

Abstracts 10th Contact Day Jewish Studies on the Low Countries

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Agency and identity in the Age of Exploration. A case study of a Western Sephardic family in the 17th and 18th centuries

An intriguing chapter in Jewish history is the rise of the Western Sephardic communities in the early modern age, in Northwestern Europe, Northern America and the Caribbean. Pressured by the Inquisition and attracted to the burgeoning economies in the North, New Christians left the Iberian Peninsula and migrated to trading cities on and near the Atlantic littoral. There, they were able to rediscover their Jewish roots and found wealthy and influential Sephardic communities, which at the end of the Early Modern Age spanned both sides of the Northern Atlantic. To this day, impressive synagogues in for example Amsterdam, Willemstad and Paramaribo attest to the wealth and self-consciousness of the Western Sephardim.

However, this outcome was not self-evident. In my paper I will contend that the ability and desire to 'return' to Judaism and the reconstruction of a Jewish identity depended on a number of factors, not least that of individual agency. I will do so by focusing on the case of the Lopes family, a New Christian family from Bragança which by way of Bordeaux migrated to Amsterdam and London. There, the extremely wealthy Lopes Suasso and Lopes Berachel lines converted and would play an important role as cornerstones in Sephardic community life, running the congregations as *parnassim* and donating liberally to them. The Lopes Suasso family reached a peak of wealth and public notoriety in the late 17th century, when it was ennobled and famously funded the exploits of King William III, forever making the family a fixture of Dutch Jewish historiography. A Sephardic success story if ever there was one.

Closer scrutiny of the 'life choices' individual members of the family made however reveals a more complicated story, with identities much more in flux and dependent on the circumstances in which the Lopes found themselves. As the life stories of several Lopes will show, even when safely and comfortably ensconced in Northwestern Europe their Jewishness was not always axiomatic. Cornerstones of Sephardic life they may have been, but not as a matter of course.

Tsila Radecker

The struggle for a better life. Dina Sanson as social worker and feminist 1902-1910

In 2018 it is 150 years since the first female and Jewish policewoman Dina Sanson (1868-1929) was born in Rotterdam. She is best known for her fight against baby farming. This was the practice where shelters, either intentionally or through indifference, neglected and malnourished infants to death. The dismantling of baby farms was the reason for child care legislation. In addition, she was committed to improving the social position of (Jewish) women and prostitutes. As the first policewoman she left her mark on history.

She owed her appointment as policewoman (1911) to the nomination by the *Vereeniging ter Behartiging van de Belangen van de Vrouw* [Society for the Promotion of the Interests of Women]. Dina had been an active member in this organization. She was vice president from 1903 and gave lectures on the causes of poverty. The *Vereeniging ter Behartiging van de Belangen van de Vrouw* fought for women's rights and gave out brochures concerning the unequal treatment of women. Also "the usual suspects" of the Dutch women rights movement like Aletta Jacobs, Wilhelmina Drucker, Jan Rutgers, Johanna Naber frequently gave lectures. This organization shows a network of women, Jewish and non-Jewish, which were all engaged in the moral elevation of the poor and struggle for women rights. These feminists and social workers were in close contact with each other even though they had different religious backgrounds. Interestingly, Dina was active both within and outside the Jewish network, representing Jewish women's assimilation. Dina's neutrality is the main reason for her appointment.

This paper discusses Dina's place within the women rights movement. The first part focuses on Dina's Jewish network and work for various Jewish (children) associations. Then it follows Dina's work as a social worker for the Rotterdam municipality and the specific role that women played in the elevation of the working class. The third part concentrates on Dina's place within the women's right movement.

Huibert Schijf

Russian Jewish immigrants in two Amsterdam streets, 1850 -1914

Last year I showed some preliminary results of my research on Russian-jewish migrants to illustrate a very common practice known among researchers as *chain migration*. After the arrival of a pioneer, other members of the family, neighbourhood or town follow. As the data processing is completed, another general pattern, also well-known among researchers, surfaces. Not all migrants stay long in the first country of arrival. They return or move on. Between 1850 and 1914, 338 registered Russian-jewish immigrants arrived in Amsterdam. The first addresses where they settled down were spread all over the city, with usually no more than one or two Russians in the same street. However, two streets stand out: Manegestraat, a short and narrow street at the outskirts of the traditional Jewish Quarter with 23 immigrants and the newer and longer Blasiusstraat which is located further away from the Jewish Quarter, with 40 immigrants. But the street was nearby a terminal where trains from Utrecht used to arrive. In the 1930s, the Manegestraat was sometimes called 'het Russenstraatje' (the little street of the Russians). A micro-study of the relatively high concentration of Russian-jewish immigrants in these two streets offers a possibility to test how chain migration, if any, worked in the past and how family connections helped sometimes. As starting-point I use data which are collected and processed by Karin Hofmeester from the registration of these immigrants in the Amsterdamse Vreemdelingenregister (Amsterdam Registration of Foreigners). The Russian inhabitants of the two street has been followed through other public records after their arrival in Amsterdam.

Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel

Being and belonging: Three stories of Jewish life in Amsterdam before, during and after the Shoah

This contribution offers a close-up study of three lives affected by the Holocaust in Amsterdam: Sandór Baracs, Benno Premsele and Joop Voet. All three were citizens of the Dutch capital, Jewish, and survivors of the Holocaust. By following these three main characters and their social Umfeld before, during and after the war, this paper focuses on (changes in) their interactions with Jewish and non-Jewish friends and their sense of being and belonging. The main argument of this contribution is that in all these three persons' lives the social and emotional fabric they were part of did not break: this appeared to have increased their chance to find help and to survive in hiding. At the same time, this paper shows that both self- and group-identity of all three characters were severely affected by the Holocaust. In most cases this also became obvious in drastic choices made after the war.

Veerle vanden Daelen

Living together in the "Yidische gas" around the diamond district - Antwerp (Belgium), 1930-1950

This contribution deals with Jewish-non-Jewish relations in Antwerp. At the eve of the Second World War, Antwerp became home to a very diverse and colourful Jewish life, including both leftist tendencies, remarkable Zionist activity for a Western European city at that time and Orthodox religious initiatives as indicated by the presence of more than a handful Hassidic groups in the city. This contribution examines the trajectories of Jewish families and individuals around the Provinciestraat in Antwerp. Into what degree did the war bring Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors closer to each other? Into what degree did attitudes towards Jewishness change because of the war?

Gerben Zaagsma

Help, betrayal and the importance of networks – Jews in hiding in the Netherlands and the case of Anne Frank

This paper deals with help, betrayal and the importance of networks when researching Jews in hiding in the Netherlands by using the story of Anne Frank as a case study. The question of help and betrayal of the eight *onderduikers* in the *Achterhuis* is tied to the broader question of the role of the Dutch population during the Holocaust. As James Young noted: “By reflecting back to the Dutch their own mixed record of resistance and neutrality, victimization and passive complicity, Anne Frank has effectively become an archetypal figure for all of Holland's war memory.”¹ If the story of the helpers, epitomized by Miep Gies, can be used to showcase Dutch resistance (never mind the irony that Gies had an Austrian background) then the story of their betrayal can be used to make a point about “bystander apathy”.² The Anne Frank story thus provides a template to showcase an idealized and arguably romanticized image of gentile help as well as a stereotypical image of gentile betrayal. In the public realm, the story of Anne Frank has become the symbol *par excellence* of Jewish wartime experiences in hiding in Nazi-occupied Europe, and Anne’s diaries of Jewish diary writing. Similarly, the stories and theories about the helpers and possible betrayers often serve to present a simplified narrative; here are eight *onderduikers* trying to live a life in confinement as normal as possible in what seems to resemble a normal house, helped by a number of selfless, altruistic, ordinary men and women, who are ultimately betrayed by an unscrupulous individual, or so it seems.

While the importance of the support provided by the five core helpers should in no way be diminished, just as the fact that someone made the fateful call in early August 1944 that led to the arrest of the *onderduikers*, this knowledge only leaves us with a partial understanding of the story of help and betrayal; the focus on individuals and their possible motivation obscures the role that the broader networks in which the *onderduikers* were embedded played. In the paper I will argue that while the core network of helpers (their ‘strong ties’) was crucial in the decision to go into hiding, the commitment of the helpers could only be transformed into action by their extended network (their ‘weak ties’) through which services necessary for survival could be obtained and arranged. Similarly, the extended network of those who knew, or might have known, about the hiding place is crucial to

understanding the ultimate betrayal of the *onderduikers*. The final aim here is not only to further our understanding of help and betrayal by shifting the focus from individuals to networks; along the way I also hope to underscore the importance of recontextualizing this part of the story of Anne Frank, as the engagement with that story has arguably tended to produce and reinforce overly stereotypical notions of help and betrayal of Jews in hiding during World War II.

The Dutch 'Diamond Jews' in Bergen-Belsen

This panel of three discusses some aspects of the fate of the so-called Diamond Jews of Amsterdam, 1940-1945. Between 1941 and 1943, the Germans and their Dutch collaborators in the civil service deported 107,000 Dutch Jews, mostly to Auschwitz and Sobibor. Those who worked in the diamond industry were able to delay deportation for some time because Himmler had designated them for exemption so that they might help the Nazis establish a diamond industry of its own back in Germany. These Dutch Jewish diamond cleavers and sawyers and cutters and splitters and polishers and merchants and their families remained in Amsterdam until the summer of 1943, secured by the diamond *Sperre* (exemption). Himmler ordered their machinery and tools to be moved with them when they were deported to Bergen-Belsen, still hoping to process diamonds in the camp as late as the fall of 1944, when it became clear that Germany was likely to lose the war. Historical accounts differ on these men and women who worked in the diamond industry of Amsterdam, and only relatively brief mention of them exists in Dutch histories of the Holocaust (Presser 1988 [1968]: 371-374; De Jong 1975: 298-301, 1978: 706-707, 713, 780 n.1; Moore 1997: 140-142). After an overview of the history and its comparison to the Antwerp diamond Jews, these panellists visit the USC Shoah Foundation testimonies of 15 survivors who narrate this painful history, in English or in Dutch.

Pim Griffioen

The Fate of the 'Diamond Jews' of Antwerp and Amsterdam, 1940–1945: a Historical Comparative Overview

Both in the Netherlands and in Belgium the German occupiers carried out a policy of economic persecution against the Jewish population. Jewish shops and businesses were registered, put under the control of a non-Jewish 'administrator' and either liquidated or taken over and continued by a non-Jewish owner. However, in both countries, the Jewish diamond trade and industry were for a long time an exception to this rule. In some respects the fate of these wealthy merchants and very skilled workers was determined by the conflict between the economic interests and ideological imperatives of the German occupation administration (and Nazi regime in general). In this instance it developed into a struggle between the power of the German army (Wehrmacht) and Armaments Inspection (Rüstungsinspektion) on the one hand and the various echelons of the SS on the other. Even the latter had to concede that this industry was important to the German war effort. Amsterdam and Antwerp were the world's leading centres for the diamond trade and cutting, whereas South Africa held a monopoly on diamond mining. On the basis of research literature to date (e.g. Aalders 2000; Laureys 2000, 2005; Van der Leeuw 1972) the role of German authorities, German companies, local actors and the Jewish companies in Amsterdam and Antwerp will be compared. What accounted the most for the differences in outcome regarding the fate of the 'Diamond Jews' in the two cities by the end of war and occupation in 1945?

Dawn Skorzewski

The Asschers and the Soeps in Bergen-Belsen: A Tale of Privilege, Guilt, and Suffering

On December 4, 1944, after months of sharing barracks in Bergen-Belsen with those had operated every aspect of the diamond industry in Amsterdam, those in the diamond camp were told to report for deportation. The men would be transported to Sachsenhausen and the women to Beendorf. Their 54 children were taken from their mothers, driven in a dump truck to another part of Bergen-Belsen, and abandoned in a frozen field. Although 52 of the children would survive through the intervention of a Polish nurse, very few of the men and

only a dozen of the women, would survive. Abraham Asscher and Abraham Soep, wealthy owners of two of the largest diamond factories in Amsterdam, shared barracks in the Sternlager with many of their former employees. The only diamond Jews not selected to be deported to labor or death camps in December 1944, they remained in Bergen-Belsen with their families until the end of the war. What do the testimonies of one Asscher's grandson and Soep's daughters tell us about their experiences as "elite" members of the diamond camp? How do they explain why their families were allowed to stay in Bergen-Belsen? What do they say about the experience of watching their closest friends loaded onto trucks for deportation? Their conflicting reports on their final days as a diamond group as well as the psychological consequences of their special status, resonate in the testimonies, which offer almost diametrically opposed perspectives on the relationships between privilege, guilt, and suffering.

Bettine Siertsema

Testimonies of the Diamond Workers' Children on Their Rescuing "Angel"

Oral testimonies, especially those recorded fifty years after the events, are contested sources for historians. The Shoah Foundation video testimonies of the children of the diamond workers of Amsterdam, however, offer an important addition and even a correction to the existing historiography. Ignored by most historians, or, at most, wrongfully mentioned as dead or sharing the fate of their mothers, these children survived with the help of a Polish Jewish nurse, Sister Luba, who had lost her husband and child in Auschwitz. Without adult help the 54 children were destined to die in the camp, where hunger and typhus reigned. Luba used all possible resources to keep 52 of the children alive. The story is not completely unknown, since newspapers covered Luba's immigration to New York in 1947, and the oldest girl of the group, Hetty Werkendam, published her memoirs on these events in 1985 (cf. 2011). Ten years later, a relatively large number of these former children gave testimony to the Shoah Foundation. There are six interviews in Dutch and four in English by people who emigrated to the US after the war. Although there are many contradictions in these testimonies, and researchers should keep in mind that all but one of these interviews were conducted after a reunion of the group with Sister Luba in April 1995, together they constitute a convincing correction to the 'official' story of the fate of the Dutch

diamond workers and their families. This paper will compare the video testimonies and the written one, and use them not only to reconstruct the story, but also to point out certain tendencies in oral testimony as a genre that researchers should be aware of in using them as a historical source.

Bieke Van Camp

Remembering the Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: Publication Policies (1943-2016)

Much has been written on the social receptiveness of Shoah testimonies, especially concerning the period following immediately World War II. First moved away from the public sphere, in the necessity to focus on resuming normal life (commemorating above all the glorious past of the Resistance), Shoah witnesses began to gain their place in public only after the Eichmann trial (1962), or even after the release of the miniseries *Holocaust* in the United States (1978). An investigative tool on memory policies can thus be constituted by the publishing world. When it comes to the Netherlands, analyses concerning memory politics through publishing don't seem to exist. Besides, historiography shows that even more than in other countries of Western Europe, in the Netherlands racial deportation appears to have been subject to taboo after World War II due to the large number of deportees (approx. 75% of the Jewish community was exterminated). Therefore, I believe that studies based on statistics targeting publishers, first editions and reprints as well as studies based on the analysis of editor's collections in which testimonies are published, could greatly contribute to this debate.

At first, I will focus on general statistics regarding the memory of the Holocaust in the Netherlands (based on the catalog of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek van Nederland*); then more specifically on the publications of Shoah testimonies (concentration camp experiences as well as hiding experiences) only published originally in Dutch and by Dutch publishers. I will then take into consideration the circulation of these works: first within the Netherlands (prints, reprints...) and secondly their circulation abroad (translations). I will situate my results in the European context, targeting in particular a comparative study between the Netherlands and Italy.

Lastly, I will put my focus on the individuals, the witnesses themselves, putting the results of these studies in the context of my own research field (the central question that I treat is to know how, beyond the luck / bad luck factor that arises in such extreme situations, the socio-cultural background of the deportees can determine their chances of adaptation and survival strategies in the concentration camp society). Therefore, it is necessary to establish reasoned corpuses of testimonies, by the socio-historical method², applying prosopographic studies. These studies allow us to identify typical/standard deportee profiles: who amongst the returnees feels legitimate to testify? Who testifies first? Who publishes? Does the way and moment in time the deportees testimony differ according to their age, their socio-cultural identities, their places of origin...?

Rosa de Jong

The voyage of the Nyassa

On Christmas Eve 1942 107 Dutch and Belgian Jews on board of the Portuguese ship *Nyassa* reached their destination: Paramaribo, Surinam (then Dutch Guyana). The ship had left the harbor of Lisbon on the 8th of December. For the Jews on board it was not the beginning of a journey but rather the end. They had travelled through the occupied Netherlands, Belgium, France, they had managed to cross the French demarcation line, travelled through Spain and crossed the final land border to Portugal. Their destination, Surinam, was not one of choice but rather one of coincidence; most of them simply hoped to leave occupied Europe; only a few wanted to leave for America specifically.

All of them travelled without the right legal travelling papers or identification documents. They had to rely on their own inventiveness and financial resources. One of the most intriguing aspects of their journey from the Netherlands to Paramaribo, is the late date of departure from the Netherlands. Most started their journey in springtime 1942, but some left Holland as late as August of that year. At this time all borders of the occupied countries were closed and German border control was optimized. In the Netherlands travelling for Jews was nearly impossible: on the 30th of June a curfew was imposed and Jews were not allowed to cycle or travel by public transportation (driving a car was already prohibited in January). This extreme late

departure in combination with the amount of countries they crossed makes this case study truly unique and fascinating. Another striking element of this group is that most travelled in a family context.

This study focuses on the common aspects of the travellers. It concludes that the group was very diverse: their socio-economic status, age and educational background varied greatly. The research on this exceptional group of Jewish survivors exposes information about the broader structures of resistance in five different countries. There are two relatively detailed personal accounts, one of the journey of Manfred Wolf's family and one of Liny Yollick's family. However, it is notable how little is known about this *Nyassa*-group, especially since all on board survived the Second World War.

Ludo Verbist

The fate of the Jews at the "Green Border"

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the fate of Jews at the Green Border during the Nazi regime in Europe. The "Green Border" is the natural border between Belgium and Germany and Belgium and Luxemburg. This border has been crossed legally and illegally by thousands of Jewish families in search for shelter, to save their own lives or their children's.

After the Versailles convention, Belgium got assigned the German cantons, Malmédy and Eupen. The new Belgians were divided in to a group of pro-Belgians and a group who still was pro Germany. This last group established several cultural foundations, which where tanned as *Sturm Abteilung* subsections. They received money and information directly from the *Gauleiter* in *Aachen*. When Belgium started the mobilisation of its troops, many of the pro German Belgians disserted and became soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* in Germany.

Meanwhile the situation of the Jews continued to deteriorate. The option to leave Germany even to flee from Germany became realistic. At the begin of the exodus, Jews could cross the German/Belgian border without any problems. Closer to the invasion of the German army, the bigger the problem became for Jews to cross the border legally, so the help of smugglers was a need to reach Belgium. In the beginning the prices where reasonable but

soon they rose this much that to be smuggled over the border was only possible for the wealthier Jews. The situation of those of lesser financial means was dramatic and painful.

Jews who succeeded to cross the border, still has to be alert not to be caught by the Police, Border Guard and the Belgian *Gendarmerie*. Some of the Jews who crossed the border illegally, found shelter with family in Brussels or Antwerp. But most of them got caught by the SS and the Gestapo. They were sent to the Gestapo Office in Brussels, transferred to the Dossin barracks in Mechelen and from there put on the train to Auschwitz and the most of them never came back.

This presentation proposes to give an overview of the current status of the research. It is work in progress. There is still much research needed on the escape routes as well on the Jews who crossed the borders and their fates.