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“Peripheral Inclusion: Communal Belonging in Suriname’s Sephardic Community

Aviva Ben-Ur, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



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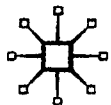
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**RELIGION, GENDER, AND CULTURE
IN THE PRE-MODERN WORLD**

EDITED BY

ALEXANDRA CUFFEL AND BRIAN BRITT

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Chapter 8

Peripheral Inclusion: Communal Belonging in Suriname's Sephardic Community*

Aviva Ben-Ur

The Jews of Suriname in a Dutch Caribbean Context

The first Jews to permanently settle in the Caribbean arrived in the mid-seventeenth century and traced their origins to the Iberian peninsula, where many had lived for centuries as New Christians before reverting to Judaism in centers such as Amsterdam, Bayonne, and London. The place of Jews in colonial Caribbean societies is of particular interest since they were often among the first white settlers. Perhaps nowhere in the region has their impact been more pronounced than in Suriname and Curaçao, the longest-lived and historically largest Jewish communities in the early modern Caribbean.¹

Both communities were established in the 1650s by Sephardim (the Hebrew-derived term for Jews of Portuguese and Spanish origin), peaked at just over 1,000 members in the eighteenth century, comprised one-third of the white population, and survive to this day, albeit in drastically reduced numbers.² Suriname, a former Dutch colony and today an independent republic roughly the size of the U.S. State of Georgia, and Curaçao, an island of 178 square miles that is part of the Netherlands Antilles (an autonomous region of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since 1954), are ideal for a

diachronic exploration of relations between European-origin Jews and non-Jews of African descent in the Caribbean. The vast majority of Suriname's population (96 percent by the late eighteenth century) was both enslaved and of African origin.³ Similarly, 79 percent of Curaçao's population by 1789 traced its roots to Africa.⁴ These factors—demographics and communal longevity—form the context in which the black/Jewish nexus developed from the 1650s to the present day.

Only recently have the role and status of men and women of African descent in Caribbean Jewish communities received serious attention, particularly since Robert Cohen's groundbreaking *Jews in Another Environment* (1991).⁵ This article seeks to fathom the transformation of communal membership and the place of Eurafican progeny in the Jewish settlement of Suriname, with some attention to Curaçao.⁶ In both cases, the linchpin of the early creolization of the colonies' Jews are the mostly nameless women of African descent, at once reviled and desired, who bore children fathered by their masters, setting into motion a Judeo-African syncretism that endures until today.

Defining Communal Membership

In his 1991 monograph, Robert Cohen explored the transformation of early modern Surinamese Jewish society as it sought to perpetuate traditional mores while responding to its new surroundings. The importance he placed on environment is especially pertinent in a comparison between Suriname and Curaçao.⁷ Physical environment—particularly climate and its long-term consequences—played a central role in shaping the economies and societies of these two Jewish communities.

On the riverside shores of the jungle, Suriname's Jews established an agrarian settlement comprising dozens of plantations and centered around Jodensavanne, or Jews' Savannah, an autonomous village where members congregated for synagogue services, attended educational institutions, and were administered justice by a secular Jewish court. Dominating the stretch of the Suriname River, some thirty kilometers south of the capital city of Paramaribo, Jodensavanne and the dozens of surrounding Jewish plantations collectively formed, by the mid-eighteenth century, the largest Jewish agricultural community of its time and the only Jewish settlement in the Americas that was granted virtual self-rule. Under tolerant Dutch rule, Sephardim received rights, exemptions, and immunities both as an ethnic minority and as burghers, arguably the most liberal treatment Jews had ever received in the Christian world. The setting—a self-determining Jewish

village—represents one of the few situations in Diaspora history where the highest form of social climbing meant becoming a Jew, rather than a Christian or a Muslim. Beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a combination of soil depletion, maroon attacks, and economic crisis led to the gradual demise of Jodensavanne, the abandonment of agricultural pursuits, and the definitive shift of Suriname's Sephardic community to the capital city.⁸

Curaçao's early Jewish settlers were drawn from the same streams as those who migrated to Suriname. While the first Jews to plant roots on the island were expected to engage in agriculture, the infertility of the soil and infrequency of rain quickly led them to abandon the earth for mercantile enterprises.⁹ Because of their preference for trade over agriculture, Curaçao's Jews owned fewer slaves than their Surinamese brethren. This did not, however, affect their standing in the Dutch Caribbean social pyramid. Similar to Suriname, the island's Sephardim were among the white elite, occupying a social status just below that of Dutch Protestants.¹⁰

In both Suriname and Curaçao, colonial demographics cited earlier, dramatically skewed in favor of blacks, rendered miscegenation virtually inevitable. In the former colony, Jews were vastly outnumbered by the Africans they owned. As early as 1684, 4,200 African slaves resided in Suriname, and the colony's 232 Jewish householders, comprising 28.6 percent of Suriname's European population, owned slightly more (30.3 percent or 1,298) than their share of slaves.¹¹ On Curaçao, however, the "most complete list of Curaçaoan slave owners," dating to 1764–65, shows that only 16 percent (or 869) of the 5,534 slaves on the island were Jewish-owned.¹² Thus, the number of slaves owned by Jews roughly equaled the Jewish population of the time, though there were exceptional community members who owned dozens of slaves.¹³

Like many early colonial American settlements, the Jewish communities of both Suriname and Curaçao suffered a dearth of women in the early years of formation. 64.4 percent of Suriname's Jewish population in 1684 was adult male, comprising almost twice as many men as women. This approximates patterns in the gentile European population, where 74 percent of the community was male. Such gender imbalance helped open the doors to "Suriname marriage," described as "the informal, but still permanent relationship concluded with some form of ceremony and ending with the death or departure of the white male," a phenomenon typical of both the gentile and Jewish communities. This Caribbean form of concubinage was characterized by sexual double standards, leading to an Afro-European population that could claim white descent mainly through the paternal line.¹⁴ While parallel statistics are not available for Curaçao, it is likely that a similar pattern was obtained.¹⁵ Finally, the slave in colonial American society possessed

no legal status. Official marriage between the enslaved and the free was impossible, again leaving concubinage as an obvious resort.¹⁶ Extra-legal sexual relations between blacks and whites led to the rise of two separate Eurafrican classes that existed on the peripheries of white gentile and Jewish society. These marginal groups were key to the growth, survival, and redefinition of the white gentile and Sephardic populations.

Miscegenation between Jews and blacks in Suriname likely began during the earliest Jewish settlement in the colony. The first known evidence is a bylaw drafted by the Mahamad (Hebrew for "assembly"), the autonomous governing body of Suriname's Jews, alluding to unions between Euro-Sephardi Jews and their African-origin consorts. In 1662–63, Suriname's Jewish leaders explicitly defined the two subdivisions of the Sephardic community. The Hebrew term *jahid* referred to a full member of the Jewish community by virtue of his or her European descent. The second-class *congregante* (Portuguese for "congregant") denoted either a Eurafrican Jew or a first-class member, by virtue of his whiteness, who had been demoted to a lower social status as a penalty for marrying a Jewish female of African descent.¹⁷

More concrete evidence of sexual unions between Sephardim and women of African origin—both legal and extra-legal—are sprinkled throughout communal archives. The excavation and collation of these references has only just begun, and those relating to concubinage are particularly oblique. Among the earliest is the case of Joseph Pelegrino, who in 1720 appealed to local authorities to recognize the manumission of his children, all procreated outside of legal marriage.¹⁸ Simha, Jacob, and Mariana, he declared, were all of the Jewish religion, adopted as members of Suriname's Sephardic community by its teacher (*leraar*) and properly manumitted according to the rules of the Jewish "nation." Inheritance issues prompted Pelegrino's request, for the laws of the Jewish community were at times contrary to those of the Dutch colonial government, and it was thus unclear whether the children's status and rights would be accepted outside Jewish circles. Pelegrino's request was nonetheless granted by the court and his three children were declared "free of all slavery" and legitimized as his true descendants.¹⁹

Here, it is important to note that a white Jewish woman would likely never have found herself in a position to produce Eurafrican children, convert them to Judaism, and appeal for their manumission. First of all, her children would have been automatically Jewish according to rabbinical laws, which stipulated that Jewishness is transmitted through the mother. Secondly, extramarital intercourse between European-origin women and (presumably enslaved) blacks or Indians was regarded a heinous crime by the larger ruling society. In a placard of 1711, colonial authorities named

such aberrations "unnatural whoredom and adultery." Unmarried violators would be flogged and banished for life, while married women would also be branded, a punishment generally reserved for slaves.²⁰ The very existence of this law points to actual illicit unions between white women and their black or Indian consorts, but these were rare.²¹ In 1721 two white Christian women were so accused, while ten years later, the daughter of a Jewish planter acknowledged having a sexual relationship with an Indian. The key is that the offending female was expelled from the colony, while the extra-marital alliances of white Jewish men were not only on some level countenanced, but the resulting offspring at times legitimized through recognition of paternity, conversion to Judaism, and manumission.²²

Thus, miscegenation in the Dutch and Jewish communities was outright prohibited only when the involved female was white. Her punishment entailed not a mere loss of social status (as in the case of *jehidim* demoted to *congregantes*), but rather her local eradication: complete elimination from community membership as well as physical removal from the colony. In Suriname, the Jewish tradition of women as determinants of an offspring's ethno-religious identity was therefore reversed. If Sephardic men had not sought to bring their enslaved children into the Jewish fold, the community would have had few, if any, Eurafrican Jews. The phenomenon of the so-called "mulatto" Jew—at least initially, before Eurafrican Jewesses complexified Jewish genealogical descent—was thus wholly an expression of a Caribbean patriarchy that suppressed one of the main matriarchal aspects of rabbinical Judaism.²³

There are suggestions that in Suriname the conversion of slaves to Judaism entailed a formal ceremony carefully guided by rabbinical liturgical rites. The prayer book *Sefer Berith Yitshak* ("The Covenant of Isaac"), whose earliest known edition was published in 1729 in Amsterdam, includes instructions for circumcising and ritually immersing male and female slaves for conversion to Judaism. The ceremony, involving a ritual circumciser (*mohel*) for boys, Hebrew prayers, a glass of wine, and ritual immersion for both sexes, closely followed the biblical commandment, "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant."²⁴

Though published in Amsterdam, the prayer book was evidently meant not only for European, but also for Caribbean consumption. The appendix of ritual circumcisers at the end, arranged according to their city or colony of residence, names practitioners in the Sephardic communities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Naarden, London, Hamburg, and Bayonne, as well as Suriname and Curaçao, the only Caribbean centers included in this list. Significantly, another Amsterdam edition from 1764/1765, reprinted in 1803/1804, is housed in the synagogue archives of Congregation Mikvé

Israel-Emmanuel in Curaçao. While bereft of a list of ritual circumcisers, this volume does include the slave conversion ceremony.²⁵ The extent and geographical range of archival holdings (yet to be determined) is essential in providing an idea of the relevance of slave conversions for various early modern Jewish communities. The successive reprinting of this book—with the slave prayer unexpurgated—opens the question of the endurance of this practice through at least the early nineteenth century. The explicit evidence of slave conversion to Judaism unearthed for Suriname seems not to exist for Curaçao (or has not yet surfaced), leading most scholars to conclude that the phenomenon did not develop on that island.²⁶

Peripheral Inclusion

The entrance of individuals of African descent into the Jewish community of Suriname granted them a second-class social status I have termed “peripheral inclusion.” In this paradigm, Jewish elites extended official communal membership to individuals they considered fellow, albeit marginal, Jews. Typically, these individuals were the progeny of African mothers and Sephardic fathers who were legally recognized and converted to Judaism under the aegis of the Jewish patriarch, as well as their descendants (who, if born of Eurafrican Jewish mothers, did not need to convert). These individuals—the aforementioned *congregantes*—existed both metaphorically and literally at the limits of Sephardic society.

The synagogue, as a daily gathering spot offering social prestige and a sense of belonging, provided the most dramatic spectacles of *congregante* relegation. It is thus not surprising that some Eurafricans actively asserted their right to *jahid* status in this very space. The most coveted seats in the synagogue were between the pillars, and even *jehidim* who had a theoretical right to be seated there were obliged to petition the Mahamad for an official seat. In 1754, the Mahamad added an ordinance that seating for Eurafrican Jews was limited to the mourner’s bench, just as in times past, and not anywhere else (that is, not between the pillars). This reaffirmation hints that by the mid-eighteenth century, Eurafricans had begun to petition for just those seats.²⁷ The article does not appear in the 1748 askamot, suggesting that the 1750s were a turning point for congregant activism. Peripheral inclusion had already existed in Amsterdam’s Sephardic synagogue, where male converts to Judaism were never appointed to official posts in the Jewish community, rabbinical law stipulating that a convert not be given a post with coercive authority. Similarly, Amsterdam’s Mahamad decreed in 1644 that “circumcised Negro Jews” were not to be called to the

Torah or given any honorary commandments to perform in the synagogue.²⁸ These examples indicate that peripheral inclusion was not exclusively a Caribbean phenomenon, but was perhaps an outcome of Atlantic slavery and its impact on Sephardi Diasporic communities.

Second-class status followed the manumitted and their nonwhite descendants to the grave, noticeable in Jodensavanne’s cemetery, which preserves some 460 grave markers. The cemetery is spread over terrain that gently slopes downward from “top to bottom” (northwest to southeast) and from right to left (northeast to southwest). In the southeast extreme (the limit of the burial ground, near a no-longer extant fence) three tombstones, submerged several feet beneath the soil’s surface, were unearthed by a cemetery expedition in 1999.²⁹ The individuals buried below, Jacob Peregrino (d. 1750), Joseph Pelengrino, and Joseph de Mattos (both d. 1751) share the family names of Jewish slaves manumitted by the first two decades of the 1720s and may be direct descendants. Joseph Pelengrino is perhaps the aforementioned petitioner who manumitted his three children.³⁰ Communal archives describing the relative position of deceased Eurafrican Jews in this cemetery reveal a concatenation of *congregantes* stretching from Luna, daughter of David Haim del Monte, to Joseph Pelengrino, all buried along the fence on the southerly slope of the hill.³¹

This liminal spot continued to be reserved for manumitted slaves through at least the late eighteenth century. In May of 1791 the free “mulata” Simha, who had been enslaved to Joseph Gabay Farro, was also buried in the “southern part” of the cemetery, near the fence. She was laid to rest with feet pointing to the east, in accordance with Jewish law, near the grave of the aforementioned Joseph, son of Gabriel de Mattos. The next month her sister, Jahel, also a free Eurafrican who had once served the same master, was buried at Simha’s feet. Both graves were marked with a (presumably wooden) stake, rather than a carved stone slab, and have since disintegrated. Only the burial register and a passing reference to their manumission preserve their memory.³²

A similar pattern of peripheral inclusion emerged in Paramaribo’s oldest Sephardic burial ground. A plot book of that cemetery lists “rows of congregants,” where the socially inferior were interred. The decedents bear well-known Eurafrican Jewish family names, such as Judio/Judia (Jew/Jewess) and Pelegrino, as well as names of founding Sephardic families, such as d’Avilar, Cohen Nassy, and Mendes Meza, revealing an increasingly intertwined African and European Jewish lineage.³³

While in death Suriname’s Eurafrican Jews were pushed into the margins of the Jewish cemetery, in life they had more options. In the mid-eighteenth century Eurafrican Jews formed separate institutions and developed their own ceremonies, closely modeled on those of their white Jewish counterparts.

This occurred as early as 1759, when Eurafrican Jews at Jodensavanne formed a brotherhood (*siva*) called the Path of the Righteous (*Darhe Jesarim*)³⁴ as well as a separate prayerhouse.³⁵ These separate institutions were not only sanctioned by white Jews but also founded with the financial support of both Sephardim and Ashkenazim.³⁶ When Eurafrican Jews attempted to extend these parallel models to funereal ceremonies, they realized the limits of their Jewish independence.

On November 20th, 1787, evidently on his deathbed, Daniel Peregrino petitioned the governing leaders of the Liviat Hen brotherhood for permission to be carried in a funeral procession by his disciples. Evasively, the regents decided not to answer, instead placing the question in the hands of the brotherhood's leader.³⁷ Peregrino's last name suggests a Eurafrican Jewish identity, and indeed, his entry in the death register two days later identifies him as a congregant.³⁸ References to his "disciples" and the desire for a special procession suggest that Eurafrican Jews had their own leadership and ceremonies that paralleled those of the white Sephardic community.

A major fissure that split the Sephardic community in 1790 reveals that the Peregrino case was not an isolated incident. First studied by the late Robert Cohen, this was perhaps the first major rebellion against Jewish congregant status.³⁹ In April 1790, Joseph, son of David Nassy, a prominent member of the Jewish Eurafrican class, breathed his last breath. Given his stature, the Eurafrican mourners desired to inter him with the ceremonies reserved for a Sephardic community president (*Parnas Presidente*), carefully dictated in communal ordinances.⁴⁰ This entailed a procession with wax candles in which the mourners—rather than the cantor—would sing the memorial prayers. The problem was that Joseph was a Eurafrican Jew, and hence occupied the status of congregant. In demanding such protocol, Nassy's disciples expressed their desire to appropriate rituals reserved solely for leaders of the Mahamad, suggesting the development of an internal political structure that consciously mimicked that of the white Jewish community.

A regent present at the funeral observed this breach of social propriety and intervened to forbid the procession "as being contrary to the bylaws of the community."⁴¹ Racial tensions resurfaced during the actual burial. The Eurafrican mourners were horrified to discover that Nassy's intended grave was located "in a swamp and only one foot deep." Their objections were silenced with the Mahamad's response: "You cannot give orders here, and if you folks do not shut up we will shut you up." The grave's condition confirms not only a designated location for deceased non-white Sephardim in the outer limits of the cemetery—similar to that of Jodensavanne—but also the Mahamad's discriminatory neglect of Eurafrican burial sites. The regents rejected the latter allegation, pointing to weather conditions in the months of April and May, which assured that "there will always be water on

the outer grounds which are lying low and in which a hole has to be dug to serve as a grave."⁴²

At the end of that year more unrest challenged the Mahamad's authority. On December 17, just before the Jewish Sabbath, the president (*Parnas Presidente*) of Jodensavanne's Congregation Beraha VeSalom dispatched the *samas*, Solomon Fereyra, to order a shroud and box for the recently deceased congregante, Simon de Meza. Fereyra presented the request before the congregation's brotherhood, Liviat Hen, which was in charge of funereal arrangements. However, the brotherhood official refused to comply, pointing to article 10 of the brotherhood's bylaws—approved by the Mahamad itself—that only members of the Portuguese Jewish nation, who were *jehidim* or *congregantes* from a "legitimate marriage," could receive these funereal necessities. Simon de Meza was not a *jahid*, nor a *congregante* of a legitimate marriage. Although his parentage is unknown, de Meza was likely conceived out of wedlock to Eurafrican Jewish parents or out of wedlock to a white Sephardi master and *congreganta*. The death register lists Simon de Meza only as a *congregante* who was buried in Paramaribo.⁴³

So as not to be "considered disobedient," the brotherhood official paid a personal visit to the president of the Mahamad and reminded him of the articles that prevented the request from being fulfilled. In what was likely a heated argument, the president asked and then commanded that the order be carried out that one time, without consequences for the future. He promised to provide the explanation later. Recognizing the Mahamad was its superior, the brotherhood was forced to carry out the order, as there was no opportunity to convene a *junta* (ad-hoc meeting). Fissures were appearing in the community's foundation: the president had violated the Mahamad's own legislation.

The Tuesday following the Sabbath, the brotherhood convened a *junta* at which it was resolved to respectfully ask the Mahamad to allow the Liviat Hen to follow its own articles. One *junta* member, Abraham Bueno Bibaz, requested to be exempt from the meeting, suggesting either a fear of repercussions or his sympathy with the Eurafrican Jew's plight. The disruption over the funeral of Joseph Cohen Nassy earlier that year may have made the congregation's leaders more cautious about further offending the sensibilities of Eurafrican Jews. If this reading is correct, the Eurafrican community had a considerable degree of communal power, despite its second-class status. Moreover, the conflict suggests that there was no clear dividing line between white and Eurafrican Jews. Cross-group alliances show that the Mahamad itself was internally divided.

Meanwhile, fury over the treatment of Joseph Nassy's remains seemed to intensify with time. The protests of the Eurafrican mourners led the Mahamad to demand a written statement from Eurafrican leader Reuben

Mendez Meza, presenting his community's complaints. Meza's statement was interpreted by the regents as a demand for independence, and their response was intended to remind Eurafrican Jews of their place and prevent further social uprisings. The Mahamad responded that all "Mulattoes, Mestices and Castices who call themselves children of Portuguese [and] Spanish Jews will be *congreganten* of the Congregation *Beraha Ve Shalom*." Furthermore, the Mahamad reminded them that they were forbidden to maintain their brotherhood without permission and demanded the Eurafrican Jews present the brotherhood's constitution. They submitted these constitutional bylaws in May of 1791, over a year after the controversial funeral.

To the surprise of the Eurafrican Jews, the regent secretary, David Nassy (perhaps the white father of the deceased Eurafrican Jewish leader), returned a revised version of this constitution that severely limited the operations of *Darhe Jesarim*. Nassy curbed Eurafrican Jewish privileges in three areas: burial rites, financial aid, and *jahid* involvement in the running of *Darhe Jesarim*. Restrictions on funeral services conveyed a clear message that protests, such as those that interrupted Joseph Nassy's funeral, would not be tolerated. The white Nassy stipulated that no *congregante* would ever be buried in a procession carrying wax candles, and the funeral liturgy (*ascaba*) was to be recited by the cantor as opposed to the mourners. Furthermore, these prayers were to be uttered in the fraternity house, not in the cemetery. Lastly, the Mahamad would withdraw virtually all financial assistance to and involvement in the brotherhood. Such strictures helped ensure that *Darhe Jesarim* would remain purely a brotherhood and not a separate religious congregation.⁴⁴ They also dealt a huge blow to both the brotherhood and the status of Eurafricans in the Jewish community.

These setbacks did not inhibit Eurafricans from further rebellion. Not only did they refuse to sign this new constitution; they also threatened to withhold their taxes (*finta*) and to withdraw from the Jewish community by joining the Ashkenazim, leading the Mahamad to ban the brotherhood altogether. In 1793, the Eurafricans, perhaps naïvely, appealed to the non-Jewish authorities at Paramaribo to be admitted as full members (*jehidim*) of the Sephardic community. The detailed process of this appeal and reactions to it predictably ended in a triumph of the white Sephardic government. Eurafrican Jews were "to behave themselves in all respects with the subordination and the due respect" toward the leaders of the Mahamad, and the abolishment of *Darhe Jesarim* was confirmed. Furthermore, any further protests or uprisings would be punished as "disturbances of the peace."⁴⁵

The threat posed by the Eurafrican Jews did not lay merely in their ritual challenge to time-honored traditions. The very existence of Jewish Eurafricans and their limbo racial status threatened the definition of white

status. The communal bylaws bifurcated members into the categories of *jahid* and *congregante*, and seem ill suited to deal with the more complex social reality. Jewish Eurafricans referred to themselves as colored (*kleurlingen*), while the colonial and white Jewish leaders of the colony employed such terms as *negroes*, *karboegers*, *mulattos*, *mestices*, and *castices*.⁴⁶ Moreover, the issue of "legitimate marriage" further clouded the social status of second-class Jews. And, as we have seen, a white Jewish leader's personal sentiment or conviction could overturn the Mahamad's very regulations. In this panoply of ancestry, circumstances of birth, and personal bias, what precisely defined a Jew, a *jahid*, or a *congregante*?

Previous studies dealing with Suriname's "mulatto" Jews usually portray them as pitted against white Jews and fighting for autonomy or secession. In reality, the two groups more resembled concentric circles than separate spheres. The same communal records that detail racial conflict also reveal just how permeable boundaries could be. The case of the aforementioned Simon de Meza and his white Sephardi sympathizers is one example. Another is the recurring controversy surrounding seating arrangements in the synagogue. In 1794 the Mahamad of Beraha VeSalom complained of disorderly conduct among the *congregantes* who frequently claimed seats in the section reserved for *jahidim*. The resolution, imposing a fine of 100 guilders on any transgressor, also warned that the same punishment would be the lot of *jahidim*—male or female—who attempted to occupy the seats of *congregantes* or insisted on having second-class Jews sit beside them. The Mahamad believed that those in question were interested in "offending the orders of this College,"⁴⁷ but this was no mere rebellion. Like the aforementioned Joseph Pelegrino who manumitted his three children more than half a century earlier, many European-origin Jews may have wished to publicly claim *congregantes* as their own flesh and blood.

These "concentric circles" were part of a broader pattern emerging in Caribbean societies by the mid-eighteenth century. In 1752, Curaçao's Council argued that a number of free, prosperous, and powerful families of African origin who had intermarried with whites should be granted equal treatment with whites. In 1769 the West India Company's military commanders and the civil militia officers began a dispute about which organization should accept a group of some twenty or thirty soldiers of mixed African-European descent. The white militia officers maintained that these soldiers were not truly mulattoes and should thus not be incorporated into the free black and free mulatto militias, but rather into the white militia unit. By 1789, 214 mestizos were accordingly admitted into the white militia unit, comprised of 1,063 soldiers.⁴⁸ Similarly, in the Danish West Indies legislators in the second half of the eighteenth century grappled with the concept of "nearly white" and sometimes proposed that the status of these

Eurafricans be legally changed to white. Tellingly, the government never took a definitive position on this matter, an indication of its controversial nature and serious threat to white society.⁴⁹

In Suriname, experiments with the social elevation of Eurafrican Jews had also proven controversial. Communal records hint that at one time, Eurafrican Jews were sometimes conferred *jahid* status. The regents' decision by at least 1748 to classify them solely as *congregantes* emanated from "the impropriety of admitting Mulattos as *jahidim*, and elevating them in this community, in which some have intervened in cases of government of the congregation."⁵⁰ Seven years later this locution was intensified to "the harm and impropriety of admitting mulattoes as *jahidim* [italics mine]."⁵¹

The circumstances leading to the bestowal of *jahid* status on Eurafrican Jews sometime before 1748 are not yet known. Perhaps the nepotism of white fathers who had sired "mulatto" children played a role. If this interpretation is correct, it may explain why the aforementioned Eurafrican Jewish leader, Joseph, son of David Cohen Nassy, who died in Paramaribo on April 17, 1790, was listed in the community's death records as a "mulatto and not a congregant."⁵² If read as subversive, this entry, recorded by First Cantor David Hezkiah Baruh Louzada, is another sure indication that displeasure with the status and treatment of *kleurlingen* was also shared among certain high-placed *jehidim*.⁵³

Another factor encouraging alliances between white and Eurafrican Sephardim was the possibility of white demotion to the status of congregant (through marriage to a "mulatto" Jew), as stipulated by communal ordinances. Though not apparent in the community's bylaws (*ascamot*), a distinction between whites demoted to the status of *congregantes*, on the one hand, and ("mulatto") *congregantes*, on the other, did exist. It is likely that this legal nuance was formalized only in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the 1790s, community officials reaffirmed the distinction between "born congregants" (*congregantes de nacimiento*) and *jehidim* relegated through marriage to a Jew of African origin. An announcement from 1797 stipulated that born congregants were obliged to sit on the bench behind the *tevah* and on the bench in front of the seat of the *samas*. *Jehidim* (perhaps indicating *jehidim* lowered to a congregant status) were strictly banned from these spaces.⁵⁴ If this reading is correct, the announcement demonstrates an attempt to publicly distinguish born congregants (presumably Eurafrican) from demoted congregants (presumably white), and to soften the social stigma of the latter, at least in regard to this racial game of musical chairs.

As it had been for Joseph Pelegrino in 1720, a key issue in defining the status of Eurafrican Jews continued to be inheritance. In 1797, the Mahamad issued an ordinance that required congregants to begin registering

the births of their children. The issue that spurred it into being was the realization of "how damaging" it could be for both *congregantes* and the "nation in general" to be ignorant of birth dates in cases of inheritance. *Congregantes* were ordered at both Beraha VeSalom in Jodensavanne and Paramaribo's Congregation Sedek VeSalom to register the births of their children, proffering circumcision certificates as proof.⁵⁵ The law is a sure indication that the community had previously not recorded such births (at least systematically). Indeed, the earliest records of newborns specified as *congregantes* date to the 1770s.⁵⁶ Why would the community not have recorded these births previously? Perhaps this omission reflects a reluctance to record the undeniable evidence of "illegitimate" unions. Whatever the reason, at least some of these Eurafrican children had evidently long enjoyed an unofficial status as potential heirs within the organized Jewish community. The ordinance also suggests a sea change in the status of Eurafrican Jews. Second-class Jews were increasingly being named as inheritors, suggesting a rise in their social status and power. The demand for this came not only from within the Eurafrican Jewish population, but no doubt also from *jehidim* themselves. The nineteenth century was to usher in a new era of opportunity and inclusion for *kleurlingen* in the Caribbean, Jewish and Christian alike.⁵⁷

The End of Peripheral Inclusion

As we have seen, challenges to the second-class status of *kleurlingen* intensified at the turn of the eighteenth century. In April of 1802 the Mahamad of Beraha VeSalom decided to abolish all differences in burial rites between *jehidim* and *congregantes*. They decided that "pious deeds must be carried out without prejudice," and that in the administration of last rites to the dead, "every distinction is improper and disagreeable." All charitable institutions, those already existing (gemilut Hasadim, Livi'at Hen, and Hozer Holim) and those to be established in the future, were to identically serve *jehidim* and *congregantes* with respect to coffin, shroud, and procession and burial in the cemetery, without exception.⁵⁸

By January of 1820 the practice of relegating deceased congregants to specific cemetery rows ceased. The Mahamad decreed that all baptized congregants be interred throughout the cemeteries, "without stipulation of the place of their graves."⁵⁹ The resolution fixed new attention on a "book of baptisms [conversions to Judaism]," listing the names of "congregants who are baptized and those who will be in the future." This book suggests the existence of a significant body of fringe members of the Jewish community, hovering in a spiritual no-man's land, neither Jew nor gentile. Alas, the

record book does not make explicit the ethnic or circumstantial origins of these individuals.⁶⁰

The end of peripheral inclusion among Suriname's Jews emerged alongside parallel developments elsewhere in the Caribbean, including the Danish West Indies. There, the phenomenon was uneven, reflecting conflicting interests. Frederik V's "Reglement for Slaverne" of 1755 stated in its last clause that the "freed are to enjoy all rights on par with the free-born subjects esteemed and respected in all regards equally with the free-born subjects of the Crown."⁶¹ As in Suriname, the end of peripheral inclusion was partially a result of the exponential growth of the Eurafrican population. By 1775, in St. Croix, freed people comprised some 20 percent of the total free population, and by 1797 that number had increased to 35 percent (some 4 percent of the total population). Similar statistics are available for St. Thomas. By 1797, there was nearly one freedman for every two whites in the Danish West Indies (1,418 compared to a white population of 3,062).⁶²

Identifying Eurafrican Jews

The birth and death records of Suriname's Sephardic community are among the richest sources for identifying Sephardic Jews of African-European origin. Before 1777, the starting date of the most comprehensive communal registers, it was superfluous (or perhaps indecorous) to racially identify decedents in birth and death registers. Matrilineal descent was also irrelevant: in terms of identifying the child, only the father was mentioned as parent. But in 1777, cantor Mendes Quiros died and passed on his administrative staff to cantor David Baruh Hezkiah Louzada. The latter began to carefully note both racial and social status. This was about two decades after the Eurafrican Jewish *siva* was established (1759) and about a decade and a half before a group of Eurafrican Jews in Paramaribo were to assert themselves and rebel (early 1790s). In the registers kept from 1777, both father and mother were noted; in the case of most Eurafrican Jews, only the mother was mentioned. This demonstrates a transition back to matrilineal descent, offering another explanation for the apparent proliferation of Eurafrican Jews beginning in the late nineteenth century.

The record book maintained by cantor Baruh Louzada provides hard evidence of this proliferation. The 1,371 entries span from 1778 to 1835. Between 1779 and 1824 the deaths of 99 Jews of second-class status were recorded. The overwhelming majority was identified as *congregantes*, while three were named as "mulattoes" and one as a Jewish slave. Two of the congregants were converts and, for reasons suggested earlier, another individual

(Joseph, son of David Cohen Nassy) was a Eurafrican who was specifically designated as not a congregant.⁶³ Alas, Baruh Louzada did not differentiate in his records between born *congregantes* and *jehidim* demoted to congregant status.

The statistics of this community profile show that, at least officially, between 1778 and 1835, 7.2 percent of the members were lower status members. Most of these were likely of African origin. Phrased another way, more than one out of every fourteen Sephardic Jews in Suriname over the course of roughly half a century was certainly either of African origin or lowered to a congregant status through marriage to what was probably in most cases a Eurafrican Jew. This statistic, which cannot possibly reflect every fringe member of the community, nevertheless significantly exceeds official estimates, which place the Eurafrican members of Suriname's white gentile and Jewish communities between one and two and a half percent.

Particularly in light of Louzada's detailed records, official statistics tabulated by the colonial government do not seem useful for determining the size and composition of Suriname's non-white Jewish population. A general population survey taken in 1817, claiming to be accurate for the Jewish communities, came up with a dubious 30 *kleurlingen* and no blacks living among a urban white Sephardic population of 592. What makes these figures all the more unreliable is the statement that community members owned no enslaved "coloreds" or blacks. In the rural district of Jodensavanne and its surroundings, the survey counted 99 free whites, but turned up nothing for freed and enslaved *kleurlingen* and *negers*. For Paramaribo's Ashkenazi community, there were supposedly 580 whites, 5 free colored, and no blacks, while in the outside districts there were only 26 whites and no *kleurlingen* or *negers*, whether enslaved or free.⁶⁴ These improbable statistics are rendered all the more dubious on the very next page, where the editor remarks that the ongoing dearth of white women has resulted in the reality that "Whites generally . . . live with women of color so that the closest relationships come about between white man and women of color."⁶⁵

Another important consideration is the comparison between rural and urban areas. Two second-class Jews listed by cantor Baruh Louzada were buried on the Caxewinica Creek on the Cupij Plantation and just eight at Jodensavanne.⁶⁶ The vast majority (89 or about 90 percent) were buried in Paramaribo. It would be erroneous to thus conclude that the Eurafrican Jewish phenomenon was largely an urban phenomenon, for extant records focus on the late seventeenth century and beyond, precisely when Suriname's Jews were transitioning from the jungle interior to Paramaribo.

The identification of additional congregants and the details of the lives of those already recognized, has scarcely begun. To discover more information, the research methodology sometimes referred to as monks' work (*monnikenarbeid*) would be essential. This would involve tirelessly scanning hundreds of pages of Jewish marriage, birth, circumcision, and death

records, for an African or unusual Jewish name (e.g., Jaba or Ismahel) or racial notation (e.g., *congregante*, *castiço*, or *escrava*). Poring through Dutch notarial archives with this goal in mind turned up our Joseph Pelegrino, while the thousands of pages of Jewish communal meeting minutes, dating from 1749 to the turn of the nineteenth century, are sprinkled with references to slaves and their conversion. Collectively, the individuals retrieved from these painstaking searches form a significant bunch, both in terms of relative size and impact, and are the key to understanding the phenomenon of Jewish Africanization in the Caribbean.

The second step is more subtle and complicated. Scrutinizing the silence demands a sensitive eye that detects *congregante* status when none is mentioned, and only sometimes implied. One of the main challenges is that the racial composition of Jews of African descent is often not mentioned, the aforementioned Joseph Peregrino, manumitter of his three children, being a possible example of this omission. Moreover, congregants existed at the margins of the community. Birth and death registers demonstrate that they are hardly mentioned at all until the late eighteenth century, though they were always crucial to the general community's development.

The consequences of these silences are also evident among Curaçao's Jews. Over the centuries, its members were so successful in cultivating "public secrets" (and censoring their official historian) that not one African-origin Jew appears in the two-volume history of the community, published in 1970.⁶⁷ Curaçao's elite Jews showed deep concern with maintaining decorum and family honor, and it is possibly in this light that we may interpret their social conventions. Nineteenth-century invitations to balls celebrating engagements and wedding anniversaries often concluded with the stern admonition: "servants are not permitted entrance ("No se admitten criados;" "No se admitten sirvientes")."⁶⁸ A congratulatory anniversary card written in 1857 explicitly conveys this preoccupation. Lea J. M. Monsanto wished her friends A. J. and E. D. Jesurun happiness and sunny horizons, but most of all that they would forever conserve their family name as righteously and stainlessly as they had inherited it.⁶⁹ A systematic exploration of genealogy and reputation throughout the Jewish Caribbean will no doubt reveal much more information on "parallel lives" and "parallel wives," even if it means a substantial reliance on oral testimony and family traditions.

Casual conversations with community members whose families have lived on the island for seven generations reveal that most every Sephardic man led a "parallel life," with a public, white Jewish spouse and children, side-by-side with a covert black cohort and her Eurafrican children. In Curaçao the children of these "secret" unions are still known in Papiamentu as "yu di afo" (often pronounced, "yu ja-fo," from the Portuguese: *hijo de afora*), "children of the outside." They and their mothers were permitted to visit the white patriarch once a year but could enter only via the back door.

The white spouse was entirely aware of the relationship and its offspring, but the matter was not a topic of open acknowledgment.⁷⁰

Even if scholars are correct that the island's Jews did not permit conversion of African-origin people to Judaism, we must not discount alternative forms of communal membership. Fewer than six white families on the island could declare they had no Afro-Curaçaoan relatives, an island native observed in the 1950s, and it is difficult to imagine that Sephardim were exempt from this reality.⁷¹ Gerardus Balthazar Bosch, pastor of the island's Protestant community from 1816 to 1825 and of the united Protestant community from 1825 to 1836 (when the church merged with the Lutheran community), confirmed this in 1829:

Only the Jews in the West Indies can pride themselves—if it is any reason for pride—that they have not mixed their Asian origins with African or American races. Whereas one Christian family accuses the other of having some drops of black blood—as they usually call it—in their veins, and whereas there are a few who even consider it a badge of honor not to descend in the maternal line from the Negroes, but from the free-born Indians—it is certain that the Jews have preserved their species in a pure and unmixed form. The illegitimate children which they have conceived with black or colored women, and which one can see walk around in some parts of the West Indies in large numbers, to be recognized by their Asian noses, they have never attempted to bring into their church, and have even steadfastly refused this in the event that a petition was made. On Curaçao I know a colored man who for a number of years has been a diligent observer of the Jewish religion, who can shout out all Hebrew prayers as well as a born Jew, and closes his eye and mouth to bacon, turtle, and whatever else is non-kosher, indeed, does not want to eat from pots in which Christians have cooked. As a reward for all this he only requests to be incorporated among the number of Abraham's descendants; but that is out of the question. He is allowed constantly to observe the religion, but they refuse to introduce him into the community.⁷²

The anecdote suggests that by at least the 1820s the community eschewed formal conversion of Afro-Curaçaoans to Judaism, but tolerated the existence of fringe people, existing on the extreme margins of the community, and neither clearly gentile nor legally Jewish.

Other evidence for this type of fringe existence also emerged in Suriname. It involves African-origin and Indian concubines, who perhaps understood that their prospect for upward mobility was through their hybrid children. Jodensavanne's communal ordinances, whose earliest extant version dates to 1748, include a prohibition against the synagogue attendance of "Negras, Mulatas ou Indias," with or without children, and indicate the responsibility of their masters to remove them. Perhaps these non-Jewish females were attempting to attain a higher social status, or even

recognition as Jews, through participation in public communal prayer. The presence of these women in the company of children, coupled with the masters' responsibility to discipline them, moreover, suggests that the children may have been the issue of concubines and their masters.⁷³ If this reading is correct, this phenomenon parallels the aforementioned situation of unbaptized congregants in Suriname in the 1790s, some of whom seemed poised for official conversion and inclusion in the Sephardic community.

Conclusion

Suriname's autonomous community and unprecedented New World environment allowed for the development of conversion practices only indirectly informed by *halakha*, and more intensely conditioned by a society distant from centers of traditional Jewish authority. The Sephardi community of Suriname can be compared to other frontier or marginal societies that developed their own definitions of Jewishness. An example is eighteenth-century Ashkenazi male criminals in the Dutch Republic, who formed sexual liaisons with Gypsy women. Criminal proceedings suggest that their conversion to Judaism was informal, including the case of Fisone, who "had become a Jewess" during her relationship with the Jew, Levi Abrahams. One of her children produced during a previous relationship with a Christian man was given a new, Jewish name. Florike Egmond, who has studied this marginal subclass, classifies this phenomenon as the adoption of Jewish customs by a Christian/Jewish group.⁷⁴ Particularly in the case of frontier societies of the early modern Caribbean, which developed to some extent independently of the halakhic centers of the Jewish world in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, it is crucial to consider nontraditional ways of communal belonging that defy the strictures of normative Jewish law. This broader vision of community is critical for understanding the Jewish and Dutch gentile communities alike.

Notes

* All translations from the French, Hebrew, Portuguese, and Dutch are mine, except where noted. Abbreviations are as follows: NA = Nationaal Archief; The Hague; GAA = Gemeentearchief Amsterdam.

1. Perhaps the most dramatic imprint has been economic and linguistic. See Linda Marguerite Rupert, *Roots of our Future: A Commercial History of Curaçao* (Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles: Curaçao Chamber of Commerce & Industry,

- 1999) and "Trading Globally, Speaking Locally," *Jewish Culture and History* 7:1/2 (2004): 109–22; Jacques Arends, "The History of Surinamese Creoles I: A Sociohistorical Survey," 115–30, 118–19 and Norval Smith, "The History of Surinamese Creoles II: Origin and Differentiation," 131–51, 140 and 146–47, both in Eithne B. Carlin and Jacques Arends, eds., *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002). Ashkenazim, present in Suriname since the late seventeenth century and in significant numbers on Curaçao only since the 1930s, fall outside the parameters of this article. Eva Abraham-van der Mark, "The Ashkenazi Jews of Curaçao, a Trading Minority," *New West Indian Gids/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 74. 3 & 4 (2000): 257–80.
2. Each community has about 200 members.
3. This data is derived by the author from Cornelis Christiaan Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680–1791* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands and Dover, New Hampshire: Van Gorcum, 1985), 279, 291, 309, 341, and 519.
4. This data is derived by the author from Wim Klooster, "Economische malaise, politieke onrust en misdaad op Curaçao in de Patriottentij," in *Breekbare Banden: Feiten en visies over Aruba, Bonaire en Curaçao na de Vrede van Munster, 1648–1998* (Bloemendaal, The Netherlands: Stichting Libri Antilliani, 1998), 108, table 1. The population of 20,988 included 3,714 free blacks; 12,864 slaves; and 4,410 whites (including 1,095 Jews and assuming servants were white).
5. Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill: 1991). More recent studies include Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Alan F. Benjamin, *Jews of the Dutch Caribbean: Exploring Ethnic Identity on Curaçao* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002), which alludes to Eurafrican Jewish identity in passing, and a dissertation in progress by Wieke Vink, tentatively entitled "Suriname Jews: Creolisation Strategies of Group-Identities in a Global Environment, 1800–2000," as cited in her, "Over migranten, suikerplanters, Joodse kleurlingen en religieuze tolerantie," *Oso: Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse Taalkunde, Letterkunde, Cultuur en Geschiedenis* 21.1 (May 2002): 35–57.
6. The term Eurafrican refers to an individual of mixed European and African descent and is borrowed from George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
7. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 1 and 4.
8. Aviva Ben-Uri and Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones: The Jewish Cemeteries and Synagogue of Suriname* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, forthcoming).
9. Charles T. Gehring and J. A. Schiltkamp, eds., *Curaçao Papers, 1640–1665*, vol. 17 (Interlaken/New York: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1987), 58, 61, 62, 92.
10. By the nineteenth century, however, Dutch Protestants and Sephardic Jews each saw themselves as the elite of the island. Frances P. Karner, *The Sephardics of Curaçao* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1969), 32–33.

11. The figure of 232 Jews (including 105 men, 58 women and 69 children, presumably mostly settled along the Suriname River) is from a census conducted by the Society of Suriname in 1684 and cited in Claudia Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten: Engländer und Niederländer im amerikanisch-atlantischen Raum, 1648–1713* (Köln: Böhlau, 1998), 382. Victor Enthoven states that 1,158 individuals resided in Jodensavanne in 1684, with Africans outnumbering Jews 6 to 1. Statistics for slaves do not reflect natural increase, but rather the constant replenishment by "saltwater slaves." Victor Enthoven, "Suriname and Zeeland: Fifteen Years of Dutch Misery on the Wild Coast, 1667–1682", in J. Everaert and J. M. Parmentier, eds., *International Conference on Shipping, Factories and Colonization* (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen, 1996), 249–60, 255. Comparable figures for Suriname's European and enslaved populations are provided in Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 185.
12. Appendix 22 in Isaac Emmanuel and Suzanne Emmanuel, *A History of the Jews in the Netherlands Antilles*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), 1036–45. (Emmanuel's list on 1045 indicates 867 Jewish-owned slaves, including 23 separately listed. However, if these 23 are added to the alphabetical list he provides the number jumps to 869.)
13. Curaçao's Jewish community never numbered over 1,100. See the 1789 Curaçao census, showing a tally of 1,095 Jews on the island, in Maritza Coomans-Eustatia, "Het oog van de Engelsen gericht op Curaçao, Aruba en Bonaire," in *Breekbare Banden: Feiten en visies over Aruba, Bonaire en Curaçao na de Vrede van Munster, 1648–1998* (Bloemendaal, The Netherlands: Stichting Libri Antilliani, 1998), 142. Avraham and Isaac de Marchena owned eighty slaves, and Francisco Lopes Henriquez, Isaac Mendes, and Jeosuah Henriquez, are each listed as owning forty. Appendix 22 in Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *A History of the Jews in the Netherlands Antilles*, 1036–45.
14. Enriqueta Vila Vilar with Wim Klooster, "Forced African Settlement: The Basis of Forced Settlement: Africa and its Trading Conditions," in P. C. Emmer, ed., *General History of the Caribbean*, 6 vols. (London and Basingstoke: UNESCO, 1999), 2: 159–71, 170; Cornelis Christiaan Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 358 ("Surinam Marriage"); R. A. J. van Lier, *Frontier Society: A Social Analysis of the History of Surinam* (The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 78 ("marriage Surinam-style"). For statistics see Wim Hoogbergen, *De Bosnegers zijn gekomen!?: Slavernij en rebellie in Suriname* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992) and Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten*, 382. On the endurance of concubinage (male infidelity and double sexual standards) in the modern Caribbean, see Christine Barrow, "Male Images of Women in Barbados," *Social and Economic Studies* 35.3 (1986): 51–64, 53 and 58.
15. As in Suriname, the gender ratio had likely equalized by the second half of the eighteenth century. In Willemstad proper the number of Jewish families in Curaçao in 1789 was 259. Taking into account that the average family counted four members, and assuming that the vast majority probably had a matriarch

- and at least one girl, there would have been perhaps 500 females. This data is derived by the author from Klooster, "Economische malaise, politieke onrust en misdaad," 108, table 1.
16. Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 74.
 17. "em Este kaal ay huma escama feita no ano 5423 que Prohibe a cual quer Jahid so pena de herem a circosidar os filhos do que sedespidue de Jahid. Esta escama que foy feita com Prudencia pelos Primeiros fundadores deste kaal (adterorem)." GAA, no. 334, folio 1029, Stukken betreffende gemeenten te Amsterdam, Curaçao, Suriname en Constantinopel, 1650–1798, on 428–29. The earliest known definitions of *jahid* and *congregante* in Suriname's Sephardic community are provided in NA, Portugees Israelitische Gemeente in Suriname, no.99, Minuut-Askamoth voor de gemeente B.V.S. 1748 [Minutes-Askamoth for Congregation Beraha VeSalom 1748], tractate 26. The racial terms used are "mulattos" and "Jehidim." The androcentric location of the bylaws became more gender inclusive by the mid-eighteenth century. At least by the 1750s, intramarriage between Sephardi men and Ashkenazi women, which lowered the couple to congregant status, was sufficiently frequent as to merit mention in the communal ordinances (Tractate 26, article 4). By at least the 1780s, the gender-sensitive location of the ordinance reveals that Sephardi women had also begun to intramarry in significant numbers. Fragment van een concept-vertaling in het Nederlands van de Askamoth, no.111, chapter 1, article 2, 1789. "Tanto homen como mulheres" appears in superscript over the words, "Todo Jahid."
 18. Given the wording of the petition, Pelegrino obviously produced these children outside of Dutch marital law, but perhaps according to Jewish law. Surinamese Jews had obtained a special privilege in the 1650s to arrange their own marriages under the jurisdiction of their religious leaders. After 1703, however, Dutch law required Jewish marriage contracts be approved by Dutch officials and registered with the state archives. On the repeal of exclusive autonomy in Jewish marital laws see Ralph G. Bennett, "The Blacks and Jews of Surinam," *African Notes: Bulletin of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan* 17.1–2 (1993): 62–82, 69; P. A. Hilfman, "Some Further Notes on the Jews in Surinam," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 16 (1907): 10–13; and Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), I: 150–54. The family name appears variably throughout the archives as Pelegrino, Pelengrino, and Peregrino.
 19. NA, Oud Archief Suriname, Request of Joseph Pelegrino to Governor General Johan Coetier [Jean Coutier], Paramaribo, July 17, 1720, 83–87.
 20. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 359; J. A. Schiltkamp, J. Th. de Smidt, T. van der Lee, eds., *West Indisch Plakaatboek, Suriname, Deel I* (Amsterdam: S. Emmering, 1973), 277 (plakaat 240). On Curaçao this taboo is preserved through oral tradition. See A. F. Paula, *From Objective to Subjective Social Barriers: A Historico-Philosophical Analysis of Certain Negative Attitudes among the Negroid Population of Curaçao* (Curaçao: Curaçaosche Courant, 1972), 33.
 21. The phenomenon was also rare in North American British colonies. See, for example, Johann Martin Bolzius, "Reliable Answer to some Submitted

- Questions concerning the Land Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 14: 2 (April 1957): 223–61, 235. Compare Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
22. In North America's frontier societies Jewish men sometimes raised their halakhically gentile children as Jews. The children of Samson Levy (Philadelphia) and Michael Judah (Connecticut), both of whom intermarried, were ritually circumcised in the eighteenth century. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, III: 1228–29. In the French Caribbean, too, children of Sephardic men and gentile African women were sometimes raised as Jews, though this was counter to traditional Jewish law requiring Jewish descent to be traced via the mother. In St. Louis, Saint-Domingue, one M. de Paz spawned several male and female children with a black woman "to whom he is very loving." She was emancipated years before, but he did not marry her. He was "very tender" to the children and sent them to his parents in Bordeaux to be educated. Abraham Cahen, "Les juifs dans les colonies françaises au XVIIIe siècle," *Revue des Études Juives* 4 (1882): 127–45, 141.
 23. Eurafican women born to Jewish mothers could, according to Jewish law, automatically transmit Jewish status.
 24. The translation is from Harold Fisch, ed., *The Holy Scriptures* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1989), 16. Abraham and Solomon Levy Maduro, eds., *Sefer Berit Yitshak* (Amsterdam: Gerard Johan Jansen in the shop of Israel Mondove, 5528 [1767/1768]), 16. Copies consulted for this article are located at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Ets Hayim library in Amsterdam, and represent the edition published nearly forty years later. It is apparently a reprint of the 1729 edition, cited in Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana jussu curatorum digessit et notis instruxit M. Steinschneider* (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1931), entry 3222. For an alternative interpretation of this ritual see Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 225–26.
 25. *Sefer Berit Itshak* (Amsterdam: Belinfante and de Vita, 1803/1804 [Amsterdam: Solomon Levy Maduro, 1764/1765]).
 26. J. Hartog, *Curaçao: From Colonial Dependence to Autonomy* (Aruba: De Wit, 1968), 148; Emmanuel, *Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 1:146; Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew: 1492–1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 1: 200; all cited in Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 222 and 237–38. Schorsch, basing himself partly on Isaac S. Emmanuel's silence about black or mulatto converts in the island's Jewish cemetery (in Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*), concludes that Jews "did not convert their slaves." However, scholarly censorship must be considered; Emmanuel himself reveals that "the parnassim made it a condition *sine qua non* to control the manuscript before delivery to the printer" (Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 1: 8). One wonders what a thorough perusal of Curaçao's early modern documents might further reveal on black/Jewish relations. As is the case for Suriname, this work has scarcely begun. Moreover, one important eighteenth century source for Curaçao (NA, Oud Archief Curaçao) is in poor

- condition and often illegible (author's personal communication with Wim Klooster).
27. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no.102, 1754, tractate 19, articles 3 and 4 on 43–44.
 28. Kaplan, "Political Concepts," 57–58.
 29. Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*.
 30. If so, the spelling of his last name would be interchangeable with Pelegrino.
 31. The others are Miriam Nassy; Abigail, daughter of Simha de Meza; Ishmael Judeo; Matatia de Robles; Moses Rodrigues del Prado, Joseph de G[abriel?]. de Mattos (d.1751?); and Jacob Peregrino (d. 1750). Three others, the brothers Jacob and Isaac Garcia, and a "morito, son of Isaac Naar Meza," were likely buried in the vicinity. Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones*.
 32. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 423, Register van begravenen op de kerkhoven van de Savanne, 1777–1833 [Register of graves in the cemetery of the Savanna, 1777–1833], p.19; N.A., microfilm reel 67a, n. 785, undated will of Joseph Gabay Farro. Simha died May 1, 1791 (27 Nissan 5551); Jahel June 19, 1791 (17 Sivan 5551). *Congregantes* were permitted burial in the Cassipora Cemetery by at least 1819, but no register of burials there has survived. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen), [Minutes of the meetings of the Gentlemen of the Mahamad (Parnassim) and of the Junta (Parnassim and elderly)], September 7, 1819, on 7.
 33. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, Grafboek van het kerkhof te Paramaribo (1849) [Grave register of the cemetery at Paramaribo], no. 137. While burials are generally undated, many seem to date from the late eighteenth century onward. A few Ashkenazi names, such as Samson and Goedschalk, also appear among *congregantes*, suggesting Sephardi/Ashkenazi unions.
 34. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 164.
 35. Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 81; J. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Surinam* (Amsterdam, H. de Hoogh, 1861), 256; Willem F. L. Buschkens, *The Family System of the Paramaribo Creoles* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1974), 70; Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 366.
 36. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 166.
 37. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 435, Minutes of meetings, Liviati Hen Society, 1778–1790, November 20, 1787, on 65 [b].
 38. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 420, on 18. He is listed as "Danl. Pelengrino (congregante)."
 39. NA, Oud Arch. Sur. Gouvernements secretaries, no. 528; Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 163–74.
 40. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 102, tractate 55 (1755). The only "Joseph Cohen Nassy" listed in the Old Sephardi Cemetery burial register and identified as a *congregante* appears in an undated entry for the *carreira dos congregantes* in row 6, grave number 68. NA,

- Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, Grafboek van het kerkhof te Paramaribo (1849), no. 137.
41. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 163.
 42. Ibid., 170. Ironically, the plot on which the cemetery lay was sold in 1959 and the gravestones transferred to a newer Sephardi burial ground, where they were haphazardly piled in the back of that graveyard in a "tumbled heap," disrupting the social distinctions that had been so carefully arranged in rows since the eighteenth century. Adriana van Alen-Koenraadt and Philip Dikland, "Brief History of the old Sephardic cemetery," unpublished article, 2002.
 43. NA, no. 420, December 18, 1790 (11 Tebet 5551), 93.
 44. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 165.
 45. Ibid., 172.
 46. Ibid., 170.
 47. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 36, Bijlagen tot de notulen van Mahamad en Junta (ingekomen stukken en minuten van uitgegane stukken) [Bylaws of the minutes of Mahamad and Junta (incoming pieces and minutes of outgoing pieces)], 337.
 48. Wim Klooster, "Subordinate but Proud: Curaçao Free Blacks and Mulattoes in the Eighteenth Century," *New West Indian Guide* 68. 3/4 (1994): 283–300.
 49. Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B. W. Higman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 152–53 and 160–61.
 50. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 99, Ascarnot, 1748, Tractate 26, article 1, "On not admitting Mulattoes as Jehidim to the synagogue nor whites married to mulattoes." The locution is, "Avendo aliado pr. experiencia o Improprio q'he Admeter mulatos p. Jehidim & sublimalos nesse gremio (. . .)." NA, Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, No. 99, Minuut-Askamoth voor de gemeente B.V.S. 1748, tractate 26, article 1.
 51. The locution is "Havendo mostrado aexperiencia o danozo, e improprio que he admittir Mulatos por Jahidim, e colocalos em esse gremio, em oqual alguns se entremetera'o em Cazos do governo do Kaal (. . .)."
 52. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 418, Registro Mortuorio [Death Register], 49.
 53. Alternatively, this may indicate that Joseph was conceived outside of "legitimate marriage" and thus qualified as neither *Jahid* nor *congregante*.
 54. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 36, 187. The ordinance does not mention the *Jehidim* as relegated, but the term *congregantes de nacimiento* implies that there were *congregantes* who were formerly *jahidim*.
 55. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 36, Mosseh Davilar, sworn clerk, October 2, 1797, 251. This bylaw seems to imply that only sons were concerned. If so, one wonders how the community dealt with young *congregantas* claiming an inheritance.
 56. The earliest birth register contains no specific references to *congregantes*. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 416, Alfabetische staten van geboren en over 1662–1723 en 1723–1777 (commenced

- by Mendes Quiros, who died June 21, 1777); no. 417 (commenced June 16, 1777); no. 419 (commenced June 16, 1777).
57. The question of entitlement of Eurafricans to equality with whites had emerged in the Danish West Indies as early as the 1750s, when in a slave conspiracy, a freedman of St. Croix apparently conspired to make himself governor general in a new society bereft of whites. This is evidence that before the end of the eighteenth century "a certain sense of individual, if not communal, self-esteem" had emerged. This self-consciousness intensified during the nineteenth century. Hall, *Slave Society*, 156–57.
 58. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 437, Extracto do Registro de Notulas & Rezolucoems do Collegio dos Sres ao MM & Deputados da Nacao do KKBVS [Extract from the Register of Minutes and Resolutions of the College of the Gentlemen to the Mahamad and Deputies of the Nation of Holy Congregation Beraha VeSalom], April 13, 1802.
 59. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 11 on 13. The bylaw reads in part: "que todos os Congregantes que forem banhados, poderao ser enterrados por todo o lugar no Beth-ahaim sem particularizar lugar de seus Sepulcros."
 60. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 11, October 30, 1820, 13; November 20, 1820, 15. The book was kept by the secretary of the community. In response to this announcement, former First Cantor David Baruh Louzada offered his testimony that two congregantes, Gabriel Davilar and Moses de Pina, had been baptized under his aegis, demonstrating that these conversions were not always strictly recorded (NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 11, November 20, 1820, 15). Alternatively, the First Cantor may have fabricated his testimony due to some sort of personal bias. Davilar appears as a "molato" in the communal death register (April 14, 1824/16 Nissan 5584); de Pina does not.
 61. See Hall, *Slave Society*, 146.
 62. Ibid., 145.
 63. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 418, Registro Mortuorio [Death Register], 49. He is listed as "Molato & nao congregante."
 64. N.a., *Surinaamsche Almanak voor het jaar 1821* (Paramaribo and Amsterdam: E. Beijer & C. G. Sulpke, 1821), 30. "Alleen van de Joodsche Gemeenten, en vooral van de Portugesche, heeft men eene juiste opgaaf kunnen bekomen" [We have obtained an accurate listing only of the Jewish communities and especially of the Portuguese].
 65. Ibid., 31. "De Blanken wonen vrij algemeen, (daar de vrouwen van hunne kleur in zulk een gering getal voorhanden zijn) bij de vrouwen-Kleurlingen, zoodat er de naauwste betrekking tuschen de Blanke mannen en de Kleurlingen-vrouwen onstaat."
 66. Interestingly, none lay buried at the Cassipora Cemetery, perhaps exclusively reserved for elite descendants of the leading families. As noted earlier, *congregantes* were theoretically permitted burial in the Cassipora Cemetery by at least 1819. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname,

Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen), [Minutes of the meetings of the Gentlemen of the Mahamad (Parnassim) and of the Junta (Parnassim and elderly), September 7, 1819, 7].

67. Isaac Samuel Emmanuel and Suzanne Amzalak Emmanuel, *A History of the Jews in the Netherlands Antilles*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), 1: 8–9; Benjamin, *Jews of the Dutch Caribbean*, 27–28.
68. Mongui-Maduro Library, Uitnoodiging map [invitation album], Book 1, 1854–1932, Curaçao. I thank Ena Dankmijer-Maduro for permission to view her collection.
69. Lea J. M. Monsanto to A. J. and E. D. Jesurun, March 6, 1857, Mongui-Maduro Library, Uitnoodiging map [invitation album], Book 1, Curaçao. The letter reads in part: “surtout que vous conserverez toujours vos noms aussi just et sans tache, que les ont laisses ceux dont vous l’avez hérités.”
70. The term, its meaning, and the ubiquity of such arrangements among the island’s Jews until just a few generations ago were shared in a casual conversation during a recent trip to Curaçao. The informant, whose family had dwelled on the island for seven generations, requested I conceal her identity. I have heard similar stories from former members of Suriname’s Jewish community, again, in casual conversation. See also Eva Abraham-Van der Mark, “Marriage and Concubinage among the Sephardic Merchant Elite of Curaçao,” in Janet Henshall Momsen, ed., *Women and Change in the Caribbean: a Pan-Caribbean Perspective* (London: James Currey Ltd., 1993), 38–49.
71. Abraham-Van der Mark, “Marriage and concubinage,” 43, who cites H. Hoetink, *Het patroon van de oude Curaçaose samenleving: een sociologische studie* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1958), with no page number.
72. Gerardus Balthazar Bosch, *Reizen in West-Indië*, 2 vols. (S. Emmering, 1985 [Utrecht: N. van der Monde, 1829]), 1: 230–31.
73. NA, Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname, no. 101, Ascarnot, 1748, tractate 2, article 6.
74. Florike Egmond, “Contours of Identity: Poor Ashkenazim in the Dutch Republic,” in *Dutch Jewish History: Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, vol. III (Jerusalem: The Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry/Assen and Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993), 205–25; 217–18.

Chapter 9

The Vain, Exotic, and Erotic Feather: Dress, Gender, and Power in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England

Catherine Howey

Around the year 1532, Hans Holbein sketched Mary Howard, Duchess of Somerset and Richmond. At first glance, there is nothing particularly striking about this simple, but elegant chalk outline of the widow of Henry VIII’s illegitimate son, now part of the Royal Collection housed in London. Yet, there is something very unusual about this image: it is the first one of an English woman wearing a feather. Although few scholars from any of the disciplines of dress history, early modern English history, literature, or gender studies have made any weighty remarks about this fashion accessory, it caused grave concern among some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century contemporaries. The anonymous author of *Hic Mulier* angrily accused women, “from the other, you haue taken the monstrosnesse of your deformities in apparell, exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hood, Cawle, Coyfe, handsome Dresse or Kerchiefe, to the cloudy Ruffianly broad-brim’d Hatte, and wanson feather.”¹ The outrage of this unknown individual seems incomprehensible to modern eyes, because the twenty-first century perception of the role of clothing has changed since the sixteenth century, and more importantly, because today the feather is a completely feminine fashion accessory.

The concept of a feminine feather, however, is a modern one. Originally, only men wore feathers, and women committed the horrid crime of