

Session I: Jewish Identities in the Colonies

Aviva Ben-Ur, *Eurafrican Identity in a Jewish Society: Suriname in the 18th and 19th centuries*

Historians of the Atlantic world and the African Diaspora have considered the religious and ethnic lives of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas in broadly two ways. Some studies focus on identification with various denominations of Christianity, while others place the spotlight on “African survivals,” the retention of Islam and animist traditions. But little thought has been given to the relationship of slaves and freed people to Judaism, whose adherents were among the earliest white colonists in the Caribbean and, in Suriname, Curaçao, and perhaps Dutch Brazil, formed one third of the white population. Nor does there exist any sustained study on the role of ethnic or religious Jewishness in the quest for communal belonging, manumission, or social equality among enslaved people and their free descendants.

Suriname, first colonized by the English in 1651 and under almost uninterrupted Dutch rule from 1667 to 1975, offers the richest field of inquiry for these questions. In no other American colony is the record of Eurafrican Jews (typically called “mulatto Jews” or “Jewish mulattoes” in the archives) so varied, long, and continuous. Ninety percent of Suriname’s population was both enslaved and of African origin. Jews, primarily of Iberian origin, began to convert their slaves to Judaism in the 1660s, creating a subclass who typically bore Hispanic names, spoke Portuguese, and were identified as second-tier affiliates of the “Portuguese Jewish nation in Suriname.” These Jews, who were among the earliest white settlers in Suriname, disrupted the slave system in a variety of ways. Their inadvertent or intentional subversion of racial hierarchies and blurring of communal boundaries led to the rise of a sizeable free colored population that was either a legal part of the Jewish community or existed on its margins, and who identified on various levels as Jews.

The growth of the “free colored” population to ten percent of the official Jewish population by the early 1800s, their linguistic patterns, religious customs, and organizational autonomy made them cultural brokers who straddled—even as they blurred—the boundaries of the slave and white communities. This paper will examine Eurafricans in Suriname’s Jewish community in terms of the choices available to “free coloreds” in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious colonial society, and will analyze (in comparative context with other Eurafricans) the strategies Eurafrican Jews employed to find acceptance, gain collective autonomy, and attain first-tier status in the white-dominant Jewish community.

Laura Leibman, *The Rabbi’s House and Religious Authority in Colonial Curacao*

Built in 1728 at 26-28 Kuiperstraat, the Rabbi’s House is one many fine examples of early Jewish domestic architecture in Curaçao. Like early Rabbi’s residences in Barbados, Suriname, and Amsterdam, the house formed part of a Synagogue Complex that included a *mikveh*, school space, and the synagogue itself. Unlike in Barbados, Suriname, and Amsterdam, however,

however, the house on Kuiperstraat predated the placement of the island's main synagogue. As the Jewish population on the island flourished, the congregation outgrew its initial spaces and moved successively in 1671-75, 1681, 1690, and 1703. In 1729 the fifth synagogue was destroyed in order to build the sixth synagogue ("Snoa") adjacent to the Rabbi's home. In this paper, I argue that the Rabbi's house should be read as part of a larger project by the Mikve Israel Mahamad to ensure the religious authority of the island's main synagogue. By building a synagogue complex around the Rabbi's house, members of Mikve Israel's Mahamad attempted to place the Rabbi at the center of Jewish life and worship and to disambiguate the relationship between synagogues and rabbis. Such a gesture was necessary because Jews had begun to move across the channel to Otrobanda and in 1732 (the same year the Snoa was built) they opened a synagogue and school in Moses Penso's house on Bree Street and Conscientie Lane. Ideally having a place to worship in Otrobanda would allow Jews living in the neighborhood not to have to violate the Sabbath by crossing the channel to the Punda neighborhood. Yet despite its optimistic name *Neve Shalom* (Dwelling of Peace), the breakaway congregation caused a large amount of controversy. In this paper I look at the various ways that the Rabbi's house was architecturally tied to the synagogue through symbolic motifs. In my conclusion I place the house in the context of larger shifts in religious authority in the colonies. If as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu argues the house is "a microcosm organized according to the same oppositions which govern all the universe," houses are not merely a space that unambiguously reflects Jews' visions of the cosmos, but also a space of opportunity for asserting contested understandings. By rebuilding, relocating, or regulating houses, Jewish communities could reshape their vision of how the world ran. In particular in colonial America, Rabbi's houses became a focal point for disputes about where authority and boundaries lay in Jewish communities.

Tsila Rådecker, *Purim and the Jewish Question: poverty, inequality and unproductivity in the Dutch Purim productions (ca. 1800)*

At the end of the eighteenth-century Jewish enlighteners criticized the deplorable state of the Dutch Jewry. Numerous enlightened writings offered solutions ranging from dismissing the Jewish community leaders or educating the Jewry, to moving the Sabbath to the Sunday. Moreover, the religious ritual became a tool to spout criticism. Purim and especially its literary productions were used to critique Jewish society and to disseminate Enlightenment ideas. Criticism was directed at the Jewry's inability to work in the crafts, their strong adherence to Jewish tradition and the inability of the poor to afford the observance of the Jewish Law. Enlighteners regarded these aspects of the Jewry incompatible with modern times.

Various Purim productions such as theatre plays, comical dialogues and poems incorporated these contemporary concerns. Besides variations on the book of Esther and the comical reversal of social order, specific Jewish problems such as the immense poverty among the Dutch Jewry were addressed. Popular poverty themes were the lack of housing, food and clothing. Connected with poverty was the issue of the Jewish unproductivity. According to the *maskilim*, the reluctance of the Dutch Jewry to work in manufactory, despite the lift of legal constraints, decreased their economic opportunities and it stood at the basis of their deplorable situation. The employment in petty trades, the Jewish overrepresentation in

criminality and the large group of *betteljuden* moving from one city to another created a negative image of the Jew and his breadwinning. Furthermore, the price tag on Jewish observance reappears in several productions. Because the majority of the Jewry could not acquire the necessary funds for the execution of Jewish Law, only the more affluent were able to fulfil their Jewish duties.

In the Purim productions certain political objectives became embedded within the existing Jewish tradition. Critique on the difference between rich and poor, the price tag on Jewish observance and the issue of the Jewish productivity became entangled within the contemporary Purim tradition of scatological humour and the reversal of social order. As such, the Purim productions are an outstanding example of how critique was channelled through the religious ritual. Moreover, it shows the politicisation of Jewish ritual as well as the central role religion played in the modernization of the Dutch Jewry.

Session II: Diamond Migrants from Amsterdam to Antwerp

Youssef Deconinck, Huibert Schijf & Peter Tammes, *Moving to Antwerp. The migration of Jewish and Gentile workers in the diamond industry from Amsterdam to Antwerp, 1865-1914*

Amsterdam and Antwerp possess a long tradition of trading and processing diamonds. Diamond workers, who migrated to find (temporary) employment, connected the community and industry in both cities. Our presentation will focus on the migration of diamond workers from Amsterdam to Antwerp in two time periods, 1865-1880 and 1898-1914. Deconinck (2012) has presented a collective portrait of Amsterdam workers who migrated to Antwerp during the period 1865-1880. He took all Amsterdam diamond workers registered in the so-called Foreigner's registers in Antwerp and tracked them down in the public records in Amsterdam. About three quarters of these workers were Jewish. This percentage is in line with the percentage of Jews Schijf and Tammes have found among the members of the largest trade union, the ANDB, in the diamond industry, during the period 1898-1914. Among these Amsterdam diamond workers about a quarter had moved to Antwerp, some more than once; not all of them were Jewish. Information of these workers is supplemented by information from the Foreigner's registers in Antwerp.

Because a long timespan is considered, developments in the diamond industry can be taken into account for the first time. Even during the flourishing period of the so-called 'Kaapse tijd' (the early 1870s) in Amsterdam diamond grinders migrated to Antwerp. After 1900 the whole industry declined. From the year 1900 there were many up and downs in the diamond industry and it might be expected that the number of migrations increased. We also expect that among the second group more short-term migrants will be found, who tried to avoid unemployment in Amsterdam. Because of the short periods of migration to Antwerp, we also expect that the second group settled in other districts in Antwerp than the first group. Furthermore, we expect that migrants are younger and more often belonged to Judaism than those who did not migrate.

Jaap Cohen, *Quasi-socialisten. Hollanders te Antwerpen (1907)*. Historical perspectives on a roman à clef about the world of diamond grinders in Antwerp

It was a fairly common phenomenon: because of the crumbling of the Amsterdam diamond industry in the last decennium of the nineteenth century, many jobless diamond workers exchanged Amsterdam for Antwerp, where the market for polished diamonds was flourishing. They would often, along with their families, end up staying a long time in that city, establishing a specific and assertive immigrant colony.

The young writer Eli d'Oliveira (1886-1944) was the son of an emigrated Sephardic diamond grinder from Amsterdam. He lived in Antwerp, along with his parents and brothers, from 1903 to 1906. There, he joined the emerging socialist movement. Many meetings in small backrooms inspired him to write his debut, titled *Quasi-socialisten. Hollanders te Antwerpen (1907)*. It was a curious book, a cross between a novel of manners and a roman à clef about the world of Antwerp diamond workers and the young socialist movement.

In general, *Quasi-socialisten* was not critically acclaimed. Reviewers did acknowledge the talent of the just 21-year-old novelist, but they criticized 'the raw, naughty-ish brutality in the depiction of filthy scenes'. The novel would sink into obscurity soon after its publication. However, for modern-day historians *Quasi-socialisten* can be regarded as an important book. In an original manner, Eli d'Oliveira touched on themes like Jewish identity, anti-Semitism and the practices of Antwerp socialism, as well as the interaction between the Dutch and Flemish, Jews and Gentiles, and Sephardim and Ashkenazim. For instance, the author gave special attention to the so-called 'Hollandersquestion': the indignation of (catholic) Antwerp diamond workers aroused by certain aspects of the behavior of their (mostly Jewish) immigrated colleagues from Amsterdam. This even led, in 1904, to the founding of the 'Guild of the Antwerp Diamond Industry', which stirred up the aversion against the enlarging Dutch immigrant community. The legendary diamond grinder A.B. Soep (1874-1956) also plays a special role in the book. He was, in the words of the historian Salvador Bloemgarten, 'around 1900 the enfant terrible par excellence in circles of Marxist oriented socialists'. The main character of *Quasi-socialisten* is modeled after him.

In my presentation I will discuss D'Oliveira's depiction of the above mentioned themes, and I will analyze which new insights *Quasi-socialisten* could give us of the culture, the environment and the problems of the Dutch-Jewish immigrant colony in Antwerp at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Session III: Studies of Jewish Life via Settlement Patterns

Daniël Metz, *The forgotten heart of the Amsterdam diamond industry*

In 1846 the first large steam driven diamond factory, the Diamantslijperij Maatschappij, was opened at the Nieuwe Achtergracht in Amsterdam. In the following decades a substantial number of factories and other diamond related buildings were established in its vicinity. Today, a reconstruction of the remnants doesn't only shed light on this Jewish dominated trade on the

outer east side of the Amsterdam historic city, it also marks the Nieuwe Achtergracht as the heart of Amsterdam diamond production.

At the dawn of the industrial revolution, around 1820, diamond production grew to a larger scale. A short experiment with horse driven workshops was soon abandoned. 53 jewellers joined forces in establishing a steam powered factory, the Diamantslijperij Maatschappij. It would be one of the very first factories to be built in Amsterdam.

For the new factory suitable ground was found on one of the canals just outside the Jewish quarter. From the 17th century on, the banks of the Nieuwe Achtergracht had already been used for large scale and polluting industries. When in the 19th century pre-industrial companies got disbanded, factories took over. The location had two other important benefits. It was close to the homes of the diamond workers, who in those days were mostly of Jewish origin; and it offered easy access over the water for shipping coal for the engines.

The Diamantslijperij Maatschappij had an almost complete monopoly on the diamond production. After the 'Kaapse Tijd' (1870-1876), dozens of entrepreneurs split off from the mother company and started private factories. The new class of factory owners settled on the elegant Sarphatistraat on the east of the Nieuwe Achtergracht, while the workers clustered together at the west side in the Lepelstraat. The canal was the territory of factories and dealers. But also an early (diamond) workers union, the Handwerkers Vriendenkring, had its headquarters here.

Another influence on the industry on the canal was the increase of international trade. Diamond dealers from all over the world frequented the city, arriving by rail at the nearby Weesperpoort Station and staying at Amsterdam's first luxury hotel, the Amstel Hotel. Both are situated close to the canal. Prestigious Dutch dealers opened offices in the streets around the hotel, transforming it into an exclusive trading centre.

In 1910 the monumental Diamond Exchange was opened at the corner of Nieuwe Achtergracht and Weesperplein. Across the street a second, less prestigious, diamond exchange 'Concordia' was established. Around the corner, in the Sarphatistraat, a bank was founded specialized in transactions of the diamond trade. Up till the Second World War the canal and its vicinity formed the buzzing heart of diamond industry and trade.

After the war little of the industry was left. Most of its Jewish workers and dealers had been killed. Still some factories on the canal reopened. Probably most important was the new factory of Samuel Gassan, which later moved to a larger plant in the former Jewish Quarter. When, in the 1980's, the Diamond Exchange moved away it marked the definite end of the diamond industry on the Nieuwe Achtergracht.

Dorien Vandebroek, *The relationship between Jewish immigrants and Jewish assimilated inhabitants in Antwerp: the Terlist street as a micro study*

During the 1930's a great deal of Eastern European refugees came to Antwerp. They settled themselves among other Jewish immigrants who emigrated during the 1920's to this metropolis. How was the relationship between these two groups? The focus in this thesis will be the social composition of the assimilated and the refugees at the end of the interwar period. Since a large number of refugees and immigrants found a new haven within Antwerp, a more detailed standard is required. Therefore this thesis focuses on the Terliststraat as a criterion.

This street found itself in the middle of the Jewish neighbourhood of Antwerp and was religious, political and economical active during the interwar. This generates a second question rises. Were the inhabitants of the Terlist street involved in any of this organisations? Did this street function as a neighbourhood? And were the assimilated Jews involved within the safety and wellbeing of refugees?

This thesis probes to discover a possible network between these two groups during the rising anti-Semitic reign in Eastern Europe. First the social composition of this street will be researched. Thanks to the register of population and the Jewish register of Antwerp a database was made possible. Counting 51 houses, the Terliststraat had a high mobility during the period of research: a proximately 400 persons are enlisted in this research. These inhabitants had a diverse background in professions and in the function of the household. Furthermore a great deal of the inhabitants lived already during the twenties in the Terlist street, while another significant amount installed themselves here during the thirties. Hereby these *a proxima* 400 persons are representative for this research and is this case manageable.

Files of the foreign police office and files of the Prosecution Council will be studied as well to have an image of the Terlist street that is as complete as possible. Within these files there is a lot of information about the charitable organisations for Jewish refugees. Because of this indirect information about the organisations, the network will be examined from an opposite vision which can be interesting to find "missing links". To research the network in a more profound way, two interviews and the reading of a diary will be used as supplementary material. While studying these files, it will give me the opportunity to extract the information indirectly.

Session IV: Round-table with keynote lecture: Identifying Archives and Collections on Jewish History in the Low Countries

Gertjan Desmet & Pascale Falek-Alhadeff, *Archival source guide on Judaism and the Jewish population in Belgium 19th-20th century. Intermediate Results and Discoveries.*

Sources with regard to Judaism and the Jewish population in Belgium are numerous. Unfortunately, they are often overlooked or even unknown, and scattered over a large number of private and public institutions. Belgian and foreign researchers have been deploring the absence of a scientific instrument providing them with a survey of the available source material. Therefore, the State Archives decided to take the lead and publish an archival source guide. This guide will correspond to three main objectives: (1) the duty to maintain our collective memory; (2) a fundamental support of scientific research; (3) a substantial support of genealogical research. In addition to the classic publication, we plan to also launch the guide in an online-database.

This two-year research project started in September 2011. First, the archival material kept by the State archives and after that the sources of Belgian public institutions were examined. The final phase encompasses research of the archives kept by private institutions. We presented this project last year at the 5th Contact Day Jewish Studies on the Low Countries. In May 2013, we would like to emphasize the intermediate results and new discoveries realized

during these two years. After a brief summary of the project, we will present our results and focus on a few key archival finds, such as the archives of the *Brüsseler Treuhandgesellschaft*, the archives of sequestrated properties and the different fonds concerning the Second World War damages. These public fonds are not well-known but contain crucial information on the history of the Jews in Belgium. A second group of unknown fonds that will be presented consist of private archives. These archives, kept by the Jewish communities and organizations, were not yet used by historians. Some are well-preserved, ordered and easily accessible. Others contain important material but are in desperate need of the necessary safeguarding measures.

By underlining the existence and significance of new or lost fonds, and by focusing on a broad timeframe (1795 – 1983), high quality, innovative research on the history of the Jewish community in Belgium will be made possible.