

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Fall 2013

Purim in the Public Eye: Leisure, Violence, and Cultural Convergence in the Dutch Atlantic

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



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Jewish Conversion in an Imperial Context: Confessional Choice and Multiple Baptisms in Nineteenth-Century Russia

Ellie Schainker

ABSTRACT

This article uses Moshe Schneerson's 1820 conversion to Catholicism and subsequent attempt to convert to Russian Orthodoxy as a frame for the multiconfessional political and social backdrop of conversions from Judaism in imperial Russia. Though the Russian Empire legally promoted Russian Orthodoxy as the "preeminent and predominant" imperial religion, it granted religious toleration and institutional support to a host of non-Orthodox confessions in whose churches Jews could be baptized. I trace the genesis of confessional choice for Jews, the problem of serial baptisms, and the social and cultural contacts that enabled converts to move between confessional communities, arguing that the study of religious conversion in modern Jewish history needs to be analyzed as a social encounter with the peoples and institutions of neighboring confessional communities rather than just an impersonal, strategic move to gain entrée to "mainstream European society."

Key words: conversion, Russian Empire, confessional state, religious toleration

Scholars long knew that Moshe, the son of Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad Hasidism, converted to Christianity in the early nineteenth century somewhere in the province of Mogilev in the Pale of Settlement, on imperial Russia's western borderlands. With the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and

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Purim in the Public Eye: Leisure, Violence, and Cultural Convergence in the Dutch Atlantic

Aviva Ben-Ur

ABSTRACT

In its public and ecumenical nature, the celebration of Purim in Suriname and Curaçao in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was unparalleled in the Atlantic world. White Christians and slaves actively participated in the revelry and by the early 1800s, Purim showed signs of having become the colony's carnival, a nonsectarian festivity with strong Afro-Creole attributes. This small corner of the social fabric, manifested in shared cultural performance, more approximates latticework than the separate spheres, ordered upon hierarchy and violence, that most obviously undergirded daily life in Caribbean slave societies. Purim's public prominence reflects the three major conditions that characterized Jewish communities in Suriname: Jews formed one third to one half of the white population, lived in a society where most residents were both enslaved and of African origin, and enjoyed an autonomy rooted in legal privileges unparalleled among Jews elsewhere in the Atlantic world.

Key words: Purim, Africans, violence, slavery

The Jewish holiday of Purim as celebrated in Suriname and Curaçao in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was neither a private occasion nor limited to Jews.¹ Instead, Jews and Christians, along with the enslaved and manumitted peoples who outnumbered them, participated in public holiday revelry with abandon. In Suriname, Purim lasted nearly a week and sometimes longer. Crowds of masked Jews, young and old, poured into the streets of Paramaribo, yelling out obscene declarations against Christianity. Surrounding

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them were bands of field slaves pulling wagons laden with costumed Jews and their domestic bondsmen. Sometimes these bondsmen circled the masquerading Jews, shouting and singing through the streets. Intoxicated Jewish men dressed up as armed soldiers, sailors, and even Maroons and Indians,² and women donned men's clothing, their female slaves following suit. Christians purchased masks from Jewish vendors and disguised themselves, with the suspected intention of attacking their enemies incognito.³ In Curaçao, meanwhile, Jews stretched out the observance of Purim to eight or ten days.⁴ Each year, masked youths paraded through the streets of Willemstad, dancing and singing to the tune of an accompanying band and visiting Jewish homes. The carousing included a magnificent fireworks display, the firecrackers bursting into the air or zigzagging erratically across the ground.⁵ Purim in Curaçao, one observer remarked in 1853, "constituted carnival."⁶ In both colonies, not only the Jewish community's ruling institution, the Mahamad, but also successive colonial governors stepped in to curb such public displays of boisterous commotion and intemperance.⁷

Purim is the annual celebration of the deliverance of the Jews of ancient Persia from annihilation in the fifth or fourth century B.C.E., as narrated in the biblical book of Esther. The story's heroes, Mordechai and Esther, together triumph over a high-ranking political adviser named Haman, who has convinced the Persian king Ahasuerus to blot out the Jews. Purim, which can fall in late February, March, or April, begins on the eve of the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month of Adar and in most diasporic Jewish communities is observed for just one day.⁸ The festival is preceded by the Fast of Esther, lasting 25 hours and commemorating in shortened form the three-day period of abstinence the story's protagonist observes before presenting herself to the king with a plea to halt his decree against her people. Though on the surface Purim would appear to be an essentially religious holiday, in the context of the Dutch Caribbean the festival is better understood as one of the multiple ways free and enslaved peoples amused themselves when not working.⁹ That Purim is based on the only biblical book that omits any mention of God underscores this point. Moreover, since late antiquity, the holiday of Purim was marked by a spirited merriment that encouraged inebriation, inversion, and, by the early modern period, masquerade. For this reason Christian theologians called the holiday "Jewish carnival," or *bacchanalia Judaeorum*.¹⁰

This article focuses on the holiday of Purim in the Dutch Caribbean as a time and theme that invited cultural convergence. The model of social confluence it exemplifies, which I have elsewhere likened to

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concentric circles, is an especially useful paradigm for Suriname, where by the early nineteenth century several religious and ethnic groups were often represented within one nuclear family or household and where it was not unusual for a single testator to leave legacies to the five or six major religious groups of the colony: Dutch Protestant Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Moravian, Portuguese Jewish, and High German Jewish.¹¹ At the same time, the public prominence of Purim tells us something quintessential about the Jewish community of Suriname and its extensive impact on the colonial ethnic landscape. Purim as celebrated in Suriname is a manifestation, in concentrated form, of the three most prominent conditions that characterized Jews of the Dutch Caribbean: Jews formed one third to one half of the white population; they lived in a society in which 90 percent of residents were both enslaved and of African origin; and they enjoyed an autonomy rooted in legal privileges unparalleled among Jews elsewhere in the Atlantic world. That it was possible to celebrate this holiday ecumenically and publicly is at least as interesting as the restraints both the colonial government and local Jewish authorities imposed on Purim celebrations. A close examination of Purim, then, allows us to gauge the paradoxical unease with which both parties experienced the liberal treatment accorded Jews. At the same time, Purim—more than any other Jewish holiday—presents an opportunity to consider a rarely treated aspect of Caribbean society. This small corner of the social fabric, manifested in shared cultural performance, more approximates latticework than the separate spheres, ordered upon hierarchy and violence, that most obviously undergirded daily life in Caribbean slave societies.

The emphasis on Suriname in the present article bears explanation. Out of all the historically Dutch colonies in the Americas, stretching from New Netherland (New York by 1664) to the insular Caribbean and the South American mainland, Suriname alone meets the two prerequisites for a detailed diachronic study of Jews in the Dutch Americas: the longevity of the local Jewish community and a surviving archive of continuous records.¹² Suriname was first colonized by the English in 1651, and Jews of Iberian origin, who self-identified as Spanish and Portuguese Jews (or in shorthand, as Portuguese Jews), were among its earliest settlers. During that same decade, these Portuguese Jews established an autonomous territory in the rainforest, which eventually evolved into Jodensavanne, or Jews' savannah. In 1667, Suriname passed into Dutch hands and remained there almost uninterrupted until 1975. The colony had the good fortune to have a deeply rooted Jewish community that conscientiously preserved, generally intact

from the mid-eighteenth century, what is by and large a weekly account of life in the colony from the perspective of the ruling Jewish elites, the *parnassim* of the Mahamad, referred to in this article as regents. Although these preserved records stretch back to the 1660s, the surviving communal minutes begin only in the mid-eighteenth century. The communal minutes these Jewish elites kept, responding to both institutional mandate and pragmatism, allow us to trace every mention of Purim, along with its conspicuous absence, from the 1750s onward, although our in-depth inquiry concludes in 1825, the year authorities in the Dutch Republic abolished Jewish communal autonomy in Suriname and Curaçao. The Jewish communal minutes also serve to anchor incidental Purim references scattered in wills, inventories, correspondence, governors' journals, colonial ordinances, ship records, and almanacs.

Curaçao's Portuguese Jewish community, which also emerged in the 1650s and rivaled its Surinamese cohort in both longevity and real numbers, peaking at 1,100 members in the late eighteenth century, has not made available its communal minutes, if they still exist.¹³ The minutes of other Jewish communities of the shorter-lived Dutch outposts in the New World have not survived. These factors necessarily limit the focus of the present inquiry to Suriname. At the same time, the uneven records of English and other Dutch colonies allow us to contextualize Suriname's Purim by highlighting its differences and similarities and by using it as a possible guide for understanding poorly documented Purims.¹⁴

Historical studies on Jews in the Caribbean are few and far between, and it is thus no surprise that Elliot Horowitz's far-reaching *Reckless Rites* (2006), the only diachronic analysis of Purim that meets current historiographical standards, omits any allusions to the Caribbean (or, for the modern period, Latin America, Australasia, or sub-Saharan Africa).¹⁵ But in providing a framework for considering Purim in long historical perspective, Horowitz's panoramic study invites historians to fill in the inevitable gaps that are markers of archival research yet to be carried out. This article takes a first step in that direction.¹⁶

The leading study that considers Jewish communities in slave societies is Jonathan Schorsch's *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (2004), an erudite history of ideas, experiences, and legislation. Schorsch's main argument is that Jews of European origin did not differ from the majority of white Christian societies in which they lived in their attitudes and behavior toward people of African origin. This thesis is not only axiomatic but also echoes the findings of Bertram Korn on Jews in the antebellum South published almost half a century earlier.¹⁷ However, Schorsch's book was a necessary riposte to the two ahistorical extremes

that, particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s, vitiated research on the relationship of Jews to African-origin peoples in the Americas: on the one hand, the racially antisemitic diatribes identifying Jews as the utmost oppressors of blacks, and on the other hand, the apologia of American Jewish historians (Korn excluded) who argued that Jews were benevolent masters.¹⁸

Schorsch's study has conclusively moved the shopworn theme of "blacks and Jews" beyond such essentialist and self-serving assessments. But because it is largely unidirectional—in its preoccupation with Jewish as opposed to African perspectives—his inquiry has left a gap.¹⁹ This article, in part, seeks to discover whether archival sources indirectly capture the thoughts of bondsmen vis-à-vis the Jewish communities in which they lived. As such, this article is less aligned with Schorsch's concern with Jewish identity and acculturation to mainstream society, a particular focus of Jewish historiography, and more in consonance with Atlantic historians interested in the agency of slaves and their inner lives. I also join these scholars in their quest to overcome the limitations of the sources, almost always crafted by literate elites.

This article does not attempt to dispute Schorsch's judgment that slaves experienced "general nonintegration" into the religious lives of their masters, nor in this context do I refute his contention that Caribbean slaves participated in Jewish rituals and life cycles by and large peripherally and passively, as observers and enablers attending Jewish funerals and synagogue services, overhearing Hebrew elegies, and ceasing from work on the Sabbath. Rather, my intention is to shine light on the Caribbean Purim as an unusual site for the public coparticipation of bondsmen in Jewish leisure life, an aspect of slave society Schorsch overlooks as a result of his focus on printed material and secondary sources.

What I do argue, in accord with Schorsch's perceptive observation, is that in Curaçao and especially in Suriname, where Jewish institutional life was both highly autonomous and centralized, "slavery was more an affair of the collective community" than it was anywhere else in the Americas.²⁰ In Suriname in particular, most plantations were clustered in and around Jodensavanne, and Jews "exercised authority over the slaves . . . with a high degree of autonomy" that was recognized and legally reinforced by colonial authorities. Slaves owned by individual Jews were often pooled together to meet the exigencies of harvest time or to tame the ever-encroaching wilderness around the village's public square. Schorsch aptly remarks that this "communalism of the masters created and overlapped with a parallel

communalism among the slaves."²¹ Needless to say, the fact that these slaves experienced Jewish life communally in no way mitigated their depersonalization as objects to be physically and psychologically tortured, traded, rented, or sold.²²

The Primacy of Purim for Portuguese Jews

For roughly the first two hundred years of the Atlantic age (1500–1825), most of the Jewish population of the world stretching from the coastlines of Europe and Africa to the shores of the Americas was of Iberian origin, and this shared provenance characterized the Jewish Caribbean for the entire period. Only in the mid-seventeenth century did Ashkenazi Jews begin to migrate to western Europe and eventually, though to smaller extents, to North America and the Caribbean.²³ In most Atlantic cities, including Amsterdam, London, Willemstad, and Paramaribo, Portuguese Jews and Ashkenazim created separate communities. Even after Ashkenazim came to form the majority of most Caribbean Jewish populations by the early nineteenth century, Portuguese Jewish hegemony—as assessed through leadership, synagogue rites, and pronunciation of Hebrew—held sway.²⁴

The political and cultural hegemony of Portuguese Jews is critical in understanding Purim's centrality among Jews in the Atlantic world. In the biblical narrative, Esther initially conceals her Jewish identity in order to marry the Persian king and then reveals her true origins to him in a plea to halt his planned genocide of her people. The collective experience of forced conversion and secret Judaism, initiated in the Iberian Peninsula in the late fourteenth through early sixteenth centuries, conditioned Portuguese Jews to identify with Esther, for she too masqueraded as a non-Jew while never relinquishing her loyalty to her heritage and people. Miriam Bodian, in her study of Portuguese Jews in early modern Amsterdam, attributes the "elevated status" of Purim among Conversos in the Iberian Peninsula to their intense identification with Esther as an ancient crypto-Jew.²⁵ For similar reasons, Cecil Roth argued almost a century ago, the Fast of Esther acquired among crypto-Jews an importance that "rivalled that of the Day of Atonement itself."²⁶

We can speculate that this same heritage contributed to the enthusiasm for Purim in the open Jewish communities established by former crypto-Jews and their descendants in the Americas. A minor Jewish festival, Purim in Suriname was on a par with all the major holidays of the Jewish calendar, including the hallowed Yom Kippur. Though the

Surinamese sources examined thus far include no mention of Purim fireworks, as witnessed in Curaçao, Suriname's Jews gave primacy to the festival in other, equally conspicuous ways. Devotion to Purim was first and foremost institutionally reinforced. The mandated recitation of the book of Esther in synagogue was enhanced by a high-quality scroll (*meguila*) with large letters and marble handles enclosed within a brass box, a costly relic that the Mahamad's regents specially ordered from Amsterdam in 1772, evidently to replace an older scroll that had worn out.²⁷ In the 1780s, more candles illuminated Suriname's two Portuguese synagogues on Purim than on an ordinary Friday night, and as many were lit as on a major holiday coinciding with Sabbath eve.²⁸ This brilliant display of light—48 lamps and four tapers—was a significant investment considering the unreliability and expense of candle shipments from across the Atlantic.²⁹

Although Purim was a minor holiday halakhically speaking (work, for example, was technically permitted), Surinamese Jews carefully safeguarded its unhindered observance and did not hesitate to protest its encroachment by non-Jewish authorities, just as they periodically protested the infringement by colonial officials on major Jewish holidays and Sabbaths.³⁰ In 1775, one concerned member of the Portuguese Jewish community asked the Mahamad to appeal to the commissioners of the civil court not to disturb "our individuals" by serving them sentences on the festival of Purim.³¹ In fact, the minutes record several dispensations granted by the regents to Jews wishing to engage in secular matters and behaviors during biblically sanctioned holidays such as Passover, but never during Purim.³² In the colony's annual almanac, where every major Jewish holiday for the 1820s is listed, "Haman's festival," as Purim was most frequently called in that publication, along with Tisha be-Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E., are the only minor holidays mentioned. Noticeably absent from the list (until 1894) are the eight days of Hanukkah, even though the congregation's leaders distributed candles to individuals and families for that holiday's domestic observance, and many Surinamese Jews owned Hanukkah lamps.³³

Devotion to Purim is also evident outside the religious realm. Suriname's earliest Jewish settlers showed a characteristic proclivity for Esther as a given name. In the colony's oldest Jewish cemetery, founded in 1666 and located at Cassipora Creek, Esther is the second most popular name appearing on surviving epitaphs,³⁴ a naming tradition observed even more emphatically among British colonial Jews.³⁵ In a 1793 issue of the colony's weekly newspaper, Purim masks were advertised for sale four months in advance of the holiday, an invitation to anticipation

directed at Jewish and Christian readers alike.³⁶ Privately owned biblical scrolls were almost invariably Torah scrolls,³⁷ scrolls of Esther being the only known exceptions. For example, Sarah de Miranda (1750–1803), wife of Emanuel d'Anavia, on her deathbed legated her daughter Rachel a scroll of Esther (*meguila off de Histoire van Ahasverus*).³⁸ A wide range of Jewish relics, from biblical scrolls to religious accoutrements, was regularly legated to family members and friends or pawned to the synagogue coffer, particularly during periods of economic stress, showing the importance of these objects not only in the spiritual but also in the material realm.³⁹

The book of Esther also had spiritual and perhaps material meaning for enslaved and manumitted members of the Portuguese Jewish community. Roza Mendes Meza, a wealthy Eurafrican Jewess who was born a slave, listed in her 1771 inventory a scroll of Esther (*Histoire van Hester*), alongside Hebrew books and a Spanish-language prayerbook.⁴⁰ In 1759, an unnamed "Jewish negro" belonging to a Jew by the last name of de la Parra ran away from his master to a Maroon settlement, carrying a "so-called history of Esther in Hebrew." The scroll was found in one of the Maroon huts by a government military expedition charged with capturing runaway slaves.⁴¹ The owner of both the fugitive and the scroll 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.⁴² The runaway's religious identity or formal belonging in the Jewish community is ambiguous—he is referred to as the "Joode Neeger van La Parra" ("Jewish Negro of La Parra" or "Jewish Negro [with the surname] van La Parra). Was he a "Jewish Negro" 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? Furthermore, what motivated him to abscond with a *meguila*? A biblical scroll was not a practical object to steal or to ensure survival in the rainforest. Perhaps he regarded the roll of parchment as a talisman to protect him from capture, or perhaps, understanding the monetary and sentimental value of such a scroll, a precious relic passed down through the generations, his intention was to inflict financial and emotional damage on his master. If he was fully aware of the text's religious and historical message, as I strongly suspect, he would have seen that message as resonant with his own predicament as an unfree person in a brutal slave society. The appeal of Esther for diasporic Jews, a subordinate minority in a foreign culture, was arguably transferrable to African-born slaves and their descendants, who formed a majority in many Caribbean societies and in the Southern United States.⁴³ If this

interpretation is correct, it would resonate with Nell Painter's observation that Sojourner Truth, among other enslaved and manumitted peoples of African origins in the mid-nineteenth century United States, also cherished the triumphant story of Esther.⁴⁴ Like Sojourner Truth, the de la Parra fugitive may have been "speaking in biblical code" when he stole the scroll of Esther, reminding his owner of the vengeful and genocidal outcome of the sacred narrative.⁴⁵

The vindictive undercurrent that fundamentally informed the dynamics between runaway slaves and Jewish plantation owners supports this hypothesis. Emmanuel Pereyra and David Rodrigues Monsanto, Portuguese Jews living on the savannah (the region in and surrounding Jodensavanne), were murdered during slave uprisings in the 1730s. Although the specific circumstances of Monsanto's death are unknown, Pereyra perished in 1738 when enslaved Africans on his plantation in Sarua staged a violent rebellion, killing their master and pillaging his property. The runaways set out on a rampage through the savannah, destroying the neighboring estates. Independently of the colonial Dutch authorities, the Jewish community sought its own vengeance by attempting to track down, punish, and kill the escaped slaves. Their pursuit was successful; they returned after six weeks with 47 captives and six hands severed from the bodies of the vanquished fugitives. The epitaphs of both Jews, preserved in the Jodensavanne cemetery, indicate the cause of death and included prayers for divine retribution against the rebels, who are disparaged on Monsanto's gravestone as "cruel, uprising negroes" (*crueys negros alevantados*). The opening verse carved on each monument is identical: "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!" (Psalm 94:1).⁴⁶

Similarly, when Jacob, son of Abraham Meijer, of the "Ashkenazi nation," perished in a Maroon attack in 1789, David Hizkiah Baruh Louzada (1750–1825), the cantor of Jodensavanne's Congregation Beraha VeSalom and keeper of the cemetery and its register, described the killers as "our cruel and rebellious enemies" (*nossos crueis e rebeldes enemigos*), concluding the entry with the curse "may his blood be avenged." Such man-hunting excursions inspired the creation of Hebrew prayers to be publicly recited in the synagogue. In 1806, following the directives of the regents, Louzada, still serving as cantor in the Beraha VeSalom synagogue, composed a prayer to be read on Sabbath days, imploring God for the "triumph of the militia of this colony dispatched against our enemies, the rebelling, uprising Negroes."⁴⁷ In the culture of violent vindictiveness shared among slave owners and enslaved alike, it is easy to imagine that unfree people—particularly those who took

the unusual step of fleeing—not only identified with the narrative in the book of Esther but also inverted the ethnoreligious identities of the story's heroes and villains.

We find another connection between slaves and the scroll of Esther in Jewish naming traditions across the Caribbean. Now and again, whether in Barbados, Suriname, or St. Thomas, archival and secondary sources refer to slaves named Purim, including an unusually rebellious one who lived at Jodensavanne in the 1770s and 1780s.⁴⁸ The evidence thus far examined suggests that this name is found only among slaves owned by Portuguese Jewish masters.⁴⁹ All eight of these Purims are either explicitly or implicitly classified as "black" (*negros*); in contrast, slaves belonging to Portuguese Jews and bearing Portuguese Jewish names, such as Simha, Ismael, or Roza, tend to be Eurafrican in origin (they are denoted under various permutations of *mulat*, a word indicating a person of dual African and European origin).⁵⁰

Slave names denoting religious holidays are not very common in Atlantic slave societies. Christian owners sometimes named their human property after the holidays of Easter or Christmas.⁵¹ But a parallel practice is almost never noted among Jews living in slave societies. Some slaves owned by Surinamese Jewish masters were named after Harbona, the eunuch in the book of Esther who suggested Haman be hanged on his own gallows,⁵² but Purim—applied solely to enslaved males—is the only known example of a Jewish holiday used as a slave name. As a distinctly Jewish name that is also unambiguously a slave name, the name Purim set the slave apart even as it tied him to the Jewish community. Although Purim is attested as a last name of Jews,⁵³ Jews never named their children after this holiday, even if they sometimes used the names of heroic personages in the Purim narrative (notably Esther and Mordecai). As an "ironically inappropriate name," the moniker Purim also served to mock, similarly to the practice of assigning slaves names such as Caesar or Pompey to facetiously highlight subservience and reinforce a slave's degradation.⁵⁴ Purim, a holiday of untrammelled joy, pokes fun at the inevitable misery of slavery and is an unmistakably deprecatory name. The selection of Purim as a slave name could also be an indirect reference to the mishnaic law that stipulates a Hebrew slave be pierced with an awl during that Jewish holiday in order to signal his decision to remain with his Hebrew master rather than be manumitted and to thereby accept perpetual subservience.⁵⁵ This is not to say that all slaves named Purim were viewed by local secular and rabbinical authorities as Jews (the opposite seems to be the case) but rather that Portuguese Jews living in Caribbean slave societies may have been aware of the rabbinical association between Purim and slavery.

Alternatively, *Purim* may be a faint echo of African survivals, the retention among slaves of ancestral traditions. Personal names such as Easter, Christmas, and Purim seem to preserve the African practice of day-naming (where a child is named after the day of the week on which he or she was born) or naming a child after an event. Since Africans more often named their children after special occasions than did Europeans, these Christian and Jewish holiday names may indicate their election by slaves rather than by their masters, or at least slave owners' recognition of African onomastics.⁵⁶

Of the eight slaves named Purim, the most visible first appears in Suriname's communal minutes in the 1770s. He is identified as Creole, an indication of his native-born status, and as a sawyer with some knowledge of carpentry.⁵⁷ His mistress, Ribca (born Ribca Nunes Forte), living at Jodensavanne, was the widow of Abraham Mendes Vais. Purim attacked both fellow slaves and members of the ruling elite. His first recorded offense was the murder on the day preceding Yom Kippur, in September 1771, of a slave belonging to the synagogue and entrusted with keeping slaves quiet during the synagogue service.⁵⁸ In March of 1772, Jacob, son of Samuel Cohen Nassy, complained that Purim behaved outrageously and insolently against him, even physically approaching Nassy in the presence of witnesses. For the violation of his honor and physical space, one of several such occurrences, Nassy appealed to the regents of the Mahamad to mandate that Purim be punished according to Nassy's satisfaction. The regents ordered Ribca Mendes Vais to carry out the punishment on penalty of having Purim forever banished from the savannah.⁵⁹ The holiday of Purim that year fell on March 19, and it is likely that the slave's riotous behavior, registered five days later, occurred during the festival.⁶⁰

In October 1772, Purim again caused a commotion, this time on the eve of Yom Kippur itself. A combination of repetitive offenses and the fact that his latest rebellion occurred once again on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar probably convinced the Mahamad to banish him from the savannah. His owner was ordered to carry out this expulsion, and if she refused, Purim was to be handed over to the colonial prosecutor (*fiscaal*).⁶¹ If Purim was ever expelled, it was only a temporary relocation, for he appears again in the savannah in 1782. By this time, Ribca Vais had been dead for just over a year and had left her slaves in the charge of one of her executors, who was mandated to put them to work to benefit her estate.⁶²

Purim seems to have been as keenly aware of the significance of his name as he was of the Jewish calendar. We can speculate that his rebellious behavior intensified during both the holiday after which

he was ironically named and Yom Kippur, a term that rabbinical thinkers since antiquity read as "like [*ki*] Pur[im]," understanding the austere Day of Atonement to be a mirror image of the festive Purim during the diasporic period and its very embodiment in messianic times.⁶³ There is some evidence that Suriname's Portuguese community also saw the Day of Atonement in close relationship to Purim. In September of 1817, the regents resolved to make a public announcement during the Sabbaths preceding both holidays restricting loud socializing in synagogue on both Yom Kippur and Purim. In that decree, worshipers were forbidden "to applaud or beat with hands or feet in the synagogues on any occasion, including the beating of Aman [Haman] the night and day of Purim."⁶⁴ It is possible that Suriname's Portuguese Jewish community, like that of Amsterdam, practiced *malkot*, a ritual of self-flagellation that would have been very noisy, on the day before Yom Kippur.⁶⁵

As with the vast majority of Africans taken to the Americas and enslaved, Purim's birthplace is unknown. If Purim was born around the mid-eighteenth century, there is a 41 percent chance that he traced his origins to the Kormantin ethnic group and a one in four possibility that he came from either the Mandingo or Loango cultures, all in West Africa.⁶⁶ Purim's awareness of the holiday after which he was named is not surprising given the importance West Africans attached to the literal and ontological meanings of their given names. Many West Africans and their diasporic descendants preserved a tradition of naming a child after his or her birthday in the week. Moreover, a name could signify a person's spiritual attributes or his parents' mundane situation at the time of birth.⁶⁷ Just as Purim had an African birth name and probably at least one byname, it is also clear that he maintained some of the spiritual traditions of his native West Africa. In 1782, David de Jacob Raphael de Meza discovered "the negro Purim" slaughtering a goat later discovered to be the property of the Portuguese Jew Isaac Lopes Nunes. When Meza tried to intervene, Purim forcibly resisted.⁶⁸ Purim may have been sacrificing a goat in veneration of one of his ancestors, a practice common to many communities in Angola and other regions of West Africa.⁶⁹ On paper, Purim's act also seems similar to the ceremonies (*rónias*) of the Guinean coast, which also involved ritual animal slaughter and where local healers played a central role not only in curing diseases but also in linking living people with ancestral spirits, securing a physical or spiritual bulwark, and carrying out purification and divination rituals.⁷⁰ Purim would have had numerous occasions to appeal to his ancestors for intervention or protection. When chastised by the

Mahamad for Purim's behavior, David de la Parra, an executor of Ribca Vais's estate, assured the regents that he was well aware of Purim's crime and "was still exhausted from administering him a severe beating." By that time, most of the savannah's free residents, including Meza, had complained about Purim's insolence (*desaforos*) "infinite times," and the Mahamad had passed numerous resolutions to have Ribca or her executors banish Purim from the savannah. Once again, the regents ordered Parra to expel Purim. If he did not obey, he would be required to bring Purim to the colonial prosecutor.⁷¹ Purim had witnessed several slaves owned by his late mistress promised manumission after her death and probably realized how slim his own chances were for release from slavery, the "cherished gift of freedom" that was reserved mainly for a highly select group of mostly Eurafrikan women and children.⁷² Purim must have known that severe physical punishment and a banishment that might catapult him from the frying pan into the flames were inevitable. Yet did not the holiday of Purim teach one to hope for precipitous salvation?

Even in the absence of an official policy that imposed the ruling society's spiritual traditions, enslaved populations historically have shared the religious heritage of their masters to varying degrees. Much research has been devoted to the participation of Caribbean and American slaves in the Christmas holiday, which sometimes offered an opportunity for slaves to experience momentary upward mobility.⁷³ In early nineteenth-century Jamaica, for example, slaves celebrating Christmas

appear an altered race of beings. They show themselves off to the greatest advantage, by fine clothes and a profusion of trinkets; they affect a more polished behavior and mode of speech; they address the whites with greater familiarity; they come into their masters' houses, and drink with them; the distance between them appears to be annihilated for the moment.⁷⁴

In Suriname, slaves also lived according to the religious rhythms of their masters and mistresses, whether Jewish or Christian. As early as 1698, the colonial government issued an ordinance prohibiting slaves in and around Paramaribo from gathering in public to drum and play on Sundays and Christian holidays.⁷⁵ In 1711, a similar placard was issued banning *negers* (slaves) on the savannah from gathering in large numbers on Jewish holidays and other occasions to drum, dance, and play without express permission of the Jewish regents.⁷⁶ The placard was reissued periodically over the course of the century

in reference to Sundays and other "holy days," often explicitly underscoring the 1711 ordinance dealing with Jewish holidays.⁷⁷ Worthy of note are the several words referring to dance. The Dutch *dansen* would imply a Christian European provenance, whereas the *watermamadans* is a clear allusion to the African water spirit and cult common to certain regions of western Africa.⁷⁸ The term *baljaaren*, meanwhile, is a Creolized Dutchification of the Portuguese and Spanish infinitive "to dance" (*bailar*). The placards first mentioned *baljaaren* in 1741 and the *watermamadans* in 1776, an indication that the colonial authorities had begun by then to perceive cultural distinctions between the leisurely activities of slaves and to assign to them separate Dutch, West African, and possibly Portuguese Jewish attributes.

Slave participation in Jewish religious life in the colony was probably a constant during the period of slavery. A communal ordinance whose earliest extant version dates to 1748 includes a prohibition against the synagogue attendance of "Negras, Mulatas ou Indias," with or without children, and indicates the responsibility of their masters to remove them. In 1817, the First Parnas (chairman of the Mahamad) proposed the renewal of an interdiction against disruption in synagogues by free and manumitted slaves (*negreerias*) entering with or without children in both the men's and women's sections of the building. These individuals formed a disruptive group that attended synagogue under the pretext of rendering services to their owners or offering holiday greetings (*felicitaçoems*) to free or enslaved blacks.⁷⁹ The successive reissue of such regulations reveals the tensions inherent in a society whose ruling elite wished to exclude slaves from its ranks even as it necessarily incorporated them into its communal rhythms and religious outlook.

The foregoing examples of Purim as a holiday and as a personal name transmit a general message about how ethnic groups interacted in Suriname. Most studies of Caribbean Jewry have either largely ignored the enslaved element or have sought to find Jewish "influences" among slaves and their free descendants.⁸⁰ But it is not that these individuals were passive, unwitting recipients of a rich Jewish heritage that was so compelling or dominant it overwhelmed their own, as most scholars have argued or implied. The acquisition of culture and its performance were much more active processes. Jewish masters and mistresses habitually related their human property to the fiber of Jewish life. Unfree people of African origin, for their part, seem to have fully understood the Jewish heritage of their immediate surroundings. Slaves owned by Jews sometimes incorporated a Portuguese Jewish cultural worldview into their own, as suggested by the actions of Purim the slave, the unnamed fugitive who absconded into

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the wilderness with a scroll of Esther, or the baljaaren of Jewish holidays, of possible Portuguese Jewish provenience. But Jewish-owned slaves, particularly those who worked in the field with little contact with the owner and his or her extended family, also had sufficient cultural autonomy (in the absence of an official colonial religion and language imposed on all residents) to preserve or cultivate their own traditions, such as the watermamadans, often performed during Jewish holidays but clearly West African in origin. Any discussion of cultural transformation demands a consideration of how both groups were affected in their encounter with one another. Substituting the idea of influence with a more mutual and active paradigm of cultural expression is much more than a semantic distinction. It allows us to see that rigid racial barriers and violence did not preclude cultural convergence. This confluence is only hinted at in the aforementioned individual expressions of Purim; it finds fuller expression in Purim as a panethnic Caribbean festival.

Purim Pandemonium

In American colonies where Judaism was a licit religion, Purim was the most public of Jewish holidays. This was partly because the festival's main attractions (costuming, masquerade, and fireworks displays) occurred outside of the synagogue. But even the activity entirely confined to the house of worship—the public reading of the *megillah* (the scroll of Esther)—entailed a riotous call and response component in which the congregation sometimes reacted violently. Purim celebrations became a pressing issue for Suriname's Jews and the colonial government only during the 50 years that bracketed the turn of the nineteenth century. The concern fell into two distinct categories: noise levels within the synagogue and the accompanying destruction of synagogue property, and boisterous behavior on the streets of Paramaribo. We shall first deal with the former category, which was registered only internally and never reached the governor's desk.

The Sabbath of Remembrance, immediately preceding Purim and known in Portuguese-inflected Hebrew as Sabat Zahor, signaled the onset of Purim in the Dutch colonies. On that day, in keeping with ancient Jewish tradition, a special concluding Torah reading (*maftir*) from the book of Deuteronomy recalled the iconic villain Amalek who attacked the ancient Israelites after their flight from Egyptian slavery. Jewish communities throughout the world have traditionally associated Amalek with Haman of the Purim story and have understood the

Amalekites as a symbol of the evil that arises in each generation and must be stamped out.⁸¹ A long-standing diasporic tradition, which Surinamese Jews also followed, was to produce a cacophony of noise every time the cantor uttered the name of Haman from the lectern during the reading of the megilla, a custom inferred from Exodus 17:14: "For I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the Heavens."⁸²

Upholding the authority of the regents, especially by regulating behavior within the synagogue, was the Mahamad's main task. The vast majority of cases the regents dealt with, as a diachronic perusal of the communal minutes from the mid-eighteenth century onward shows, involved scrutinizing what went on in the synagogue and ascertaining that violators of proper decorum were swiftly disciplined. The six separate incidents of commotion during the reading of the megilla registered in the communal minutes date from 1772 to 1819. Two involved a conflict between named individuals. On Purim day of 1772, David de Jacob Raphael de Meza was reciting the scroll of Esther in synagogue and hammering the lectern, perhaps to quiet the congregation.⁸³ Abruptly, Meza descended from the reader's lectern and slapped Joseph Haim Pinto across the face.⁸⁴ Similarly, on Purim eve in 1808, Jacob Miranda asked David Souza Britto to cease making a commotion so that the cantor's recitation of the scroll of Esther would be audible. When Britto refused, Miranda called him a "drunk and lowly sailor."⁸⁵ These two conflicts were resolved by a public request for forgiveness at the synagogue lectern and a monetary fine.⁸⁶

Most recorded cases of synagogue disruption during Purim, however, concerned crowd behavior. A few days after Purim of 1777, regents convened to discuss the pandemonium that had ensued during the recitation of the scroll of Esther in both the Beraha VeSalom synagogue in Jodensavanne and the Sedek VeSalom house of worship in Paramaribo. Worshipers had struck the benches with hammers, clubs, and other hard objects, preventing others from hearing the megilla recitation by the cantor as mandated by Jewish law and damaging the synagogue furniture, to the burden of the charity chest. The regents therefore outlawed the "beating of Haman," permitting only self-striking instruments such as clappers, and appointed fathers, teachers, and children's tutors responsible for preventing raucous conduct.⁸⁷ In March of 1797, worshipers again hammered the benches during the megilla reading, rendering "ridiculous a ceremony practiced in all the congregations of Israel." The striking of synagogue furniture also disrupted "the precious moment of prayer" and invited the disdain of other religious groups for "our divine cult

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and its august ceremonies." The regents imposed a fine of 500 guilders on any *jahid* or *congregante* (first- and second-tier members of the Jewish community) who struck any object with a hammer or made noise outside of the appropriate times. Moreover, informers would receive anonymity and a reward of 200 guilders. The resolution would be read aloud each year in synagogue, on both the eve of Purim and the following day, before the recitation of the meguila, in the Jodensavanne synagogue and in Paramaribo's Sedek VeSalom house of prayer.⁸⁸ In 1819, the regents entirely forbade worshipers from striking during any mention of Haman. Only the hazan reading the meguila was permitted to strike, and even he was directed to do so only with his foot and only with three blows.⁸⁹ Even though the congregation had for the past several years exhibited good behavior (*boa comportamento*), the Mahamad reiterated the ruling in 1826 as a preventative measure.⁹⁰ This gradual imposition of somber and orderly worship, which virtually eliminated the congregation's audible participation, generally characterizes the process of ritual reform in Suriname and elsewhere in the Portuguese Jewish Caribbean beginning in the early nineteenth century. There, innovation in synagogue services was typically introduced gradually, with none of the ideological warfare instigated by the emancipation decrees of western and central Europe during the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries.⁹¹ These episodes in Suriname rather suggest the self-consciousness of practicing Jews living in a Christian-dominated society and witnessed among Portuguese Jews in Europe since at least the seventeenth century.

Before 1772, neither surviving government placards nor extant records of the Surinamese Mahamad express specific complaints about the ways in which Jews celebrated Purim. This silence should not mislead us into assuming that all previous behavior in synagogue during Purim was docile, especially given prior patterns in Amsterdam, where the "mother community" of the Portuguese Jewish diaspora held court. Two weeks before Purim in 1640, Amsterdam's Portuguese Mahamad resolved to outlaw hammering in the synagogue during the reading of the scroll of Esther, considering the custom more appropriate to barbarians than to civilized individuals. Three decades later, the decree was repeated and the fine increased twentyfold.⁹² Such comportment was also habitual among the Portuguese Jews of London.⁹³ When an English non-Jew named John Greenhalgh visited the city's Portuguese congregation in 1662, he observed that during the synagogue service of Purim "they use great knocking and stamping when Haman is named."⁹⁴ The earliest recorded attempt to

reduce disruption in London's Jewish house of worship dates to around the turn of the seventeenth century, when the congregation's Mahamad forbade any worshiper, regardless of sex or age, to "beat, or make a noise in Synagogue with a hammer, or any other instrument, since, independently of the scandal such a bad custom would give rise to, it may prevent many devout persons of our congregation from going to Synagogue on these occasions."⁹⁵ The reaction of Curaçao's Mahamad to "beating Haman" is unknown, since communal minutes, if they have survived, are not available to the public. But the Jesuit Miguel Alexias Schabel, a Bohemian who lived on the island during the first decade of the seventeenth century, made anti-Jewish remarks concerning the loud music emanating from the synagogue, suggesting that Jews there also had cause for self-consciousness.⁹⁶

The apparent silence of Suriname's regents between the 1750s (the date of the earliest surviving minutes) and the 1770s may have a great deal to do with the fact that before the mid-eighteenth century the majority of the Jewish community lived not in the capital city of Paramaribo but in Jodensavanne, in the country's remote interior.⁹⁷ As we have seen, the earliest known placard complaining about Jewish festival days, dating to 1711, refers only to the ruckus caused by enslaved celebrants. Colonial legislators complained that great numbers of slaves (negers) in the savannah gathered on Jewish holidays and other days in order to "drum, dance, and play, and that on these occasions there, many disorders occur." They forbade these activities without prior permission of the regents, on pain of a whipping.⁹⁸ Though absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, Purim as celebrated by Jews may only have come under public scrutiny when the majority of the colony's Jewish population relocated to Paramaribo over the course of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Living in a bustling urban environment inhabited by multiethnic whites may have given rise to a Jewish self-consciousness witnessed earlier in Amsterdam, London, and possibly on Curaçao.

Moreover, increasing Jewish squeamishness with ritual rowdiness could reflect the implicit internalization of Christian behavioral norms in houses of worship. In Paramaribo, the Jewish synagogue would have received more Christian visitors who arrived out of curiosity, to reinforce social or business ties, or to negotiate political relations. In fact, Jews often extended these invitations themselves. One example dates to the Friday evening after Purim, when the High German Jewish community invited the governor and gentlemen of the council to attend Sabbath evening services. To mark the occasion, the entrance to the synagogue was decorated with orange, the Dutch

national color, and musicians performed.⁹⁹ There is ample evidence that successive governors and other dignitaries also visited the synagogue in Jodensavanne beginning in the late seventeenth century.¹⁰⁰ But unlike the remote hinterland, in Paramaribo the synagogue was vulnerable to the prying eyes and straining ears of non-Jewish neighbors, whose unwelcome attention sometimes caused the congregation extreme embarrassment. One such incident, in 1821, involved a wedding ceremony turned sour when passersby gravitated to the doorway of Sedek VeSalom to hear the "scandalous shouts and insults" coming from within.¹⁰¹

The Mahamad's paramount duty to enforce proper behavior became much more complicated any time transgressions were carried out beyond the synagogue walls, where individuals outside of the community were inevitably implicated and the jurisdictional domain of the Mahamad was compromised. Once again, absence of evidence is not conclusive. But it is likely that Purim celebrations took to the streets only with the mass migration of the colony's inland Jewish population to Paramaribo. In 1775, the Court of Policy and Criminal Justice issued the first surviving Surinamese placard specifically referring to the holiday of Purim. Colonial leaders complained that men in groups, masked, costumed, and walking with weapons, created a ruckus while deeply inebriated, hurling insults at other men and inciting violence on the avenues known as the Heeren Straaten.¹⁰² Adult males were consequently forbidden to appear masked on these streets, much less to carry out any wantonness or molestation (*balddigheeden of moleste*), under any pretext whatsoever, under pain of arbitrary punishment.¹⁰³ It is noteworthy that the assembly of men (that is, white men) and their costumes, weapons, drunkenness, noise level, and insults seemed to be of secondary importance. Masquerade was deemed the main culprit, ostensibly because facial disguise prevented accountability and punishment and perhaps more than other factors encouraged uninhibited behavior.

The hurled insults may have been religious in nature, given events two decades later in Suriname and considering the diasporic record of Purim's villain Haman morphing into a Christian symbol.¹⁰⁴ In March of 1792, a band of masked Portuguese and Ashkenazi youth winding their way through Paramaribo's streets engaged in "various forbidden actions" that were "against the general peace [*sossego*] and against Catholics in this colony." Portuguese Jewish leaders worried that such actions would harm "the credit of the nation" and could incite the "displeasure and indignation" of the colonial magistrate against the entire Jewish community.¹⁰⁵ The impulse of these Portuguese and Ashkenazi Jews to

scapegoat Catholics (perhaps with an effigy of Christ depicted as Haman) is telling, given the social position of Catholics in a nominally Dutch Reformed Protestant colony. Although "tolerated" in the colony, as the Portuguese communal minutes explicitly note, Jews enjoyed a much longer-lived and generally more secure status than Catholics. Jewish autonomy was rooted in privileges granted under the English in the 1650s and reconfirmed and expanded after the Dutch takeover in 1667. Jews were immediately accorded the liberty of public worship of their religion, whereas the first Roman Catholic congregational building in Suriname was established only in 1785.¹⁰⁶ Targeting Catholics may have been a safer way to vent a general anti-Christian animus. But Portuguese Jews (and perhaps their Ashkenazi sympathizers) harbored a specific and enduring resentment of the religion they identified with the forced conversion of hundreds and thousands of Jews in centuries past. There is evidence in the communal minutes that Suriname's Portuguese Jews kept these bitter memories alive, especially in contexts where they praised the Dutch Republic for its tolerance of Jews.¹⁰⁷

Denigration of Christianity did not deter some non-Jews (ostensibly free Eurafrikan or white Christians) from sharing in the Purim pandemonium. In 1793, the Mahamad learned that "various people outside of the Judaic nation" masked themselves during the evening of Sabat Zahor and Purim with the possible intention of launching attacks. The communal minutes, which typically do not distinguish between Christian denominations, do not tell us whether these Christians were Dutch Reformed, who might have shared a disdain for Catholicism. The regents also noted that slaves of unspecified spiritual traditions (*negros*) invariably accompanied their masters in the annual costume parades. The leaders made an announcement from the synagogue podium prohibiting all Portuguese Jews, whether jehidim or congregantes, from costuming themselves or wearing masks on those evenings and allowing children to do so only during the day. Furthermore, children were to remain in their homes from six o'clock in the evening onward, to avoid the insolence and commotion (*alborotos e tumultos*) that invariably characterized the disport.¹⁰⁸ The explicit inclusion of congregantes, typically Jews of Eurafrikan descent, is a reference not so much to their sudden participation in Purim as to their exponential growth in the latter half of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ During that period, for the first time, communal minutes began habitually to reference jehidim and congregantes in one breath.

Anxiety over Purim among the colony's Christian and Jewish leaders peaked during the British interregnum (1799–1815). Shortly after Suriname capitulated in August of 1799, British authorities issued a

document of Dutch surrender whose second article stipulated that the "inhabitants of the colony shall enjoy full security to their persons and the free exercise of their religion,"¹¹⁰ an implicit sanctioning of Purim and other holidays. But Purim was becoming an ever more fraught holiday, given the colony's increasing militarization under British rule. The authorities not only regrouped existing Dutch battalions but also added over 3,500 rank-and-file soldiers, including "Germans of the Walloon guards, as well as some Hungarians and Austrians," and also augmented the local naval force.¹¹¹

Five months before capitulation and nine days before Purim, the regents noted "the critical circumstances of this colony" caused by the Quasi-War between France and the United States (1798–1800). The regents feared that under the pretense of masquerading through the streets during the festival of Purim, opposing parties would commit aggressive acts that would later give Jews a bad name. Jewish leaders were particularly nervous given that they had received notice about various "Christians" who had already purchased masks, a rumor probably based in truth if we consider the aforementioned newspaper advertisement from 1793 announcing Purim masks for sale.¹¹² The regents appealed to the governor to publicize a placard imposing heavy penalties on men and children masquerading in the streets and pulling any medium of transportation laden with domestic bondsmen and other people.¹¹³

The regents issued similar ordinances from 1800 through 1819, and all of them expressed similar concerns: Purim celebrations, primarily outside the synagogue, would incite suspicion and ridicule among Christians, and it was indecent, insolent, and a threat to the public order for slaves and domestic bondsmen to run shouting and singing through the streets. The reaction of Governor Juriaan François Frederici (1790–1802) confirms the broad threat of Purim to colonial stability. In February 1800, 13 days before Purim, he issued a new ordinance forbidding any adult or child from donning a costume or mask.¹¹⁴ But by 1807, his Purim edict had entirely lost its efficacy and the disruption was worse than ever. Not only had the revelers walked through the streets "very indecently with masks," but they had also paraded in decorated military costumes, to the beat of drums, sounding an alarm, an act forbidden by a colonial placard. Moreover, some male Jews donned "inappropriate and indecent costumes," parading "almost naked and in the form of Indians and Bush Negroes" through the streets. Among them were "even women disguised in the costumes of men," which inevitably led mulatas and negras to assume male dress and join the revelry.¹¹⁵

Even if others took part, it is clear from these reports that Jews were the initial instigators of rowdy behavior on Purim. Their choice of disguises (sailor, soldier, Maroon, and Indian costumes, and female cross-dressing), as well as the earlier "drunk and lowly sailor" insult in the 1808 synagogue dispute, therefore merit remark. Whereas European Christians in their dramaturgy selected from both the Old and New Testaments, in addition to the lives of saints, Jews limited themselves to some 20 biblical episodes and legends for their Purim plays. This observation, offered by Nahma Sandrow in her study of Purim dramaturgy among modern Ashkenazim, distinguishes the provocative costumes chosen by Surinamese Jews as a marked imaginative departure from traditional Purim merriment.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the only costumes mentioned in the sources are restricted in range and therefore demand our interpretive scrutiny.

Sailors, soldiers, Maroons, and Indians were all low-status groups in the colonial hierarchy. Between the 1750s and the early nineteenth century, sailors were increasingly visible on Suriname's waterfront and rivers. In response to market demands, they were frequently hired as rowers of barges, previously typical slave work.¹¹⁷ In the colony as elsewhere in the Atlantic world, sailors commonly received brutal corporal punishment from their superiors, and most lived short lives.¹¹⁸ Soldiers were often impressed into service, and those who had served under Dutch rule were extremely reluctant to continue their duties under British military authority.¹¹⁹ In the Portuguese Jewish communal minutes, both sailors and soldiers are often associated with chronic inebriation.¹²⁰ As nonwhites, Maroons and Indians occupied the lowest rungs of the colony's racial ladder (one notch above slaves), and their clothing, skimpy by white standards, was a symbol of denigration.

Nevertheless, each of these groups also exacted fear, if not respect. Sailors and soldiers and other "white ruffians" were hired as white officers (*blankofficiers*) on Surinamese plantations, a disposable workforce that estate owners used to shield themselves from the wrath of their slaves.¹²¹ At various times of the year other than Purim, some Portuguese Jews disguised themselves as soldiers in order to exact vengeance on their Jewish enemies incognito, an apparently well-known ruse in the colony. One Sabbath night in 1768, Imanuel de Abraham Jessurun and other Jews, including an Ashkenazi, walked through the streets of Paramaribo disguised as drunken soldiers and armed with spades and other weapons, attacking two Portuguese men and wounding one. Jessurun's repeat offense resulted in his repatriation out of the colony within two months, but he clearly had

accomplices and perhaps even sympathizers.¹²² Other Jews dealt with their opponents by hiring sailors as thugs. In 1796, a Portuguese Jew banned from attending a coreligionist's funeral fetched four sailors from his tavern and returned to harass those who physically barred him from entering the house of the deceased.¹²³ Periodically, Portuguese Jewish regents called on non-Jewish soldiers as guards to protect the synagogue during the High Holy Days or as law enforcers if Jews did not behave themselves in the house of worship.¹²⁴

Moreover, a Jewish soldier was not an ontological contradiction: Suriname's Jews, like those of Curaçao, had their own separate civil guard. Jewish officers served in full military regalia, as we can see from the inventory of David Haim del Monte, a lieutenant of Suriname's Jewish militia, who owned houses in both Paramaribo and Jodensavanne and died in 1824.¹²⁵ But a separate militia enhanced a Jewish man's status only so far, for it also highlighted his exclusion from the society's mainstream military forces, which even free Christian men of African ancestry could join by the late eighteenth century.¹²⁶ The only way Jews could serve in the mainstream forces, it would seem, was by secretly renouncing their Jewishness and passing themselves off as white Christians, as a handful of Portuguese Jews did in Suriname around the turn of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷

An awareness of this derision for soldiers and sailors, alternately doused with fear and respect, may also have enticed males living in a wide range of other Portuguese Jewish communities in the previous century to don sailor or soldier disguises during Purim. The earliest known objection to Purim disguises in Amsterdam, which dates to 1690, does not tell us whether sailor or soldier outfits were donned. In 1690, Amsterdam's Mahamad resolved that neither community members, their children, nor their servants be allowed to appear in the streets during Purim, as was customary, in costumes or masks, "since some of our enemies use this [custom of] masquerading to demonstrate their ill intent toward us."¹²⁸ In 1695, the description became more specific. The regents outlawed public Purim celebrations after spotting children in the street dressed up as sailors or in masks. Daniel Swetschinski notes a general fear among the regents that "large and unruly crowds" and public exuberance during various Jewish holidays would draw unwelcome attention from Christians who viewed Portuguese Jewish traditions with "suspicion or ridicule." Such public displays of euphoria vitiated the tranquility (*quietação*) the Mahamad sought to enforce.¹²⁹ These concerns echo those of the Surinamese Mahamad a century later. The regents there were likewise worried about Jews creating public spectacles and endangering

the community's reputation or status. In 1772, they had explicitly asserted their right to seek the colonial government's intervention in the public scandals occasioned by Purim the slave on the savannah. According to the privileges conferred on Suriname's Portuguese Jews, they noted, the Mahamad had a right to assure the "good governance and tranquility" of the village.¹³⁰

This anxiety about public disorder throws new light on the parallel obsession among Reformed Protestants in seventeenth-century New Amsterdam (New York), an obsession Dennis Sullivan mistakenly attributes to a concern that disruptive behavior would cause economic loss.¹³¹ In this context, it is also worthwhile to reconsider Yosef Kaplan's analysis of the concept of *bom judesmo* (good Judaism) among Portuguese Jews. Kaplan explains that good Judaism was understood not as strict adherence to halakhah but rather as "obedience and restraint," control of one's instincts, and "maximal consideration for the taste and inclinations of the surrounding society."¹³² Kaplan contends that this understanding of Judaism was influenced by Iberian values of civility and that it was emphasized because in a community with a wide range of religious observance it was much more effective than exhorting the population to comply with the minutiae of Jewish law.¹³³ However, the examples of public Purim celebration suggest that the ideals of self-containment did not emanate from any set of values imported from Portugal or Spain, nor were they a reaction to the Jewish community's recent return to and struggles with rabbinical Judaism. Rather, the principle of *bom judesmo*, like *quietação*, was a factor of Jewish existence as a tolerated minority at the whims of a dominant group. Public order was a value rhetorically upheld in every segment of Dutch society, including the political elite, but among groups whose presence was tied to privileges that could be arbitrarily withdrawn there were perhaps more urgent reasons to embrace it.

The disorder that sailor costumes could incite is vividly recounted in the memoir of boxing champion Daniel Mendoza, born in London's Jewish community in 1764. As a young man, Mendoza and his friends attended a Purim festival disguised as a party of sailors, Mendoza himself playing the part of lieutenant. Unfortunately for them, they encountered a press gang and were thrown in jail for two days. This did nothing to deflate their holiday spirits, however. Upon their release, some Jewish acquaintances staging a traditional Purim play invited Mendoza and his party to perform as sailors. In the midst of their intolerably poor performance, Mendoza and company were hissed off the stage and created further "uproar and tumult" when they insisted on pocketing the proceeds from the admission fee.¹³⁴

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Consideration of more extreme Purim costumes brings us to Maroons and Indians. As the only nonwhite groups in the colony that had successfully negotiated their political autonomy, these two also exacted respect. Both received annual tribute from the government, a method of pacification. Alexander Salonthay van Salontha, a plantation owner and colonial leader who lived in Suriname for nine years before returning to Europe, rightly noted in 1778 that such gifts were "in essence nothing more than openly recognizing their [the Maroons'] superiority."¹³⁵

Finally, one must consider the mundaneness of soldier, sailor, Maroon, and Indian costumes, at least in a Surinamese context. All were familiar groups in local society and as such were obvious choices for imitation. Soldiers became ever more present under British occupation, and sailors, who worked on the urban docks and along Suriname's rivers, were also very visible. Maroons and Indians, even if geographically marginalized to the colony's rainforest interior, possessed political clout, whether under British occupation or otherwise, and there is scattered evidence that Portuguese Jews living in the hinterland had contact with both groups. Indians are sometimes mentioned in the communal minutes as trading partners of Jews or as their slaves.¹³⁶ In 1791, the regents deferred the hour of prayer so they could attend the funeral of an Indian.¹³⁷ In the savannah, Indians were sometimes hired to maintain the Jodensavanne and Cassipora cemeteries.¹³⁸ Abraham, son of Moses Bueno de Mesquita, was living and trading, not always harmoniously, among the Saramaka Maroons in 1802.¹³⁹ Aaron J. da Costa evidently also traded with a Maroon tribe. When he died on the savannah in 1820, his possessions included five "Bush Negro" plates (*Bosch Neeger Borden*), likely a reference to intricately carved woodwork purchased directly from Maroon artisans.¹⁴⁰ In a sense, the Purim costumes with which Surinamese Jews clad themselves and their children attest to a lack of imagination, if not provincialism.¹⁴¹

The social position of Jews during the British interregnum was far too complex to point to costuming as a means of performing higher or lower status. The historically elite status of Jews in the colony had been declining along with the economy since the 1770s, and the free Christian colored population had in many respects risen above Jews by then. The Jews' bathetic status was apparently well-known in the colony. Shortly after capitulation, a senior British official reported that although Jews were "the first settlers" of Suriname and settled there "with their own laws and privileges granted them by the Sovereign," they were now "considerd [*sic*] as the very lowest class of the white people."¹⁴²

In Suriname, an intensely multiethnic population and politically complex society, each group had a multivalent image. A Purim costume representing another social or ethnic group would therefore have communicated multiple messages. In cladding themselves as soldiers, sailors, Maroons, and Indians, Jews were simply expressing their boisterous sides through a limited repertoire of costuming also available to revelers of other backgrounds.

Purim's public manifestations should attract our attention for a different reason. Particularly if we consider the enthusiastic participation of the enslaved, it is clear that Purim in Suriname from the second quarter of the eighteenth century had become an Afro-Creole festival, akin in many ways to what scholars and many contemporary observers in the Caribbean have understood as a local variety of carnival.¹⁴³ Within the synagogue, Purim retained its characteristics as a classical Jewish holiday celebrated by Jews. But once it took to the streets, its ethnic applicability broadened. Its masquerade and cross-dressing, the relaxation of social boundaries, and dancing and singing through the streets invited the participation of others, just as did carnivals and other festivals imported to the Americas from Europe and Africa and transformed there in slave societies. We are not told the details of the dancing and singing during Suriname's Purim that would mark these cultural expressions as typical of the Dutch Protestant, Portuguese Jewish, or African diasporas or that would allow us to develop a creolization hypothesis. But the countenanced participation of white Christians, slaves, and domestic bondsmen, as well as the reactive objections of the Jewish and colonial authorities, indicate that the holiday by the early 1800s had become a joint cultural production with strong West African overtones. In fact, the musical and aerobic slave assemblies, alternately referred to as *dansen*, *watermamadans*, and *baljaaren* and outlawed in Suriname by successive ordinances since the late seventeenth century, can all be seen as precursors, if not manifestations, of Suriname's carnivalesque festivities. Their official proscription by the colonial and Jewish authorities is in itself diagnostic of carnival, which has a long history in the circum-Caribbean of interrelation with the law.¹⁴⁴

The celebration of carnivals developed in slave societies throughout the Caribbean and is not necessarily linked to Catholicism and its associated period of abstinence preceded by frenetic crapulence. Carnivals also developed in colonies that lacked substantial Catholic populations and whose official religion was Protestantism. Carnival-like celebrations in the Caribbean, as observed among the enslaved and their free descendants, have diverse origins.¹⁴⁵ Some strands can

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be traced directly back to Europe, whereas others show remarkable consistency with West African traditions.¹⁴⁶ In some cases a theory of parallel evolution is applicable, whereby "similar cultural artifacts can emerge independently in diverse regions." Perhaps most compelling is the creolization paradigm, whereby European traditions blended with imported African culture "to produce a distinctive form of expression."¹⁴⁷ Attempts to determine the ancestry of Afro-Creole carnival are at best tentative, but the term rightly recognizes that people of African origins have formed the majority of the Caribbean population. As such, the Afro-Creole carnival implicitly acknowledges the wealth of African derivatives and, more important, the worldviews of slaves and their free descendants.

What, then, did Purim celebrations mean to Suriname's multi-ethnic enslaved population? If masquerades and communal dances constituted crucial life-cycle rituals, including initiations, for the population of African descent, as they did in early modern West Africa, taking part in masked Purim celebrations may have been a means by which slaves could inculcate ancestral values into their immediate community and transmit these to their descendants.¹⁴⁸ If most African-born slaves in Suriname spoke mutually unintelligible languages, dance may have functioned as a "performative literacy" and their bodies as a depository of "kinesthetic memory."¹⁴⁹ As we have seen, communal dances of slaves in Suriname were repeatedly outlawed by colonial ordinances beginning in the late seventeenth century. Until it too was outlawed, Purim carousing may have served as a sanctioned outlet through which slaves could invoke or refashion their ancestral masquerade and communal dance traditions or preserve or create social institutions.

Exuberant Purim celebrations only came under broad public scrutiny in Paramaribo, where the enslaved were among the most enthusiastic participants, circling the Jewish revelers and shouting and singing through the city streets. We may surmise that slaves had more freedom for public displays of animation in Jodensavanne, where violations of colonial ordinances were not as closely scrutinized. There is scattered evidence that some regents there tended to be lax or ineffectual enforcers of slave behavior and that some Jews and Christian officials even encouraged slave celebrations. The earliest example is from 1780, when the regents of the Mahamad complained about the *bailes de negros* (dances of bondsmen) in the savannah that caused inebriation among slaves, some of whom hurled insults at whites, just as Paramaribo's Purim revelers would affront Christians later in the century. To the regents' astonishment, some white Jews had actually

encouraged the slaves to celebrate (*festejar*) and on other occasions had incited them to make a racket during slave funerals.¹⁵⁰ The regents resolved to reinforce the aforementioned 1711 colonial ordinance proscribing slave dances during Jewish holidays. Moreover, slaves were permitted to gather only during the nights of their funerals and only if the decedent's master had received permission from the regents. Dancing and musical instruments were strictly forbidden.¹⁵¹ The communal minutes do not speak of costumes or masquerade, and Purim is not at all mentioned in the discussion. However, the complaint was lodged on February 21, which in 1780 coincided with the day after Purim—the fifteenth of Adar. Descriptions such as these underscore Joseph Roach's point that carnival was a substitute for more open forms of violence. At the same time, the persistent linking of slave celebrations on Jewish holidays with slave funerals encourages us to explore the possibility that death rites were an important component of Afro-Surinamese carnival. Another case that links funerals to communal dance occurred in 1806, when two members of the Jewish community complained about disorderly slaves in the savannah. These slaves walked around the streets, clapping their hands. The previous Friday night they had beaten drums. In response to this report, the regents again reissued the 1711 ordinance.¹⁵²

Patently, funerals among unfree people of African origins in Suriname were celebratory affairs. We know this from trials involving Jews complicit in encouraging these mortuary occasions. In 1781, a free Eurafrican Jew named Ismael Judeo was cited for hosting funeral songs in his home. The samas who discovered him threw the slaves out of the house and promptly reported him to the Mahamad. Judeo was fined 50 guilders, but evidently many others had sympathized with his cultural hospitality, for the Mahamad ordered Judeo to procure declarations from his neighborhood that he had subsequently not held in his house "any gathering of strange negroes nor any sort of dances or shouting songs."¹⁵³ We should not conclude from this episode that only those who stood at the interstices of white and black societies sympathized with the cultural traditions of slaves. In 1794, one regent complained to the Mahamad of "certain dances of negroes on the savannah," which turned out to have taken place in the port of the Gelderland plantation, "where all the negroes of the savannah and the plantations gather." The local prosecutor (*fiscaal*), Mr. Errich, who had authority over this port, was reprimanded for allowing such dances and informed that they violated the placards of the colony. But Errich refused to abide by the ordinance, informing

the regents that he owed obedience only to "His Excellency in Amsterdam."¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Jodensavanne's cantor, David Baruh Louzada, was cited in 1821 for allowing dances of slaves to take place on his patio. Louzada had gone so far as to offer protection to one of the participants, a free black (*negro livre*) named Jan van La Parra. Louzada had offered to liberate Parra from any punishment, and the regency's paraphrase of his promise, however ambiguous, makes it clear that the cantor viewed such punishment as a crime (*crimen*).¹⁵⁵

The foregoing evidence again speaks to the awareness of Jewish holidays among slaves but also shows their persistence in celebrating their own spiritual traditions, which often coincided with Jewish festivities, including Purim. We have also seen how some white Christians and white and Eurafrican Jews actively encouraged black celebratory heritage, even in blatant violation of colonial statutes and under threat of harsh physical penalty and exorbitant fines. The picture that once again emerges is one of a racially rigid society whose authorities did not succeed in puncturing the concentric circles that emerged from cultural contact.

The abolition of Jewish communal autonomy in the Dutch Caribbean colonies in 1825 had an unexpected effect on the unruly, ecumenical celebration of Purim. This decree, legislated throughout the Dutch Caribbean, aimed to make Jews socially equal to other free people by taking away their legal privileges and disabilities, as had already been done in the Dutch Republic (though not in its colonies) in 1795. Jews in Suriname would no longer belong to an officially recognized ethnonational group but would simply be considered followers of a religion, and the colonial government, rather than the Mahamad, would have direct authority over Jews. Given the Mahamad's long tradition of reining Purim in, it is not surprising that its first official response to the retraction of its power related to Purim. The regents decided to repeal all decrees against rowdy Purim behavior, including the ban on masks and "beating Haman" in synagogue. Such decrees not only trespassed the Mahamad's authority (since the dissolution of communal autonomy, "the Collegio must not intervene in what occurs in the neighborhood") but were also unnecessary. The regents noted with contentment the "good behavior of our individuals in the house of God," particularly on the eves of Sabat Zahor and the eve and day of Purim during meguila reading. The congregation had apparently internalized the values of decorum, silence, and decency, and the Mahamad was now merely a "church" council, not a corporate group exercising absolute authority over its constituents and their human property. The reign of reining in Purim had ended.

Yet, there is a hint in the communal minutes of wishful thinking. As an afterthought, the regents resolved that they would issue a reminder to worshipers of all ages, in both synagogues, on the eves of Sabat Zahor and on Purim before the reading of the meguila, to uphold decorum and silence and to refrain from striking objects during the recitation of the meguila and other prayers. Only the hazan would be permitted to strike, and even then solely with his foot and only for the words "Haman the evil, cursed be Haman, cursed be Zeresh, and cursed be the evil-doers" (*Amana [sic] rang arur aman, arura zeres e arurim a reshaim*). Violators would be considered disobedient disturbers of the holy place and punished accordingly.¹⁵⁶ Although the regents in their statement did not proscribe behavior outside the synagogue, it is tempting to imagine that they would have had ample cause to do just that. By 1825, Purim in Suriname had in fact become the patrimony of Suriname's multiethnic population. The detractors of its pandemonium could do little more than reissue ordinances that had been ineffectual since the late seventeenth century, when the joyful celebrations of Jews and slaves of African-origin first began to coincide.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the Jewish festival of Purim is a prism through which to understand how the cultural domains of enslaved and free people in Surinamese society became imbricated. Jews extended their ethnoreligious heritage to unfree people by naming some of their slaves Purim or Harbona and by allowing their bondsmen and bondswomen not only leisure time but also participation in the holiday merrymaking. In their rebellious behavior, whether by challenging masters or mistresses on Jewish holidays, absconding into the wilderness with a meguila, or synchronizing their communal celebrations with Jewish festive days, slaves owned by Jews demonstrated an awareness and understanding of Jewish heritage.¹⁵⁷ Public celebration of Purim reached a new zenith in the early 1800s and, with the participation of Christians, slaves, and domestic bondsmen, shows strong signs of having become the colony's carnival, an ecumenical festivity with pronounced Afro-Creole attributes. There are hints, discussed in the opening of this article, that this was also the case for Curaçao, the other Dutch Caribbean colony where Jews formed one third of the white population and exercised a similarly high degree of communal autonomy. As such, Purim as celebrated in Suriname (and perhaps in Curaçao) is a detailed example of what

Toby Green, in the context of West Africa, has described as "mutual receptivity."¹⁵⁸ That such reciprocity occurred reminds us that the brutality of slave society and the general rigidity of its racial categories did not preclude cultural convergence.

Additionally, the observance of the Purim holiday highlights the public prominence of Jews in the Dutch colony and the tensions this visibility caused after the community relocated from the savannah, a region heavily populated by Jews, to the colony's capital city of Paramaribo and attempted to give full expression to their ethnoreligious heritage. The diachronic nature of the Surinamese sources allows us to gauge the public nature of Purim as observed in the Dutch colony, the successive efforts to contain its attendant unruliness, and the ways in which non-Jewish population elements gave the holiday their own meaning. Even though we lack testimony as to the inner thoughts and motivations of those who engaged in Purim festivities, the behavior associated with this holiday sheds light on the tension inherent in the position Jews occupied in the colony as a white, non-Christian minority: highly privileged and at the same time disdained; set apart from other sectors of society and at the same time overlapping with them. Moreover, the enthusiastic participation of slaves and domestic bondsmen in Purim encourages us to reflect on what the holiday may have meant to them and how they may have used its more rowdy rituals to reenact or refashion their own African-derived traditions of masquerade and communal dancing.

Although the participation of non-Jews in Purim may surprise some readers, the ecumenical celebration of the holiday is not an unusual phenomenon in the Jewish diaspora.¹⁵⁹ Even in early modern Italian cities, where the world's first ghettos were instituted, Christians took part in Jewish festivities, especially Purim, which Roni Weinstein likens to a "Jewish version of a carnival." In those neighborhoods, hermetically sealed between dusk and dawn, Jewish and Christian men and women danced together on Purim, their masks blurring the borders between the two groups.¹⁶⁰ Much of the historiography of Jews in Christian Europe and the Americas focuses on Jewish acculturation to the heritage of their Christian neighbors. Works on Jews in the Caribbean often speak of Jewish resistance or vulnerability to acculturation, and some recent publications seek to find Jewish provenience for Afro-Creole religious systems.¹⁶¹ Rather than arguing that Jews or Africans in the Americas were impacted by or in turn influenced the heritage of the other, the foregoing exploration of Purim in Suriname encourages us instead to concentrate on religious culture and spiritual traditions as a shared site of leisure

activity. Such an analysis may be executed without denying the daily violence that informed American slave societies. Examining such ritual or social activities as sites of cultures in contact may avoid the unnuanced cultural-resistance paradigm that seeks to portray Jews or Africans as triumphantly prevailing, against all odds, over assimilatory forces. More important, the cultures-in-contact approach is truer to the historical processes themselves and upholds what decades of sociological and anthropological research have demonstrated: culture is dynamic and borders between groups are permeable. Focusing on how this cultural confluence took place could challenge a fundamental problem in the interdisciplinary field of Jewish Studies, what one reviewer calls "the simplification of insider-outsider divides and relationships."¹⁶²

Finally, Purim as celebrated in the public sphere is an ideal opportunity to consider what Stephanie Camp, in her study of bondsmen in the antebellum South, calls "geographies of containment," referring to spatial and temporal restrictions on slave mobility.¹⁶³ Purim created a rare occasion for slaves to venture licitly out of their cabins, off their plantations, and into the streets. Even as we consider what appears to be the enthusiastic participation of bondsmen in this holiday, we must remember that such scenarios often involved coercion, as when Christian slaveholders forced Christmas and Easter celebrations upon their slaves or closely surveilled their revelry in order to contain and control them, a phenomenon Camp refers to as "paternalistic plantation parties."¹⁶⁴ But public Purim festivities seem to have diverged from this type of authoritarian control in that masters engaged in the merriment alongside their slaves. In this coparticipation, neither slaves nor Jews were spectators. Whereas in plantation society slaves covertly mimicked their masters and mistresses when it was safe to do so, and owners contemplated, at a distance, their slaves' festive gatherings, observance of Caribbean Purim did not involve the gaze of the "other." In this sense, Purim carousing more closely approximates the "illicit dances" or "outlaw gatherings"¹⁶⁵ that antebellum slaves engaged in to flout authority. But unlike outlaw gatherings, where slaves covertly donned dress in imitation of their masters and mistresses, some enslaved women in Suriname mimicked their mistresses by cross-dressing. Caribbean Purim created an illusory shared space in which every participant seemed to be an invited guest. This flattening of social hierarchy helps to explain why Purim was the only Jewish holiday straitjacketed by colonial law, its coparticipants to be immediately apprehended, their mobility contained, and their purses and bodies subject to "arbitrary correction."

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- 1 Much of the research for this article was carried out while I was a fellow of the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS). I would also like to acknowledge the University of Massachusetts–Amherst for granting both a sabbatical and an Enhanced Sabbatical Grant and the Hadassah–Brandeis Institute for a Senior Grant in History. Special thanks to Wim Klooster and Jessica Roitman, to the two anonymous reviewers, and to Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Sarah Sheckman for their discerning comments. All translations from languages other than English are my own.
- 2 The term I translate as “field slave” appears as *negro* in the original. “Domestic bondsman” is the closest Anglophone rendering of the Portuguese term *muleque*, which refers to a young male domestic or personal slave. Maroons are slaves who fled their plantations and established independent communities in the wilderness. On Surinamese Indians, who comprised a variety of groups including Caribs and Arawaks, see Jessica Vance Roitman, “Portuguese Jews, Amerindians, and the Frontiers of Encounter in Colonial Suriname,” *New West Indian Guide* 88 (2014): 20–21.
- 3 This composite portrait of fin-de-siècle Purim as celebrated in Suriname is based on Jacobus Th. de Smidt and To. van der Lee, *Plakaten, Ordonnantien en andere wetten, uitgevaardigd in Suriname 1667–1816*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1973), 2: 883 (no. 757, “Notifikatie, Maatregelen tegen uitspattingen op Feestdagen,” May 24, 1775, Paramaribo); “Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores do Mahamad,” inv. 3, Feb. 22, 1793; Mar. 14, 1797; Mar. 13, 1799; inv. 4, Feb. 27, 1800; Mar. 27–28, 1807; inv. 5, Mar. 27, 1815; Feb. 18, 1817; inv. 11, Feb. 9, 1823, Suriname Nederlands Portugees-Israëlitische Gemeente (SNPIG), Nationaal Archief Nederland (NAN), The Hague, Netherlands. In both the records and this article, *Christian* always refers to white Christians. Most slaves and manumitted people in Suriname practiced their own African and Creole spiritual traditions; the government generally discouraged their conversion to Christianity.
- 4 Isaac S. Emmanuel and Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1970): 1: 235; 2: 1088–89.
- 5 Ibid., and Bastiaan de Gaay Fortman, “Curaçao en Onderhoorige Eilanden, 1816–1828,” *Nieuwe West Indische Gids* 9, no. 1 (1928): 516 (unattributed anecdote dated to both “each year” and 1818).
- 6 *Archives Israélites* (Paris, 1853), 91, cited in Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*, 1: 371 n. 10.
- 7 “Minuut-notulen,” inv. 4, Feb. 28, 1800 (Paramaribo).
- 8 However, mostly as a result of vernacular practice, it was not unusual for Purim to last longer than the rabbinically prescribed single day of festivities in both the Land of Israel and the diaspora. According to rabbinical law, in Jerusalem and all ancient walled cities Purim

continues through the next day (see Jean Baumgarten, “Prières, rituels et pratiques dans la société juive ashkénaze,” *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 218, no. 3 [2001]: 384). Some Jewish communities since late antiquity have observed a three-day Purim, which has generated controversy through the ages; see Nakdimon S. Doniach, *Purim, or the Feast of Esther: An Historical Study* (Philadelphia, 1933), 3, 67–68, 251–58 n. 36. Padua's Jewish community, drawing on a variety of subethnic Jewish influences, observed Purim for eight days to two weeks; Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews*, trans. Batya Stein (Leiden, 2003), 384 (example from 1580). Similarly, the youth-centered Purim celebrations of early modern central Europe began weeks before the actual holiday; Yuzpa Schammes, *Minhagim dk"k Verneisha*, 2 vols., ed. Binyamin Shlomo Hamburger (Jerusalem, 1988–92), 1: 258. In Shushan, the holiday was celebrated for two days.

- 9 For a parallel, consider cross-dressing, inebriation, and recreational firing of guns during holidays such as New Year's Day, May Day, Shrove Tuesday (Vastenavond, the Tuesday preceding Lent), and *kermis*, a Dutch annual fair or carnival, as celebrated in New Netherland; see Dennis Sullivan, *The Punishment of Crime in Colonial New York: The Dutch Experience in Albany during the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1997), 53, 55.
- 10 Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, 2006), 44.
- 11 See, for example, “Register der vrye personen woonachtig in de wyk Litta: B opgenomen door wykmeesters in de maand July 1828,” inv. 58, Gemeentebestuur van Suriname, NAN; will of Johan Conrad Wilhelm Braunmuller, May 29, 1799, inv. 81, no. 33, Suriname Oud Notarieel Archief (SONA), NAN; will of Isak de Abraham Bueno de Mesquita, inv. 821, no. 51; will of Casparus Reyns, 1827, inv. 822, no. 10, SONA; will of Ludwich Esais Heinrich Forberger, Sept. 29, 1827, inv. 822, no. 23, SONA. The sources do not consider Winti, the spiritual traditions of the colony's enslaved and free Creole population, alongside the aforementioned European religions. This exclusion is an opportunity for scholars to take Winti on its own terms rather than as a “religion,” a concept formulated in Europe. On “concentric circles,” see Aviva Ben-Ur, “Peripheral Inclusion: Communal Belonging in Suriname's Sephardic Community,” in *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Alexandra Cuffel and Brian Britt (New York, 2007), 195.
- 12 New Netherland (under Dutch rule from 1624 to 1664 and 1673 to 1674) and Dutch Brazil (under Dutch rule from 1630 to 1654); the insular Caribbean: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St. Croix (under Dutch rule from 1642 to 1645), St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, Tortola (under Dutch rule from 1648 to 1665), and Tobago; and in Guiana: Berbice, Cayenne, Demerara, Essequibo, and Suriname.
- 13 Records of Congregation Mikvé-Israel in Curaçao were available to its rabbinical leader and his coauthor and wife (Emmanuel and

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Emmanuel, *History of the Jews*), but it is unclear from the annotations whether the minutes of the Mahamad were consulted. The archival and rare-book collection of Congregation Mikvé-Israel has not been systematically inventoried or organized, and the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, which holds many photocopied and microfilmed records from Caribbean Jewish communities, does not possess a continuous copy of the minutes.

- 14 For example, James Robertson discusses a proposed bill, purportedly written by the island's "negro slaves," that indicates a "wide awareness of the Jewish Purim holiday among white Christians in mid-eighteenth-century Kingston"; James Robertson, "A 1748 'Petition of Negro Slaves' and the Local Politics of Slavery in Jamaica," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2010): 322, 344. We might wonder, in light of my findings, whether Jamaica's pseudonymous bill hints at an Afro-Creole expression of the island's Purim.
- 15 Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*; and see idem, "The Rite to Be Reckless: On the Perpetration and Interpretation of Purim Violence," *Poetics Today* 15, no. 1 (1994): 9–54. Other sources include Doniach, *Purim*; Cecil Roth, "The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation," *Speculum* 8, no. 4 (1933): 520–26; Yeshiva University Museum, *Purim: The Face and the Mask; Essays and Catalogue of an Exhibition, February–June 1979* (New York, 1979); J. G. Krieger, "Pablo de Santa Maria the Purim Letter, and *Siete edades del mundo*," *Mester* 17 (1988): 95–103; Shifra Epstein, "Purim: The Smiting of the Figures of Haman and Zeresh in Yemen," *Mankind Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1989): 401–16; Susan Gilson Miller, "Crisis and Community: The People of Tangier and the French Bombardment of 1844," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 4 (1991): 583–96; Jeffrey Rubenstein, "Purim, Liminality, and *Communitas*," *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (1992): 247–77; Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction à la littérature yiddish ancienne* (Paris, 1993), 443–73; idem, "Prières, rituels et pratiques," 369–403; Ahuva Belkin, "The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshipil," in *Yiddish Theater: New Approaches*, ed. Joel Berkowitz (Oxford, 2003), 29–43; Harvey E. Goldberg and Rosie Pinhas-Delpuech, "Les jeux de Pourimet leurs déclinaisons a Tripoli: Perspective comparative sur l'usage social des histoires bibliques," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 49, no. 5 (1994): 1183–95; Michael C. Steinlauf, "Fear of Purim: Y. L. Peretz and the Canonization of Yiddish Theater," *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 1, no. 3 (1995): 44–65; José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "Purim in Cochín," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 11 (2009): 13–14; and Jean R. Freedman, "The Masquerade of Ideas: The *Purimshipil* as Theatre of Conflict," *Revisioning Ritual: Jewish Traditions in Transition*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Oxford, 2011), 94–132.
- 16 Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, Engl., 2004), briefly considers the slave Purim (264, 467 n. 50), lists or discusses Purim as a slave name (243–44, 247, 305–6, 309), and alludes to it as a holiday in Amsterdam (84, 465 n. 18).

17 Bertram Wallace Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865* (Elkins Park, Pa., 1961).

18 See Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 1–4, for a review of this debate.

19 Schorsch links the recorded commentary of blacks on Jews to rising literacy rates among slaves beginning in the eighteenth century. Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 340 n. 4. In idem, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic: Judeoconversos, Afroiberians and Amerindians in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2009), Schorsch essentially concludes that Judeoconversos and Afroiberians saw each other through the lenses of the dominant elite.

20 Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 261.

21 Ibid., 262.

22 Ibid., 263–65.

23 Robert Cohen, "Jewish Demography in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of London, the West Indies, and Early America" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 9.

24 The Jews of Iberian origin discussed in this article self-identified as members of the Portuguese and Spanish nation or, in shorthand, as Portuguese Jews. The Germanic Jews self-identified as Ashkenazi or as members of the High German Jewish nation.

25 Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington, Ind., 1997), 10.

26 Cecil Roth, "Religion of the Marranos," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 22, no. 1 (1931): 26.

27 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Dec. 20, 1772.

28 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3; Dec. 29, 1791 (referring back to a resolution of Aug. 26, 1787); inv. 11, Mar. 26, 1822, p. 217.

29 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, Aug. 16, 1787, p. 440 (for quantities, delayed shipments, and exorbitant prices); Jan. 9, 1786, p. 326 (for resignation of wax-candle shipping agents in Amsterdam).

30 See, for example, "Minuut-notulen," inv. 5, Mar. 17, 1816; inv. 10, Feb. 15, 1819; inv. 11, Mar. 27, 1825 (concerning the privilege of exemption from being served sentences three days before and after Passover); Jan Marinus van der Linde, *Surinaamse Suikerheren en hun Kerk: Plantagekolonie en handelskerk ten tijde van Johannes Basseliers, predikant en planter in Suriname, 1667–1689* (Wageningen, 1966), 169–87.

31 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Mar. 22, 1775.

32 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Apr. 24, 1791 (permission to shave on Passover intermediary days); inv. 3, Mar. 27, 1798 (permission to serve sentences and litigate on Passover).

33 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Dec. 29, 1791; Mar. 13, 1792 (candle distribution); inventory of Roza Judia, Paramaribo, Nov. 13–14, 1771, inv. 234, p. 441, SONA (Hanukkah lamp); inventory of Ishak Messias, Nov. 4–7, 10–14, 1760, inv. 783, p. 74 verso, SONA (Hanukkah lamp); inventory of Sallem plantation on the Suriname River belonging to Jahacob Uziel Davilar, inv. 783, p. 41 verso, SONA (two Hanukkah lamps); inventory

- and appraisal of Jacob Gabay Crasto, Jan. 7 1762, inv. 783, SONA (Hanukkah lamp); inventory of goods left by Ribca Mendes Vais, née Nunes Fortes, Nov. 24, 1780, inv. 788, no. 109, p. 114, SONA (Hanukkah lamp); inventory and appraisal of estate and other goods left by Ribca, widow of Mosseh Naar, Nov. 27, 1780, inv. 788, no. 109, p. 148 (Hanukkah lamp), SONA; inventory of Abraham Gabay Fonseca, Feb. 21, 1781, inv. 789, p. 36, SONA (Hanukkah lamp). The known run of the Surinamese almanacs is 1820–1955, beginning with *Surinaamsche Almanak voor het Jaar 1820* (Paramaribo, 1819).
- 34 Data derived from the field research of Aviva Ben-Ur and Rachel Frankel.
- 35 Holly Snyder, "Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700–1800," in *Women in American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover, N.H., 2001), 21, 36 n. 37, and idem, e-mail message to author, Aug. 27, 2013, on unpublished analysis of the data compiled in Malcolm H. Stern, *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654–1977* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1978).
- 36 *Weeklysche Surinaamsche Courant* 20 (Nov. 14, 1793): 6.
- 37 See, for example, "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, Dec. 26, 1782; June 13, 1784; Sept. 29, 1786; will of Abraham Rephael Arrias, May 22, 1720, inv. 7, p. 50, SONA; will of Joshua Hiskiahu Arias, Nov. 5, 1728, inv. 8, p. 141, SONA; will of Benjamin Henriques Granada, Feb. 19, 1732, inv. 11, p. 57, SONA; will of Issac, son of Moses da Costa, 1725, inv. 13, p. 245, SONA; will of David Raphael Robles de Medina and Ribca Robles de Medina, Nov. 19, 1780, inv. 44, p. 252, SONA; will of Samuel Henriques Moron, Jan. 20, 1794, inv. 73, p. 59b, SONA.
- 38 Aviva Ben-Ur and Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones: The Jewish Cemeteries of Suriname; Epitaphs* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2009), 295; will of Sarah de Miranda, Apr. 4, 1803, inv. 82, no. 34, SONA.
- 39 For the recent economic turn in Jewish history, see Gideon Reuveni and Sarah Wobick-Segev, *The Economy in Jewish History: New Perspectives on the Interrelationship between Ethnicity and Economic Life* (New York, 2011).
- 40 Inventory of Roza Mendes Meza, Paramaribo, Nov. 13–14, 1771, inv. 234, p. 441, SONA.
- 41 *Gouvernements Journaal*, Aug. 10, 1759, no. 411, Archief West Indie Surinam, NAN.
- 42 *Gouvernements Journaal*, Feb. 29, 1756, no. 411, Archief West Indie Surinam.
- 43 Sidnie Ann White, "Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, Minn., 1989), 173 (for the appeal of the story to diasporic Jews).
- 44 Nell Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York, 1997), 135–36 (reference to Truth) and 318 nn. 5–6 (reference to Truth's peers). I thank Joyce Berkman for this reference.
- 45 Ibid., 134.
- 46 Aviva Ben-Ur and Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones: The Jewish Cemeteries and Synagogues of Suriname; Essays* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2012), 63–64.
- 47 Ibid., 64, and "Inventarissen van papieren, berustend onder de le voorzanger B.V.S., D. B. Louzada, 1793–1812," inv. 131, SNPIG.
- 48 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Sept. 17, 1771; Mar. 24, 1772; inventory of slaves left by Ribca Mendes Vais, Jodensavanne, Nov. 27, 1780, inv. 788, p. 134, SONA.
- 49 Ibid.; Wilfred S. Samuel, *A Review of the Jewish Colonists in Barbados in the Year 1680* (London, 1936), 34, 61; inventory and appraisal of Mahanaim plantation on the Suriname River, Nov. 29–30, 1758, inv. 782; "Inventario e avaliação dos escravos pretenesenter ao boedel dos bems deixados por Selomoh Pereyra," savannah, May 3, 1756, inv. 781, p. 206, SONA; inventory of slaves on the Quamabo plantation, owned by the late Sarah de la Parra, per order of David de Jah. B? d'Meza as executor, Jan. 25, 1762, inv. 783, no. 1, SONA (note that the pagination begins anew several times in this book); inventory of the coffee ground Tranquilité on the Suriname River, between the plantations of Mordehai Mendes Quiros and the heirs of Carillho [sic], Apr. 30, 1762, inv. 783, no. 81, SONA; inventory and appraisal of the ground lying outside of Paramaribo belonging to Raphael de Britto, May 15, 1763, fols. 47–49, Records of the Jurators of Suriname, NAN, as cited in Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, 317 (s.v. "Sources"); "New Advertisement, Two Joe Reward," *St. Thomas Gazette*, July 8, 1813, p. 1.
- 50 When racial classification does not appear in relation to slaves named Purim, it can be inferred by reference to a slave in the same sentence who is designated as mulat.
- 51 For Easter, see Margaret Peckham Motes, *Blacks Found in the Deeds of Laurens and Newberry Counties, South Carolina, 1785–1827* (Baltimore, Md., 2002), 3, 10, 15–16, 51, 67, 74–75, 94, 125; Mary Kemp Davis, "'What Happened in This Place?': In Search of the Female Slave in the Nat Turner Slave Insurrection," in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (Oxford, 2004), 171; and Federal Writers' Project, *North Carolina Slave Narratives* (Bedford, Mass., 2006), 2. For Christmas, see Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), 287; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweniger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford, 1999), 287; and Gretchen Long, *Doctoring Freedom: The Politics of African American Medical Care in Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2012), 54 (in fiction).
- 52 Will of Abraham Mendes Vais and Ribca Nunes Fortes, Jodensavanne, Apr. 29, 1766 (manumission of "moleque named Harbona, son of our negress Amba"), inv. 788, p. 12, SONA; will and inventory of Ribca de Meza, widow of Joseph de Abraham de la Parra, Feb. 13, 1783, SONA; Dec. 21, 1794; Jan. 5, 1795, inv. 935, p. 19, SONA; will of Samuel Henriques Moron, Jan. 9, 1777 (infant named Harbona), inv. 41, p. 8, SONA.

- 53 Albert M. Hyamson, *The Sephardim of England: A History of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Community, 1492–1951* (London, 1951), 79 (reference to Isaac Purim, an Ashkenazi Jew employed as *samas* (beadle) in London's Saarei HaSamaim congregation in the late seventeenth century); "Naturalisation Index to Names, Naturalisation, Year Ended 31st December, 1978, Oaths of Allegiance Registered at the Home Office (Certificates Granted by the Secretary of State for the Home Department)" (David Purim, born in Israel and naturalized in Blackpool in 1978), HO/409/30, p. 74, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Kew, England; H. M., "Purim," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 12 vols., ed. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (New York, 1916), 10: 275 (Purim as family name among Italian Jews).
- 54 Vincent Carretta, *Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, Ga., 2005), 41.
- 55 Jonathan R. Ziskind, trans. and ed., *John Selden on Jewish Marriage Law: The Uxor Hebraica* (Leiden, 1991), 361–62.
- 56 Trevor Burnard, "Slave Naming Patterns: Onomastics and the Taxonomy of Race in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (2001): 336, and Cheryll Ann Cody, "There Was No 'Absalom' on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720–1865," *American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (1987): 573.
- 57 Inventory of slaves left by Ribca Mendes Vais, Nov. 27, 1780, p. 134.
- 58 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Sept. 17, 1771 (coinciding with 9 Tishri, the eve of Yom Kippur). The sentence reads "as insolencias de seu Negro Purim de haver masacrado ao Negro da sedaka, tendo cuidado q nao fizesem ruido os Negros, em qto estivesem na Esnoga" (the insolences of his slave Purim, having murdered the charity slave, who was authorized to keep quiet the slaves who attended synagogue). No punishment is mentioned.
- 59 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Mar. 24, 1772.
- 60 Alan Corre, "Perpetual Jewish Civil Calendar," www.uwn.edu/cgi-bin/corre/calendar.
- 61 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Oct. 8, 1772.
- 62 Inventory of slaves left by Ribca Mendes Vais, Nov. 27, 1780, pp. 128–29 (executor Jeosua M. Arrias) and 133 (died Nov. 21, 1780).
- 63 The key texts Portuguese Jews may have drawn from to connect the two holidays are the ancient *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* (*Mishlei* 9) and *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 21, 57b). The former source names Purim and Yom Kippur as the two Jewish holidays that will never be nullified with the coming of the Messiah; the latter states that in messianic days, Yom Kippur will resemble Purim in many ways as a day of rejoicing and material pleasures.
- 64 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 6, Sept. 21, 1817.

- 65 Julie-Marthe Cohen, "Ceremonial Objects in Early Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam: Three Inventories of Bet Israel Dates, 1619, 1620, and 1635," *Images* 2 (2009): 182, 193, 200, 210, 212.
- 66 Alex van Stipriaan, "Een verre verwijderd trommelen . . . : Ontwikkeling van Afro-Surinaamse muziek en dans in de slavernij," in *De Kunstwereld: Productie, distributie en receptie in de wereld van kunst en cultuur*, ed. Ton Bevers, Antoon Van den Braembussche, and Berend Jan Langenberg (Hilversum, 1993), 145. I use the term *ethnic* advisedly, with the concern that this Western concept not be inappropriately imposed.
- 67 John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London, 1969), 118–19; Richard D. E. Burton, "Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures," *New West India Guide* 73, no. 1–2 (1999): 35–58; Benjamin Edward Pierce, "Kinship and Residence among the Urban Nengre of Surinam: A Re-Evaluation of Concepts and Theories of the Afro-American Family" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1971), 239.
- 68 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, Jan. 1, 1782. This was probably a goat sacrifice to a god. Ritual sacrifice of goats was also a Calabar custom, which Antera Duke calls to "make doctor." See Stephen D. Behrendt, A. J. H. Latham, and David Northrup, eds., *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader* (New York, 2010), 151.
- 69 James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 193 (for the practice in late seventeenth-century Angola).
- 70 Philip J. Havik, "Walking the Tightrope: Female Agency, Religious Practice, and the Portuguese Inquisition on the Upper Guinea Coast (Seventeenth Century)," in *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move*, ed. Caroline A. Williams (Surrey, 2009), 178.
- 71 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, Jan. 1, 1782.
- 72 Will of Ribca Mendes Vays, née Nunes Fortes, Jodensavanne, Sept. 27, 1780, inv. 788, no. 78, pp. 77–78, SONA (manumits "her mulate girl named Assie," daughter of her "negress Fortuna"); no. 79, pp. 81–82, SONA (manumits "her mulatto boy named Moses, son of her negress named Roselina"); will of Ribca Mendes Vais, Jodensavanne, Nov. 24–27, 1780, pp. 125–38, SONA (manumits Chozinja, "creole sewer and knitter"); will of Abraham Mendes Vais and Ribca Nunes Fortes, Apr. 29, 1766, pp. 7–14 (manumission of "moleque named Harbona, son of our negress Amba"); will of Ribca Mendes Vais, née Nunes Fortes, Jodensavanne, Dec. 21, 1779, inv. 788, pp. 31–32, SONA (manumits "her negress Chosinja daughter of her negress Isabeliña).
- 73 See, for example, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (New York, 2007): 87.
- 74 John Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica, with Remarks on the Moral and Physical Condition of the Slaves, and on the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies* (Edinburgh, 1823), 270–71.

- 75 Smidt and van der Lee, *Plakaten, Ordonnantiën en andere wetten*, 1: 219–20 (May 8, 1698).
- 76 Ibid., 280 (Aug. 25 [18 Elul], 1711).
- 77 Ibid., 348 (Oct. 12, 1722), 409 (May 1, 1733), 484 (May 9, 1741; *baljaaren*).
- 78 Jill Salmons, "Mammy Wata," *African Arts* 10, no. 3 (1977): 8–15, 87.
- 79 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 6, Sept. 21, 1817.
- 80 Judah Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time: A History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands* (Hanover, N.H., 2004); Josette Capriles Goldish, *Once Jews: Stories of Caribbean Sephardim* (Princeton, 2009); Melville J. Herskovits, "On the Provenience of the Portuguese in Saramacca Tongo," *West Indische Gids* 12 (1931): 550; idem and Frances S. Herskovits, *Surinam Folk-Lore* (New York, 1936), 42 n. 5 ("influence which the Jews of the colony have had on this Negro culture"); Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff, *Judeus, Judaizantes e seus Escravos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1987), 18–19.
- 81 Deuteronomy 25:17–19.
- 82 Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 213, 252, 255; cf. *Midrash Bereshit Rabba* 49.
- 83 Coincidentally, this was the same Meza who 10 years later would catch the slave Purim slaughtering a goat.
- 84 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Apr. 16, 1772.
- 85 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 4, Mar. 16, 1808.
- 86 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Apr. 16, 1772 (resolution inferred); inv. 4, June 21, 1808.
- 87 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Feb. 26, 1777 (coinciding with 19 Adar).
- 88 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Mar. 11, 1797.
- 89 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 10, Mar. 14, 1819.
- 90 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 12, Feb. 7, 1826.
- 91 See Aviva Ben-Ur, "Atlantic Jewish History: A Conceptual Reorientation," in *Catalogue of the Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica*, ed. Arthur Kiron (Philadelphia, 2014), 25–46.
- 92 Yosef Kaplan, "Ha-kehilah ha-portugalit be-Amsterdam be-meah ha-17: Bein mesoret le-shinui," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 7, no. 6 (1986): 181. See also the depiction of children pounding with hammers and rocks in the Portuguese synagogue in *Ceremonies de la Feste de Sorts* (engraving, Amsterdam, 1731), as reproduced in Yeshiva University Museum, *Purim*, 74.
- 93 Kaplan, "Ha-kehilah ha-portugalit," 181; Kaplan does not cite the original text of the ordinance.
- 94 Hyamson, *Sephardim of England*, 19.
- 95 Moses Gaster, *History of the Ancient Synagogue of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews* (unpublished manuscript, London, 1901), 58 (year unspecified; I infer the approximate year from the previous paragraphs).
- 96 Christine W. M. Schunck, "Michael Joannes Alexius Schabel S.J. 'Notitia de Coração, Bonaye, Oruba' (1705) and 'Diurnum' (1707–1708)," *Archivum historicum societatis Iesu* 66 (1997): 89–162.

- 97 It is impossible to gauge the celebration of Purim prior to 1751 from the community's point of view, as the continuous minutes of the Mahamad have been preserved only from that year.
- 98 Smidt and van der Lee, *Plakaten, Ordonnantiën en andere wetten*, 1: 280 (no. 244, "Plakaat: Verbod aan Slaven om op Zondag te Trommelen, Te Dansen of uit te Gaan," Aug. 25, 1711).
- 99 Inv. 9, Mar. 16, 1770, Gouvernementssecretarie, Oud Archief Suriname, NAN.
- 100 Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones: Essays*, 13–14.
- 101 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 11, Mar. 1, 1821.
- 102 Smidt and van der Lee, *Plakaten, Ordonnantiën en andere wetten*, 2: 883 (no. 757).
- 103 Ibid., 883–84.
- 104 Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 16, 87, 158, 214, 223, 261; Tavim, "Purim in Cochinchina," 13–17.
- 105 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Mar. 13, 1792.
- 106 Armando Lampe, *Mission or Submission? Moravian and Catholic Missionaries in the Dutch Caribbean during the Nineteenth Century* (Göttingen, 2000), 32.
- 107 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, July 17, 1789; letter from Rabbi Chumaceiro to Surinamese regents, Amsterdam, Apr. 26, 1802, folio of uninventoried papers, inv. 538 II, SNPIC.
- 108 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Feb. 22, 1793.
- 109 Ben-Ur, "Peripheral Inclusion," 185–210, and idem, "A Matriarchal Matter: Slavery, Conversion, and Upward Mobility in Colonial Suriname," in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore, Md., 2009), 152–69, 270–79.
- 110 Précis of letters to secretary of state, July 18, 1799–Aug. 24, 1805; Aug. 23, 1799, CO 178/4, TNA.
- 111 Journal of Lieutenant General Trigge, Paramaribo, Aug. 29, 31, Sept. 11, and Nov. 14–15, 1799, CO 278/4, TNA.
- 112 See n. 36, above.
- 113 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Mar. 13, 1799.
- 114 The ordinance does not appear in the *plakaatboek* (a collection of colonial edicts) but is summarized in "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Feb. 27, 1800. It may have been a private letter addressed to the Portuguese Jewish regents.
- 115 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 4, Mar. 27, 1807.
- 116 Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1996 [1st ed., New York, 1977]), 18. Her observation applies equally to Portuguese Jewish Purim plays.
- 117 Karwan Fatah-Black, "Slaves and Sailors on Suriname's Rivers," *Itinerario* 36, no. 3 (2012): 62–63.
- 118 Wim Klooster, "Marteling, Mouterij en Beeldenstorm: Militair Geweld in de Nederlandse Atlantische Wereld, 1624–1654," in *Geweld in de West*:

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Een militaire geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Atlantische wereld, 1600–1800, ed. Victor Enthoven, Henk den Heijer, and Han Jordaen (Leiden, 2013), 330–31.

- 119 Journal of Lieutenant General Trigge, Paramaribo, Feb. 4, 1800, CO 178/4, TNA.
- 120 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, July 10, 1782; inv. 3, June 29, 1792; and esp. inv. 4, June 24, 1806; inv. 5, June 29, 1813.
- 121 Fatah-Black, "Slaves and Sailors," 61.
- 122 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 7, June 1, 1768.
- 123 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Sept. 26, 1796. Portuguese Jewish funerals began with the ritual circumvolution of the corpse in the house where the person had expired.
- 124 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Oct. 15, 1778; and Oct. 5, 1774; Oct. 14, 1776; Oct. 22, 1777.
- 125 Inventory of David Haim del Monte, Dec. 24, 1824, inv. 939, no. 21, 22, SONA; Ben-Ur and Frankel, *Remnant Stones: Epitaphs*, 458, epitaph no. 656.
- 126 Jessica Roitman, "Creating Confusion in the Colonies: Jews, Citizenship, and the Dutch and English Atlantics," *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (2012): 71, 74.
- 127 See, for example, the case of Joseph Lopes discussed in "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, Feb. 6, 1791. Additional cases are discussed in my book in progress, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society*.
- 128 Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, 62.
- 129 Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London, 2000), 219.
- 130 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Oct. 8, 1772.
- 131 Sullivan, *Punishment of Crime*, 238.
- 132 Yosef Kaplan, "Bom Judesmo: The Western Sephardic Diaspora," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York, 2002), 652–55, and see idem, "Gente Política: The Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam vis-à-vis Dutch Society," in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, ed. Caya Brasz and Yosef Kaplan (Leiden, 2001), 21–40.
- 133 Kaplan, "Bom Judesmo," 652–55, and idem, "Gente Política," 21–40.
- 134 Daniel Mendoza, *Memoirs of the Life of Daniel Mendoza* (London, 1816), 12–15.
- 135 Alexander Salonthay van Salontha, *Précis de deux lettres avec une réflexion générale sur l'état présent de la colonie de Surinam* (Nimgue, 1778), 5.
- 136 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, June 12, 1780; inv. 5, June 29, 1813; "Libro de Insinuacoems," Oct. 6, 1739 (Indian slave Florinda belonging to Rebecca, wife of Abraham Haim Cohen Nassy), inv. 324, SNPIG.
- 137 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, July 21, 1791.
- 138 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 4, Dec. 5, 1808.
- 139 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 4, Oct. 12, 1802.
- 140 "Inventaris van goederen toebehoorende aan de Heer Ah. J. da Costa aan 't comptoir der Gemeente ter bewaaren op de 4 July 1820," folio of uninventoried papers, inv. 545, SNPIG. The use of Indian and Maroon

costumes also highlights the traditional role of Jews on the Surinamese frontier, a theme I explore in my book in progress, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society*.

- 141 James Robertson (personal communication) suggests that the skimpy costumes were simply a matter of convenience in a colony where material goods were scarce.
- 142 "Memorandum of Suriname," June 6, 1800, CO 278/1, p. 52, TNA.
- 143 For an interpretation that foregrounds the Afro-Caribbean nature of carnival and other leisure assemblies among slaves in colonial and modern New Orleans, see Joseph Roache, "Carnival and Law in New Orleans," *Drama Review* 37, no. 3 (1993): 46. On the African strains of carnival, see Rosita M. Sands, "Carnival Celebrations in Africa and the New World: Junkanoo and the Black Indians of Mardi Gras," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (1991): 75–92, and Judith Bettelheim and John W. Nunley, *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference* (Seattle, 1988).
- 144 On the link between legal interdiction and carnival see Roache, "Carnival and Law."
- 145 Robert Wyndham Nicholls, *The Jumbies' Playing Ground: Old World Influence on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean* (Jackson, Miss., 2012), 16.
- 146 See, for example, Hollis Urban Liverpool, "Origins of Rituals and Customs in the Trinidad Carnival: African or European?," *Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (1998): 24–37, and Jeroen Dewulf, "Pinkster: An Atlantic Creole Festival in a Dutch-American Context," *Journal of American Folklore* 126, no. 501 (2013): 245–71.
- 147 Nicholls, *Jumbies' Playing Ground*, 16.
- 148 For indigenous rituals in Senegambia, including marriage, death, and initiation rites, linked to community-wide dances and masquerades, see Peter Mark, "Art, Ritual, and Folklore: Dance and Cultural Identity among the Peoples of the Casamance," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 34, no. 136 (1994): 563–84. For a reference to masquerading in Jamaica during Christmas, see Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of That Island: With Reflections on Its Situations, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government* (London, 1970 [1st ed., 1774]), 424.
- 149 These ideas are from Esiaba Irobi, "What They Came With: Carnival and the Persistence of African Performance Aesthetics in the Diaspora," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 6 (2007): 896–913.
- 150 The regents complained that "there are stupid people [*brancos*; alternative reading, *brancos* (whites)] with such vulgar ideas that they encourage slaves to dance and to create a racket while solemnizing their funerals"; "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Feb. 21, 1780.
- 151 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 1, Feb. 21, 1780; Apr. 23, 1780.
- 152 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 4, Dec. 24, 1806.
- 153 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 2, Dec. 31, 1787.

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Purim in the
Public Eye

Aviva Ben-Ur

- 154 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 3, May 29, 1794.
 155 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 11, May 10, 1821.
 156 "Minuut-notulen," inv. 12, Feb. 7, 1826.
 157 Similarly, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, enslaved and free blacks developed a Pinkster Day in New York and New Jersey, coinciding with Pentecost. Pinkster Day, like its parallel Negro Election Day in New England, involved ritual role reversals, merrymaking, music, song, and dance. See Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, 1998), 191, and Dewulf, "Pinkster."
 158 Tobias Green, "Equal Partners? Proselytising by Africans and Jews in the 17th Century Atlantic Diaspora," *Melilah* 5 (2008): 4.
 159 This certainly applies to learned individuals. In the 1760s and 1770s, theologian and educator Ezra Stiles visited his local synagogue in Newport on at least two separate occasions to hear the scroll of Esther read aloud; other times he simply noted the occurrence of Purim in his diary; Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles: Jan. 1, 1769–Mar. 13, 1776*, 3 vols. (New York, 1902), 1: 7, 41, 354–55. For ecumenical Purim as celebrated in modern Iran and Yemen, see Epstein, "Purim," 401–16.
 160 Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals*, 383–84, 433.
 161 See, for example, Christoph Daxelmüller, "Organizational Forms of Popular Jewish Culture," in *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge, Engl., 2002), 29–48, esp. 40, and James Houk, "The Role of the Kabbalah in the Afro-American Religious Complex in Trinidad," *Caribbean Quarterly* 39, no. 3–4 (1993): 42–55.
 162 Kimberly Arkin, "Deconstruction without Destruction: Reimagining Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History," review of *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustán, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, *H-Judaic*, Aug. 18, 2011, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32829>.
 163 Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 16.
 164 *Ibid.*, 65.
 165 *Ibid.*, 69, 76, on these terms.

Jews, German Culture, and the Dilemma of National Identity: The Case of Moravia, 1848–1938

Marsha L. Rozenblit

ABSTRACT

Jews in Moravia, a mixed Czech- and German-speaking province of Habsburg Austria and later Czechoslovakia, spoke German and formed a part of the German community. Nevertheless, they always formed a separate German Jewish group within the community of Germans, and not because of antisemitism. Rather, the primary identity of Moravian Jews was as Jews who spoke German, not Germans who practiced Judaism. The settlement patterns of Jewish life sustained this German Jewish group and made German into a Jewish language. In interwar Czechoslovakia, which suspected Germans of disloyalty, Jews demonstrated their loyalty by declaring on the census that they belonged to the "Jewish nationality." That they spoke German did not mean that they belonged to the German nation. Their easy switch to Czech in the mid-1930s, in response to the increased popularity of radical German nationalism, reveals the fluidity of national identities and the primacy of Jewish identity for the Jews of Moravia.

Key words: Moravia, Czechoslovakia, nationality, identity, German Jews

The relationship of Jews in Germany to German language, culture, and national identity has long attracted popular and scholarly attention. Some observers have waxed eloquent about the "German-Jewish symbiosis." Others, reading history backward from the Holocaust, have criticized German Jews for their

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