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“A Matriarchal Matter: Slavery, Conversion, and Upward Mobility in Colonial Suriname”

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Atlantic Diasporas

*Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the
Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*

Edited by RICHARD L. KAGAN
and PHILIP D. MORGAN

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A Matriarchal Matter

Slavery, Conversion, and Upward Mobility in Suriname's Jewish Community

AVIVA BEN-UR

IN 1720, JOSEPH PELEGRINO of Suriname petitioned the local authorities to recognize the manumission of his children, all procreated outside of legal marriage.¹ Simha, Jacob, and Mariana, he declared, were all of the Jewish religion, adopted as members of Suriname's Sephardic community by its teacher (*leraar*) and properly manumitted according to the rules of the Jewish "nation." Still, the senior Pelegrino fretted that their status and right to inheritance would not be accepted outside Jewish circles, since their laws were at times at variance with those of the Dutch colonial government. The court granted Pelegrino's request. The three children were thus declared "free of all slavery" and legitimized as his true descendants.²

Joseph, whether of "undiluted" Sephardic ancestry or himself a hybrid of the European Jewish and western African worlds, was a free member of Suriname's Sephardic community and evidence of the transformation of Jewish identity in this remote slave colony, far from the major rabbinical centers of Europe and the Ottoman Empire.³ Pelegrino's children belonged to a marginal group whose demands and very existence challenged accepted definitions of Jewishness and whiteness. More broadly, they were members of a free colored class that, through steady population growth from the dawn of the nineteenth century, would eventually make inroads into the mainstream of colonial society.

This essay considers the ways in which Suriname's Sephardic Jews readjusted their definitions of communal belonging in a virtually unprecedented New World environment, where African-origin peoples formed the majority and Jews enjoyed a high degree of self-determination and au-

tonomy. Beginning with Jewish settlement in the mid-seventeenth century, females of African descent were key to both community building and creolization. Their deceptively quiet presence in archival documents affirms their continued role in the community's transformation through the centuries.

Suriname, South America's smallest nation, is arguably the most ethnically diverse in the Caribbean, earning it the nickname "the land of seven peoples." This former Dutch colony, roughly the size of the U.S. State of Georgia and sandwiched between French Guiana and English-speaking Guyana, draws its heritage from pre-Columbian America, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, India, China, and Indonesia.⁴

Jews were among the colony's first nonindigenous settlers. The earliest were of Iberian origin and began arriving in the 1650s from various parts of Europe, northern Africa, or other regions of the Americas. Under tolerant English (1650–67) and Dutch (1667–1975) colonial rule, they established an agrarian settlement in the midst of the Surinamese jungle, some fifty miles south of the capital city, Paramaribo. Situated along the Suriname River, this settlement developed into an autonomous village known as Jodensavanne (Jews' Savannah). By the mid-eighteenth century, Jodensavanne was surrounded by dozens of satellite Jewish plantations sprawling north- and southward and dominating the stretch of the river. These Jews owned plots, mostly devoted to the cultivation and processing of sugar and worked by African slaves; at the time, they collectively formed the largest Jewish agricultural community in the world and the only Jewish settlement in the Americas granted virtual self-rule. The setting—a self-determining Jewish village—represents one of the few situations in diaspora history in which the highest form of social climbing meant becoming a Jew, rather than a Christian or a Muslim.

Beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a combination of soil depletion, slave rebellions, maroon attacks, economic crisis, absentee landownership, and a ravaging fire led to the gradual demise of Jodensavanne, the abandonment of agricultural pursuits, and the definitive shift of Suriname's Sephardic community to the capital city. By the close of that century, the Sephardic transition to Paramaribo was nearly a fait accompli. By 1817, some 82 percent of the colony's Sephardic Jews made

their home in Paramaribo, composing, along with the local Ashkenazi community, more than a third of the city's white population.⁵

Given the colony's demographic profile, the emergence of a colored Jewish population was nigh inevitable. The vast majority of Suriname's population (96 percent by the late eighteenth century) was both enslaved and of African origin.⁶ This ratio remained stable throughout the following century, although the population of free coloreds steadily increased as a result of manumissions, mostly involving adult females.⁷ By 1684, there were 4,200 African slaves living in Suriname, and the colony's 232 Jewish householders, who made up 28.6 percent of Suriname's European population, owned slightly more (30.3 percent, or 1,298) than their share of slaves. By 1705, the number of African-origin slaves in the colony climbed to 10,000, and in 1765 jumped to 50,000, captive on some 400 plantations.⁸

Like many early colonial American settlements, the Jewish community suffered a dearth of women. In 1684 Suriname's Jewish population comprised almost twice as many men as women, a pattern similar to that of the gentile European population, where 74 percent of the community was male. Such gender imbalance helped open the doors of both communities to "Suriname marriage," described as "the informal, but still permanent relationship concluded with some form of ceremony and ending with the death or departure of the white male." This Caribbean form of concubinage was characterized by sexual double standards, leading to an Afro-European population that could claim white descent mainly through the paternal line.⁹ Moreover, the slave in colonial American society possessed no legal status. Official marriage between slaves and freemen was impossible, again leaving concubinage as an obvious resort.¹⁰ African-origin women were thus a key component in the growth, survival, and redefinition of the Sephardi population.

The response of the *Mahamad* (Hebrew for "assembly"), the autonomous governing body of Suriname's Jews, to unions between white Sephardic Jews and their African-origin consorts was probably immediate, although the earliest extant evidence dates to thirteen years after the English became the first Europeans to establish a lasting colony on the Guianese coast. In 1663, Suriname's Jewish leaders affirmed the dichotomous social structure of their community, bifurcated between *jehidim* and *con-*

gregantes. Subsequent legislation clarifies that the Hebrew term *jahid* denoted in Suriname a full member of the Jewish community by virtue of his or her European descent. The *jahid's* inferior was the *congregante*, a Portuguese word indicating "congregant." The congregant was either a full member, by virtue of his whiteness, who had been demoted to a lower social status as a penalty for marrying a female of African descent, or was himself or herself a Eurafrican Jew.¹¹ These social distinctions, at odds with rabbinical law, were patently inspired by Calvinist doctrine in the Dutch Republic, which distinguished between "members" and "followers."¹²

Like Dutch colonial law, Suriname's Jewish laws included no restrictions against extramarital miscegenation between white males and blacks or Eurafrican slaves. Only when Sephardic men attempted to formalize unions with former slaves did strict penalties accrue. Thus, mid-eighteenth-century ordinances stipulated that white men who married *mulatas*, "whether through our Holy Law or solely before the Magistrate, will then be discharged from their status as *Jehidim*, and immediately recorded as *Congregantes*, and in every single way considered mulatto." Affirming the plastic nature of race in the Caribbean, the *Mahamad* also stipulated that a "fallen" *jahid* could be readmitted with his family to his former social status provided that his children and grandchildren all married white women.¹³ It may be tempting to regard the law relegating intermarried white men to the status of congregants as a prohibition against miscegenation. However, Suriname's Jewish community did not prohibit formal marriage between white male members and free African-origin consorts. It merely discouraged such nuptials through harsh penalties, which nevertheless did not exclude the offending couple from legitimate communal membership. Thus—and this must be emphasized in the face of scholarly misreadings of the legislation—formal nuptial relations between white men and free Eurafrican Jewesses were not forbidden, only discouraged through punishment. Significantly, *negras*, women deemed to be of "undiluted" African origin (and perhaps understood as slaves), are passed over in silence, either implying that no white man would ever contemplate formal marriage to a black woman or the legal impossibility of formalizing such a union.

Matrimonial alliances between Jewish women and African-origin freemen are not addressed in any of the Jewish ordinances. This ellipsis re-

flects the typically androcentric locution of such ordinances, but, once again, it is not accidental.¹⁴ The scenario of a white woman seeking matrimony with a free Eurafrican Jew was apparently unspeakable in the Jewish community, a reflection of both "white male dominance and irreducible racism."¹⁵ A fortiori, extramarital intercourse between European-origin women and (presumably enslaved) blacks or Indians was regarded a heinous crime by the larger ruling society. Colonial authorities reserved harsh punishment for such relations, considering this behavior, in a placard issued in 1711, "unnatural whoredom and adultery." Unmarried violators would be flogged and banished for life, while married women would also be branded, a punishment generally reserved for slaves. The promulgation of this law is a sure indication that such illicit unions did occur, and it is thus not surprising that two white Christian women were so accused in 1721.¹⁶ Ten years later, the daughter of a Jewish planter admitted to a sexual relationship with an Indian and was duly expelled from the colony.¹⁷ Thus, only when the typical gender roles were reversed can miscegenation be deemed to have been truly prohibited. The punishment of a white woman consorting with a black or Indian entailed not a mere loss of social status but rather her local eradication. She was completely eliminated from community membership as well as physically removed from the colony. By the 1760s and '70s such liaisons, while still rare in broader colonial society, were apparently no longer as severely censured as foreign sojourners suggest.¹⁸

The children of such transgressing Jewish women would have automatically been Jewish, since, according to rabbinical laws developed in the second century CE, Jewishness is transmitted through the mother. If Sephardic men had not sought to bring their enslaved children into the Jewish fold, the community would have had few, if any, Jewish mulattoes. The phenomenon of the colored Jew—at least initially, before Eurafrican Jewesses "muddled the waters"—was thus wholly an expression of a patriarchy that suppressed one of the main matriarchal aspect of rabbinical Judaism.¹⁹

It is perhaps not accidental that matrilineal descent in Judaism emerged after the destruction of Jerusalem's Second Temple. Once it became evident that the rebuilding of the Jewish Commonwealth was unlikely, Judaism was transformed into a "portable" religion, no longer reliant on the Temple as its political and ritual center, and rabbinical

thought increasingly connected the idea of national salvation to acts of lovingkindness (*hesed*). Since in rabbinical literature women were thought to innately excel in this trait, as Susan Sorek has recently argued, patrilineal Jewish descent made way for the mother as the determinant of her child's national and religious identity.²⁰ By contrast, patrimonial descent in Suriname's Sephardic community was a reversal of this historic transition and no doubt reinforced by the patriarchal society that defined colonial Caribbean life.²¹ Yet it also expressed a larger tendency among Hispano-Jewish colonists to resurrect laws and customs that had prevailed during the First and Second Commonwealth eras.²² Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Caribbean Jewish religious ceremonies, which often understood the institution of slavery through the lenses of Jewish antiquity.

When the senior Joseph Pelegrino decided to enter his children into the covenant of Abraham in 1720, he might have had recourse to a prayer book similar to one first published in Amsterdam just nine years later. *Sefer Berith Yitshak* (The Covenant of Isaac) details instructions for circumcising and ritually immersing male and female slaves for conversion to Judaism. The ceremony, involving a ritual circumcisor (*mohel*) for boys, Hebrew prayers, a glass of wine, and ritual immersion for both sexes, closely followed the biblical commandment, "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant."²³ Significantly, instructions for welcoming slaves into the bosom of Judaism are preceded by the explanation that this ceremony was practiced "when the Temple [still] existed."²⁴

This rarely cited Hebrew literature suggests that bondmen and bondwomen in early modern times were officially allowed to convert to Judaism as slaves, during their enslavement. The appendix of ritual circumcisers at the end of *Sefer Berith Yitshak*, listed according to their city or colony of residence, confirms the intended "end users." A list of practitioners in the Sephardic communities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Naarden, London, Hamburg, and Bayonne, all centers where former crypto-Jews settled after their departure from the Iberian peninsula, hints at an extensive African Jewish presence in western Europe. Significantly, Curaçao and Suriname, the two leading American Jewish communities in the eighteenth century, are the only Caribbean centers included in this list.²⁵

Similar prayer manuals, such as *Orden de Bendiciones* (Amsterdam, 1687), contain special formulas used in the purchase of slaves ("*bendición de quando compran siervos*").²⁶ Michael Studemund-Halévy argues that the Hebrew locution (*avadim*) confirms that slaves, rather than domestic servants, were the prospective converts.²⁷ The extent and geographical range of holdings of such prayer books is strongly suggestive of the relevance of slave conversions for various early modern Jewish communities.²⁸

Jews seem to have taken the lead among whites in converting slaves to the household religion. White Christians in Suriname did not typically baptize their slaves until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, though an ordinance of 1733 required that masters instruct their slaves in Christianity *after* manumission.²⁹ The scattered references to the Christian conversion of African slaves beginning in the late seventeenth century specifically characterize the conversion phenomenon as rare.³⁰ Planters in particular objected to slave baptisms, feeling threatened by a gospel that preached equality and regarding slaves as inferior creatures by virtue of their "heathenism."³¹ Only at the tail end of the eighteenth century were there signs that religious instruction for slaves was beginning to be considered praiseworthy, even linked to the economic success of sugar plantations. An early example was recounted in 1795 by David Cohen Nassy, a physician, political theorist, and historian, who praised an Englishman named Palmer for transforming his Surinamese plantation into a "sort of republic." Slaves were ruled according to laws that they themselves determined, which "brought as much honor to their hearts as to humanity." Palmer enlisted a few Moravian brothers to instruct his slaves in religious principles, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws. This English planter became, in short, "master, judge, priest, and father to his slaves."³² The specific reference to Moravians renders the anecdote somewhat plausible. These brethren began their missionary activities in 1735, focusing mainly on the conversion of Native Americans and maroons in the colony's wilderness. Only in 1765 did they transfer to Paramaribo, in the face of ardent opposition by the Dutch Reformed Church and the colonial government, both generally averse to slave baptisms.³³ Still, most of their evangelizing was carried out among the Saramaka maroons after 1765, and their activities in the capital city did not proliferate until the 1820s.³⁴

Suriname's Jewish regents, in contrast to many Jews not in leadership positions, actively sought to discourage the conversion of Eurafrican slaves to Judaism, perhaps remembering a similar ordinance from Brazil's Sephardic community passed in 1648.³⁵ In 1663, Suriname's Sephardic leaders ("the first founders of this congregation") decided to prohibit, under pain of excommunication, a *jahid* from circumcising male infants born to *jehidim* who had been relegated to the class of *congregantes*.³⁶ The ordinance not only denied the Jewishness of children issuing from what was presumably a white/colored relationship but also barred the fallen *jahid* from recapturing his elite status through the hypergamous marital choices of his children and grandchildren, a proviso that would appear in 1748.³⁷

Most likely, the conversion of most slaves to Judaism involved not "saltwater slaves" but rather the progeny of European-origin Sephardim and their African consorts. It is thus not surprising that various references to slave conversion from the late seventeenth century through the nineteenth generally refer to Eurafricans. Isaac da Costa, a contemporary of the aforementioned Joseph Pelegrino, also converted his enslaved children to Judaism. In his last will and testament, drafted in 1725, he clarified that he had legitimately married his wife, who (not unusually) happened to be his cousin and bore the same name as his mother. The two produced no children, but da Costa was far from impotent. The bulk of the will is devoted to six young Eurafricans, whom he undoubtedly procreated with two or more of his slaves beginning in at least 1703: Rosa (21), Ismael (19), Simha (10), David (7), Hana (5), and a *muleca* (young black girl) named Aquariba, daughter of his late "negress, Assiba."³⁸ Da Costa affirmed that they all merited manumission by virtue of being "born in my house and from my female slaves, [by virtue of] the good service and loyalty that I had from their mothers, and [by virtue of] the inclination of said mulattos to be observant of our Holy Law and having received it willingly and with love." Here, again, these slaves were obviously converted to Judaism during their enslavement, for da Costa mentions that the males were already circumcised and the females baptized according to the Jewish rite (*bañadas*). Perhaps because they did not have European ancestry, the mothers did not merit manumission, but da Costa nonetheless conveys his gratitude for their loyal service, which implicitly included sexual relations.

Isaac da Costa not only manumitted his mulatto children but also made them slave owners in their own right, a not uncommon phenomenon in the Caribbean.³⁹ Ismael was bequeathed the negress Beatriz and her children, while David inherited the negress Serafina and her children, along with the negro Piche. His daughters, Rosa, Simha, and Hana also became slave owners. The bestowal of human property upon manumitted slaves, as Neville Hall suggests, discouraged them from forming political alliances with slaves with the intention of destroying the institution of slavery.⁴⁰ Da Costa's nonhuman property went to the boys. Ismael and David received one half of da Costa's house furniture, clothing, and cattle, plus the cultivated land and buildings he owned in Paramaribo (the master's nephews received the other half).⁴¹ The will is remarkable in that it embodies the key elements of Suriname marriage: the "legitimate" wife is mentioned and even made a beneficiary (though the bequest she received was comparatively paltry). The illegitimate children also appear, though, for the sake of decorum, they are never explicitly mentioned as their master's children.

Given the case of da Costa's five Eurafrican children, one wonders if conversion accompanied by eventual manumission was a significant gateway into the Jewish community. The degree to which the Jewish community opened its doors to manumitted converts was likely a function of both place and time. While the community was still clustered around Jodensavanne, such conversions appear to have been rare, though the archival spadework has only just begun. Mortuary records for the Jewish rural community are misleading. They identify the burial of only ten non-*jehidim*: two laid to rest on the Cupij Plantation, off the Caxewinica Creek, and just eight interred at Jodensavanne.⁴² The vast majority of non-*jehidim* (89, or about 90 percent) was buried in Paramaribo. However, it would be erroneous to conclude, based on this evidence, that the mulatto Jewish phenomenon was largely urban, inasmuch as extant records focus on the late eighteenth century and beyond, precisely when Suriname's Jews were transitioning from the jungle interior to Paramaribo.⁴³

Still, there are hints that the incidence of children born of "mixed" ancestry and officially accepted in the community as *congregantes* proliferated in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Before 1777, the starting date of the most comprehensive communal registers, it was superfluous (or unadvisable, in keeping with public decorum) to identify

decedents by race in birth and death registers. Matrilineal descent was also irrelevant: in terms of identifying the child, only the father was mentioned as parent. But in 1777, cantor Mendes Quiros died and passed on his administrative staff to his successor, cantor David Hezkiah Baruh Louzada, who began to carefully note both racial and social status. This was about two decades after the mulatto Jewish brotherhood Path of the Righteous has been established (1759) and about a decade and a half before a group of colored Jews asserted themselves and rebelled against the religious constrictions imposed upon them by white Jews (early 1790s).⁴⁴ In the registers initiated by Baruh Louzada, both father and mother are noted; in the case of most colored Jews, only the mother is mentioned. Apparently, then, the increase in colored community members stimulated a transition back to matrilineal descent, offering another explanation for the apparent proliferation of mulatto Jews beginning in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁵

In the absence of reliable government statistics, the record books kept by cantor David Baruh Louzada offer an approximation of Suriname's colored Jewish population. The first of 1,371 entries dates to 1778, the last to 1835. Between 1779 and 1824 the deaths of 99 Jews of non-*jahid* status were recorded. The overwhelming majority were identified as *congregantes*, while 3 were named as mulattoes and 1 as a Jewish slave.⁴⁶

The statistics of this fairly representative community profile show that 7.2 percent of the members were lower status members, likely of African origin, between 1778 and 1835. Phrased another way, more than one out of every fourteen Sephardic Jews in Suriname over the course of roughly half a century was of African origin or lowered to a congregant status through marriage to a descendant of Africa. This statistic, which cannot possibly reflect every fringe member of the community, patently contradicts a study of health conditions in Suriname, published during World War II. This publication tried to assure readers that the plague of racial "impurity" was not a risk for potential Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe. Jewish intermarriage in Suriname with coloreds, the authors argued, almost always involved a Jewish man and a colored woman. "Reciprocal crosses," they maintained, "hardly ever occur. And since children born of a non-Jewish mother cannot become members of the Jewish community, the members of this community . . . are of pure Jewish and, consequently, of pure white descent. And these constitute the

families which have been living and multiplying in Surinam for many generations."⁴⁷ Such statements mirror a public veneer carefully constructed by Suriname's Jewish community since its formation in the mid-seventeenth century. Even if Jews did mingle sexually with blacks and mulattoes, their hybrid descendants allegedly did not infiltrate the community.

Statistics cannot transmit the qualitative dimensions of slave conversion and manumission in the Jewish community. Among these converts was Jaba, a black woman whose name suggests an African birthplace or strong cultural ties to Africa. Jaba was the slave of Abraham Haim Nunes Henriquez and perhaps also his concubine. David, the child they apparently produced together in July 1813, bore the master's last name and was circumcised after thirteen days as a free person. Baby David may have been named to honor the man who brought him into the Jewish covenant, cantor David Hisquiah Baruh Louzada.⁴⁸ Perhaps the senior David served as the baby's godfather, reflecting active efforts of slaves and free blacks to raise their social status and secure mentors and protectors from Jewish society's elite members. The fictive kinships created by such liaisons, popular in slave cultures of the Caribbean and the American South, broadened the otherwise constricted circles that connected African-origin peoples socially to whites.⁴⁹ Just nine years later, one Sarah Roldão, a Jewish slave (*Escrava Judia*), passed away and was buried in the old Sephardi cemetery in Paramaribo.⁵⁰ In November of 1832, seven years after the abolishment of Jewish communal autonomy, Abraham de Leon informed Sephardic leaders that his mulatta slave, Louise, "was inclined toward embracing the Judaic religion," and requested that she be converted, promising to free her as soon as the ceremony ended. The authorities granted his request.⁵¹

Similar is the case of the freed mulatta Eva van Robles, apparently the former slave of Moses Robles de Medina Jr., who expressed her desire to "be admitted to professing the Judaic religion in our Portuguese congregation." She must have written her request during Elul, the Hebrew month of repentance. On September 7, 1819, the Mahamad, convened at Jodensavanne, read her persuasive letter. In it she affirmed that she had never professed any other religion and produced a declaration from two *jehidim* to that effect. Her final request was that the Mahamad authorize the First Cantor of the congregation to "conduct for her the necessary ceremonies according to her request and desire." The absence of her for-

mer master (or father?) shows that she took the initiative. Despite the dry legalese, the regents appear to have been genuinely moved in their letter of response. The Mahamad acted quickly and succinctly, "not being able to deny the request of the said Eva, and on the contrary, embracing her through [our permission], with the authorization of the First Hazan of the congregation, to receive said Eva in our religion and effect the necessary ceremonies."⁵² On September 15, at the age of forty, Eva became Jeudith Hava Robles. Her conversion entry, like those of dozens of other black and Eurafican Jews, appears in the communal birth register, emphasizing her baptism as a rebirth.⁵³ Eva/Jeudith Hava may have shared an experience with New Christians reverting to Judaism, who sometimes described their conversion as akin to receiving a new soul. When Spanish-born Abraham Gabay Izidro, who served as Suriname's *hakham* in the 1730s, returned to Judaism in London, he felt he had received a "new spirit."⁵⁴

The conversion process could also heavily tax the female convert. Mariana Levy—who was apparently partly descended from Jews—was required to shave her head, cut her nails, and discard her "heathen clothing" before being "incorporated into the true Jewish religion" on March 14, 1799. Only after this process was she allowed to marry Samson according to Jewish law. The couple's "wedding present," in consonance with communal ordinances drafted in the mid-eighteenth century, was the revocation of the groom's *jahid* status. Samson protested in vain the Mahamad's decision some two weeks later, maintaining that his wife "belonged to the fourth class of white blood and therefore was not in the category" vulnerable to social demotion.⁵⁵ Levy's harsh experience suggests that even for converts with some Jewish ancestry the path back into the Jewish community was sometimes strewn with thorns.

As we have seen, conversion of blacks and mulattoes in Suriname's Jewish community often took place during enslavement. Somewhere along the line the Jewish community decided that no slave could convert before manumission. In the early nineteenth century, the colonial government passed a law stipulating that slaves could only be manumitted if they embraced a religion. This left Jewish masters between a rock and a hard place: how could Jewish masters desiring to both manumit and convert their slaves to Judaism accomplish their goals?

The aforementioned Abraham de Leon was one such master. In No-

vember 1832 he petitioned the *parnassim* of Beraha VeSalom, now headquartered in Paramaribo, concerning his slave, Louisa, who, he claimed, was "inclined to embrace the Jewish religion." The problem was that, according to the Jewish community's laws, she could not be admitted to the Mosaic faith without having first obtained her freedom. Meanwhile, the "laws of the land" would not grant liberty to someone bereft of religion. Jewish mandate and colonial law had locked horns. De Leon thus requested that the *parnassim* allow "my mulata" to be baptized according to the Jewish religion and receive upon herself the yoke of Judaism, promising to manumit her as soon as this had been accomplished.⁵⁶

The leaders' reaction was prompt. Just three days later the cantor of Sedek VeSalom, Moses Jona, certified that he had baptized her according to the Jewish rite. Louisa was now Ribca Louisa de Leon.⁵⁷ Jona specified that she was converted "as a Portuguese Jew," a phrase not superfluous in that Louisa had clearly received not only a religious identity but also an ethnic one. The conversion of a female allowed Jewish women a rare opportunity to serve as official witnesses, because the immersion, occurring in the nude, called for sexual modesty. Hence, Louisa was immersed not only before Samuel Fernandes and David Israel Vieira, who probably turned their backs at the crucial moments, but also in the presence of Luna, widow of Isaac Robles de Medina, and Jael, wife (or daughter) of Abraham Fernandes. As so often seen in conversion and manumission records, the relationship between the slave and her master is passed over in silence. In all probability, Louisa was either the daughter or the concubine of Abraham de Leon. The continuation of slave conversion to Judaism during enslavement in the 1800s may help explain the perseverance of the aforementioned slave conversion ceremony in *Sefer Berith Yitshak* through at least 1803.⁵⁸

Once Suriname's Sephardic community had largely migrated to Paramaribo—where white Christians occupied the highest step on the social ladder—the question of admission into the Jewish fold continued to plague its members. But here, in a largely Christian environment, the laws changed noticeably. In 1829, four years after the dissolution of the Mahamad, the regents drafted new regulations whose frequent crossed-out lines suggest internal disputes or ideological wavering. The question of "who is a Sephardi Jew" and gradations of membership status occupy the very first bylaw. "It is understood that members are all born from legal

marriages, Portuguese Israelites," the regulations open. Tellingly, a key section of the bylaw, clarifying that "members are whites, free coloreds," is deleted, suggesting an attempt to deracialize the definition of community membership. Another remark, a marginal passage revealing hypocrisy's blinders, is also crossed out: "In order on the one hand to encourage marriage and morals among the *kleurlingen* [literally, "colored ones," in this case, Eurafrican Jews], the title of member is extended to them, but, on the other hand, in order not to forget what order and politics [*staatkunde*] prescribe, they should only be given a few more privileges or rather honors than the congregants, and this through the sixth grade. N.B. For your information, there are six grades: Negro, Carboeger, Mulat, Musties, Casties, Poesties. The seventh being white."⁵⁹

A comparison between the suppressed ordinances and the portions spared from deletion clearly shows a leadership grappling with the ascendancy of sexual behavior over racial definition. In the plantation environment of Jodensavanne, Sephardic society was informed by the racially and behaviorally based binary of *jehidim* versus *congregantes*. In the city by the 1820s, the Luso-Jewish community complicated this binary by considering racial subcategories and distinctions based on sexual conduct. Congregants in Paramaribo were free men and women stained by improper sexual behavior: those who "are free though not legally born, women who have given birth to children outside of wedlock, and married women who during their marriage give birth to bastards, as well as their children conceived in adultery." The deleted passage suggests that in the city Christian influence seeped into the self-definition of Suriname's Sephardim, producing a curious combination of Christian and Jewish ideas of illegitimate sexual relations and the resulting progeny.⁶⁰ Back in Jodensavanne, Judaism was understood and transmitted in primarily patriarchal terms. In the city, a shift seems to have occurred, with Jewish social status largely determined by the sexual behavior of women.

The term "member" (*lidmaat*), used at a time when *jahid* and *congregante* were still viable descriptors of social status, suggests a third tier of Jewish identity assigned to those who were considered neither completely gentile nor completely Jewish. At this point, slaves were not granted conversion to Judaism, as in centuries past. But in the case of newborns, the law also became more porous and lenient. Article 5 reads: "No slave may be admitted to the Israelite religion or circumcised. However, if one

prefers to have a newborn little slave become a Jew and have him circumcised on the eighth day of his birth, this will only occur on the explicit condition that the slave owner, as soon as possible, give enough compensation to the Parnassim for the benefit of such a child.⁶¹ [The slave owner should do so] with the highest speed according to precepts of the law [and] request letters of manumission from the competent authority."⁶² This measure perhaps guarded against the licentiousness of female concubinage, but it openly accepted—and even encouraged—the conversion of baby slaves to Judaism. Presumably, these babies were largely the mulatto progeny of Sephardic slave owners and their gentile slaves. Figures gathered for the early nineteenth century demonstrate that “half-breeds” and females were more likely to be manumitted than male blacks.⁶³ One in 494 females and 1 in 1,004 males were manumitted in Suriname in 1826, suggesting that economics were not the only factor: the personal relationship between the master and the slave was also crucial.⁶⁴

Thus, in the 1840s, the Sephardic community began to exercise more caution in conversion matters. When the slave Wilhelmina declared herself in 1841 as “desirous of being adopted into the Jewish ways,” the regents wondered whether she was being coerced or possessed earthly incentives. Similarly, when J. Barsano presented her son, Isaac, as a prospective convert, Sephardic leaders provisionally granted her request, with financial conditions.⁶⁵ Subsequent meetings also suggest that the leaders’ apprehensions were more financial than racial or religious. After investigating her case, the regents decided that Wilhelmina’s interest in Judaism was “pure affection” and welcomed her as a member (*lidmaat*), but again with a financial guarantor.⁶⁶

The concern with economic stability was particularly directed at prospective converts with no Jewish background.⁶⁷ A mulatto, for example, might fall back on the assistance of his Jewish father, but a “pure” gentile had no such luck.⁶⁸ For this reason, gentile free persons and black slaves were subject to particular scrutiny. After some discussion in 1840, the regents decided in March of the following year to compile a set of rules regarding the conversion of “both free persons and slaves, not born from Israelite parents.” The first article articulates the fear that such individuals would fall into poverty and become the responsibility of communal charity (*kerkbestuur*). They decided to set aside a special fund for the benefit of these people, to “bail” them out of impoverishment. Own-

ers would contribute to this fund and, according to the second article, were required to secure letters of manumission within six months after “adoption” by the community. Article three stipulates that children born of a female slave already a member of the community would be considered members and would be circumcised or ritually immersed in water according to Jewish law. A guarantor was responsible for applying for their manumission within six months of their birth. He would also be responsible for arranging the funerals of converts, whether enslaved or free, and for designating one or two trustworthy substitutes should he leave the colony. These gynocentric regulations, suggesting a preponderance of women converts, can be principally explained in three ways. First, female slaves were frequently impregnated by Jewish masters. Secondly, adult conversion to Judaism was much simpler for a female, who was exempt from the excruciating and risky ritual of circumcision. Finally, Suriname marriage and the institution of slavery gave rise to a preponderance of matrilineal families. Here we see once again that females were central to the redefinition of Jewishness in Suriname.

The mingling of Jews with the local African descendant population exerted a profound linguistic impact. Partly because they were among the earliest white settlers in the Caribbean, Sephardim had a significant impact on creole languages, including Papiamentu, the lingua franca of Curaçao by the 1740s,⁶⁹ and Suriname’s Sranan Tongo, formerly known as Negro English (*neger engels*).⁷⁰

The proliferation of Sranan Tongo among the colony’s Jews is difficult to explore, as casual conversations between people are rarely recorded verbatim in communal minutes, and these records appear mainly in Portuguese and Dutch. However, thanks to the trial pieces of a Jewish charitable organization, snippets of creole conversations have been preserved. From the second decade of the nineteenth century onward, the Gemilut Hassadim brotherhood sent various representatives to collect monies owed by its members living in Paramaribo. These men visited the homes of debtors and recorded the response of whoever answered the door. The case of Menaseh Abarbanel illustrates the trilingualism of Paramaribo’s Sephardic families. On various occasions in 1815 and 1816, representative J. Fernandes Jr. arrived at Abarbanel’s house to warn him of his overdue debt. Abarbanel replied each time in Portuguese that he had no

money ("*nao tenho dinheyro*"). When Abarbanel's wife answered the door she replied in Sranan Tongo that she would speak with him ("*me take hem*"). Their son Joseph responded in perfect Dutch that he would inform his father when he returned home ("*als myn vader thuys komt, zal ik hem zeggen*"). When Abarbanel finally surrendered himself as an insolvent debtor, he expressed his willingness in a mixture of Portuguese and Dutch.

These records reveal that women and daughters replied more often in Sranan than in any other language, echoing David Nassy's complaint in the 1780s that Jewish women were continuously chattering in Negro English ("*continuellement jasant en negre Angloi*").⁷¹ Only in one case is it clear that these speakers of Negro English were themselves African in origin. On January 10, 1823, Abraham Moses Fernandes, sworn clerk, arrived at the home of Jacob Hayim Robles. On behalf of the Gemilut Hasadim brotherhood, Fernandes conveyed the warning that the debt was due within twenty-four hours. Robles was not home, but the mulatta ("*humma mulata*") who opened the door replied in Sranan Tongo, "*Mi papa no de na hoso te a kom mi sa takie gie hem*" (My father is not at home; when he comes I shall speak to him).⁷² These records do not represent a wide enough sample, not only because they are relatively few in number (about forty entries), but also because females would have been more likely to answer the door. Yet they do speak to the possibility that miscegenation with African-origin women accelerated the proliferation of Sranan in the Jewish community. This theory becomes particularly suggestive when one considers that the vast majority of Surinamese blacks (excepting maroons) were African born, and thus Sranan "was still a second rather than a first language for three-quarters of the population" as much as a century after the colony's founding.⁷³ If blacks were not key transmitters of this creole, *mulatas*, whose important role in the Jewish community has been illustrated, may have been critical in the development of Sranan among Suriname's Sephardim.

The former Dutch colony provides an unparalleled case study for a diachronic investigation of black-Jewish interactions in the early modern world. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Suriname was home to the largest Jewish community in the Americas, peaking at just over a thousand souls. Its Jewish community is the longest lived in South Amer-

ica, surviving until today. Suriname was a plantation society, the vast majority of whose members were of African descent; thus, creolization meant the fusion of European Jewish and black cultures and peoples. Viewed in a broad Sephardic context and within the multiethnic context of the "land of seven peoples," the creolization of Suriname's Jews proves to be one aspect of a transatlantic phenomenon that found its fullest expression in the former Dutch colony.

This essay argues that the transmission of Jewishness in Suriname's Sephardic community became an increasingly matrilineal matter, endowing black, and especially mulatto women, with a pivotal role as determinants of community belonging. If this is true, it complements recent research demonstrating the distinctive and critical roles of African-origin women in developing Christian religions of the American South and the Caribbean.⁷⁴ Whether or not this hypothesis as relates to Suriname is borne out has yet to be determined, since the real archival spadework has scarcely begun. The presence of these individuals in the Dutch colony's Jewish community is difficult to pinpoint, as it involves tirelessly scanning thousands of pages of Jewish marriage, birth, circumcision, and death records for an African or unusual Jewish name (e.g., Jaba or Ismahel) or racial notation (e.g., *congregante*, *castiço*, or *escrava*). Poring through Dutch notarial archives with this goal in mind turned up our Joseph Pelegrino, his black concubines, and his mulatto children, while the myriad pages of Jewish communal meeting minutes, dating from 1749 to the turn of the twentieth century, are sprinkled with references to slaves and their conversion. Moreover, the silences embedded within these sources must also be scrutinized, for the sense of public decorum frequently censored written records referring to female blacks and mulattoes, whether enslaved or free. In birth records, for example, Eurafrican Jews are often not racially identified, but a child listed as the issue of his mother solely, and therefore not publicly recognized by his father, is a telltale sign of second-class status. Scholars attempting in vain to trace the birth records of known mothers or others known by family tradition to have dwelled in the colony have also confirmed these silences.⁷⁵ Collectively, the individuals retrieved from these painstaking searches form a significant group, in impact, if not in relative size, and they are the key to understanding the phenomenon of Jewish creolization in Suriname.

72. Ibid., fol. 386.
73. Ibid., fol. 350.
74. Ibid., fols. 348, 350, and de Mello, *Gente da Nação*, 471.
75. AN/TT, IL, liv. 254., fols. 354–54v, 383–88.
76. AN/TT, IL, liv. 254, fol. 358v, and also pc. 7820, confession of January 18, 1661 (Pedro Luís). AN/TT, IL, liv. 254, fols. 365–68 (João da Fonseca) and fol. 364, and Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Olinda Restaurada: Guerra e Açúcar no Nordeste, 1630–1654* (São Paulo, 1975), 119–21 (Estevão Dias).
77. AN/TT, IL, liv. 254, fol. 357v.
78. AN/TT, IL, pc. 11562, confession of February 5, 1649.
79. AN/TT, IL, pc. 7820.
80. “Instrução ao Embaixador o Conde do Prado, 1 de maio de 1669,” in *Corpo Diplomático Português*, ed. J. C. de Freitas Moniz (Lisbon, 1910), vol. 14, *Relações com a Cúria Romana*, 55.
81. See n. 27.
82. Calado, *O Valeroso Lucideno*, 31.
83. AN/TT, IL, liv. 220, fols. 4v–5, fols. 68–69.
84. AN/TT, IL, pc. 7533, confession of May 27, 1647.
85. AN/TT, IL, pc. 11562, confession of February 4, 1649.

Chapter Eight: A Matriarchal Matter

All translations from the French, Hebrew, Portuguese, and Sranan Tongo, except where noted, are mine. I thank Wim Klooster for his assistance with the Dutch translations and symposium participants for their suggestions and corrections.

1. Given the wording of the petition, Pelegrino obviously produced these children outside of Dutch marital law, but perhaps according to Jewish law. Surinamese Jews had obtained a special privilege in the 1650s to arrange their own marriages under the jurisdiction of their religious leaders. After 1703, however, Dutch law required Jewish marriage contracts be approved by Dutch officials and registered with the state archives. On the repeal of exclusive autonomy in Jewish marital laws, see Ralph G. Bennett, “The Blacks and Jews of Surinam,” *African Notes: Bulletin of the Institute of African Studies* (University of Ibadan) 17, nos. 1–2 (1993): 69; “Some Further Notes on the Jews in Surinam,” *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 16 (1907); and Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit, 1970), 1: 154.

2. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Netherlands (hereafter NAN), Oud Archief Suriname, pp. 83–87, request of Joseph Pelegrino to Governor General Johan Coetier [Jean Coutier], Paramaribo, July 17, 1720.

3. Given the petition’s lack of references to Pelegrino’s racial status, one might assume he was of “pure” Sephardic ancestry. Elsewhere, however, Pelegrino’s son Jacob is classified as a *karboeger* (i.e., a child of a mulatto and a black) and his grandson Daniel Pelegrino, as a *negro*. I thank Jean Jacques Vrij for this information. A Joseph Pelegrino appears in Suriname as early as the seventeenth century, but his racial status is not specified; NAN, *Nederlandse Portugees Israëlitische Gemeente in Suriname* (hereafter NPIGS), no. 25, *Bijlagen tot de notulen van mahamad en Junta* [Appendices of the minutes of the Mahamad and Junta], “Mem das promesas que Prometerão os Sres nomeados Abaixo” [Memorandum of pledges promised by the below-mentioned people], 1690.

4. Frits Eduard Mangal Mitrasing, *Suriname, Land of Seven Peoples: Social Mobility in a Plural Society—An Ethno-Historical Study* (Paramaribo, 1979). Conventionally, the seven peoples are understood to be Native Americans, maroons, Creoles, Europeans, Javanese, Hindustanis, and Chinese. In reality, the diversity is even greater, encompassing various Native American groups, six maroon tribes, and recent immigrants from Lebanon, Guyana, Haiti, and Brazil. French Guiana, roughly half the size of Suriname, is an overseas department rather than an independent nation. This and much of the following paragraph are largely drawn from Aviva Ben-Ur, “Still Life: Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and West African Art and Form in Suriname’s Jewish Cemeteries,” *American Jewish History* 92, no. 1 (2004): 31–79.

5. Robert Cohen, “Surinam Jews under British Rule: A Contemporary’s Report,” *Michael* 10 (1986): 41.

6. These data are derived by the author from Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680–1791* (Assen, 1985), 279, 291, 309, 341, 519.

7. A 1738 census counted 598 free coloreds and 2,133 whites. Around 1770, there were 3,000 free persons (mostly whites), compared to 60,000 slaves in the colony. By 1787, there were 650 free men and women of color. By 1812, that number had jumped to 3,075, and in 1830 to 5,051. In 1863, there were 36,000 slaves, while the free population had sextupled. Alex van Stipriaan, “An Unusual Parallel: Jews and Africans in Suriname in the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 31, nos. 1–2 (1997): 79; R. A. J. van Lier, *Frontier Society: A Social Analysis of the History of Surinam* (The Hague, 1971), 8, 97, and for figures showing the preponderance of female manumissions, 100.

8. The figure of 232 Jews (including 105 men, 58 women, and 69 children, presumably mostly settled along the Suriname River) is from a census conducted by the Society of Suriname in 1684 and cited in Victor Enthoven, “Suriname and Zeeland: Fifteen Years of Dutch Misery on the Wild Coast, 1667–1682,” in *International Conference on Shipping, Factories, and Colonization*, ed. J. Everaert

and J. M. Parmentier (Brussels, 1996), 255. Enthoven states that 1,158 individuals resided in Jodensavanne in 1684, with Africans outnumbering Jews 6 to 1. Statistics for slaves do not reflect natural increase, but rather constant replenishment by "saltwater slaves." Comparable figures for Suriname's European and enslaved populations are provided in Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge, 1990), 185.

9. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 358 ("Surinam marriage"); van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 78 ("marriage Surinam-style"). For statistics see Wim Hoogbergen, "De Bosnegers zijn gekomen!": *Slavernij en rebellie in Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1992), and Claudia Schnurmann, *Atlantische Welten: Engländer und Niederländer im amerikanisch-atlantischen Raum, 1648-1713* (Cologne, 1998), 382.

10. Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 74.

11. "Em Este kaal ay huma escama feita no ano 5423 que Prohibe a cual quer Jahid so pena de herem a circonsidar os filhos do que se despedue de Jahid. Esta escama que foy feita com Prudencia pelos Primeiros fundadores deste kaal (adterorem)." Gemeentearchief, Amsterdam (hereafter GAA), no. 334, fol. 1029, Stukken betreffende gemeenten te Amsterdam, Curaçao, Suriname en Constantinopel, 1650-1798 [Pieces concerning the communities of Amsterdam, Curaçao, Suriname, and Constantinople, 1650-1798], pp. 428-29. The earliest known definitions of *jahid* and *congregante* in Suriname's Sephardic community are provided in NAN, NPIGS, no. 99, Minuut-Askamot voor de gemeente B.V.S. 1748 [Minutes-Askamot for Congregation Beraha VeSalom, 1748], tractate 26. Cf. Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004), 252, 463n228, who dates this tractate, recorded in another document, to 1665.

12. A. T. van Deursen, *Plain Lives in a Golden Age: Popular Culture, Religion and Society in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Cambridge, 1991), 262. Rabbinical law does distinguish in some respects between born Jews and converts, for example, forbidding a Cohen (a male descendant of a Temple priest) from marrying a convert. But Suriname's Jewish laws rendered even a *born* Jew intransigently inferior if he was a *kleurling*, or colored. Compare the attitudes of Judah Halevi (Spain, eleventh-twelfth centuries) toward converts to Judaism in Isaak Heinemann, commentator, *The Kuzari*, in *Three Jewish Philosophers: Philo, Saadya Gaon, Jehuda Halevi* (New York, 1981), 35-37.

13. NAN, NPIGS, no. 99, Ascarnot, tractate 26, art. 3, 1748. This tractate subsequently reappears in 1754 and 1784. NAN, NPIGS, no. 101, Askamot, 1754, and Aanwinsten, Jaar: 1929-XIV-1, 1551, Ascarnot Velha em Portugees y em Hollandez Ao 1784. Compare A. G. van der Østen's proposed legislation of 1785, never implemented, which would have allowed remote descendants of

blacks who maintained white ancestry "in an unbroken line" to be declared as whites. See Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B. W. Higman (Baltimore, 1992), 153.

14. In contrast, Sephardic Jews marrying Ashkenazi men or women would be demoted to congregant status by at least 1789. Fragment van een concept-vertaling in het Nederlands van de Askamot [Fragment of a draft translation in Dutch from the Askamot], no. 111, chap. 1, art. 2, 1789. "*Tanto homem como mulheres*" appears in superscript over the words "*Todo Jahid*." This insertion suggests an increase in the incidence of Sephardi women marrying Ashkenazim. Unions with Ashkenaziot are first mentioned in the 1754 version of the Askamot. NAN, NPIGS, no. 101, Askamot, 1754, tractate 26, art. 5: "Tambem os que cazarem com tudescas, seraõ logo despedidos de Jehidim, e reduzidos ao gremio de Congregantes."

15. The explanation for this double standard is from Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 153.

16. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 359; H. Hoetink, *De gespleten samenleving in het Caraïbisch gebied* (Assen, 1962), 71; J. S. Schiltkamp, J. Th. De Smidt, and T. van der Lee, eds., *West Indisch Plakaatboek, Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1973), 1: 277 (plakaat 240).

17. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 359. This was probably Ganna Levy Hartog, expelled from the colony on January 25, 1731, "for having had sex with an Indian slave"; Bennett, "The Blacks and Jews of Surinam," 70, citing NAN, NPIGS, no. 527, where I did not find the document in question. Sexual liaisons between white women and slaves were also rare in the Cape, but they were not as severely punished as in Suriname. Robert Carl-Heinz Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (Hanover, NH, 1994), 316-20.

18. Philippe Fermin, a physician who spent many years in Suriname, maintained that a white woman having "commerce" with a black man was "rare," but "*pas sans exemple*"; Fermin, *Description générale, historique, géographique et physique de la colonie de Surinam*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1769), 1: 121. John Gabriel Stedman, a Scottish militiaman who spent four years in Suriname in the 1770s, noted: "Should it ever be known that a female European had kept a carnal intercourse with a slave of whatever denomination" she is "detested," and the slave "loses his life without mercy. Such is the despotic law of men in Dutch Guiana, if not in the whole world, over the weaker species." Richard Price and Sally Price, eds., *Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society* (Baltimore, 1992), 133.

19. Eurafrikan Jewesses would have also automatically passed on their Jewish status to their children, regardless of the father's identity. By at least the 1780s,

Sephardic bylaws explicitly disregarded whether or not Sephardi ancestry was transmitted via the father or the mother, accepting as *congregantes* all colored progeny "who carry the name of, or are known to be descended of the Portuguese or Spanish Nation." Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1991), 162, citing 1787 Ascamoth, tractate 1, art. 3, par. 12.

20. Susan Sorek, "Mothers of Israel: Why the Rabbis Adopted a Matrilineal Principle," *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 3, no. 1 (2002).

21. The imposition of patrilineal descent on children produced in concubinage was not uncommon in medieval Jewish communities of both Europe and the Maghreb. Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Hanover, NH, 2004), 137–38. In North America's frontier societies Jewish men sometimes raised their halakhically gentile children as Jews (children who were not Jewish according to Jewish law). The children of Samson Levy (Philadelphia) and Michael Judah (Connecticut), both of whom intermarried, were ritually circumcised in the eighteenth century. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 3: 1228–29.

22. Christian white colonies also replicated biblical slavery laws. Examples appear in "Bermuda's Inter-Colonial Diaspora, 1625–1675," chapter 3 of Michael Joseph Jarvis's book manuscript, based on his dissertation, "'In the Eye of All Trade': Maritime Revolution and the Transformation of Bermudian Society, 1612–1800" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1998). I thank him for sharing this manuscript chapter.

23. The translation is from *The Holy Scriptures*, ed. Harold Fisch (Jerusalem, 1989), 16.

24. Abraham and Solomon Levy Maduro, eds., *Sefer Berit Yitshak* (Amsterdam, 5528 [1767–68]), 16. This is apparently a reprint of the 1729 edition, cited in Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana jussu curatorum digessit et notis instruxit M. Steinschneider* (Berlin, 1931), entry 3222.

25. Copies consulted for this article are located at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Bibliotheek Ets Hayim, Amsterdam. Many other versions of this prayer book exist, bearing the same title, but they do not reference slaves. See, e.g., *Sefer Berith Itschak*, ed. Solomon Levy Maduro (Amsterdam, 5525 [1764–65]), at the Bibliotheek Ets Hayim, and the 1729 edition of the same title, held at the Yale University library.

26. Michael Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon der Hamburger Seefarthen: Die Grabinschriften des Portugiesenfriedhofs an der Königstrasse in Hamburg-Altona* (Hamburg, 2000), 665.

27. His argument may not be sound, as the Hebrew word "eved" often ap-

pears in vernacular translations as "servant." See, e.g., Fisch, *The Holy Scriptures*, 24; John G. Fee, *An Anti-Slavery Manual: The Wrongs of American Slavery Exposed by Light of the Bible and of Facts, with A Remedy for the Evil*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1851), 19–20. The religious manuals Studemund-Halévy discusses were useful to Amsterdam's Sephardic community, where African-origin slaves served Jewish masters (including one man who bequeathed several female slaves to his wife in 1752). Although this ownership of humans contradicted laws in London, Amsterdam, and Hamburg, it nevertheless continued. Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon*, 666–67.

28. These texts definitively refute scholarly assumptions that black slavery did not exist in early modern northwestern Europe. For refutations of these assumptions, see Alison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), 225–26, and, more extensively, Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*.

29. Schiltkamp, De Smidt, and van der Lee, *West Indisch Plakaatboek, Suriname*, 1: 412. Among Europeans, the Dutch "may well have been the least interested in efforts to educate and Christianize the Africa population"; Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 70–71. See also Humphrey E. Lamur, "Slave Religion on the Vossenburg Plantation (Suriname) and Missionaries' Reactions," in *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader*, ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Kingston, Jamaica, 1991), 287–94. Another scholar argues that until the 1820s, Dutch colonial planters preferred that their slaves maintain their pagan religions, which of course provided the former with another justification for enslavement. Gert Oostindie, "The Enlightenment, Christianity, and the Suriname Slave," *Journal of Caribbean History* 26 (1992): 154–55. By contrast, the Code Noir of 1685 made baptism of slaves obligatory in the French colonies. In Jamaica, slaves solicited baptism beginning in the late eighteenth century and used this to lord it over "saltwater slaves" (those born in Africa), making Africans themselves eager for baptism. Richard D. E. Burton, "Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures," *New West Indian Guide* 73, nos. 1–2 (1999): 45.

30. One Dutch eyewitness noted during his sojourn in 1680s Suriname that although most slaves had no religion, "various among them had been baptized" (*verscheyden onder haar Gedoopt zijn*). Adriaan van Berkel, *Amerikaansche Voyagien, behelzende een Reis na Rio de Berbice, gelegen op het vaste Land van Guiana, aande wilde-kust van America, mitsgaders een andere na de Colonie van Suriname, gelegen in het noorder deel van het gemelde landschap Guiana* (Amsterdam, 1695), 126.

31. Van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 73.

32. NAN, Aanwinsten, no. 1666, David Cohen Nassy, "Memoire sur les

Moyens d'améliorer la colonie de Surinam," Philadelphia, 1795, 61. Nassy had heard the story from a number of "reliable" people who knew Palmer personally and were "enchanted with the order with which he ruled his plantation."

33. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 370–71.

34. Jacques Arends, "The History of Surinamese Creoles I: A Sociohistorical Survey," in *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*, ed. Eithne B. Carlin and Jacques Arends (Leiden, 2002), 126–27.

35. GAA 334, fol. 1304, Askamot, 5409.

36. GAA, no. 334, fol. 1029, Stukken betreffende gemeenten te Amsterdam, Curaçao, Suriname en Constantinopel, 1650–1798, p. 438. The reason for the demotion of such *jehidim* is not specified. Assuming that the demotion was imposed because these *jehidim* had married free Eurafrican Jewesses, the child would have been both free and automatically Jewish. Thus, it is possible that withholding circumcision privileges from the children born of such relations was a harsh measure to discourage white Jews from wedding Eurafrican Jewesses. The other alternative, that these *jehidim* had been demoted for having sexual relations with their gentile slaves, is unlikely, as there are no ordinances prohibiting such contact.

37. NAN, NPIGS, no. 99, Askamot, 1748, tractate 26.

38. In accordance with social conventions of the time, da Costa never explicitly disclosed his identity as the father. Were one to question Isaac da Costa's status as the father of these slave children, one would still be obligated to explain how they, born of negresses, obtained their European ancestry, and why their master was so much more generous to them than to his own wife and nephews. In the analysis of similar wills and manumission decrees drafted by gentiles, Caribbean historians have generally assumed the paternity of the white slave owner. See, e.g., Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 141; Arlette Gautier, *Les soeurs de solitude: La condition féminine dans l'esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIX siècle* (Paris, 1985), 170; Géraud Lafleur, *Saint-Claude: Histoire d'une commune de Guadeloupe* (Paris, 1993), 75. *Muleca* or *moleca* is translated as "a young black girl" and a "young Negro girl, maid in the Big House," in Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves [Casa-Grande and Senzala]*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York, 1978), 326, 492. Given her racial designation, Aquariba may not have been Isaac's daughter.

39. See Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 141.

40. Ibid., 143. Hall notes that by the early nineteenth century manumitted men and women were owners of two-thirds of the enslaved persons living in the towns of the Danish West Indies.

41. NAN, Oud Notarieel Archief, Suriname, will of Isaac da Costa, November 8, 1725, fol. 13, pp. 245–47.

42. NAN, NPIGS, no. 418, Alfabetische staat van overledenen over 1777–1812 [Alphabetical record of deaths for 1777–1812]. Place and date of entries of *congregantes* and *congregantas* are as follows: p. 2 (Cupij plantation, 1789) p. 24 (Savana, 1820); p. 31 (Cupij plantation, 1792); p. 43 (Savana, 1815); p. 57 (Savana, 1814); p. 59 (Savana, 1791); p. 65 (Savana, 1816); p. 67 (Savana, 1793); p. 69 (Savana, 1797); p. 72 (Savana, 1811).

43. By 1791, 29 percent of the colony's Sephardim lived in Paramaribo (250 Sephardim dwelled on plantations, while 620 lived in the capital city). Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 309.

44. Jewish mulattoes formed a brotherhood (*Siva*) called the Path of the Righteous (*Darhe Jesarim*) as well as a separate prayer house. These separate institutions were not only sanctioned by white Jews but also founded with the financial support of both Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 164–66; van Lier, *Frontier Society*, 81; J. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1861), 256; Willem F. L. Buschkens, *The Family System of the Paramaribo Creoles* (The Hague, 1974), 70; Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 366. The fissure that split the Sephardic community in 1790, first studied by the late Robert Cohen, was perhaps the first major rebellion against Jewish congregant status. NA, Oud Arch. Sur. Gouvernements secretaries, no. 528; Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 163–74.

45. NAN, NPIGS, no. 423, Register van begravenen op de kerkhoven van de Savanne, 1777–1833 [Register of graves in the cemetery of the Savanna, 1777–1833], p. 1.

46. Ibid., no. 418, Registro Mortuario [Death Register], p. 49.

47. N. H. Swellengrebel and E. van der Kuyp, *Health of White Settlers in Surinam* (Amsterdam, 1940), 31.

48. NAN, NPIGS, no. 417, Registro de Notaião de Nacimentos [Birth Register], p. 24.

49. On similar uses of godparenthood, see Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763–1840* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), 140–43, and Frances P. Karner, *The Sephardics of Curaçao* (Assen, 1969), 24.

50. NAN, NPIGS, no. 418, Registro Mortuario [Death Register], p. 113. She died on June 8, 1822 (19 Sivan 5582).

51. Ibid., no. 13, Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen) [Minutes of meetings of the Gentlemen of the Mahamad (Parnassim) and of the Junta (Parnassim and elderly)], November 4, 1832.

52. Ibid., no. 10, p. 4.

53. Ibid., no. 417, p. 63.

54. The "urgent obligation of circumcision" infused him with a "*nuevo espíritu*." Abraham Gabay Izidro, Sermon predicado neste K.K. de T.T. por Ribi Abraham Gabay Izidro. En Sabat Vaikrà en R.H. Nisàn del Año 5484 En Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 1724), 9; Cecil Roth, "The Remarkable Career of Haham Abraham Gabay Izidro," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 24 (1974).

55. R. Beeldsnijder, *De geboorteregisters der Portugees-Israelitische gemeente in Suriname 1777-1866* (n.p., 2001), 6, without archival attribution.

56. NAN, NPIGS, no. 13, Minuut-notulen van vergaderingen van de Senhores de Mahamad (Parnassijns) en van de Junta (Parnassijns en ouderlingen) [Minutes of meetings of the Gentlemen of the Mahamad (Parnassim) and of the Junta (Parnassim and elderly), November 4, 1832.

57. Baptismal certificate written by Moses Jona, Paramaribo, September 30, 1832 (6 Tisry 5593), 345. Unfortunately, the convert's age was left blank.

58. *Sefer Berit Itshak* (1764-65; Amsterdam, 1803-4), housed in the synagogue archives of Congregation Mikvé Israel-Emmanuel in Curaçao. While bereft of a list of ritual circumcisers, this volume does include the slave conversion ceremony.

59. The distinctions between various combinations of racial mixture were formalized in a 1781 resolution by the Council of Policy and Criminal Justice. Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment*, 162, 306n41; Rosemary Brana-Shute, "The Manumission of Slaves in Suriname, 1760-1828" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1985), xvi-ii, 227.

60. According to Christian law, a married man who has sexual relations with someone other than his wife is guilty of adultery, and all children born out of wedlock are considered bastards. In Judaism, by contrast, a Jewish man is not guilty unless the Jewish woman he has relations with is married to another Jewish man. In such a case, the resulting offspring would be classified as a bastard (*mamzer*) according to Jewish law. However, a child born to a single Jewish woman is not classified as a bastard.

61. The Jewish leaders here demonstrate their foresight by imposing a sum intended to prevent the infant from falling into poverty.

62. NAN, NPIGS, no. 117, Pieces concerning the newly designed regulations for the Dutch Portuguese Israelitic Head synagogue in Suriname, 1829-48, art. 1.

63. Luiz C. Barbosa, "Manumission in Brazil and Surinam: The Role of Dutch Hegemony and Decline in the Capitalist World-Economy," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 10, no. 3 (1987): 357.

64. Brana-Shute, "The Manumission of Slaves in Suriname, 1760-1828," 223. See also Okke ten Hove and Frank Dragtenstein, *Manumissies in Suriname, 1832-1863* (Utrecht, 1997).

65. NAN, NPIGS, no. 14, Vergadering van Parnassims, March 11, 1841.

66. Ibid., March 21, 1841.

67. Ibid., June 28, 1840.

68. Ibid., no. 13, June 28, 1840.

69. Wim Klooster, "Between Habsburg Neglect and Bourbon Assertiveness: Hispano-Dutch Relations in the New World, 1650-1750," in *España y los diecisiete Países Bajos, siglos XVI-XVIII: Una revisión historiográfica*, ed. Ana Crespo Solana and Manuel Herrero Sánchez (Cordova, 2002), 703-18; Linda M. Rupert, "Trading Globally, Speaking Locally," *Jewish Culture and History* 7, nos. 1-2 (2004). The Creole language of the ABC islands is variably spelled with a final *u* or a final *o*. See Roger William Andersen, "Nativization and Hispanization in the Papiamentu of Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles: A Sociolinguistic Study of Variation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1974), and Jossy Mansur, *Dictionary: English-Papiamentu, Papiamentu-English* (Oranjestad, Aruba, 1991). Aruba's creole language, though mutually comprehensible to creole speakers of Curaçao and Bonaire, maintains a distinctive spelling, based on etymology (or perceived etymology) rather than phonetics. This is because Arubans claim that their creole and their ancestry are "derived more from Native Americans and less from Africans," likely a prestige claim emphasizing free as opposed to enslaved ancestors. The ABC islands formed the Komishon Standarisashon di Papiamentu (KSP) in 1984. Alan F. Benjamin, *Jews of the Dutch Caribbean: Exploring Ethnic Identity on Curaçao* (London, 2002), 82.

70. J. D. Oppenheim, "Jewish Customs among the Suriname (Dutch Guyana) Population," *Edoth* 3, nos. 1-2 (1947-48).

71. David Cohen Nassy, *Essai historique sur la colonie de Surinam* (Paramaribo, 1788), 2: 60. Nassy's contemporary, John Gabriel Stedman, who arrived in the colony in 1773 for a four-year sojourn, expressed a more positive view of the language as "so sweet and sonorous that even among the genteel European companies, nothing else is spoken in Surinam. It is also extremely expressive and sentimental." Price and Price, *Stedman's Surinam*, 261.

72. NAN, NPIGS, no. 467, Trial pieces re: debts receivables of the Gemilut Hasadim Brotherhood. The interchange underscores the record keepers' convention of not explicitly identifying Eurafican Jews as children of their presumably white fathers. (Note that Fernandes referred to the female as "a mulatto," while she identified herself as her father's daughter.)

73. Arends, "The History of Surinamese Creoles I," 123.

74. See, e.g., Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998).

75. See, e.g., Beeldsnijder, *De geboorteregisters*, 5.

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