibly Judith Carrilho de Mattos, who filed with her Dutch-speaking husband David Pereyra but was not completely fluent in Dutch (3 June 1800), NAN, SONA 77, p. 40; the free mulattress Marianna Pinto (26 May 1803), NAN, SONA 82, p. 58.

⁷⁹ See e.g. the free Frans van India (15 Nov. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, p. 240; the free Simon Petrus Adam van de weduwe van de Lande (15 Nov. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, p. 248; the free Joseph Hendrik van Schuyt (15 Nov. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, p. 252; the free Cornelis van [the free] Dafina van Rocheteau (16 Nov. 1803), NAN, SONA 83, p. 292.

⁸⁰ Raymond L. M. Lee, 'The Paradox of Belonging: Sino-Indian Marginality in Malaysia', *Ethnic Groups*, 8 (1990), 119–21.

that Ladino was spoken among Suriname's Jews.⁸¹ Nowhere in the collected articles is Ladino defined, and it is probable that the authors were unaware that Ladino was the vernacular of Ottoman Sephardim, not of Iberian Jews who remained in the western hemisphere and therefore continued to speak the Portuguese and Spanish vernaculars of the Iberian peninsula.⁸² Moreover, none of the discussions of Jewish languages are based on systematic surveys of actual language use as verifiable through, for example, epitaphs, wills, and communal minutes.⁸³ The importance of such surveys for Jewish history is self-evident. However, systematic surveys may also have implications for the origins of Surinamese Creole languages, which contain Portuguese and sometimes Hebrew vocabulary. The enduring vitality of Portuguese among Suriname's Jews—especially Eurafricans—may help to explain the survival of Portuguese in these Creole languages (an estimated 4 per cent of Sranan Tongo and 35 per cent of Saramaccan).⁸⁴

Conversion to Judaism

The earliest known case of a Surinamese master officially converting his children to Judaism is Isaac da Costa (d. 1734),⁸⁵ owner of the Wayenrebo plantation on the Caxewinica (Cassewinica) Creek, just north-east of Jodensavanne. With an unnamed mother (or mothers), he produced Roza (1705–71),⁸⁶ Ismael (1707–91),⁸⁷ Simha (1716–98),⁸⁸ David (b. 1719), and Hana (b. 1721). A 'muleca' (young black girl) named Aquariba, daughter of his late 'negress, Assiba', was also probably his child. In his 1725 will, recorded in Spanish, da Costa declared that all six merited manumission by virtue of being 'born in my house and from my female slaves, and [by virtue of] the good service and loyalty that I had from their mothers, and [by virtue of] the inclination of said mulattoes to be observant of our Holy Law and having received it willingly and with love'. The males had already been circumcised and the females ritually immersed according to the Jewish rite.⁸⁹ The locution of the will ('inclination', 'received it willingly') suggests that, at least from their master's point of view, these enslaved chil-

⁸¹ Magnus Huber and Mikael Parkvall (eds.), *Spreading the Word: The Issue of Diffusion Among the Atlantic Creoles* (London, 1999).

⁸² On languages among western and eastern Sephardi Jews, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, 'Castilian, Portuguese, Ladino: The Non-Hebrew Literatures of Sephardi Jewry' (Heb.), in Tsvi Ankori (ed.), *From Then Until Now* [Me'az ve'ad atah] (Tel Aviv, 1984), 35–53.

⁸³ Huber and Parkvall, *Spreading the Word*.

⁸⁴ Statistics from Arends, 'The History of the Surinamese Creoles I', 115–130, 118.

⁸⁵ Epitaph of Isaac da Costa (J387, d. 1734), in Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. i: *Epitaphs*, 251 (Hebrew and Portuguese).

⁸⁶ The year of her death is recorded in the inventory of her possessions (1771), NAN, SONA 234, pp. 442–3.

⁸⁷ Grave register of Ismahel Judeo (*molato congregante*) (d. 1 Dec. 1791), Registro dos Sepultados no Beth-ahaim na Povoação da Savana, do k:k: B:V:S: (Register of Graves in the Cemetery in the Village of the Savanne of the Holy Congregation Beraha Vesalom), NAN, NPIGS 423, p. 19.

⁸⁸ Official reading of Simha Judia's will (31 Oct. 1798), NAN, SONA 75, p. 39.

⁸⁹ Will of Issac, son of Moses da Costa (8 May 1725), NAN, SONA 13, p. 245.

dren possessed some degree of agency; that is, if they did not initiate the conversion process, they theoretically had the prerogative to reject or accept it.

Da Costa seems to have been at odds with the Surinamese Mahamad the year he wrote his will. His request for the customary prayer to be recited in the synagogue eleven months after his death for the spiritual elevation of his soul was accompanied by an elaborate justification. He reminded the board that he was a veteran regent of Jodensavanne's Mahamad and thus entitled to such a post-mortem honour, as were other former *jehidim* and benefactors. Moreover, he had also been a *jahid* and benefactor much earlier than most veteran members of the congregation.⁹⁰ This apologetic approach was unusual, since all it took to secure such an honour was a charitable contribution, and da Costa had already offered the considerable sum of 200 guilders. Why would da Costa have felt compelled to remind the Portuguese Jewish regents of his veteran status? In forming a Jewish family, he had broken no laws. Neither Portuguese Jewish communal ordinances nor colonial decrees prohibited white males from procreating with enslaved women. Furthermore, the Jewish community recognized converted Eurafrican children as Jews, albeit of a lower status (they were *congregantes* as opposed to *jehidim*). Perhaps da Costa, legally married to his childless first cousin, had violated a rule of decorum by publicly recognizing the paternity of his enslaved children and bequeathing the bulk of his property to his progeny. If my hunch is correct, flaunting the conversion and manumission of enslaved children and treating them as rightful heirs was seen as scandalous in 1725.

A similar case was that of Joseph Pelegrino, a Jew of ambiguous ancestry, who in 1720 petitioned the Surinamese authorities to recognize the manumission of his children. (The family name appears as Peregrino, Perengrino, Pelegrino, and Pelengrino.) Simha, Jacob, and Mariana, he declared, were all conceived outside legal marriage and had all been converted to the Jewish religion through the Portuguese rabbinical teacher (*leraar*). Moreover, these children had been properly manumitted according to the rules of the Jewish 'nation'. What prompted the senior Pelegrino to approach the government was his concern that their status and right to inheritance would not be accepted outside Jewish circles, whose laws were sometimes at variance with those of the Dutch colonial government. The court granted Pelegrino's request, declaring these children 'free of all slavery' and legitimized as his true descendants.⁹¹

While this petition and Jewish communal sources lack references to the racial status of Joseph Pelegrino,⁹² the legal position of his descendants suggest that he was either a mulatto or a black. According to historian Jean Jacque Vrij, Joseph's son Jacob was clas-

⁹⁰ NAN, SONA 13, p. 245

⁹¹ Ben-Ur, 'A Matriarchal Matter'; ead., 'Peripheral Inclusion'.

⁹² When he pledged a nominal sum to the Beraha Vesalom Synagogue in 1690, his racial status was also unspecified (Bijlagen tot de notulen van mahamad en Junta: Mem das promesas que Prometeraõ os Sres nomeados Abaixo (Appendices of the minutes of the Mahamad and the Junta: Memorandum of pledges promised by the below-mentioned people) (1690), NAN, NPIGS 25).

sified as a *karboeger* (a child of a mulatto and a black) and his grandson Daniel Pelegrino as a negro.⁹³ My own search for Jacob Pelegrino's racial status has proven largely unfruitful, since the Jewish birth records do not mention it.⁹⁴ However, Jacob Peregrino was laid to rest in the *congregante* row of the Jodensavanne cemetery in 1750, as we have seen, confirming his second-class position in Suriname's Jewish community. Moreover, Eurafrican Jewish activists in the 1790s remembered Joseph Pelegrino's son Jacob Pelen-grino as a *karboeger* who 'enjoyed similar rights and privileges' to full members of the Jewish congregation.⁹⁵

It is not now possible to reconstruct Joseph Pelegrino's family tree. But his last name—unusual in Suriname—and the naming patterns in his family suggest a New Christian ancestor who had settled on Africa's west coast during the previous century. The story begins with Jacob Peregrino (or Pelegrino), alias Jerónimo Rodrigues Freire, a Portuguese New Christian born in the Portuguese town of Tancos. Peregrino laboured in his native town as a farmer before moving to Lisbon, where he became a salesman. At some point thereafter, he fled to Amsterdam, where he publicly embraced his ancestral faith. His wife also escaped the peninsula for the United Provinces, where she died. In 1611 the widowed Peregrino once again took up the pilgrim's staff, departing for Joal, on the Petite Côte in present-day Senegal.⁹⁶ Peregrino intended to combine mercantile goals with religious endeavours. When he departed for the Guinean coast he took not only merchandise for trading,⁹⁷ but also a Torah scroll, twelve Bibles, and circumcision tools.⁹⁸ Amsterdam's Portuguese Jewish authorities had allegedly dispatched Peregrino to serve as 'the rabbi' (religious teacher) in Guinea's burgeoning New Christian communities, concentrated in Joal and Porto de Ale. His son Manuel Peregrino subsequently followed and functioned as the community's ritual slaughterer.⁹⁹ Father and son joined a group of New Christians and reconverted Jews, entirely male or nearly so, who had already settled there, trading iron for ivory, wax, and gold.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Jean Jacques Vrij to Aviva Ben-Ur (15 Aug. 2003), without archival attribution.

⁹⁴ In 1732 the birth of Jacob's daughter Hana was recorded in the birth register, but her racial classification is not mentioned ('Hana fa de Jb Pelengrino' (21 Apr. 1732), NAN, Oud Archief Burgerlijke Stand (OABS) 44, p. 27). Two years later, Jacob sired a son named Gabriel, oddly listed in the girls' column, with no circumciser mentioned ('Gabriel f[il]h]o de Jacob Pelengrino' (21 Jan. 1734), NAN, OABS 44, p. 25). The following year, the birth and circumcision register records the arrival of Daniel, son of Jacob Perengrino, but omits any mention of racial classification ('Daniel fo. De Jb. Perengrino', circumcised by David Mendes (20 Oct. 1735), NAN, OABS 44, p. 6). The silences regarding racial status seem to suggest upward mobility at that time.

⁹⁵ Vink, *Creole Jews*, 225.

⁹⁶ Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, 'Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities on Senegal's Petite Côte', *History in Africa*, 31 (2004), 238; Tobias Green, 'Further Considerations on the Sephardim of the Petite Côte', *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), 172.

⁹⁷ Green, 'Further Considerations on the Sephardim of the Petite Côte', 172.

⁹⁸ Mark and Horta, 'Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities', 240–2, 247.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 247.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 245–6.

About a generation before Peregrino's arrival, some Jewish traders on the western African coast had chosen as their consorts and mothers of their children native-born women, either daughters of local political leaders or affluent merchants. This practice was widespread among immigrant men in the area.¹⁰¹ As we have seen, Jacob Peregrino had already married and procreated in Portugal. But one of his sons, Manuel Pelegrino, reportedly engaged in sexual intercourse with the daughter of the king of the Wolofs.¹⁰² Whether or not they produced children is unknown, but other inter-cultural couples definitely did. Around 1612 the Jewish communities of Joal and Porto de Ale counted among their members four mulattoes, three of whom were 'identified by their Portuguese city of origin'.¹⁰³ This suggests that the community determined Jewishness through patrilineal descent and that some New Christians regularly returned to Europe with their new families. The year before, one Portuguese Jew, a native of Zeeland, related that he had overheard three blacks standing in front of the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, lamenting the conversion of their African companion to Judaism.¹⁰⁴ Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, who together unearthed this remarkable material from inquisitorial archives, suggest that such conversions to Judaism 'may have been part of a broader strategy by Dutch Jews to recruit Africans to assist them in their mercantile endeavours on the Guinea coast'.¹⁰⁵

Other sources also point to the continuing presence of Eurafican Jews in both Portugal and the Jewish colony of Brazil, founded around 1630. A 'mulatto New Christian', named Manoel Lopes Seixada and born in Lisbon in the first half of the seventeenth century, converted to Judaism in Pernambuco and married a Jewish woman in Brazil. For a time Seixada was the beadle of Recife's synagogue, which may indicate a second-class status, considering that in Amsterdam this role was frequently assigned to Ashkenazi Jews.¹⁰⁶ Francisco de Faria, an Old Christian mulatto (*amulatado*) with 'woolly hair' converted to Judaism apparently in order to marry his fiancée, a scion of the respected Amsterdam Jewish family Leão. The acceptance by such a highborn family of someone who was both Old Christian and 'mixed race', historian Bruno Feitler surmises, may indicate lack of prejudice in the Recife community. Faria is known to have frequented the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam and signed the registers of Tsur Israel as a *jahid*.¹⁰⁷ One Salomão Pacheco, also described as mixed race (*pardo*), was married to a daughter of Moisés Monsanto by 1646. Whether any of these individuals were once slaves is uncertain. What we do know is that Brazil's Mahamad did its

¹⁰¹ Mark and Horta, 'Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities', 252–3; Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, 'Catholics, Jews, and Muslims in Early Seventeenth-Century Guiné', in Kagan and Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas*, 290.

¹⁰² Green, 'Further Considerations on the Sephardim of the Petite Côte', 177.

¹⁰³ Mark and Horta, 'Catholics, Jews, and Muslims', 290.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 292.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 293.

¹⁰⁶ Bruno Feitler, *Inquisition, juifs et nouveaux-chrétiens au Brésil: Le Nordeste XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Leuven, 2003), 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

best to prevent the existence of Jewish slaves. The 1648 *ascamot* of Tsur Israel forbade the conversion of male slaves to Judaism, but implicitly allowed their conversion after manumission.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, a Surinamese ordinance of 1662–3 prohibited ‘any *jahid*, under pain of excommunication, to circumcise the sons of those demoted from *jahid* status’. This ordinance discouraged the circumcision of what we may assume were ‘coloured’ sons, though it does not indicate their status as free or enslaved. It is also unclear from this ordinance what act the *jahid* might have committed in order to be demoted. A later source, an *ascama* from the mid-eighteenth century, cited marriage with a Eurafrican Jew as grounds for such a demotion. But for such a marriage to take place, the woman would have had to be both free and Jewish. The ordinances are probably deliberately opaque, in order to mask public secrets. The euphemisms and lack of detail also suggest that racial policies were both dynamic and hotly contested. The ordinances foreshadow an uneven trajectory that sought unsuccessfully to exclude individuals of African ancestry from the Jewish community or ascribe them a second-class status.

Behaviour

The foregoing evidence indicates that conversion was for some individuals a critical rite of passage into the Jewish community. It does not, however, shed light on the cultural and religious experiences of Eurafricans as Jews. Arnold Eisen, a scholar of American Jewish sociology, suggests that Jewishness can be gauged not by stated or implied religious beliefs, but rather actions: ritual, communal, political, and professional. In other words, what Jews did, rather than what they allegedly believed, is most important.¹⁰⁹ Recorded behaviour indicates that Jewish identity among Africans and Eurafricans was not merely a legal status in the community. One example is a ‘Jewish negro’ belonging to a Jew by the last name of de la Parra. This unnamed slave had absconded into the woods in 1759, taking his master’s scroll of Esther. The scroll was found in one of the Maroon huts by a military expedition charged with capturing runaway slaves.¹¹⁰ The master may have been the lieutenant of the Jewish military division, Joseph de Abraham de la Parra, who reported the flight and recapture of runaway slaves.¹¹¹ The slave’s religious identity or formal belonging in the Jewish community are ambiguous. Was he a ‘Joode Neeger’ because he was owned by a Jew? Or had he undergone a circumcision and immersion ritual that accorded him Jewish status or status as the slave of a Jew? Since a biblical scroll was not a practical object to steal or to ensure survival in

¹⁰⁸ *Ascamot* (5409) [1648–49], Stadsarchief Amsterdam (Amsterdam Municipal Archives) 334, 1304. Literally, no slave may ‘be circumcised without first having been freed by his master, so that the master shall not be able to sell him from the moment the slave will have bound himself [to Judaism]’.

¹⁰⁹ Arnold M. Eisen, ‘Rethinking Jewish Modernity’, *Jewish Social Studies*, ns 1 (1994), 18.

¹¹⁰ *Gouvernements Journaal*, 411 (10 Aug. 1759), NAN, Archief West Indie Surinam.

¹¹¹ *Gouvernements Journaal*, 411 (29 Feb. 1756; 27 May 1759), NAN, Archief West Indie Surinam.

the woods, he may have been fully aware of the religious significance of his booty. Given the centrality of the book of Esther to New Christian identity, he may have also realized the sentimental value of biblical scrolls as precious relics passed down through the generations or perhaps he regarded the roll of parchment as a talisman to protect him from capture.

The Jewish holiday of Purim, during which the scroll of Esther is publicly read twice, was a time of raucous, uncontrollable agitation in Suriname. In 1777 the Mahamad complained about the great disorder that always occurred during the ritual recitation of Esther, both in Beraha Vesalom, Jodensavanne's synagogue, and in Sedek Vesalom, the Sephardi house of prayer in Paramaribo. Those present would beat the benches with hammers, clubs, and other hard objects, not only causing damage to the furniture (and hence expense to the community), but also preventing worshippers from hearing the reading of the cantor as required by Jewish law. The Mahamad forbade everyone—including teachers, fathers, and children's tutors—from 'beating Haman' with hard instruments and permitted only clappers or similar implements.¹¹² The tradition of masquerading at Purim was also perceived as a threat by the colonial authorities. Governor General J. F. Friderici prohibited the wearing of masks or costumes or dressing children up in 'strange dress'. This would ensure the 'good order and tranquillity' of the Jews and would also stop the assembly of slaves, commotion in the streets, and 'indecent' by body servants (*moleques*), who circled the masqueraders with shouts and meandered through the streets singing.¹¹³ The agitation was evidently a male phenomenon, tied in with a long tradition of Jewish violence erupting during the festive observance of that holiday.¹¹⁴ Despite the Mahamad's efforts to subdue the festivities, Purim was eagerly anticipated by Surinamese Jews each year. An advertisement for Purim masks in 1793 appeared in November, some four months before the holiday, illustrating Roger Caillois's observation that members of traditional societies lived 'in remembrance of one festival and in expectation of the next'.¹¹⁵

Purim, which celebrates the overturning of a royal decree to wipe out the Jews of ancient Persia, was arguably the most boisterous Jewish holiday. It was especially attractive to judaizing New Christians, who identified with Queen Esther, the young Jewess who deliberately passed as a non-Jew in order to reverse the king's edict and save her people from annihilation. Because most privately owned biblical scrolls were the property of men, it is telling that a number of Surinamese women owned scrolls of Esther. Being both female and of crypto-Jewish ancestry perhaps led them to identify more closely than their male counterparts with the 'closet' Jewess of the Bible. One

¹¹² Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (26 Feb. 1777), NAN, NPIGS 1.

¹¹³ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (28 Feb. 1800), NAN, NPIGS 4.

¹¹⁴ Elliott S. Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, 2006).

¹¹⁵ *Weeklysche Surinaamsche Courant*, 20 (14 Nov. 1793), 6; Roger Caillois, *L'Homme et le sacré* (Paris, 1963), 125; trans in Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edn. (Farnham, Surrey, 2009), 256.

cannot help but speculate about this when considering Sarah de Miranda, wife of Emanuel d'Anavia, who in 1803 left her daughter Rachel a 'meguila or the History of Ahasuerus',¹¹⁶ or the aforementioned Roza Judia, who also owned a scroll of Esther, which is listed in the 1771 inventory of her possessions.¹¹⁷

The 'Jewish negro' who ran away in 1759 may have also prized as his own the historical narrative of his master's scroll. There is indirect evidence suggesting that Jewish identity or practice among slaves owned by the de la Parra clan was not particular to him or his generation. The Creole cemetery in Jodensavanne, where former slaves and their freeborn descendants were interred, preserves several epitaphs from the Wijngaard (or Wijngaarde) family.¹¹⁸ According to Surinamese custom, many manumitted slaves adopted the family name of their former masters or mistresses, but in a translated or otherwise altered form.¹¹⁹ This was encoded in law in 1832, when slaves were forbidden to carry the family name of their owners or any white family in the colony.¹²⁰ Following this tradition or regulation, one branch of the Eurafrian de la Parra clan became Wijngaard, meaning 'vineyard' in Dutch (and a wink at Parra, 'grapevine' in Spanish).¹²¹ Annaatje van la Parra had been owned by Jeosua de la Parra. Her (common-law?) husband, Abraham Garsia Junior, was director of the Rijks Steenspringerij plantation and the De Worsteling Jacob timber estate and is buried in the Jodensavanne cemetery, with a bilingual Hebrew/Portuguese epitaph covering his grave. In 1831 Annaatje gave birth at Jodensavanne to a daughter named Salij Garsia Junior, and in 1860 was buried in the Creole cemetery in Jodensavanne.¹²² Three years

¹¹⁶ Will of Sarah de Miranda, wife of Emanuel d'Anavia (4 Apr. 1803), NAN, SONA 82, will no. 34.

¹¹⁷ Will of the free mulatress Roza Mendes Meza (23 Feb. 1802), NAN, SONA 81, will no. 17.

¹¹⁸ Legible epitaphs from this family identify the following individuals: Annaatje van la Parra (d. 3 Oct. 1860); Abraham Garcia Wijngaarde (1823–1915); Jacobus Jacques Wijngaarde (1854–1943), evidently a Christian, judging from the cross in the first line of his epitaph; F. R. Wijngaarde (1810–88); J. G. Wijngaarde (1821–95); Naatje-E. Wijngaarde (1868–1937); Marius Wijngaarde (1896–1943); Rosalina Helena Selina Wijngaarde Colin (1880–1947); Jachevs H. Wijngaarde (1858–1948); Francina Elizabeth Wijngaarde (1863–[illeg.]); Gertruida Anna Wijngaard (19[illeg.], at the age of 40); Maria A. Wijngaarde, dates of birth and death illegible. Wadily Wijnhard believes that Abraham of [meaning either 'son of' or 'slave of', or both] Jeos. de la Parra, manumitted in 1827, is the aforementioned Abraham Garcia Wijngaarde. Wijnhard located the manumission request in *Surinaamsche Courant* (24 Jan. 1827).

¹¹⁹ See e.g. the will of the free mulatto Joseph Nassy (25 Feb. 1790), which mentions Anna Jacoba Yssan, probably the daughter of the testator and his manumitted concubine (NAN, SONA 63, will no. 98).

¹²⁰ Okke ten Hove and Frank Dragenstein, *Manumissions in Suriname, 1832–1863* (Utrecht, 1997), 62.

¹²¹ Wadily Wijnhard, email to Rachel Frankel (11 Mar. 2010).

¹²² Wijnhard discovered this information in a request for a manumission certificate for Antonia Wijngaard. The request was registered by the widow of Jeosua de la Parra, as heir of her deceased husband (Wadily Wijnhard, emails to Rachel Frankel (11, 13 Mar. 2010)). For Annaatje van la Parra's epitaph, see Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*, vol. 1: *Epitaphs*, 153; for that of Abraham Garcia Junior, see *ibid.* 181 (the correlation of the man buried in Jodensavanne and Annaatje's husband is tentative). See also births and acknowledgements (Paramaribo), NAN 2.10.61, 4, fiche no. 5, fo. 239/2. I thank Wadily Wijnhard for this source. On the Wijngaarde family, see also H. A. Oron, 'No aksi mi fu libi yu: A View on the History of the Congregation "Sivah Darkhey Y'sharim"—the Judeo-Creole Jews of Suriname' (M.A. thesis, Leiden University, 2009).

after her death, Annaatje's four heirs (Judith Grasiana Wijngaard, Abraham Garsia Wijngaard, Elias Garsia Wijngaard, and Salij Garsia Wijngaard) were all living at Joden-savanne.¹²³

The religious or ethnic identities of Annaatje and other decedents buried in the Creole cemetery are unclear, and, as Wieke Vink notes, the Sephardi last names some bear are not definitive indications of Jewish identity.¹²⁴ However, other Eurafricans with similar family names (and first names that suggest conversion to Judaism) were definitely part of Suriname's Sephardi community. One was Abraham van Wyngarde, active in the Portuguese Jewish burial society in the 1790s and a former slave, as indicated by the 'van' in his last name.¹²⁵ Another, Abraham Wyngaarde, purchased a large coffin from the Portuguese Jewish burial society Liviāt Hen in 1803.¹²⁶

Material possessions demonstrate other ways in which Eurafricans identified with Judaism and its rituals. Roza Judia owned several timber estates in the 1760s and 1770s, a few dozen slaves, and real estate in Paramaribo; she also possessed various Hebrew books, a prayer book in Spanish, a Hanukah candelabrum, and a sabbath lamp (in addition to the scroll of Esther mentioned earlier).¹²⁷ Roza Judia's library marks her as the member of an elite not only in her Jewish community, but also in the colony in general. Rosemary Brana-Shute has noted that 'colonial Suriname was a profoundly alliterate society' that placed a 'relatively low value' on literature.¹²⁸ To reinforce her assertion, consider that even among Jews, the proverbial 'people of the book', reading material was rare, or at least rarely passed down in wills. Of several hundred Jewish testaments and codicils passed from 1716 to 1805, only nineteen Jewish legators, most of them Portuguese Jews, mentioned books or sacred scrolls. Roza's library was all the more exceptional given her gender. As a rule, secular and sacred books mentioned in Jewish wills were owned and legated by men to other males. This rule applies equally to Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.

Roza Judia's nephew Abraham (or Abram) Ismael Judeo (d. 1789) also showed a strong European Jewish orientation. A former slave, Abraham could sign his name and had his will recorded in Dutch, rather than Sranan Tongo. In his 1780 will, he clearly

¹²³ Wadily Wijnhard, emails to Rachel Frankel with transcribed documents (11, 13 Mar. 2010). Judith, described as a 'mustice' and a child, was owned by Jeosua de la Parra and manumitted in 1824 (Humphrey Ewald Lamur and Heinrich E. Helstone, *Namen van Vrijgemaakte Slaven, 1816–1827* (Amsterdam, 2002), no. 482).

¹²⁴ Vink, *Creole Jews*, 157–8. Besides variations of de la Parra, one may also observe Lobles, an alteration of Robles, and Cotin, an abbreviation of Cotino.

¹²⁵ Records of freewill offerings (July 1794; 24 Mar. 1797), NAN, NPIGS 439.

¹²⁶ Liviāt Hen account books and receipts (27 May 1803), NAN, NPIGS 440, pp. 5, 10.

¹²⁷ Will of Roza Judia, NAN, SONA 218, p. 625; inventory of Roza Judia (1771), NAN, SONA 234, pp. 442–3; will of the free Abram Ismael Judeo (15 Mar. 1780), NAN, SONA 61, p. 302.

¹²⁸ Rosemary Brana-Shute, 'Legal Resistance to Slavery in Eighteenth Century Suriname', in Gary Brana-Shute (ed.), *Resistance and Rebellion in Suriname: Old and New* (Williamsburg, Va., 1990), 119–36, 132.

stated his desire to be buried in the Jewish fashion, requesting, as did so many white Jewish testators throughout the century, a blue sark stone. Abraham bequeathed the poor of the Dutch Protestant Reform community a perfunctory 5 guilders, with a more symbolic 10 guilders going to the Beraha Vesalom Synagogue of Jodensavanne.¹²⁹

A final example is the free mulattress Maria or Mariana del Prado (alias de Prado), with roots on the Caxewinica Creek. Her family had owned property on the creek since at least 1737, when a plantation belonging to E. R. R. de Prado was listed at 2,300 acres.¹³⁰ Maria owned land near the Quapibo timber estate on the Caxewinica Creek that had, by 1780, been left to her children.¹³¹ When she dictated her will in Paramaribo in 1787, she required a Portuguese interpreter, not being in full command of Dutch. She gave 5 guilders each to the Dutch Protestant Reform and Portuguese Jewish congregations. Although no instructions regarding last rites are indicated, Maria's children all bore Hebrew names: David, Abram, Moses, Hana or Gana, and Ribca. As is typical of Eurafricans in general, Maria named no father in her will, suggesting she bore the children out of wedlock.¹³²

Additional examples, recorded in the minutes of the Portuguese Jewish community, also point to Eurafrican identification with religious Jewishness. In 1783 the 'mulatto Simon Mendes' approached the first *parnas* of the Mahamad with a confession of religious transgression. Having been unaware that it was the first day of the Festival of Shavuot, he had travelled aboard a ship to carry out his work. Realizing that he had violated the holy day, even though inadvertently, he humbly submitted himself before the Jewish governing board for punishment. Given his own initiative in coming forward, his great repentance, and the fact that the infraction was involuntary, the Mahamad sentenced him to fast for five consecutive Thursdays, ordered him to worship three times in the synagogue every sabbath, and, finally, required a donation of 10 guilders to the charity chest. Mendes received the spiritual correction (*tesuba*) very willingly and promised to observe it solemnly and to tend to his obligations better henceforth. It would be tempting to speculate from this that Eurafrican Jews were more isolated from mainstream Judaism than their legally white co-religionists. However, Mendes's profession as some kind of travelling merchant may have been the cause of his calendrical ignorance.¹³³ Religious conscientiousness also prompted David Judeo to seek special permission to shave his beard during the High Holy intermediary days, using a loophole in a seventeenth-century ordinance that forbade hair removal during holiday weeks. In 1788 he was one of seventeen Portuguese Jews on the

¹²⁹ Will of Abraham Ismael Judeo (15 Mar. 1780), NAN, SONA 61, p. 302; death register, Abm. Ismahel Júdeó (*congregante*), died on 'Caxewinica no Plante. Cúpij' (31 May 1789), NAN, NPIGS 420, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Ana Crespo Solana, *América Desde Otra Frontera: La Guayana Holandesa (Surinam), 1680–1795* (Madrid, 2006), 231.

¹³¹ Inventory of the Quapibo plantation (22–3 Jan. 1782), NAN, SONA 790, pp. 17–29.

¹³² Will of the free mulattress Maria de Prado (12 June 1787), NAN, SONA 57, pp. 460–5.

¹³³ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (4 June 1783), NAN, NPIGS 2.

savannah—and the only verifiable Eurafrican—who submitted a physician's notice declaring his medical necessity to shave.¹³⁴

Conclusion: Religious Conversion or Cultural Bequest?

Recent scholarly attention has focused on enslaved and freed people in the Atlantic world and their identification with various denominations of Christianity and Islam.¹³⁵ But little thought has been given to their relationship to what is arguably the world's first monotheistic religion. Suriname should be the first place to explore this question. In no other Caribbean colony is the record of Eurafrican Jews so rich, varied, and long. Even as scholars seek to include Judaism in the recognized array of Atlantic religions embraced by slaves and their manumitted or freeborn descendants, we must contend with the reality that Jewishness among this population in Suriname and perhaps elsewhere more approximated an ethnic, rather than a religious, identity. Herein lie the perils of the term 'Jewish' and its comparison to 'Muslim' and 'Christian'.

All of the foregoing evidence suggests that to assess Jewishness and Jewish identity among Eurafricans by determining their ritual conversion (circumcision and immersion for males, just immersion for females) distorts the picture of what many Jewish slave masters attempted to do when they included slaves in their household and what belonging in a Jewish community may have meant to Eurafricans. Conversion was but a small part of a bequest of an entire culture that included—besides 'religion'—language, name-giving practices, historical consciousness, and identification with the Jewish people, both locally and remotely. This discussion suggests the limits of focusing on conversion as an expression of Jewishness or Jewish identity among Surinamese Eurafricans. The cultural patrimony of Suriname's Jews, whether legally white or Eurafrican, was multidimensional, including, but not limited to, religion. During the second half of the eighteenth century, moreover, it is perhaps more proper to speak of a 'cultural matrimony', since Eurafrican Jews were increasingly not converts, but rather born Jews, often the progeny of a Eurafrican Jewish mother and unnamed father. For all these reasons, we would do better to consider the conversion ritual as just one—and probably not the most central—component of Jewishness and Jewish belonging among Eurafrican Jews.

¹³⁴ Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (18 Oct. 1788), NAN, NPIGS 2. The earliest known use of this loophole is from 1778, when Samuel Uziel D'avilar complained to the Mahamad that his beard caused him sickness and was greatly bothersome; he asked permission to shave it during the High Holy intermediary days (Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad (8 Oct. 1778), NAN, NPIGS 1).

¹³⁵ See e.g. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks*; Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763–1840* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Rebecca's Revival: *Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

Perhaps because of their novelty, a quest for enslaved and manumitted Jews in Suriname is sufficiently interesting in and of itself. These individuals are an anomaly in broader Jewish history and, as Wieke Vink has noted, offer a counter-narrative to the equation of Jews with both whiteness and eliteness.¹³⁶ But far more than a collective 'curiosity', Jewish slaves and their free descendants shed light upon the majority societies in which they lived. After identifying as many Eurafrican Jews as possible, it may be possible to discover the uneven, transgenerational process by which they were rejected or marginalized and then gradually accepted by the mainstream Jewish community as social equals to whites. The means by which this subgroup became integrated and achieved legal equality may tell a larger story about social change in the Caribbean. Their complex ethno-religious identity and the initiatives they took to assert and preserve it also invite scholars to shift the focus from black Atlantic religions to black ethnicities. Jewishness is historically a civilization, not a religion, as the history of Eurafrican Jews constantly reminds us.

¹³⁶ See Vink, *Creole Jews*, 267.

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