CREOLE JEWS

**Negotiating Community
in Colonial Suriname**

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Negotiating Community in Colonial Suriname

GECREOLISEERDE JODEN
Gemeenschapsvorming in koloniaal Suriname

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Unless indicated otherwise, all photographs were taken by the author.

LIST OF FOREIGN TERMINOLOGY

Abelim	mourners
Adjunctos	council of Jewish regents and ex-regents
Akoma	West-African heart symbol that symbolized patience and tolerance
Ascaba	soul-prayer
Askamoth	community regulations
Bet Din	religious court
Beth Haim	Jewish communal cemetery
Chupa	Jewish wedding
Congreganten	members of the Surinamese-Jewish community with limited rights
Finta	community taxes
Gabay	treasurer and member of the Mahamad
Goi	abusive for a non-Jewish person, often used for Christians
Halakha	orthodox Jewish law
Hazan	cantor. In Suriname, with no rabbi present, the Hazan often functioned as the religious leader of the community
Hebra Gesed	burial society
Herem	excommunication
Junta	current and old regents (also Adjunctos)
Mahamad	Jewish church and community council., also referred to as regents
Mikwa	ritual bath
Minhag	local religious traditions
Minjan	a quorum of ten adult men, required to perform certain rituals during a synagogue service, like unfolding the Torah scrolls.
Mohel	person who performs ritual circumcision
Kashrut	food laws
Levaja	funeral procession
Parnasim	synagogue board of three men, often used as a synonym for Mahamad
Sankofa	West African heart shaped symbol that symbolizes the importance of learning from the past,
Sedaka	poor-relieve system
Sjamas	sexton
Tahara	ritual cleansing of a deceased person prior to its burial
Tachrichim	white burial shrouds
Yachidim	full members of the Surinamese-Jewish community
Yeshiva	educational institution for the study of Jewish texts (primarily Talmud)

I

INTRODUCTION: JEWISHNESS, CREOLIZATION AND THE COLONIAL DOMAIN

1   MEMORIES OF BYGONE DAYS

I was born in 1936. My mother came from an orthodox family; she was Portuguese. As a little boy, her father still lived at Jodensavanne.[1] He visited the city [Paramaribo] only during the [Jewish] holidays. At home, we lived quite kosher and made our own salted beef. My brothers had to attend the synagogue services during Sabbath. My mother was very strict about this. And when there was no *minjan*[2], poor Jews were paid for their presence.

In the synagogue, we had to wear a felt hat. I hated it. Not so much in the synagogue, where everybody wore a hat, but on the street. We looked like a troupe of Amish! When I walked behind my mother, I always secretly tried to take off my hat. But my mother; that woman had eyes in the back of her head. 'Put on your hat', she said without even looking backwards.

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[1]   Jodensavanne is the old and deserted Portuguese-Jewish plantation settlement in the interior of Suriname. It was the centre of the Portuguese-Jewish community until the late eighteenth century, after which it deteriorated. Throughout the nineteenth century, only a few impoverished families remained in Jodensavanne.

[2]   *Minjan*: a quorum of ten adult men, required to perform certain rituals during a synagogue service, like unfolding the Torah scrolls.

That hat is perhaps the worst memory of my youth [laughing]. We wore felt hats and dresses with long sleeves, and stockings.

This was in the 1960s. In those years, there was still a vibrant community. On the day before the Day of Atonement,[3] we sat in the synagogue at four o clock in the morning. It was so beautiful, all dark outside, with the candles burning. You could smell the scent of the morning, especially when it was raining. Then you really felt: I am a Jew. […]

We had a foster sister and brother in our house. The foster sister was Lutheran; the foster brother was with the EBG.[4] But they knew the *Hagadah*[5] front to back. We wished them a Happy Christmas, but what they enjoyed was an orthodox Jewish upbringing. […] There was also Zionism. As a child, I found that very threatening. I was afraid that as Zionists we would have to leave Suriname. I did not want to go to Israel; I wanted to stay in Suriname.

Then people started to move away. Younger people left for Holland for their education, for a job and a future. Older people moved away to earn their pension, to collect their AOW[6] as we said. In 1970, I left Suriname. In Holland, the Jewish feeling disappeared. I had married a non-Jewish man. The orthodox community in Holland did not accept him; they did not welcome him. I never really felt at home in Holland. Especially Christmas time was an annual disaster. Everybody asked, 'Why don't you have a tree?' Oh, it is very cosy indeed, a candlestick in the windowsill, but I do not want it. Christmas in Suriname is much more pleasant. Here in Suriname I do not have to justify myself. In Holland, I did not feel accepted. People kept asking 'why don't you go back?' That hurts.

When I returned to Suriname, the Jewish feeling returned. It is also the nostalgia. Musing on the ancestors, who once sat on those same wooden benches in that beautiful synagogue. Daydreaming where grandpa may have sat, being part of that rich and beautiful history. Especially the Heerenstraat[7] is full of memories of youth and bygone days. […]

I feel Surinamese. I am Surinamese. It was my schoolteacher, uncle Wim, who awakened this feeling. That man sowed a seed in my heart. During

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[3] Yom Kippur, one of the main Jewish holidays.

[4] EBG, *Evangelische Broeder Gemeente*, also referred to as the Moravian Brethren or Herrnhutters.

[5] This is the book used at the Jewish Passover Seder meal to recount the story of the first Passover and the escape of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt in the time of Moses.

[6] AOW, *Algemene Ouderdoms Wet*, Dutch state pension.

[7] The Heerenstraat was one of the old colonial streets of Paramaribo where the Portuguese synagogue was located and many Jews lived.

school hours, we, the whole class, had to march through the street and around the block. And we yelled: 'We want self-government. We want self-government.' I am a Surinamese and a Jew. I don't want to be a Jew in Jerusalem. I want to be a Jew in Suriname.

At home, I try to have a kosher household. Well, we do not eat meat with butter. That much of Judaism I want to hold on to: watching my food. So we buy *Halal* meat[8]. I make it kosher by soaking it in salted water. It is difficult, to live kosher in Suriname. […]

Today the community is small and pitiful. But it is still alive. During the holidays, when everybody is incited to attend, about 40 people visit the synagogue. The total membership is 150. When I came back to Suriname, I was shocked. The community had become liberal. Men and women were all sitting together. You have to accept it. You cannot come from outside, and then want to change everything. If you want to be orthodox, you should go to Israel. […] Let us hope that also in de future there will be persons who will put some effort in preserving the community; to cherish the memory of the community. I like to cherish that hope. There is no choice. The circumstances determine the possibilities, what may be or not. [silence] I sometimes feel like impoverished nobility. The only thing that remains is my coat of arms.[9]

The memories of this elderly woman describe a feeling of loss that is shared by many older Surinamese Jews. The Jewish community she remembers from her childhood, although small at the time, no longer exists. The Old Portuguese synagogue in the Heerenstraat that anchors her memories of youth to a tangible legacy, symbolizes a vanishing community. Deprived of the religious role it once had, the synagogue now accommodates an internet café and a computer store, while its inventory has been transported to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Most visitors who check their e-mail or chat with their friends on one of the computers will not be aware of the historical narrative embodied by this building.

Besides a notion of loss and bygone days, the memories of this woman also form a personal account of a localized sense of Jewishness. 'Feeling Jewish' is connected with the local Surinamese environment: the memories of synagogue visits with their strict dress code during her childhood, the hint of colonial nostalgia, the scent of a tropical early morning rain, and perhaps even the impossibility of living an orthodox-Jewish life in a place where buying *Halal* meat has become the practical standard of a kosher Jewish household.

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[8]   Meat slaughtered according to Islamic dietary laws.

[9]   Interview recorded in Paramaribo, 19-6-2006.

The reminiscences of this Surinamese Jewish woman reflect the life cycle of the Surinamese-Jewish community, which, after 350 years, seems to be on the verge of ending.[10] Jews had settled in Suriname since the mid seventeenth century onwards as part of a colonial undertaking. They were among the first settlers in the colony, and have been – together with the Afro-Surinamese population – the most constant factor in the multi-ethnic society of Suriname ever since. The history of a Jewish community in Suriname is a history of a community of colonizers and colonial migrants that became increasingly interwoven with the local environment of Suriname over the course of history. The changing circumstances in Suriname (demographics, economics, social, political and cultural) demanded continuous adjustment to new circumstances. The Jews were an intrinsic factor in the creation of this environment rather than a passive, reactive one that only responded to the changing world outside.

Social and cultural interaction between Surinamese Jews and other groups in Suriname took place from the very beginning. Jewish children grew up with slave children and the *Anansitori*[11] of their black *Nenes* (nannies), and illegitimate children of Jewish males and Afro-Surinamese women were given Jewish names and Jewish upbringings. In Suriname several diasporas have come together, resulting in complex cultural encounters.[12] This aspect of Surinamese history offers the possibility of analyzing processes of creolization against the background of diaspora identifications.

In the Jewish cemeteries of Paramaribo one can find the silent testimonies of this social and cultural interaction: traditional Jewish tombstones – some sculpted in Hebrew, others richly adorned with Jewish symbolism – alternate with creole grave markers. The heritage of Jewish settlement in Suriname remains visible in various other ways as well. Family names that once indicated Jewish origins are now considered 'typically' Afro-Surinamese family names, many streets have been named after prominent Jews or carry names that remind us of the many Jewish settlers that

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[10] Today, the Jewish community has about 150 members. The fading interest in religious activities, the migration of many Surinamese Jews to Holland, the United States and Israel in the 1950s, and the growing number of mixed marriages with Hindus and Christians, all have resulted in the disappearance of the Surinamese Jews as a separate, identifiable group in Suriname. To join forces, and in an attempt to preserve the Surinamese-Jewish community, the High German and Portuguese congregations have merged into the Israelite Congregation of Suriname (ISG, Israelitische Gemeente Suriname). In 2004, the ISG turned Liberal and gave up its Orthodox signature after nearly a century of recurring discussion. Despite these initiatives to breathe new life into the Surinamese-Jewish community, only a few believe a sustained existence of this community is viable.

[11] *Anansitori* is Sranan for spider story (*anansi* 'spider'; *tori* 'story'). *Anansitori* originated in the oral tradition of the enslaved Africans, and can be found in other slave-societies as well. The spider Anansi derives its name from the West African son god Ananse who took the shape of a spider. During the era of slavery, Anansi came to personify an imagined resistance against the condition of slavery. Anansi was the sly and trickster spider who outwitted the dominant figures that crossed its path. See, Van Kempen 2003:146-151.

[12] Such as the Indian (Hindustani), Chinese, Javanese and Libanese diaspora. For this study, the interaction between the Jewish and African diaspora is of primary importance.

used to live there in the past (such as Jodenbreestraat), some Saramaccan-Maroon clan names refer to the Jewish owners of the plantations from which their ancestors escaped more than three centuries before;, there are creole dishes that bear the stamp of Jewish dietary laws, and, of course, the old settlement of Jodensavanne with its burial grounds and ruined synagogue, and the synagogues in the Keizerstraat and the Heerenstraat.

Many analyses of Caribbean societies emphasize the confrontation between African and European cultures. Few scholars would deny the heterogeneity and diversity of the African cultures that assembled in the Caribbean. Far less attention has been given, though, to the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the European migrants. Such a view of the colonial encounter in the Caribbean might overlook the process by which European communities were forced together into a common cause in the New World.[13] The history of the Surinamese Jews adds extra depth to the analyses of socio-cultural interaction and cultural change in Caribbean societies and the complex social fabric that characterizes these societies.

With its multiple contradictions and ambiguous positions, the Surinamese Jews offer a good vantage point from which the complexity of white colonial communities can be studied. The Surinamese-Jewish narrative is a rich historical account that is much more complex and diverse than the well-known stories of Jodensavanne and the Portuguese-Jewish sugar plantations. It is a story about rich Jewish sugar planters, excluded from white colonial social life, and poor Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe who were disdained by the Portuguese-Jewish elite. It is also a story of coloured Jews and their ambiguous position within the Jewish community. Their history includes many of the complexities and ambiguities of Suriname's colonial society. The history of the Surinamese Jews does not only involve conflict, struggle and exclusion, but also cultural adaptation, inclusion and cultural production.

This study stems from a fascination with the way people adapt to new and changing circumstances, especially in a context of conquest, unsettledness and hostility, inherent to any colonial society. 'No group, no matter how well equipped or how free to choose, can transfer its way of life and the accompanying beliefs and values intact from one locale to another'.[14] These lines, written by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price as an introductory note to their classic essay on African-American culture, form the point of departure of this study. What were the consequences of colonial settlement for identifying practices among the Jews who had forged a Jewish community in Suriname since the mid seventeenth century? How did these Jewish migrants, with their diverging social and cultural backgrounds, become Surinamese Jews, what conditions framed this process, and what options were available to them given the Surinamese context? With these questions in mind, this study is essentially

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[13]   Snyder 2000:12.

[14]   Mintz and Price 1992:1.

an exploration of the arenas of colonial interplay and the many ways in which a colonial domain[15] affected identification processes in European migrant communities. The central questions that have guided me throughout this study focus on the processes of changing Surinamese-Jewish identifications: what were the critical events and dominant processes of change that directed the localization of the Jewish community in Suriname? And what conclusions can be drawn, on the basis of the Surinamese-Jewish case, about the interplay between colonialism, creolization and the dynamics of diaspora?[16]

2 IN SEARCH OF A PERSPECTIVE: CONNECTING JUDAISM, CREOLIZATION AND COLONIALISM

Jewishness and the problem of identity

In this study, the story of the Surinamese Jews is reconstructed through the accounts of men and women that contested dominant notions of Surinamese Jewishness, and created new notions. Even though 'identity' is still an immensely popular and infrequently criticized concept in the public debate, it has become an increasingly contested one in academic circles. It has become commonly accepted among researchers in cultural studies and the social sciences that identities are by no means fixed, given or self-evident, but forever changing and always in process.[17] Frederic Cooper and Rogers Brubaker have made a strong argument against the use of 'identity' as an analytical concept in such non-essentialist and volatile applications. They argue that the prevailing constructivist stance on identity has left us without the analytical tools to examine the essentialist claims of identity politics.[18] The notions of Surinamese Jewishness that are described and analysed in this study include both volatile expressions of belonging and hard claims of identity. In the words of Cooper en Brubaker: 'Setting out to write about identifications as they emerge, crystallize, and fade away in particular social and political circumstances may well inspire a rather

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[15] With 'colonial domain' I do not only refer to the local environment of colonial Suriname, its population, factions and local colonial authorities, but also to the relation with the Dutch colonial state and her representatives, and the colonial power structures that defined this relationship.

[16] Note that I will use the term creolization as a context-specific process of localization in Suriname.

[17] See, for instance, Brah 1996a, Butler 1993, Donald and Rattansi 1992, Rutherford 1990, Hall 1992, Hall 1996, and Hall 1997

[18] Cooper and Brubaker 2005:59-60.

different history than setting out to write of an identity, which links past, present and future in a single word'.[19]

In this study, the concept of identity only refers to 'hard' claims of identity: the many stories of forced inclusion in both the Portuguese and High German Jewish community during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the repressive control that Jewish community leaders had of Jewish community boundaries.[20] This sort of identity claims left little space for negotiation, and was often supported by colonial legislation. Such identity politics generally involved practices of forced inclusion, while exclusionary practices tended to be much more ambiguous and circumstantial.

In this ongoing construction of Surinamese Jewishness, the role of the Surinamese-Jewish community leaders is considered at length, as their position is often ambiguous. On the one hand, these community leaders often acted as the guardians of 'old' identifications and the executioners of 'hard' identity politics, while at other times they were the instigators of changing collective identifications. Although community leaders often presented their identity claims as self-evident and non-negotiable, they did not remain uncontested by individual community members. On repeated occasions, inclusion by force by Jewish community leaders contrasted with the way these community leaders perceived themselves, and their place in the colonial society of Suriname. For instance, an articulated self-understanding of prominent Portuguese Jews as a white and colonial elite went hand in hand with aggressive inclusionary politics towards poor and coloured Jews during the late eighteenth century.

A recurring theme in discussions on Jewish identity relates to the meaning of *halakha* and ancestry in defining Jewishness. According to *halakhic* law, there are two ways to become a Jew. The first is to be to a Jewish mother, and the second is a conversion procedure confirmed by an orthodox rabbinic court. Although the relevance of *halakha* for defining Jewishness is questioned by liberal movements within Judaism, in the orthodox-Jewish world, *halakha* is still the common law against which Jewishness is measured. In the Surinamese-Jewish case this matter turned into a complicated issue given that almost every aspect of life in colonial Suriname was

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[19]   Cooper and Brubaker 2005:85.

[20]   The idea that difference and differentiation lies at the heart of identity has led to a one-sided emphasis on exclusion. For instance, Judith Butler believes that all identities operate through exclusion, through the 'production of an outside'. Avtar Brah reaches a similar conclusion in her influential article *Difference, diversity, differentiation*. See Butler 1993:22, and Brah 1996b. Equally indicative are the different contributions in the edited volumes *'Race', Culture and Difference* by James Donald and Ali Rattansi (1992), and *Identity. Community, Culture, Difference* by Jonathan Rutherford (1990). See also the writings of Stuart Hall on identity, particularly Hall 1992, Hall 1996. Yet, as David T. Goldberg rightfully underlines, power and conflict do not only make part of identity strategies when used as a mechanism of excluding. 'Identity' can also keep people in who don't want to be in, for instance, by insisting on an essential racial character or by requiring racial, ethnic or religious solidarity, or – as in the case of the Surinamese Jews – by resorting to the colonial order of things (Goldberg 1994:12).

structured along racial boundaries. The fact that colour and a slave or freeman status – rather than *halakha* – were the primary boundary-making attributes shows the influence of a colonial, creole environment on Jewish identifications and identity politics in colonial Suriname.

The vocabulary of creole, creolization and localization

The local environment the Surinamese Jews lived in was made up of different cultural traditions, and divided by unequal power relations. Scholars have long tried to establish a theoretical framework that would explain the complex cultural processes by which new societies, such as Suriname, were formed from the sixteenth century onwards. In the 1970s, the concepts of 'creolization' and 'creole societies' became popular terms for understanding Caribbean societies. These notions were important alternatives to earlier concepts such as 'acculturation', and explanatory models such as the plantation-society thesis and the plural-society thesis. Although theories of creolization differ, they share a basic concern with the intersection of two or more previously unrelated cultural groups (or languages) and are built on the idea of cultural change and (some form of) amalgamation, rather than cultural separation.

Early perspectives on creolization, which are often associated with nationalist projects in the Caribbean, have been criticized for their homogenizing and romantic perception of creolization, emphasizing the unifying tendencies of creolization (cultural blending). Later views of creolization drew attention to the conflicts and contradictions that the process of creolization inevitably involves.[21] Such dialectical notions of creolization were picked up by a growing number of scholars engaged in the study of creole societies, several of whom believe the experience of colonialism, slavery and transportation to be at the heart of the concept.[22]

My interpretation of creolization links up with approaches to creolization that perceive it as a process of cultural change resulting from intercultural interaction in a context of colonialism, domination and unequal power relations. In this study creolization refers to a historical process tied to the colonial experiences of slavery, masterhood and coloniality. In the slave societies of the New World, creolization did not manifest itself in one way, but manoeuvred along a continuum of appearances and

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[21] For instance, Drummond 1980, Bolland 1992:64 and Bolland 2005, Chaudenson 2001, the contributions of Stuart Hall and others in Hall 2003b. See also the work of Alex van Stipriaan (especially Van Stipriaan 2000, Van Stipriaan 2002 and Van Stipriaan 2003).

[22] O. Nigel Bolland, for instance, argued that 'the colonial system of domination and the resistant responses to that domination are two aspects of the same socio-cultural process that creates a society that is creole because it is colonial' (Bolland 2005:182). Similarly, Stuart Hall claims that 'creolization *always* entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and sub-alterneity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of *power*, as well as issues of entanglement are always at stake' (Hall 2003a:31).

possible outcomes, ranging from some degree of adaptation to a new environment, and the development of group identifications that fitted this new locality, to full cultural transformation and cultural production.[23]

Different groups did undergo different processes of change, depending on a variety of circumstances, such as numerical dominance or subordination, state upon arrival (destitute or wealthy, scattered or as a rather coherent body), and the place they assumed within the spectrum of colonial rule (master or enslaved). This notion of heterogeneity has generally been used to understand the distinctiveness between creole societies: 'run the combination [of constitutive elements] one way, and – as it were – you get Cuba. Inflect the elements differently and you suddenly see Martinique, Jamaica, Dominica, Grenada.'[24] However, one also needs to account for the multiple processes of creolization that operate simultaneously within societies to understand the historical experience of various groups in Caribbean societies. This understanding of Caribbean creolization includes all the population segments that constituted Caribbean colonial societies (that is, the Amerindian population, Afro-Caribbean groups, white colonial settlers, as well as those known as indentured labourers). As such, it bears resemblance to Edward Kamau Brathwaite's notion of creolization.

Brathwaite, who played an important role in the early development of the concept, argued that creolization is a two-way process of cultural change, based upon the interaction between individuals and their environment.[25] Although Brathwaite pictured Africa as the 'submerged mother of the Creole system', he also acknowledged the importance of so-called 'lateral creolization': 'the leakage between, say, poor whites and coloureds; between Syrians, Chinese and Jews; between these and blacks; between blacks and East Indians and between East Indians and others'.[26] The relevance of Brathwaite's argument for this study lies in his explicit inclusion of the white settler community, and in his interpretation of creolization not only as a cultural, but as a social process of indigenization 'that created, by its very nature, a way of life essentially different from the metropolitan model'.[27]

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[23] The notion of creolization as a continuum is based on Lee Drummond's influential article, *The Cultural Continuum: A Theory of Intersystems* (1980). Drummond argues that 'cultures are neither structures nor plural amalgams, but a continuum or set of intersystems'. The endless internal variation within a cultural continuum leaves Drummond to argue that there are no cultures, only intersystemically connected and creolizing Culture. (Drummond 1980: 354).

[24] Hall 2003a:34.

[25] Brathwaite 1971:296, 300.

[26] Brathwaite 1974:6, 63.

[27] Brathwaite 1971:101.

Notwithstanding either Brathwaite's explicit reference to Jamaica's white population ('all Jamaican creoles were colonials')[28], little study has been undertaken so far as to how European settler communities in the Caribbean colonies were affected by colonial environment they lived in. Interpretations of creolization, as used in the Caribbean, have become almost entirely focused on Afro-Caribbean cultures, and ever more exclusive towards other groups that constitute(d) Caribbean societies.[29] In these interpretations creolization is often used synonymously for cultural production, cultural newness and cultural mixing.[30]

The Afro-Caribbean focus of the concept ties in with a tendency to emphasize the differences between European communities and the enslaved Africans, resulting in a more limited interpretation of creolization that focuses on suppression and compulsion as the essential conditions of cultural production. Such conceptualization of creolization has proved to be of good value for analyzing the idiosyncrasies of Afro-Caribbean communities, but leaves white European colonial communities largely misunderstood as it does not explain their experience of becoming creole, of adapting to a colonial environment and developing a creole 'mental envelope' that distinguished them from European metropolitans.[31]

Although many of the colonial experiences of European settlers (Jews and non-Jews alike) stand in stark contrast to the historic experience of the enslaved Africans, there are some important points of similarity between the European communities and Afro-Caribbean communities. The most striking commonality is what Van Lier has referred to as the mental framing of living in a 'frontier society' where the population (of whatever origin) found itself in a 'borderline situation', a context of slavery and colonial conditions 'on the fringes of the world economy' and 'in a country where the settled and cultivated areas lie on the edges of the mighty jungles of its uncultivated interior', a context that created 'a state of mind in both masters and slaves which was

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[28] Brathwaite 1971:101.

[29] Sidney Mintz is one of the advocates of such a narrow understanding of creolization: he confines the meaning of creolization to those processes of cultural production in the Caribbean that took place during the early colonial period. Mintz focuses on the moment of initial cultural encounter and the developments that followed immediately, when 'everyone involved was in what was for all of them a new place.' This position became clear once more during the *International Workshop on Creolization and Globalisation* in Rotterdam (March 2002), where Mintz featured as a keynote speaker. Promising, I think, was Karen Fog Olwig suggestion (in response to Mintz) that being in a new place, as a distinct feature of creolization, obviously includes physical transference, but may also involve a new social or cultural setting. This addition is particularly relevant when studying creolization processes among indigenous groups, who obviously did not share in the experience of migration, but may have felt uprooted in their dramatically changing home-environments nonetheless. See Mintz 1998:119. In contrast to Mintz' narrow understanding of creolization, Ulf Hannerz sees a whole world in creolization (Hannerz 1987).

[30] For instance, Buissaret 2000 and Price 2001.

[31] Bernabe, et al. 1993:75.

ruled by fear.' [32] Stuart Hall has referred to this commonality as a 'third space'.[33] A space that Hall describes in rather vague terms as a space of 'unsettledness, of conquest, of forced exile, and of unhomeliness', but which is very apparent and explicit in the case of the Surinamese Jews. Suriname's atmosphere of hostility and fear is very tangible in the immanent fear for maroon attacks that was an essential element of daily life in the plantation district until the late eighteenth century. This fear went side by side with a forced intimacy with the slave-population.

The notion that colonial processes like creolization affected both dominant and dominated groups is a synthesis of Memmi's assertion that the colonizer was as much affected by the colonial condition as the colonized with Eduard Kamau Brathwaite's early notion of creolization.[34] Although not new, the assumption that both Afro-Caribbean and European communities were affected by the colonial environment in which they found themselves is important nonetheless, as it uncovers the importance of creolization for white European communities that have long been excluded from creolization theory.

The history of the Surinamese Jews can show us the specific manifestations of creolization in a white colonial community, and can attribute to our understanding of the ways in which a colonial domain affected European communities in the Caribbean colonial societies. Analysing creolization from a white colonial point of view, brings along a renewed focus on the indiginizing dimension of creolization. Important are the processes of 'adjusting' and 'localization'; but also miscegenation played a role, or in the words of Robin Cohen, the process by which European settler communities took on some 'couleur locale'.[35] Recently, Stuart Hall has re-emphasized the importance of indigenization in the process of creolization by stating that: 'in most of the Caribbean islands, after the first century of conquest, all the social forces, which created plantation societies, came from 'somewhere else'. They did not 'originally' belong. They were 'conscripted,' whether they wanted to be or not, to a process of indigenization […] This aspect is often missing in our accounts of creolization; creolization as the process of 'indigenization,' which prevents any of the constitutive elements – either colonizing or colonized – from preserving their purity or authenticity'. [36]

In this study, 'localization' will be used to refer to this indigenizing dimension of creolization, as the terminology of indigenization could possibly be misunderstood

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[32] Van Lier 1971:7-8.

[33] Hall 2003a:34.

[34] Compare Brathwaite 1971 and 1974, and Memmi 1990.

[35] Cohen 2007:3.

[36] Hall 2003a:34. See also Mintz 1996:302.

when referring to the localizing process of a migrant community in relation to the indigenous population of Suriname: the Amerindians. Moreover, the process of becoming 'native' of the Surinamese-Jewish population is one of the central topics of this study. The random use of indigenization to refer to the process of localization may insinuate an already indigenized condition of the Surinamese Jews, when, in fact, their status in the Surinamese society was still contested and far from self-evident.

This interpretation of creolization with its emphasis on localization, links up with the original usage of the term 'Creole'. Soon after its introduction, the term 'Creole' came to include the native-born Afro-Caribbean population. Black Creoles were thought of as 'adjusted', or 'seasoned' to the condition of slavery, in contrast to newly arrived African slaves, who were cynically referred to as 'saltwater slaves'(in Suriname, *zoutwaternegers*). In present-day Suriname, the term 'Creole' has become a synonym for the Afro-Surinamese population. Originally, however, the term 'Creoles' referred to white Europeans who were born in the colonies, or had lived there so long that they had acquired certain characteristics that were thought of as 'native' by their European counterparts.[37] As such, it also contained a condemnatory charge as it implied that someone had forgotten to be a 'proper' Frenchman, Englishman, or in the case of the Surinamese Jew, a 'good Jew'.[38]

The development of a creole mentality among the Surinamese Jews presupposes – by definition – a process of creolization. After all, a creole mentality does not develop over night: to become creole one needs to creolize in the first place. This localized mental framing distinguished the Surinamese Jews from those Jews living in their metropolitan homeland communities, and is manifested most clearly by the racialized boundaries of both the Portuguese and High German communities during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and by the tangible examples of Jewish creole culture in Suriname. In this study, I will therefore refer to Surinamese Jews as 'creolized' or 'creole' when Surinamese-Jewish self-understanding was explicitly framed by the specific condition of living in a race-based slave society, or was adjusted to the creolized environment that Suriname became over the course of history.[39]

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[37] Within linguistics, the term 'creole' is used to refer to a vernacular language, developed in the colonies out of various lexicons, which became the mother-tongue of the majority of the Caribbean population as, for example, Sranan Tongo in Suriname. Later, the term was expanded to include other mixed languages around the world as well. For the development of creole languages in Suriname, see Carlin 2002.

[38] This can be illustrated by the verb 'to creolize', which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'to spend the day in a delectable state of apathy' (Buisseret 2000:6). Also Hall 2003a:29.

[39] My preference for creolization as a framing concept for understanding certain aspects of Surinamese-Jewish identifications lies precisely in this spatiality that cannot be disconnected from a colonial and New World setting. Alternative concepts used in the field of field of border-crossings, culture blending and cultural analyses (such as syncretism, acculturation, hybridization or assimilation) are devoid of any

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Not every transformation seen in the Surinamese-Jewish communities is adequately described as creolization, however. The historic experience of the Surinamese Jews also contains elements that fall outside the scope of creolization. Dissolving community boundaries between Portuguese and High German Jews, for instance, should not be understood as a manifestation of creolization, but cannot be explained outside the constraints and possibilities offered by Suriname's colonial context either. Although processes of Surinamese-Jewish creolization may have ended at some point in history, community bounderies and collective identifications continued to change and to adapt to a transforming environment and new circumstances – both local and global – until this very day.

Creolization and diasporic consciousness

Creolization constituted only one of the formative processes in the making of a Jewish community in Suriname; also the forces of diaspora have been constitutive to Surinamese-Jewish identifications. As noted by Avtar Brah, when used in reference to a collective migratory experience, diaspora often overemphasizes the collective experience of migration and ignores the fact that diasporas are not these massive and homogenous flows of people, but rather an amalgam of distinct and sometimes even disparate experiences of migration, and settlement.[40] In my opinion, the term diaspora derives its prime value as a cultural construct, as complexes of institutional networks, social and economic connections, and discourses of authenticity and shared notions of origin.

In this study, 'diaspora' predominantly refers to the mood or consciousness that moulded and affected identifying practices among the Surinamese Jews, and their relationships with others. Diasporic identifications can express a wide range of different moods at different moments, in different settings and under different circumstances. An important aspect of diaspora is the ambiguity it expresses: the negative feeling and experiences of exclusion, and the positive feeling that can be generated through identification with a historical grounded cultural or political force, such as 'the Jewish people'. In addition, the concept of 'diaspora' is also used to refer to the incorporation of the Surinamese-Jewish communities into a (predominantly) Dutch-Jewish religious framework.[41]

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such geographical articulation.

[40] Brah 1996a:183.

[41] Following James Clifford (1994), I believe that people do not have to be 'in diaspora' for their social relations, self-identification, actions, and ideas to contain diasporic dimensions, such as the feeling of belonging to a worldwide (here: Jewish) community; the existence of institutionalized networks (be it religious or economical) or the feeling of exclusion or alienation in the place of settlement. Also Vertovec 2000:142-3.

The juxtaposition of diasporic Jewish identifications and creolized notions of Surinamese Jewishness raises the question how the concepts of creolization and diaspora interrelate. At first sight, the diaspora may appear to be counterforce of creolization. After all, 'creole', often contains new senses of belonging and new claims of authenticity. The diaspora presumes the opposite: an attachment to a translocal community, and a claim of origin that lies 'somewhere else', and entails more than just a 'phantasmagorical reconstruction'[42] One only has to consider the many differences (both culturally and phenotypically) between different diaspora communities around the world to endorse that such a diametrical perspective on creolization and diaspora does not fit reality. Clearly, every diaspora is characterized by its own localized heterogeneities. How else could the difference have come into existence between, for instance, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Judaism? That diaspora formation always entails a measure of adjusting or cultural mixing, has already been noted by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin about fifteen years ago, when they claimed that 'diasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from 'mixing' but can probably only continue to exist as a product of such mixing. […] While this is true of all cultures, diasporic Jewish culture lays it bare because of the impossibility of a natural association between this people and a particular land – thus the impossibility of seeing Jewish culture as a self-enclosed, bounded phenomenon.'[43]

Still, despite the apparent overlap between both concepts, creolization and diaspora also account for different contexts, distinct identifications and conflicting claims of authenticity. One of the basic premises of this study is the tension that existed between participating in a local environment and becoming ever more localized and 'creole'; and a prevailing sense of belonging to a worldwide Jewish community, that is, a notion of diaspora.[44] The field of tension between creolization and diaspora appears from the many conflicts that pertained to the notion of colonial eliteness versus religious-based understandings of Jewishness. This double vision of the Surinamese Jews also manifested itself in the complex relationship between past and present where the historical consciousness that is embodied in colonial nostalgia and creole awareness conflicts with a continued wish to belong to a worldwide (orthodox) Jewish community.

Both the forces of creolization and diaspora directed the development of the Surinamese-Jewish community, not as diametrical forces, but as intrinsic elements of one another. The question remains whether a strong sense of diaspora will impede

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[42] Jean Claude Carpanin Marimoutou in Enwezor 2003:49.

[43] Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:721.

[44] Even though as an analytical concept, 'diaspora' is heading for a similar fate as 'identity' – with diasporas abound, the concept has become a buzz-word and has lost much of its analytical strength – I believe its usage to be justified in a historical analysis of the Surinamese-Jewish community.

processes of creolization: for instance, did the incorporation of the Surinamese-Jewish community into a Dutch religious framework during the nineteenth century have a decisive influence on the direction and form of Surinamese-Jewish creolization? This question makes the circumstances under which a diasporic consciousness or creole mentality among the Surinamese Jews waxed and waned even more relevant, and underlines the need for a long-term historical perspective. In the concluding chapter, I will readdress the complex relationship between localization, creolization and diaspora, and add further insights from this study.

3   A COLONIAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

A study of the effects of colonialism on a Jewish community offers possibilities for a critical view of the position of Jewish communities towards others. Many existing studies in the field of Jewish identity, tend to emphasize the ways in which Jews have been excluded, marginalized and oppressed by dominant groups. There is little or no attention for the ways in which Jews – like any community – have excluded and constructed their 'others' in the process of creating and maintaining a sense of connectedness. In light of the often ambiguous position colonial Jewish communities held in their home societies, I believe there is ample reason for such critical analyses. It is remarkable to see the amount of literature that appears on Caribbean Jewish communities that solely focus on their congregational history, and portray the communities as isolated from the colonial environment in which they participated.[45]

In addition, the colonial experience of the Surinamese-Jewish communities is still, largely, unknown. Although Jews constituted an important part of Suriname's population, for more than two and a half centuries only two full-length monographs on Surinamese Jews have been published. Both monographs are set in the eighteenth century and focus primarily on the Portuguese-Jewish community. The first monograph, *Essay Historique sur la colonie de Surinam*, published in 1788 and reprinted in English in 1974. Written by one of the regents of the Portuguese Jewish community (David Cohen Nassy) its central message is the major contribution of the (Portuguese) Jews to the development of the colony of Suriname.[46] Nassy's *Essay Historique* was to remain the standard work on Surinamese-Jewish history for nearly two centuries, and has strongly influenced today's Surinamese (Jewish) historical consciousness as such. Nassy's claims and assumptions have often been accepted as 'historical facts' by both professional and amateur historians alike without acknowledging the specific context in which *Essay Historique* was written; a political

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[45] See, for instance, Cohen 2004 and Delevante and Alberga 2006. Gert Oostindie did a similar observation in Oostindie 2007:14-5.

[46] For a contextualization of *Essay Historique*, see also Phaf-Rheinberger 2001, and Cohen 1991:94-124.

statement made by prominent and well read Surinamese Jews, as a response to Christian Wilhelm Dohm's plea for Jewish political emancipation, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (published in Berlin in 1781), and with the intent to underscore the (unappreciated) value of Jewish settlement for the development of Suriname's colonial society.

Less biased, and of a more recent date, is the work of Robert Cohen (†1992). In his most recent work, a social-economical study of the Surinamese-Jewish community, titled *Jews in another environment: Suriname in the second half of the eighteenth century* (1991), Cohen addressed several issues concerning Jewish life in a tropical environment.[47] Recently, Jonathan Schorsch has included the Surinamese Jews in his study *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (2004). Although Suriname's colonial environment is part of both Cohen's and Schorsch analyses', both studies still tend towards a Jewish perspective, rather than a colonial vantage point. Moreover, the explicit focus on the Portuguese Jews and the early colonial era, particularly by Jonathan Schorsch, leaves some important issues underexposed, such as the colonial experience of the High German Jews and the important transitions that took place during the nineteenth century in Suriname.

As for Suriname's white colonial community and the locus of the Surinamese Jews in this community, the notion that sets the Jewish community aside as a separate category in Suriname's so-called plural society – as did, for instance, Van Lier in his standard work on Suriname's history: *Frontier society: a social analysis of the history of Suriname* (1971) – calls for a critical stand.[48] The plural-society thesis emphasizes institutionalized cultural separation along ethnic or racial lines, and was the dominant paradigm for understanding Caribbean plantation societies in the 1950s and 1960s.[49] Setting Jews apart, is generally based on their separate juridical status, the so-called 'Jewish privileges', and their spatial segregation in Jodensavanne. Referring to the Jews as a 'pseudo-state'[50] largely follows the rhetoric of Jewish community leaders,

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[47] Many other publications on Jewish presence in Suriname are primarily smaller articles or reviews in newspapers or magazines; often short and dated renditions on the first Jewish migration to Suriname and the settlement in Jodensavanne. Some articles offer more in-dept analyses, however, such as the work of Samuel Oppenheim and Frederick Oudschans Dentz. For instance, Oppenheim's paper *An Early Jewish Colony in Western Guiana, 1658-1666, and its Relation to the Jews in Surinam, Cayenne and Tobago* (1909), covers the early Jewish settlement in Essequibo between 1658-1666 (at that time in Dutch possession) and the displacement of Jews from Pomeroon (Essequibo) to Suriname after the invasion of the English in 1666. Oudschans Dentz published various books and articles on Suriname, some of them relating to the Jewish population. The booklet *Kolonisatie van de Portugeesch Joodsche Natie in Suriname en de geschiedenis van de joden savanne* (1927), offers an inventory of facts and figures of the Portuguese settlement in Suriname and the history of Jodensavanne.

[48] For instance, Van Lier 1971, but also Van der Meiden 1987:14, and Schalkwijk 1994:66-70.

[49] See for instance Smith 1965.

[50] Schalkwijk 1994:66-70.

who referred to themselves as 'Regents of the Portuguese-Jewish and High German Jewish Nation' and represented the Surinamese-Jewish communities as enclosed and self-evident entities. Historic reality was more unruly, however, than this image of segregation and self-rule presumes. Moreover, the separate juridical status of the Surinamese Jews lost importance during the nineteenth century because of various edicts and decrees, most importantly the granting of civil rights in 1825. Jodensavanne only represented the mainstay of Surinamese-Jewish community life during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and then only for the Portuguese-Jewish planters community.

During the mid eighteenth to late nineteenth century, Jews made up about half of Suriname's white population, sharing much of the colonial experience of non-Jewish settlers in Suriname.[51] The interplay between the Surinamese Jews and Suriname's colonial society brings to mind Ann Laura Stoler's pioneering work on European colonial communities during the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century in Indonesia. Stoler depicts a differentiated group of Dutch colonial whites that – in short – was preoccupied with demarcating its racialized community boundaries and maintaining its white male prestige.[52] The colonial experience of the Surinamese Jews both resembles and deviates from this model of community making and self-identification. The Surinamese-Jewish (self)identification as colonial whites; the large body of poor Jewish settlers in Suriname; and the presence of a considerable group of mixed Afro-Jewish descent, creates a storyline throughout this book quite similar to Stoler's arguments. However, Surinamese-Jewish 'otherness' and their long history of settlement and localization also sets the Surinamese-Jewish experience apart from Suriname's European settlers as well. First as Jews, later as 'locals' in a colonial environment.

An insightful vantage point for studying this complex position of Jews in Suriname's colonial society is provided by Albert Memmi's classic book *The colonizer and the colonized* (1957). While Memmi's writings have been used to analyse all sorts of oppressive relationships among well or less well-defined colonized peoples, his work has hardly resulted in a rethinking of the position of Jews in the colonized world. This is even more remarkable considering that Memmi's perspective is that of a colonial Jew. Memmi's Jews are in constant pain – 'they live in painful and constant ambiguity'.[53] Although they seek to avoid categorization as a colonized group through identification with the French, they are rejected by the colonizer as belonging to their group. The significance of Memmi's work lies in questioning the prevailing

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[51] For estimations and numerical data on the size of the Surinamese-Jewish community, and the share of Jews as part of the total (white and non-white) population, see Chapter II.

[52] For instance, Stoler 1992.

[53] Memmi 1990:81.

view of the Jewish experience – not only in a European, but also in a colonial setting – as one of subordination and oppression. [54] Today, in an era of continued violence in Palestine, this image is increasingly problematic; but also in a Surinamese historic context – as in other colonial societies were the Jew assumed the role of colonizer – this image is largely untenable.

Of course, there is a world of difference between the colonial experience of the North African Jews and the Surinamese Jews. While – as locals – the colonial Jewish communities in North Africa were colonized (although they tried to escape their colonized condition by mimicking the colonizer), the Surinamese Jews were part of the colonial enterprise themselves. They came as colonizers and colonists and shared the experience of colonial migration with non-Jewish colonists, both strangers in a hostile environment. The Surinamese Jews would never identify themselves 'as much with the colonizers as with the colonized', nor were they 'undeniable natives'.[55] In the full spectrum of colonial categories and local power relations, their status was, however, ambiguous.

In this study, I will abandon a one-dimensional and static approach of the Surinamese Jews as a colonizers community, in favour of a multi-layered conception of the Surinamese Jews. The first does not do justice to their long history of localization in Suriname. With family histories going back to the early days of establishment, the Surinamese Jews shared their timeline of presence in Suriname with the Afro-Surinamese population. Somewhere along the course of history, though difficult to pinpoint at an exact moment in time, the Surinamese Jews, as a group, became 'locals'. The status of Surinamese Jews as locals in a colonial environment evidently contrasts with their dominant status as whites in a colour-coded slave society, and is but one of the multiple complexities that characterize the Surinamese-Jewish community. It was especially during the late eighteenth to early twentieth century that this paradoxical position of the Surinamese Jews became manifest.

4   BROWSING THROUGH HISTORY: ON PERIODIZATION AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

In this book, I am interested in one, albeit far-reaching, aspect of Surinamese-Jewish history, namely the many questions of belonging that were provoked by their adjustment to a colonial environment, the way this affected their collective

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[54]   For instance, when the anthropologist Homi H. Bhabha wrote that: '[t]he 'Jew' stands for that experience of a lethal modernity, shared by the histories of slavery or colonialism, where the racist desire for supremacy and domination turns the ideas of progress and sovereignty into demonic partners in a *danse macabre*', the Jewish experience of subordination, is juxtaposed to other 'grand narratives of torture, ethnic cleansing, and persecution', see Bhabha 1998:xvi.

[55]   Memmi 1990:12.

identifications, and how this fitted into the colonial undertaking. Although this study is primarily thematically demarcated, rather than by a precise period of time, some general time-based demarcations can be made. Broadly speaking, the designation 'colonial Suriname' demarcates this study historically. Here, 'colonial Suriname' refers to the period of foreign (mainly Dutch) rule in Suriname, when Suriname was primarily a plantation economy driven by slave labour or indentured labour, and legitimized by a colour-coded racism that affected all social relationships of every resident in Suriname, slave or free.[56]

The empirical research on which this study is based concentrates on the late eighteenth to early twentieth century. However, earlier and later periods are taken into account when necessary for making an argument, for picking up stories or rounding them up. When studying such a long period it is easy to lapse into a view of history as a continuous and linear process, in which various historical events form a regular pattern. Rather than demonstrating continuity between past and present, I follow Foucault's arguments for a 'genealogical approach'. According to Foucault, history is about multiple beginnings, sudden lurches forwards, pauses and gaps. History, then, is not a comprehensive story, but a multiple number of events that are as often and as much in conflict with another, as they can be held together.[57]

This study draws largely on written material derived from various archives. Far from being intangible, transforming group identifications manifest themselves by events, small and large, in a community's history, that redefine(d) or reconfirm(ed) existing categories and cultural identifications within that community. These critical events (often conflicts pertaining to community boundaries) can be traced and explained. Conflicts do not only indicate a crumbling legitimacy of existing community boundaries, but are as often an immediate cause of redefinition. Although a focus on conflicts and critical events runs the risk of disguising perhaps harmonious practices of everyday life, as well as smouldering long-term developments; conflicts and discordant events are also strong examples of the interaction between collective identifications and adjustments to a new environment and form concrete leads for studying a localizing Surinamese-Jewish community. Adjusting is not a painless process: it is about giving up and taking in; it involves conflicts and generates dilemmas.[58] Ultimately, new ideas have to be incorporated in an existing set of ideas in

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[56] Note that throughout this study, I will use the term 'colonial' as both a time marker of the period of official foreign colonial rule, and as a broader designation of certain power relations and forms of inequality characteristic to colonial societies.

[57] Foucault 1984:81.

[58] A parallel can be drawn to the mechanisms of intellectual innovation described by Mark Bevir in *The logic of the history of ideas*. According to Bevir: '[d]ilemmas arise for individuals when they accept as authoritative a new understanding that, merely by virtue of being new, poses a question for their existing

the wake of 'critical events': moments of giving up old ideas as truths, and taking in, or keeping out novelty or new elements of a collective self-understanding. The incorporation and acceptance of these 'newcomers' (often in the capacity of an official decree or resolution) are the critical moments of creolizing identifications and bring to light the dynamics and interaction between individual and the collective.[59]

Logical starting points for studying the Surinamese Jews form the Surinamese-Jewish congregational archives. The documents found in this archive provided me with a general understanding of the historical transformation seen in the two communities at large, and with a more detailed knowledge of several conflicts that are discussed in this study. The archive of the Portuguese-Jewish community is housed in the Dutch National Archives (*Nationaal Archief*) in The Hague.[60] Here, I focused on the minute books and correspondence of the *Mahamad* where I expected to find the discordant events I was after. The community regulations and records pertaining to the constitutional positions of Jews in Suriname not only provided me with the required insight into the internal organization of the community, but also allowed for a reconstruction of the many negotiations over its constitutional position in the Surinamese society with the colonial authorities. The minute books and community regulations typically contain the (male) voices of prominent Jews and community leaders, thus give only limited insight into the thoughts and feelings of common Surinamese Jews, women, coloureds or the poor. These actors in the history of Surinamese Jews only appear as the ones that fill in requests for poor relief and plea for the status of their children. However, although barred from exercising power in the community, it were exactly these subordinate groups that took center stage in debates over the demarcation of community boundaries. Through close reading of certain discordant events pertaining to such issues, I have tried to include the voices of less powerful Surinamese Jews in this study as much as possible.

An important problem I encountered when working with the archived material concerns the appalling condition of large parts of its documents. Much of the minutes of the Portuguese congregation between 1836 and 1861, including correspondence between members and community leaders, is heavily damaged by moist, severely decayed, and often no longer readable. Apart from the general condition of the Portuguese-Jewish archive, another practical impediment is the fact that the entire archive after 1864 is mysteriously missing, except for some loose documents. While some community members believe the material is smuggled out of the country, others suspect some locals of hiding the historical material 'under their beds'. As a

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web of beliefs. Dilemmas explain changes of belief because when people accept something as true, they have to extend their existing beliefs to accommodate the newcomer' (Bevir 2000:299).

[59] My use of 'critical events' is inspired by the work of Veena Das (Das 1996).

[60] By order of the Governor, the Portuguese Jewish archive was handed over to the local colonial authorities in 1861 and transferred to the Dutch National archive in 1916.

consequence, analyses of late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century developments are largely based on the High German archive (Neve Shalom Archive, NSA).

Fortunately, the High German archive is by and large in a better condition, although some of the books containing the minutes from the late eighteenth century are in rather abominable state as well. At the time of my field research, the archive was privately housed; today the High German archive is housed in the so-called *Mahamad* building, next to the synagogue on the Keizerstraat. The High German records go back to the establishment of a separate High German community in Suriname in 1734 and cover the entire period of settlement. Apart from the historical material, the archive also contains contemporary records of the merged Israelitische Gemeente Suriname. At my time in Suriname in 2003, I worked through much of the Neve Shalom Archives, especially focusing on the recorded minutes, correspondence and community regulations. The High German archive is not inventoried. When referring to records of this archive, I will refer to the boxes where I found the documents at that time.[61]

Apart from the congregational archives, I made use of the colonial archives of Suriname. The material found here ranged from extracts taken from the governor's journals; minutes of the Court of Police *(Hof van Politie)*; and correspondence between Surinamese Jews, the community leaders and the governor over internal conflicts, the constitutional position of Jews in Suriname and various other issues. The Archive of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs, also kept at National Archives in The Hague, proved to be an unexpected source of information as well as the Samson archive housed by the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana in Amsterdam.

As noted by Patrick Joyce, archives (like the historian) are the sites of public memory.[62] They are a means by which societies organize their past, rather than simple mirrors to the past, producing objective truths. This particularly holds true for colonial archives, which are among the principal sources of this study. Various writers of colonial and postcolonial history have shown that the very existence of colonial archives, as well as the enormous wealth of material that these archives contain, is a direct result of unequal relations of power, notably the regulation of peoples and territories by white colonials.[63] When working with colonial archives one should be aware of the way these archives are structured and the meanings that lay underneath. Ann Laura Stoler argues that archives are not just sites of collected knowledge, guarded treasure that hide the secrets of the colonial state and are waiting to be

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[61]   Note that a considerable part of the archive was sent to the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati in 1955 for photostat, where the documents got mixed up. This part of the archive is still left un-inventoried and piled-up in the original post-boxes.

[62]   Joyce 2001:367.

[63]   For example, Said 1978, Stoler 1995, Young 1990.

explored, but actively produce this knowledge as well by the way information is classed and categorized, by including certain facts that were deemed important and while excluding others. Colonial archives were not constructed randomly, nor should they be read in any such way: '[i]ssues were rendered important by how they were classed and discursively framed.' Content, as well as form and mode of classification of colonial archives are critical features of colonial politics.[64]

As such, the kind of material preserved and the structuring of the colonial archives can be as revealing as the actual content of the documents.[65] Take for example the Old Archives of Suriname, kept at the National Archives in The Hague. Here, Jews appear as a separate category during the second half of the eighteenth century.[66] Between 1755 and 1802, correspondence between the Jewish communities (Portuguese and High German) and the governor are filed separately. In Suriname's colonial archives, no documents of any other group in Suriname, whether religiously or ethnically defined, were archived separately in a way comparable to the Jews. The separate entry for Jewish documents coincides with the increase of conflicts between Jews Christian whites during the late eighteenth century, and is illustrative of a period of exclusionary colonial politics vis-à-vis the Jews in Suriname. From the early nineteenth century onwards, the Surinamese Jews disappear as a separate entry from the colonial administration and 'vanish' in the enormous archives of the Ministry of Colonies.

In addition to the traditional documentary sources, I have used various types of biographical material such as official censuses and other population surveys. Although census material should be considered with due reservation, it can provide insight in both processes of self-identification and colonial identity politics (through the categorization and presentation afterwards).[67] The empirical data found in the archives are contrasted with tangible legacies such as images and paintings, sepulchral culture

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[64] Stoler 2002b:98. In a same vein, Nicholas Dirks notes that the (colonial) archive not only contains documents, but is in itself a primary document - 'the instantiation of the state's interest in history' (Dirks 2002:62-3).

[65] Although Surinamese Jews were among the colonizers, they did not form part of the colonial apparatus until the late nineteenth century.

[66] NA, 1.05.10.01: 524-529. These entries in Suriname's Old Archive contain the correspondence between the community leaders and the governor between 1755 and 1802 on a variety of cases. Some of these cases concerned the interest of the Jews as a group, others related to conflicts of community members and the Mahamad in which the governor was consulted for support by either party.

[67] Joan Scott argues that statistical data are often (wrongly) kept outside the analyses of the production of meaning and social reality. According to Scott, statistical data tell an important political story Scott 1988:113 and further. Peter van de Veer makes a similar argument when he refers to the census as a 'number game' that gave meaning and stability to existing categories, and was used by the political elite in defining the boundaries of their community (Van der Veer 1994:126-7). Also compare with Benedict Anderson's remarks on the census and Virginia Dominguez' analysis of the Israeli census (Anderson 1991 , Domínguez 1989).

and cemetery space. Several interviews with community members and various synagogue visits helped me understand the importance of historical belonging, and gave me a glimpse of the present-day community. The extensive secondary literature on socio-economic changes in the Caribbean area, colonial divisions of power, and Jewish community life provided me with the necessary framing.

This book does not offer a synthetic overview of the information gathered in de various archives mentioned in the above. Much of the chapters were written in an associative manner, whereby stories and events lead me to uncover more stories and other events. As such, case studies play a central role in this study. Although they can never be more than a partial reflection of the larger identity questions that were at issue in the Surinamese-Jewish community, they make it possible to stay close to the individuals that comprise the 'empirical data' of this study.[68] In the words of Philip D. Curtin – who aptly described such an approach as eclectic empiricism – 'The whole truth is not available to historians in any case, and it is not possible to tell possible partial truths at the same time. It may be that the sum of partial truths, arrived at by asking a variety of different questions about the past, may lead to a better understanding of how human societies change through time.'[69] I hope that the answers I will come up with do justice to the many stories of men and women that make up the history of the Surinamese Jews.

5   OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

As group identification is not an isolated affair, I will focus on the relation between Surinamese Jews and their neighbours throughout this book: the world of Surinamese whites, with whom they shared their position of economic leadership but stood apart as well, and the Afro-Surinamese population, with whom they have the longest shared history.[70] Yet, identification is not about 'others' alone. The juxtaposition of participating in a local colonial society versus identifying with a broader Jewish community is also essential to processes of creolization and diaspora among the Surinamese Jews and should be taken into account as such. After all, the environment in which the Jews participated (both local and supra local) determined their cultural frame of reference to some or larger extent.

This book is divided in two parts. The first part (Forging a community, Chapter II to IV) is about the making of a Jewish community in Suriname. Based on literature

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[68] Phrasing borrowed from Curtin (Curtin 2000:xi).

[69] Curtin 2000:xi-xii.

[70] The focus in this research is on the interaction with other white segments in Suriname and the Afro-Surinamese population. Other groups in Suriname, most notably the Hindustani population, will only be referred to sporadically. This is primarily a consequence of the timeframe of this research.

study and archival research, it tells the story of a European colonial community that, through the course of history, adjusted to Suriname's changing environment. Attention is paid to the composition of the Surinamese-Jewish community based on an analysis of migration patterns and the social, economic and political engagements of Surinamese Jews. The main objective of this part, therefore, is to provide a bird's-eye view of Surinamese-Jewish history, before delving into a more detailed study and analysis of how group identifications and expressions of commonality transformed over the course of Surinamese-Jewish history.

Chapter II discusses the initial establishment of a Jewish community in Suriname, halfway the seventeenth century; the patterns of Jewish migration and settlement; the heterogeneous origin of the Jews who came to Suriname; and the growth and – ultimately – decline of the Jewish community in Suriname. In addition, I will address the specific places of Surinamese-Jewish settlement in Jodensavanne and Paramaribo. In Chapter III, attention is paid to the main social and economic changes that took place in the Surinamese-Jewish community from the late eighteenth century onwards: changes that not only influenced the economic strength of the Suriname Jews as a group, but also had considerable impact on their social status in the Surinamese society, as well as on Jewish community life. The participation of the Surinamese Jews in colonial elite life is considered, since this provides us with relevant information on the position of the Surinamese Jews within the Surinamese colonial society and its local web of power relations. Chapter IV explores the political configurations and religious structures that set the scope of Surinamese-Jewish community making. It addresses the community structures and internal divisions of power, and discusses the incorporation of the Jews in a Dutch colonial state structure and the reconnection with Dutch Jewry during the nineteenth century.

The second part of this book (Cultivating differences, localizing boundaries) focuses on Surinamese-Jewish questions of belonging in a creolizing colonial community. Suriname's colonial domain, with its many cultural interactions and specific balance of power, constituted the framework of Surinamese-Jewish processes of identification. Surinamese Jews debated not only among themselves, but also with the colonial authorities in both Suriname and the Netherlands on the pillars of a Surinamese-Jewish identity. In this part of the book, several case studies are presented that manifest contestations surrounding the manifold distinctions and boundaries that structured daily Surinamese-Jewish life. Marrying the 'other' is a recurring in theme in this part of the book. Although such marriages did occur occasionally, as a rule both High German and Portuguese community strongly opposed these matrimonies. During the eighteenth century, both communities promulgated decrees that prohibited mixed marriages, on penalty of exclusion from the community as full members (*Yachidim*). These decrees applied to mixed High German Portuguese marriages, as well as to those marrying coloureds. From the mid nineteenth century onwards, attention was directed to mixed Jewish-Christian marriages instead.

Chapter V addresses the ways in which Jews were perceived and categorized by non-Jews. As is argued, different images of the Surinamese Jews prevailed throughout history. These images were particularly contradictory during the nineteenth century, at times even at odds with one another. Chapter VI to VIII focus on the self-understanding of the Surinamese Jews and how this (collective) self-understanding was shaped by their interaction with other segments of the colonial society of Suriname. In Chapter VI, then, some of the critical moments in the process of a Surinamese-Jewish creolization are addressed through a case study of the Jewish cemeteries in Suriname. The nineteenth century did not only witness the rise of a specific form of creole sepulchral art at the Jewish cemeteries, but also some fundamental conflicts related to burial rites, gravestones, and cemetery space which reflect changing notions of Surinamese Jewishness or, at the very least, can be read as a contemporary critique of the dominant conceptions of Surinamese-Jewish identity at that time. Chapter VII discusses the relation between the Portuguese and High German communities. As is argued, cultural differences that originated from the 'Old World' were transplanted into the 'New World' where their meaning altered. In Suriname, internal differences between the Portuguese and High German communities became centred on the issue of a colonial elite status – and the dilemmas such identifications raised – versus religious defined notions of Jewishness.

In Chapter VIII, I show how the making of Surinamese Jewishness was inextricably bound to Surinamese's changing colonial social order: issues of colour and social status became intertwined in the history of the coloured Jews and their incorporation in the inner circles of the Surinamese-Jewish community. The relation between the Jewish community and the coloured Jews is characterized by a remarkable combination of exclusion, inclusion and intermingling. The transformation from a racial to a *halakhic*-defined community, halfway into the nineteenth century, marks one of the critical events in Surinamese-Jewish history, and appears as a turning point in the history of the Surinamese Jews. By way of conclusion, I will revisit the historical questions and theoretical problems set out at the beginning and try to reflect on them, adding insights from the research itself.

Some notes on terminology

Writing about identity issues in historical studies brings along some anachronistic terminology. After all, the interest in and vocabulary of identity and collective identifications is a current phenomenon. The first time I encountered the term 'identity' in the Surinamese-Jewish community archives, as a designation of Surinamese-Jewish bounded groupness and its supposed characteristics, was in a document dated in the 1970s. The concept of identity was unknown to Jews living in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, nor did they perceive themselves as 'Surinamese Jews'. They referred to themselves as 'Hebrews of the Portuguese Jewish Nation' or 'Hebrews of the High German Jewish Nation', or simply 'being of the

[Portuguese or High German] Nation' or 'belonging to the Nation', and 'living in this colony'.

During the nineteenth and twentieth century, the official names of the congregations were altered into 'Netherlands Portuguese Israelite Community' (Nederlands Portugees Israelitische Gemeenschap) and 'Netherlands Israelite Community' (Nederlands Israelitische Gemeenschap). However, for convenience I will use the designations 'Portuguese Jewish' and 'High German Jewish' throughout this study. The High German community not only included Jews that originated from German territories; also, East European Jews from Poland, the Baltic area and Russia were included in the High German community.[71] The Portuguese Jewish community also included Jews of Spanish origin. Following Daniel Swetschinki's objections against a general usage of 'Sephardi', I will only use 'Sephardi' to refer to the Jews of medieval Spain and Portugal and their immediate descendants.[72] The same goes for my use of 'Ashkenazi', a term I will only use as a general reference to the cultural orientation of East European Jews. Surinamese Jews never referred to themselves as 'Sephardi' or 'Ashkenazi'.

In this study, the notion of 'community' is used often; however, some critical remarks are in place. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis have pointed at the analytical problems that arise with the use of 'community'. Whether used as a euphemism for civil society, in reference to an ethnic or religious group; or racially, to refer to a group of persons with a shared skin-colour; the notion of community in either case assumes a 'given collectivity' or 'an organic wholeness', which rarely fits reality.[73] In the words of Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 'This 'natural community' does not allow for an ideological and material construction, whose boundaries, structures and norms are the result of constant struggles and negotiations, or more general social developments'.[74] It may seem somewhat paradoxical to use such an indefinite concept in a study of contested notions of belonging, but is in my opinion largely inevitable for want of a better, more definite concept.

'Community' will be used in different connotations throughout this study. First, 'community' is used to refer to the combined population of Jews in Suriname and their

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[71] The 'High' in High German refers to the mountainous features of the central and southern German territories. It founds it way as a denominator of a Jewish group through the field of language. Yiddish, a Germanic language written in Hebrew characters that found its origin in the mediaeval ghettos in central Europe out of several Germanic dialects, is ranked amongst the High German languages. When Yiddish expanded eastwards during the 14th century, the denominator 'High German Jews' came to include East European Jews as well. Today these Jews are often referred to as Ashkenazi Jews (Askhenaz means German in Hebrew).

[72] Swetschinski 2000:xii.

[73] Anthias 1992:157-170.

[74] Anthias 1992:163.

mutual social relationships and also in a more restricted form to the religious Jewish congregations, especially when the topic under focus applies to both Portuguese and High German Jews. Persons of Jewish descent, who were non-observing, and not affiliated with either the Portuguese-Jewish or the High German community, are not excluded from this definition a priori. However, their stories do not predominate in this study as they generally manoeuvred outside the scope of the Jewish community leaders. When a certain passage refers to either the Portuguese or High German Jews this will made explicit by referring to the Portuguese-Jewish community or High German Jewish community. Whenever a certain passage refers to the religious congregation, but not necessarily to all Portuguese and/or High German Jews, this will made explicit by the use if the term 'congregation' instead of the more indefinite terminology of 'community'.

Colonial slave societies like Suriname were characterized by their general obsession with different shades of skin-colour and the status attached. In this study, constructed notions of commonality whether based on skin colour or religion play an important role. Some have argued that we should reject the categories and cultural distinctions on which colonial rule was once invested.[75] However, if we do reject these categories or name them differently, how are we to understand and study the subjects of these categories without running the risk of creating new categories with a-historic meaning? Throughout this study, I have chosen to leave denominations as 'white', 'black' or 'coloured' non-capitalized, nor use constant quotation marks, to emphasize their socially constructed character. A critical stance towards the constructed categories and their shifting meanings throughout the colonial era is however part of the general subject of this study.

Further, I have chosen to refer to the group of Jews from mixed Afro-Jewish descent as 'coloured Jews' (without quotation marks) throughout this study. In the historical documents, this group is generally referred to as 'mulatto Jews' (*mulatten joden*), while they referred to themselves as *couleurlingen* (coloureds). Although, I do not believe that we should always and automatically use the term by which people refer to themselves in academic studies; in this particular case, the different terms have a rather different connotation. In colonial Suriname, mulatto meant mixed blood with one white parent and one white black parent. The term 'coloured' was far more indefinite, and included the lighter skinned people of mixed descent as well. In a colour sensitive society as Suriname, this may exactly be the reason why the group of mixed Jewish descent referred to themselves as 'coloureds' instead of 'mulattos'.

Finally, note that all translations of non-English citations are mine unless noted otherwise. When available, I have used English published editions of originally non-English literature to accommodate verifiability. In the case of *Essay Historique* of

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75 Stoler 2002b:89.

David Cohen Nassy (1788), the English translation from 1974 contains many grammatical mistakes and odd phrasings. For the benefit of readability, some irksome errors have been removed in quoted excerpts taken from this edition.

PART ONE

FORGING A COMMUNITY

II

A COLONIAL JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE MAKING: PATTERNS OF MIGRATION AND PLACES OF SETTLEMENT

This history of the Surinamese Jews begins in seventeenth-century Amsterdam: port of embarkation of many Jews who departed for the New World. Once settled in Suriname, Jewish migrants found themselves in a colonial order and slave society. Jodensavanne and Paramaribo, as two rather distinct colonial spaces, were the two main places of Jewish settlement in Suriname.

1   PORT OF ORIGIN: AMSTERDAM

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam, as the primary northern entrepôt of colonial commodities, had become a bustling trade centre and a popular destination for thousands of migrants, some of whom were refugees who had fled from the hardship of war or religious persecution, while others were economic migrants, drawn by the   opportunities this merchant city had to offer. Among these foreigners were several thousands of *conversos*: the descendants of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions during the fifteenth century. These converted Jews – also called New Christians – had been persecuted for years and had fallen victim to outbursts of popular violence. Despite their (involuntary) conversion to Christianity, the Iberian authorities suspected them of practising Judaism in secret.

During the sixteenth century, many New Christians tried to seek shelter on the outskirts of the Iberian empire. Important destinations were the Portuguese colonies in the New World where the expanding colonial trade offered a variety of livelihoods. Other popular havens of refuge were Salonika, Livorno, Venice, Antwerp, Hamburg, Bayonne and Rouen. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Amsterdam would increasingly become an important destination as well.[1] Portuguese *conversos* who chose to settle in Amsterdam rapidly joined the growing Portuguese-Jewish community.[2] In her study of the Sephardi community in early modern Amsterdam, Miriam Bodian sketches a complex picture of the *converso* experience and the forging of a Portuguese-Jewish community. The founding myth of the Portuguese-Jewish community, she argues, is built around notions of return and restoration: the return to a true ancestral faith and the suggestion of a natural and smooth transition from the traumatic experience of Iberian Catholicism to Jewish rabbinical life in Amsterdam.[3] As Bodian shows, however, reversion of *conversos* to rabbinic Judaism was by no means self-evident, at least not for everybody. In fact, upon arrival in Amsterdam, many lacked a clear religious identity. The Portuguese migrants had been cut-off from rabbinical scholarship and Jewish customs and traditions for generations; their notions of Judaism being sketchy at best. The Portuguese *conversos* knew that the Jewish world would eventually reject them, whilst the Protestant regents of the Dutch Republic would never allow for a new community of Judaizing Catholics within their jurisdiction. The newcomers had little choice but to embrace rabbinic Judaism and accept established *halakhic* norms.[4]

A hallmark event in the growth of the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community was the so-called Twelve Year Truce (1609-1621) that ended a Spanish embargo on Dutch commerce and shipping.[5] The opening of Spanish and Spanish-American ports to Dutch merchants presented a whole new range of possibilities for Portuguese (Jewish) migrants who were experienced in colonial trade. Thousands of crates of sugar, brazilwood, tobacco and other goods were carried out from Brazil and shipped to Amsterdam each year. The booming colonial trade gave an important boost to the

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[1] An enormous amount of literature has been published on the Portuguese and Spanish Jews, and the Sephardi diaspora. For an introduction to these histories, see for example Kedourie 1992, Roth 1995. Jewish migration to the New World is covered in Bernardini and Fiering 2001 and Israel 2002a.

[2] For the history of the Sephardi community of early modern Amsterdam see Fuks-Mansfeld 1989, Swetschinski 2000, and also Bodian 1997, Israel 1989.

[3] Bodian 1997:20-4.

[4] Bodian 1997:25-52. Still, not every reconverted Jew embraced Judaism wholeheartedly. Yosef Kaplan found that the Portuguese-Jewish community included a group of people who never paid any contribution of any kind to the synagogue, indicating a lack of connection to Jewish religious life (Kaplan 1984:117).

[5] Bodian 1997:1.

Portuguese community of Amsterdam, and Amsterdam became the centre of the Portuguese-Jewish diaspora during these years. Not because of its size – it was still a rather small community counting no more than 200 households – but for its role in worldwide trade and finance.[6]

It was a time of great lustre and prosperity, during which rich Sephardi Jews populated palatial mansions on the Amsterdam canals and summerhouses on the Vecht. Once the basic institutions of Jewish communal life were realized (a synagogue was constructed in 1612, a cemetery followed two years later), the Portuguese community of Amsterdam started to give expression to its Portuguese distinctiveness vis-à-vis other Jews. They called themselves *Gente da Naçao* (Men of the Nation),[7] thereby affiliating themselves with the larger Portuguese-Jewish *Naçao* that stretched from Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and hence differentiating themselves from the ever growing number of German, Polish, and also Ukrainian and Lithuanian Jews settling in Amsterdam. These Central and East European Jews had abandoned their homes because of wars, persecution and the hope for a better life in the Western European territories.[8] Due to a general economic decline in Central and Eastern Europe, Polish and German Jews were pushed westwards in ever greater numbers, especially during the eighteenth century. In this period, the immigration of poor Jews from Europe became a major problem for the Jewish communities of Western Europe who simply could not absorb the poverty-stricken newcomers.[9]

During the second half of the seventeenth century, the relation between the Portuguese, High German and Polish Jews (including Ukrainian and Lithuanian Jews) became tense. While the Portuguese community experienced the golden era of its existence, the High German community grew, and reached an increasingly favourable financial position.[10] The Polish Jews played a remarkable role in the power play between the High German and Portuguese-Jewish communities who were both vying to become the main Jewish community of Amsterdam. Frowned upon by the High

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[6]   Swetschinski 2000:109-12; Israel 2002a:22.

[7]   Note the gendered charge of this self-understanding. The Portuguese-Jewish use of *Naçao* is permeated with the historical experience of forced conversion to Christianity and reversion to Judaism. It expresses a feeling of unity and distinctiveness vis-à-vis the surrounding society that was stirred by dramatic news from the diaspora, such as news of massive public sentencing by the Inquisition, of public executions by secular authorities in Spain (*auto-da-fé*), or the reinstallation of Portuguese Inquisitionary rule in Dutch Brazil (Bodian 1997:2, 47-52). Note, moreover, the different connotation in the Dutch seventeenth century use of *natie* or 'nation'. In Dutch of the time, the use of 'nation' referred to a local community of foreigners, such as 'the English nation' in Amsterdam, or indeed 'the Portuguese-Jewish nation' in Suriname.

[8]   Sluys 1940:316-19.

[9]   Israel 1985:145-50, 154-5. See also Shulvass 1971.

[10]   Sluys 1940.

German community, the Polish Jews turned for support to the Portuguese community. In order to retain its leading position within the Amsterdam Jewish community, the Portuguese Jews adopted a 'divide and rule' tactic, and were more than eager to support the Polish Jews in their struggle for independence from the High German community. Supported by the Portuguese-Jewish community, the Polish Jews separated from the High German community in 1665. The separation of the Polish Jews was strongly opposed by the High German community leaders as it undermined the establishment of a united Ashkenazi synagogue. The dispute ended in 1673 when the city council of Amsterdam forbade the Polish Jews to organize separate synagogue services, and ordered them to reunite with the High German community.[11]

This study is not the place to address the complex relationship between the various Jewish factions in Amsterdam in broader detail, yet it is important to note that the Amsterdam community, being the port of origin of the majority of Surinamese migrants, was by no means a homogeneous community, neither socially or culturally. Some of the animosities and dichotomies already prevalent in the early Amsterdam Jewish communities were transplanted to the Surinamese community, where a Jewish community was established in the mid seventeenth century. Ideas of social and ethnic difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews were brought in from the Old World and influenced the demarcation of community boundaries among the Surinamese Jews.

2 DYNAMICS AND DIMENSIONS OF A SMALL-SCALE JEWISH COMMUNITY

The birth of a Jewish community in Suriname

The establishment of a Jewish community in Suriname is historically connected with the establishment of a Dutch colony in Pernambuco (Brazil) in 1630. The liberal terms of settlement and the opportunities offered by the sugar plantations and sugar trade brought about a substantial migration of Dutch-Portuguese Jews to the Dutch-Brazilian colony. At the same time, the tolerant religious climate in Dutch Brazil triggered some New Christians already settled in the colony to revert to normative Judaism, giving rise to further growth of the Jewish community. The Dutch colonial adventure in Brazil was short-lived, however. An uprising of Portuguese planters against Dutch rule in 1645 ended the period of prosperity and growth of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Dutch Brazil. Many Jews did not await the return to Portuguese Inquisitionary rule after a period of relatively tolerant Dutch rule, and left

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[11]   Sluys 1940:322-35. Kaplan 1995:138-139.

for various destinations, predominantly Amsterdam. Nine years later, following the definitive capitulation of Dutch Brazil, the remaining Jews (approximately 600) were expelled.[12]

The exodus from Dutch Brazil accelerated the establishment of Jewish communities in other parts of the New World, where their experience in colonial trade, sugar planting and sugar processing was highly valued, especially the Dutch and English trade- and sugar-producing colonies, such as Barbados, Jamaica, Curaçao and Suriname (the latter then still under British rule).[13] Although it is certainly possible that some of the refugees from Dutch Brazil headed straight for Suriname, most of them called in at French and British West Indian colonies first, before settling in Suriname. Others, after having returned to the Dutch Republic, re-migrated to the New World within years.[14]

One of the best-known Dutch Brazilian refugees and early settlers in Suriname was David de Isaac Cohen Nassy, alias Joseph Nunes da Fonseca.[15] David Nassy was an enterprising Jewish merchant, who developed strong ties to the directors of the Dutch West Indische Compagnie (WIC, West India Company). David Nassy received several charters from the WIC to establish Jewish settlements in tropical America. Especially relevant to the history of the Surinamese Jews, is the grant given to David Nassy and his partners Paul Jacomo Pinto and Francisco Medina to establish a Jewish

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[12]   For a general account of the period of Dutch rule in Brazil, see the standard work of Charles R. Boxer. Boxer 1957. For the Jewish experience in Brazil see the work of Wiznitzer, for instance Wiznitzer 1956, Wiznitzer 1960. For a broader perspective on the role of Jews in the maritime and colonial expansion of Europe in this period, see Israel 2002a.

[13]   Israel 2002a:30-3.

[14]   There is no recorded evidence that Jews came directly from Brazil to Suriname. According to L.L.E. Rens, evidence does exist of their migration to French, Dutch and British colonies in the Caribbean area; however, Suriname is not mentioned (Rens 1982:30-1).

[15]   Like many of his contemporary Jewish merchant colleagues, David Cohen Nassy used two names. His Spanish-Christian name (Joseph Nunes da Fonseca) indicates his *converso* family history. After the obligatory circumcision, as part of reversion to Judaism, all *conversos* adopted a new name, which often consisted of a biblical Hebrew surname combined with their old Jewish family names. In many cases, the Jewish family name had long since been forgotten: the history of forced baptism, persecutions and centuries of *converso* life had fallen the Jewish family name into oblivion. To overcome this practical problem, many converts simply placed the word Israel, or more poetically *Jessurun*, before their Christian family name. The use of the Jewish name was restricted to Jewish community life while the Christian name retained its legal value and was used in contact with the non-Jewish world. For example, the wealthy merchant Diogo Nunes Belmonte, who arrived in Amsterdam around 1600, adopted the Hebrew name Jacob Israel Belmonte; the baron Manuel de Belmonte was known in the synagogue as Isaac Nunes, while Jeronimo Nunes de Costa can be found in the Jewish community archives under the Hebrew name of Moseh Curiel. In their social lives as merchants, and in their interaction with the Christian world, they were still known under their Christian names. The sustained use of the Christian aliases made them practically indistinguishable from Christian merchants and offered some protection against the Inquisition during their mercantile journeys. See d'Ancona 1940:205, and Dillen 1940:565.

colony on the island of Cayenne,[16] or other places on the Wild Coast of the West Indies in 1659. This grant was part of a broader strategy of the Dutch WIC to open the whole of Guiana for colonization as a substitute for the loss of Dutch Brazil. The grant included the delivery of several hundred of slaves to Nova Zeelandia (Essequibo) as well.[17]

Under the guidance of David Nassy, several hundreds of Jewish migrants – refugees from Brazil as well as poor immigrants from Livorno – embarked upon Cayenne, where they engaged in sugar-cultivation. It turned out to be an ill-fated undertaking, as Cayenne was first captured by the French in 1664, subsequently attacked, and burned down by the English in 1667. David Nassy then moved to other places of settlement, and finally ended up in Suriname in the company of an estimated 100 Jews, bringing with them their knowledge of sugar planting and (most likely) their slaves and some plantation inventory.[18] It is presumed that when David Nassy and his group arrived in Suriname around 1670, they first settled at Cassipora Creek where they began to develop sugar estates along the Suriname River. The Cassipora settlement was short-lived, however, as in 1682 a new site was founded that would become known as Jodensavanne (Jewish Savannah).

Growth

The arrival of the Nassy group provided an important impulse to the establishment and further development of a Jewish community in Suriname. Numbers on the size of the community during the initial period of settlement are scarce, however. A poll-tax registration of 1684 gives an indication of the number of Jews resident in the colony at the time. The registration lists 55 Jewish households on whom poll-tax (hoofdgeldenbelasting) was levied, containing 105 white men, 58 white women and 995 slaves. The files further contain a 'list of Jewish children', which mentions 69 'white children', totalling 232 persons. Poll-tax was levied on every person living in

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[16] The Cayenne island is located at the estuaries of the Cayenne and Mahury rivers, named la Ravardière by the French in 1643, renamed Cayenne in 1777, and capital of nowadays French Guiana.

[17] The resolutions regarding the establishment of a Jewish settlement in Essequibo as well as the grant to David Nassy and his partners to establish a colony in Cayenne are included in its entirety in Oppenheim 1907:163-86.

[18] For an overview of the Cayenne epoch, see Arbell 2002:45-57. The Nassy group was not the first group of Jews to settle in Suriname. Jewish merchants from Britain had settled in Thorarica, the capital of the colony at that time, between (circa) 1630 and 1667 (Rens 1982:29). When Suriname came under Dutch rule in 1667, the majority of these Jews left the colony, and Paramaribo became the seat of the Dutch colonial authorities. Various Jewish historians have written about this early episode of the Surinamese-Jewish history. Owing to a lack of concrete data, this early history is marred with half-truths, assumptions and rough estimates: a large degree of uncertainty about the exact course of events or numbers of early settlers will remain. For an overview of the earliest migration to Suriname see, Rens 1982, Oppenheim 1907 and 1909b, Zwarts 1928, Hollander 1897.

the colony: man, woman or child; enslaved or free. Children under the age of three were exempted from poll tax, as well as planters and their slaves who had recently settled in the colony. The latter were exempted from poll tax for the first ten years of settlement.[19].

Six years later, the number of Jews residing in the colony had grown to about, 575 persons. David Nassy[20], who based his estimate on the poll-tax registration of 1690, wrote: 'The Jewish population at that time, as far as could be calculated from the list of contributors, amounted to ninety-two families, not counting ten to twelve German Jews who were then united to the Portuguese there by bonds of marriage; and about fifty bachelors who did not belong at all to these families. Thus, allowing five persons to each family, the total of the Jewish community would be about 560 to 575 persons'. [21]

During the eighteenth century, the Surinamese-Jewish community grew rapidly. It was the heyday of the Surinamese plantation economy, establishing the Surinamese-Jewish community as one of the leading Jewish communities of the New World. Eighteenth century migration to Suriname differed considerably from earlier Jewish migration to Suriname. While the latter was predominantly a Portuguese-Jewish affair, the number of migrants of East European descent increased and the Jewish community almost tripled in size during the eighteenth century. Although Sephardi New World migration and settlement has received the bulk of historical attention, Jews of Ashkenazi descent migrated to Caribbean and North American colonies in numbers comparable to the Sephardim; their numbers growing rapidly, particularly during the late eighteenth century.[22] Consequently, Suriname saw a rapid growth of the High German community during that time. Unfortunately, no numerical data regarding size or composition of the Surinamese-Jewish communities is available for most of this period. Yet, by 1791, the Jewish community of Suriname had grown into a community

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[19] See NA, 1.05.04.01: 213: folio 227-33 and Wolbers 1861:169. Thus, the actual number of Jews resident in the colony may have been somewhat larger than can be deducted from the poll-tax registers.

[20] Author of *Essay Historique*, not the same as the early settler David Isaac de Cohen Nassy referred to earlier

[21] Nassy 1974b:44. Nassy's estimate is generally used as an indication of the Jewish population during this period. He also claims that the Portuguese Jews owned 40 sugar-plantations in the 1690s, operated by 'more than 9,000 black slaves'. These numbers should be used with caution, as they to be exaggerated. According to Johannes Postma, the entire African Surinamese slave population counted about 3.332 men, women and children in 1684, while only a few slave ships arrived from Africa the following years (Postma 1990:185-6). Van Stipriaan mentions the number of about 4,600 slaves in 1695 (Van Stipriaan 1997:75), which makes Nassy's claim of 9,000 Jewish-owned slaves in 1690 rather unlikely, to say the least. For a further demographic analysis of Suriname's slave population, see Van Stipriaan 1993:311-46.

[22] Faber 1992:24.

of about 1330 souls, made up of 870 Portuguese Jews and 460 High German Jews.[23] Although this might seem a very small community by today's standards, the Jewish community of Suriname was among the largest of the New World at that time – five times the size of the North American community.[24]

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the traditionally dominant position of the Portuguese community vis-à-vis the High German community diminished progressively. While the Portuguese-Jewish community had decreased, the High German continued to grow, resulting in two more or less equally sized communities (see figure 1). Halfway into the nineteenth century, large-scale migration to Suriname had come to an end and the size of the Surinamese-Jewish community stabilized at around 1400 individuals. In 1845, 1365 persons were registered as either belonging to the High German community or Portuguese-Jewish community: 733 person were listed as High German Jews, and 485 persons were listed as Portuguese Jew; 145 persons were registered (or referred to themselves) simply as Israelites.

Note that any number on the size of the Surinamese-Jewish community should be used with caution and considered merely as an indication of the actual size of the community at that time. Many sources rely on numbers provided by the Jewish communities themselves. These numbers are based on the church registers and also include people who were no longer resident in Suriname, but were still registered as community members. Compare for instance the Colonial Report of 1920, which mentions 778 residents listed as Jews by the district registars (*wijkmeesters en districtscomisarissen*) during a house-to-house registration, while according to the community's reports, the Portuguese-Jewish community counted 629 members and the High German community 556 members as of 31 December 1919, thus totalling 1185 Surinamese Jews. The numbers provided by the district registars coincide with the national census of 1921 largely, when 670 were listed as either belonging to the Portuguese or High German community.[25] Especially in the early twentieth century, a discrepancy is observed between the numbers provided by the communities and the numbers of the colonial registration. While according to colonial registration, the number of Jews in Suriname decreased from 837 Jews in 1915 to 786 in 1923, the

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[23]   Surinaamsche Staatkundige Almanach 1793. At this time, about 620 Portuguese Jews lived in Paramaribo, while 250 Portuguese Jews still resided in the plantation districts or Jodensavanne. Of the listed High German Jews 430 persons lived in Paramaribo; 30 High German Jews lived 'outside Paramaribo'.

[24]   Although the United States became increasingly popular as a migration destination among (Dutch) Jews after the American Independence, the North American Jewish community would only grow slowly until the 1830s. In 1830 about 1200 Jewish individuals lived in Paramaribo versus 1150 Jewish inhabitants in New York. See Teenstra 1835, Swierenga 1994:36.

[25]   Similarly, Oudschans Dentz mentions 662 Portuguese Jews alone in 1878, and 603 Portuguese Jews in 1926 living in Suriname Oudschans Dentz 1927:24.

Portuguese and High German communities report a stable Jewish population of around 1150 to 1200 Surinamese Jews.[26]

Despite its smallness, the Surinamese-Jewish community was not simply a religious minority in a overwhelming non-Jewish environment. During the late seventeenth century, the total population in Suriname counted approximately 800 whites (including the Jews) and a slave-population of around 4000 to 5000 persons.[27] During this early phase of settlement, Jews made up of more than a fourth of all white settlers in Suriname. A century later, their share had increased to about half of the total white population. In 1788, Nassy remarked, 'the number of the [white] inhabitants of the city [that is Paramaribo] amounts to two thousand souls, without counting the garrison of the country and those employed in the military service; and included in this number are 615 Portuguese Jews and 430 German Jews, altogether 1,045 persons'.[28]

The share of Jews as part of the total white population seems to have been stable throughout the nineteenth century. With an estimated white population of circa 2500 to 3000, and a stabilized Surinamese-Jewish community of more or less 1300 individuals, the Jews accounted for one third to half of the total white population.[29] Exact ratios between Jewish and non-Jewish whites in Suriname are difficult to give, however, and contain some uncertainties, as the given numbers do no always specify whether they include the military personal stationed in the colony, nor were Jews included in the category of 'whites' per se. During the nineteenth century, Jews came to dominate the group of locally born whites in Suriname. In 1842, Maarten Douwes Teenstra counted 1,403 'white natives' [*blanke inboorlingen*] residing in Paramaribo, of whom 'almost 1200 were Jews'.[30]

During the late ninenteenth century and early twentieth century, data on Suriname's white population become even less univocal. The population charts in the Colonial Reports no longer differentiated the population by colour of skin, but referred to *landaard* (a combination of nationality and origin with a strong racial connotation) differentiating, amongst others, between Europeans and 'natives'. Whereas Jews seem to have been included in the latter category, along with other white 'locals' such as the

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[26] See the successive Colonial Reports (*Koloniaal Verslag*) between 1868 and 1924.

[27] Van Stipriaan 1997:75, Schalkwijk 1994:73. Note that the Amerindian and maroon population is generally excluded from population estimates.

[28] Nassy 1974b:141. The Surinaamsche Staatkundige Almanach 1793 mentions 1330 Jews and 3360 whites living in the colony, probably including military personel.

[29] For estimates of the white population, see Van Stipriaan 1997:75, and Schalkwijk 1994:73.

[30] Teenstra 1842:45.

Table 1: Overview of the Surinamese-Jewish population, 1666 - 2006[31]

Year	Total	Portuguese	High German	Coloured
166o	150			
1684	232			
1695	550	475	75	
1787	1411	834	477	100
1791	1330	870	460	100
1811	1292	745	547	95
1831	1286			50
1842	1324			66
1845	1365	549	816	60
1921	670	352	318	
1974	250			
2007	150			

Boeroes (Dutch farmers and their descendents that settled in Suriname after 1845) the category of Europeans is far more ambiguous.[32]

Numbers are further complicated by the fact that the Surinamese Jews did not constitute an all-white community. The Jewish communities started 'colouring' halfway the eighteenth century. Towards the end of the eighteenth century a group of about hundred coloured Jews challenged the (self-)identification of the High German and Portuguese Jews as white colonial communities. Their numbers steadily declined during the nineteenth century. The census of 1811 listed 79 Portuguese-Jewish coloureds and 16 coloureds belonging to the High German community, totalling 95 coloured Jews, while the District register of 1845 listed about 60 coloured Jews. Noteworthy is that, by then, an estimated two-third of the coloured Jews – the larger part being females - belonged to the High German community. Fair amounts of other coloureds whose family names and Jewish housemates suggest a Jewish affiliation were not listed as Jews, but as members of a Christian congregation. In the end, the Surinamese Jews never counted more than 10% coloureds in their midst during the late eighteenth century, while halfway the nineteenth century their share had declined to about 5%. Albeit a small share of the Jewish population, coloureds Jews played an

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[31] Sources: Rens 1982:42; NA, 1.05.04.01: 213: folio 227-33; Nassy 1974b:44,142; Surinaamsche Staatkundige Almanach 1793; Koenen 1843:308; Teenstra 1835:101; Teenstra 1842:10; Bruijning 1977:319;. NA, 1.05.08.01: 688-694 (district register 1845) and NA, 2.10.19.01: 1-31 (census 1921).

[32] See also the remarks of Schalkwijk on this subject (Schalkwijk 1994:70-4). For an analysis of Jewish contextual whiteness in Suriname, see Chapter V.

important role in the demarcation of community boundaries in the Surinamese-Jewish communities.

Colonial adventures, poor migrants, and the Amsterdam connection

During the initial decades of the seventeenth century, Jewish migration to Suriname consisted mainly of Iberian Jews, some of them were merchants, or part of a mercantile network, while others were adventurers in search for a new life in the colonies. Many of these early Jewish settlers had a *converso* family background or belonged to families who had reverted to Judaism relatively recently. As noted before, these Spanish and Portuguese-Jewish migrants had been cut-off from rabbinical Judaism for generations and lacked a clear Jewish religious tradition. This set them apart from later Portuguese-Jewish migrants to Suriname, who came from a more firmly established rabbinical Judaic background of the Amsterdam-Jewish community, or from East European Jewish migrants and their long tradition in East European (Yiddish) Jewish communities.

Amsterdam was the dominant port of origin of Jewish migration to Suriname (with the excemption of the period of British Intermediate Rule between 1799 and 1816, when a number of English Jews settled in Suriname). Robert Cohen analysed all new Jewish arrivals between 1771 and 1795 (circa 332): 85% hailed from Amsterdam. Many of these new arrivals to Suriname would only stay for a relatively short period: visitors would quickly return to Amsterdam, while others continued their journey to other Caribbean destinations or the North-American mainland.[33] The number of Jews leaving Suriname almost equalled the number of new arrivals. According to the passengers-lists of outgoing ships, 311 Jews departed from Suriname between 1771 and 1795. Most of them (154) headed for Amsterdam, while St. Eustatius (63) and the North American mainland (72, especially Rhode Island, Boston, and New England) were popular destinations as well. Interestingly enough, there seems to have been hardly any Jewish traffic between Suriname and Curaçao.[34] Apperantly, both communities formed separate, rather independant nucleus of Jewish settlement in de Caribbean region.[35]

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[33] Cohen 1991:24-34.

[34] Cohen 1991:24-34. See also the remarks of Swierenga (1994) concerning the Jewish colonial Atlantic community.

[35] Indicative is also the lack of correspondence between the Surinamese and the Curaçao communities in the Surinamese-Jewish community archives. Note that the Surinamese and Curaçao Jewish communities were very different in character. Whereas Suriname Jews were mainly a plantation community that was locally oriented, Curaçao was a maritime and financial hub, with links all over the Atlantic basin. For a comparative discussion of the Portuguese Jewish communities of both colonies during the early colonial period, see Israel 2001; Israel 2002b and Klooster 2001.

Cohen's analysis shows that during the late eighteenth century, Jewish migration to Suriname was not an isolated affair, nor were the Surinamese-Jewish communities isolated settlements at the margins of an expanding world. They were part of a colonial Atlantic community that maintained ties with Jewish communities across the Atlantic basin. In particular, the link with St. Eustatius is remarkable: of those Jews travelling from Suriname to other destinations in the Caribbean, circa three quarters left for this small island. Jewish migration to St. Eustatius was economically motivated. Especially during the 1770s, St. Eustatius was the main transit harbour for the intra-Caribbean trade, not in the least for the French Antilles, who were often cut off from their mother country during the Anglo-French wars.[36] Many Jewish merchants had their own representatives as the island. When St. Eustatius lost its importance as a transit harbour after 1781, it also ceased to be an important destination for Jewish migrants.[37]

In light of this study, it should be noted that this constant coming and going of Jews to and from Suriname does not necessarily imply a continuously transforming community. Although a small number of those who left Suriname were never to return, the lion's share of these Jewish partings and arrivals involved short term travels, most likely trade- and business-related.[38] The Surinamese-Jewish community should not be viewed as a static community either. Notwithstanding the general tendency of family-based settlement over multiple generations, families did move back and forth. Some families that were dominant during the early phases of settlement were no longer present in Suriname during later years, while other families, who came to dominate the contemporary community during the period, only migrated to Suriname during the late nineteenth century

In addition, it is important to note that even though Jewish migration to Suriname found its origin in Amsterdam, this does not necessarily make the Jewish migrants particularly Dutch in their cultural orientation. Take, for example, Raquel d'Anavia and Mosseh Robles de Medina, who arrived in Suriname on 27 June 1729 with the ship 'Jan' from Amsterdam, together with their four children. Both Mosseh and Raquel were born in Spain, as were three of their children. The fourth child was born in Portugal. Thus, depending on their length of stay in Amsterdam, their cultural orientation would have been either Dutch or Iberian. Unfortunately, few details are known: after their arrival in Suriname, they settled in Paramaribo where they had four more children.[39]

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[36] Paquette 1996; Klooster 2003.

[37] Cohen 1991:29.

[38] Cohen 1991:24-34.

[39] For the family tree of the Robles de Medina family, see the genealogy site of Hugo J.K. de Vries at, http://www.kibrahacha.com (accessed, 30-6-2008).

The story of Raquel and Mosseh illustrates, moreover, that Jewish migration to Suriname was not just a male affair. Family migration as well as single female migration was a common occurrence among Surinamese Jews, whereas Christian colonists were predominantly male migrants, who also intended to stay for a shorter period, Consequently, the sex ratio among the Surinamese Jews tended to be more balanced than in the group of Christian colonists. It was only during the initial phase of settlement, and possibly during the late eighteenth century, that the male-female ratio was less balanced. During the late eighteenth century, when groups of impoverished Jews from Amsterdam settled in Suriname (*despachados)*, the Surinamese-Jewish community may have experienced a temporary demographic disequilibrium as well, as this type of migration was dominated by young single men.

During the late eighteenth century, the profile of the Jewish migrants changed profoundly. Late-eighteenth-century to early-nineteenth-century Jewish migration was characterized by a growing influx of poor migrants. This influx of new migrants was a direct consequence of the pauperization of the Jewish community of Amsterdam. In contrast to the persistent idea that this group consisted mainly of East European Jews, in reality a considerable number of poor Portuguese Jews were sent to Suriname as well. The continuing stream of *conversos* from the Iberian Peninsula, and Jews from the German and Polish territory, had drawn heavily on the resources of the Jewish communities of Amsterdam. A general economic malaise characterized European Jewry during the eighteenth century. The already precarious situation deteriorated with the crises of the 1760s and 1770s.[40]

The impoverishment of the Jewish communities of Amsterdam was not only an economic problem, but also seriously undermined the reputation and image of the Sephardi Jew as the wealthy and aristocratic urban dweller. The solution of the economist-philosopher Isaac de Pinto (1748) was both simple and elitist: discourage migration to Amsterdam by refusing support, and stimulate the poor to leave for the colonies, particularly Suriname. According to De Pinto, Suriname was a suitable destination because of the many similarities between the Surinamese-Jewish communities and the Amsterdam poor: they were all 'vagrants, worthless, poor and desperate people'.[41] De Pinto's idea to send poor Jews to the New World was indeed acted upon. Anyone who migrated would receive a small sum of money to settle elsewhere, provided that they would not return to Amsterdam for a fixed period of time (mostly fifteen years).[42] Between 1759 and 1814, 430 impoverished Spanish and

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[40] Bloom 1969 and Dillen 1940:593.

[41] Pinto 1748:17, quoted in Cohen 1991:21

[42] This was not a new policy to deal with the poor. Before the development of the New World communities, the destitute were sent to the Osmanian Empire or the Holy Land (Kaplan 1995). For a study of *despechado*-politics of the Amsterdam Portuguese community, see Cohen 1982b.

Portuguese Jewish men – some with wife and children – were sent away from Amsterdam, of which more than half embarked for the New World. A total of 135 Jewish families ended up in Suriname.[43] Although this policy did not result in the structural relief of poverty within the Amsterdam Portuguese Jewish community, the migration of Amsterdam's poor Jews did constitute a considerable part of the Jewish migration to Suriname at that time.

In addition to organized - semi-forced - migration to Suriname, poor Jews came to Suriname out of free will as well. For many, the only way out of their miserable lives in Europe pointed west. Their dreams for a better life in the New World did not always materialize, however. Take, for instance, Abraham Goldsmit whose life-story shows us that for some migrants, life as a white colonial settler was not as paradisiacal as was (and still is) common belief. In May 1818, the *Mahamad* (regents) of the High German community received a request of Abraham Goldsmit for assistance to leave the colony. Abraham Goldmit had arrived in Suriname earlier that year with the prospect of making a living as an adviser in religious affairs, only to find that all sermons were held in Dutch, a language he did not master. Since he had no knowledge of any other occupation, and had no money to provide for himself, he was forced to leave the colony. What made his case more pitiful was that Abraham was planning to meet his brother, whom he presumed to live in Suriname. Upon arrival in Suriname, however, he looked for his brother in vain, only to find himself in a position of abject poverty and misery barely three months later. Penniless and deprived of all basic needs, Abraham Goldsmit applied to the church council for help.[44] Eventually, the High German community leaders decided to grant Abraham Goldsmit the amount of hundred Surinamese guilders to finance his journey to some other place, 'where Heaven would take pity on his misery.'[45]

The story of Abraham was not exceptional. In November of that same year, the church council received a similar request of some L.M. Goldsmidt (presumably not family), who had arrived in Suriname in 1817 with his father, leaving his wife, children and family behind in Coerland (nowadays Latvia). Barely one year later, his hopes for a better life in the West had disappeared. He yearned for home, but he

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[43] The exact number of poor Jews that came to Suriname as *despachados* is unknown, however, due to lack of or incomplete information on the wives and children that accompanied the *despachados*. (GAA Registro dos Despachos, PA 334: 978-9). Second most popular destinations for the despachados was Curaçao: 73 of them were sent there. See also De Bethencourt 1925, Cohen 1982b and Cohen 1991:18-23.

[44] Note that Christian terminology was used to refer to religious institutions in the Surinamese-Jewish communities. Thus, the synagogue was generally referred to as 'church' in official documents, while congregational board (*Mahamad)* became known as the 'church council' during the nineteenth century.

[45] NSA Minutes 1816-1820; 19-5-1818.

lacked the means to find his way back to his family. His request was granted with the promise of sixty-five Surinamese guilders.[46]

The Surinamese-Jewish community elders looked upon the constant arrival of new poor Jewish migrants in Suriname with great discontent. According to Zvi Loker, leaders of New World Jewish communities tried to keep their communities from growing too rapidly in order to assure their precarious existence as a religious minority or underprivileged group. New members were not admitted, while some of their own members were sent off to other communities.[47] Arguments raised by the Surinamese-Jewish community elders against the semi-forced migration to Suriname seem to have been primarily driven by their own precarious economic situation. In a petition, they pleaded against the coming of poor Jewish migrants, pointing at the deterioration of the Surinamese plantation economy, and the constant threat of maroon attacks that had caused various community members to leave to colony.[48] Alternative motives were involved as well. Especially the Portuguese-Jewish community elders were deeply concerned with retaining their status as a colonial elite. The poor Jewish settlers – who lived side by side with the free black and coloured population of Paramaribo – posed not only a direct threat to the carefully constructed (self-)image of the Portuguese-Jewish community, but also to the white colonial community at large. Not surprisingly, colonial authorities were not very happy to welcome poor migrants in the colony either. The authorities decided that only those Jews who were wealthy enough to own a plantation were allowed to settle in Suriname.[49]

Decline

Halfway the nineteenth century, large-scale Jewish migration came to an end, and the Jewish community in Suriname transformed from a migrant community into a settler community with a predominantly resident population instead. The stop of a constant flow of new Jewish migrants, culturally embedded in European Jewish backgrounds, fostered the localization of the Surinamese-Jewish community, while differences between the High German and Portuguese communities became less pronounced. Occasional Jewish migration to Suriname continued, however, and could have considerable impact on the Surinamese-Jewish communities.

In the 1880s, a handful of Russian Jews settled in Suriname after a series of violent pogroms in the Russian territory. It was only due to the intervention of the Surinamese-Jewish community leaders that the arrival of a larger group of Jewish

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[46] NSA Minutes 1816-1820: 26-11-1818.

[47] Loker 1980:183.

[48] Cohen 1991:21-2.

[49] Wolbers 1861:173.

refugees from Russia, a proposal of the Amsterdam-Jewish community, was prevented. Ten years later, news arrived on renewed violence against Russian Jews. The joint church councils of the Portuguese and High German communities considered the possibility of additional Russian migration 'of unmarried craftsmen' to Suriname since the earlier Russian migrants (those of 1882) 'had behaved well as painters and artisans'. It was considered that a 'carefully regulated migration of some of those unfortunates can be productive, first for those wretches, and second for the society in which they will find themselves'.[50] Ultimately, only a few (the exact number remains unclear) Russian families would arrive in Suriname during the late nineteenth century.

A more dramatic event of contemporary Jewish migration to Suriname occurred in 1942 and 1943 when two transports of circa 225 Jewish war refugees arrived in Suriname.[51] By then, the Surinamese-Jewish communities amounted an estimated 500 souls. The impact – albeit temporarily – of a group of 225 Jewish migrants, firmly embedded in a European Jewish tradition, on Surinamese-Jewish community life was considerable. Some Surinamese Jews remember the vividness of Jewish community life during these years: the synagogues services were better attended than ever and community activities were organized on a more regular basis.[52] Yet, the archived documents of the High German community give us an alternate and more complex view of these war years, documenting animosities between the refugees and 'old' community members, and the wish of the refugees to organize separate synagogue services. Especially the use of the Portuguese rite in a High German synagogue – one

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[50] NA 1.05.11.18:519: 17-1-1892; NSA Minutes 1880-1893: 12-6-1882 and 28-6-1882; NSA Minutes 1888-1895: 17-1-1892.

[51] The correspondence between Ministry of Colony (seated in London), the Governor of Suriname and various ambassadors related to the Jewish war refugees can be found in NA 2.10.18:571. This archive contains telegrams, passenger lists, reports of the secret services and the like. For insights into the reception of the refugees by the Surinamese-Jewish community, and consequences for Surinamese-Jewish daily life, see various documents in NSA Minutes 1939-1946 and NSA Incoming Letters 1938-1945. Some of the experiences of the refugees and their escape from Europe are recorded in NA 2.04.76:221.

[52] Paramaribo, March 2003. In fact, the war years saw an overall awakening of Jewish consciousness in Suriname. For instance, the Surinaamsche Zionisten Bond (Surinamese Zionist Society) was established in February 1941, while a community paper (Teroenga) was issued on a monthly basis, between 1939 and 1969. However, the revival of Surinamese-Jewish consciousness was largely dependent upon the efforts of only a handful of active community members, such as Philip Abraham Samson, who held leading positions in the High German community and the Surinaamsche Zionisten Bond; he was the co-founder of Teroenga and the initiator of many cultural events. His passion for the history of the Surinamese-Jewish community, and Suriname in general, has resulted in an extensive collection of publications, correspondence and other material relating to Suriname and the Surinamese Jews. The archive of Ph. A. Samson is housed by the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana in Amsterdam. For a detailed inventory of the Samson archive, see Kruijer-Poesiat 1998a and 1998b.

of the peculiarities of the Surinamese-Jewish community – was a thorn in the flesh of the Jewish refugees.[53]

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonization considered Suriname as a destination for displaced Jews. The Freeland League was in many ways the antithesis of the Zionist movement. Whereas Zionists believed that the 'Jewish problem' could only be solved by large-scale Jewish territorial colonization of Israel, the Freeland League searched for alternative places suitable for Jewish colonisation. In Australia, the Freeland League attempted to persuade the government to create a semi-autonomous settlement for 50,000 Jews in a sparsely populated region of that country. Similar plans were made for Jewish colonization of Suriname. In 1947, a delegation of the Freeland League arrived in Suriname to discuss the plans for large-scale Jewish colonization in Suriname with the Surinamese authorities.[54] After a fierce debate in the Chambers of States of Suriname [Staten van Suriname, the colonial parliament] on June 27th of 1947, it was agreed by majority vote (seven against five) that up to 30.000 Jews, slightly less than the smallest group present in Suriname (being the Javanese), would be allowed to settle in Suriname in the district of Saramacca.[55] The plans for Jewish colonization in Suriname were highly criticized by various groups in Suriname and emotions ran high during the preceding months.[56] Some Surinamese Jews supported the plans enthusiastically; others were afraid that the arrival of a large number of Polish Jews would only foster anti-Semitism in Suriname. Self-evidently, the Zionist movement perceived the plans of Jewish colonization as treason to the 'Jewish cause'. Mass-migration of displaced Jews to Suriname never took place: the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 thwarted all plans of any large-scale Jewish migration to Suriname.[57]

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[53] Presumably, the use of the Portuguese rite in the High German synagogue dates back to the early colonial period when High German settlers were incorporated in the Portuguese-Jewish community. When a separate High German community was established in 1734, the High German Jews held on to the use of the Portuguese rite in their synagogue. It is commonly believed that the use of the Portuguese rite was commanded by the Portuguese Jews as part of the separation act between both groups, and should therefore be understood as a manifestation of the paternalistic relationship between the Portuguese and High German communities (for instance, Arbell 2002:10 and Emanuels 1982:12). However, the official separation acts (NA 1.05.04.02:256: 50-65) do not mention any such arrangements, keeping the precise origin of the use the Portuguese rite in the High German synagogue unknown. Throughout their history, the High German Jews did hold on to their custom, even though if was a cause of conflict between the High German *Mahamad* and serving rabbis coming from abroad on several occasions.

[54] See Freeland League 1947 and 1948.

[55] *Verslag der Handelingen van de Staten van Suriname* , 27-6-1947. Also: *De West*, 1-7-1047.

[56] See also Chapter V.

[57] Documents concerning the activities of the Freeland League in Suriname can also be found in NA 2.10.26: 2194 and NA 2.10.01: 11840-11843. For a highly critical view of Jewish colonization in Suriname, see the articles in Teroenga, 8:6 to 9:2 (May to December 1947). The perspective of the

(continued)

In the course of the 1950s, a definitive decline of the Surinamese-Jewish community set in. In the slipstream of the general emigration of elite Surinamese to the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s, many Jews left Suriname, too. The socio-cultural consequences of these demographic changes were accordingly: empty synagogues, little interest for cultural or religious activities, and not enough Jewish clientele to bear the costs for a ritual butcher, rabbi or circumciser.[58] In 1974, the Surinamese Jewish communities counted an estimated 250 members in total. Today, the Jewish community counts about 150 member, of whom only a few dozen can be considered as participating members, either socially or religiously. The fact that the Surinamese-Jewish community had shrunk to such small numbers, facilitated the rethinking of community boundaries in post-slavery Suriname, and marked a new phase in the localization of the Surinamese-Jewish community.

3   PLACES OF SETTLEMENT

Jodensavanne (Jewish Savannah) and Paramaribo were the two primary sites of Jewish settlement in Suriname. Jodensavanne was the centre of Portuguese-Jewish life until the late eighteenth century, while Paramaribo, the capital and colonial administrative centre of Suriname, was the place where both High German Jews and Portuguese Jews have lived since the early days of colonial settlement in Suriname. Paramaribo became the principal place of Jewish settlement in nineteenth century Suriname.

Jodensavanne: heart of the Portuguese Jewish planters community

Jodensavanne was founded in 1682 through the donation of 25 acres of land and a sum of money, earmarked for the construction of a brick synagogue, by Samuel Nassy, a scion of the Nassy family. The gift was later supplemented by additional donations of land by both Samuel Nassy and the Dutch colonial authorities in their efforts to stimulate wealthy Portuguese-Jewish colonists to settle in Suriname.[59] The establishment of the basic institutions, such as a cemetery and houses of prayer or synagogues, was of crucial importance for the creation of Jewish communal life. A

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Surinameesche Zionisten Bond on this matter can be found in NSA Archive of the SZB, box 5, 1946-1948.

[58]   Evelien Gans paints a penetrating picture of the confined and inward-looking Surinamese-Jewish community of the 1950s, and the wonderment of a Dutch Jewish family over the peculiarities they encounter in Suriname (Gans 2008).

[59]   Oudschans Dentz 1927:52. and Nassy 1974b:39. For the donation of 100 acres of land to Jodensavanne on 12 September 1691 by Governor van Scharphuizen, see Recueil der Priviligien vergund aan de Portugees Joodse Natie in Suriname tot 1746, NA 1.05.11.18:94.

small village was constructed on the savannah soil, on the sandy right banks of the Suriname River. Although contemporary Jews simply referred to the village as 'the Savannah', non-Jewish colonists referred to the place as 'Jodensavanne', by which name it is still known today.

The main square, situated on a hill overlooking the Suriname River, housed the synagogue Berache ve Shalom (Blessing and Peace).[60] Various views of Jodensavanne depict the synagogue as by far the tallest of the whole village[61], surrounded by several houses, some communal buildings, a coffee shop, a billiard hall, a fire station, and the burial grounds (see figure 1 to 3).[62] Rachel Frankel points out that, in contrast to European Jews, who often lived in cramped cities and ghettos, the Portuguese Jews of Suriname had full freedom to plan and construct Jodensavanne to their liking, including the synagogue. Most striking, according to Frankel, is the open town plan of Jodensavanne and the vulnerable location of the synagogue: approachable from all sides. 'Despite the harsh reality of the threat of slave revolts or of raids from former slaves living independently in their newly established villages in the interior, from European powers, and from native Americans, the town was laid out as in a perfect world'. The synagogue at Jodensavanne was further characterized by its typical Dutch-style architecture: brick walls with squared-off top parts. Frankel therefore believes that a Dutch (non-Jewish) architect was involved in the construction of the synagogue of Jodensavanne, since Jews were excluded from the building guilds.[63]

Throughout the eighteenth century, Jodensavanne was the heart of Portuguese-Jewish community life where the inhabitants shared close economic and family ties. They lived in each other's proximity on the many Jewish plantations along the Suriname River, fairly isolated from the rest of Surinamese society. While few people inhabited the village on a daily basis, the majority lived on their plantations surrounding Jodensavanne. On Sabbath and during the High Holydays, the otherwise drowsy township transformed in a lively spot filled with planters with their families

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[60] Frankel 1999:422.

[61] Historical descriptions and paintings of Jodensavanne can be found in Teenstra 1835, Stedman 1988, Lammens 1982 , Nassy 1974b, Voorduin and Van Heemskerck van Beest 1860, and Benoit 1839.

[62] Teenstra 1835:134-44.

[63] Frankel 1999:419. Frankel's argument poses some problems though. During the construction years, the threat of maroon attacks to which Frankel refers, was no part of daily life yet. The synagogue at Jodensavanne was inaugurated in 1685, while the first reported maroon attack on a plantation occurred some years later in 1690. So, the open town plan of Jodensavanne reflects a phase in the colonial history of Suriname, wherein the state of mind of white colonists was not yet 'ruled by fear' (Van Lier 1971:7-8. Moreover, according to Nassy, Jewish colonists built the synagogue at Jodensavanne themselves, using self-made bricks; the same type of bricks used for the masonry of the boiling vats used for the refining of sugar (Nassy:29 and Benjamins 1914:153, 393).

Figure 1: View on Jodensavanne by P.J. Benoit (1839)
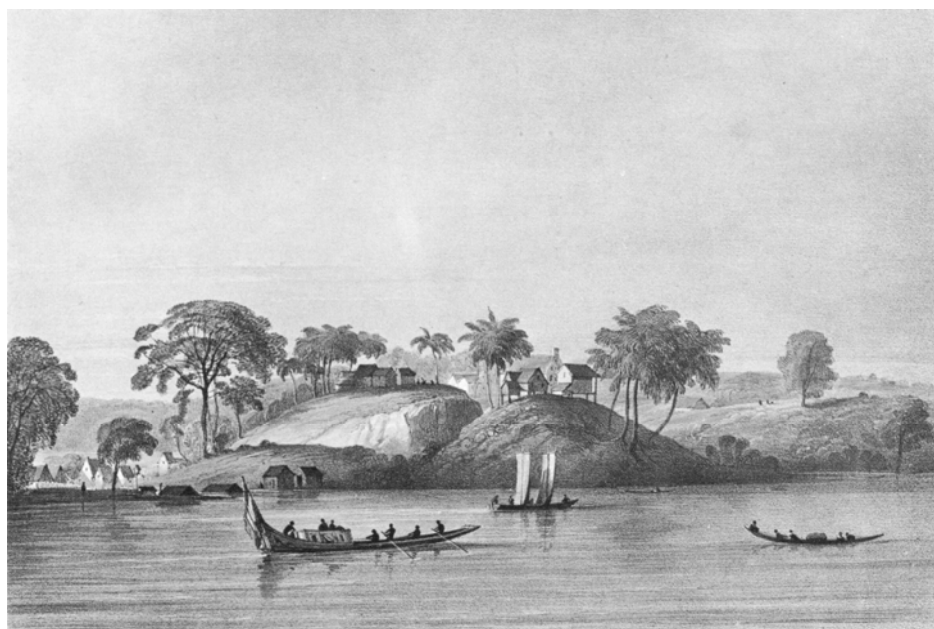
Figure 2: View on Suriname River and Jodensavanne by P.J. Benoit (1839)
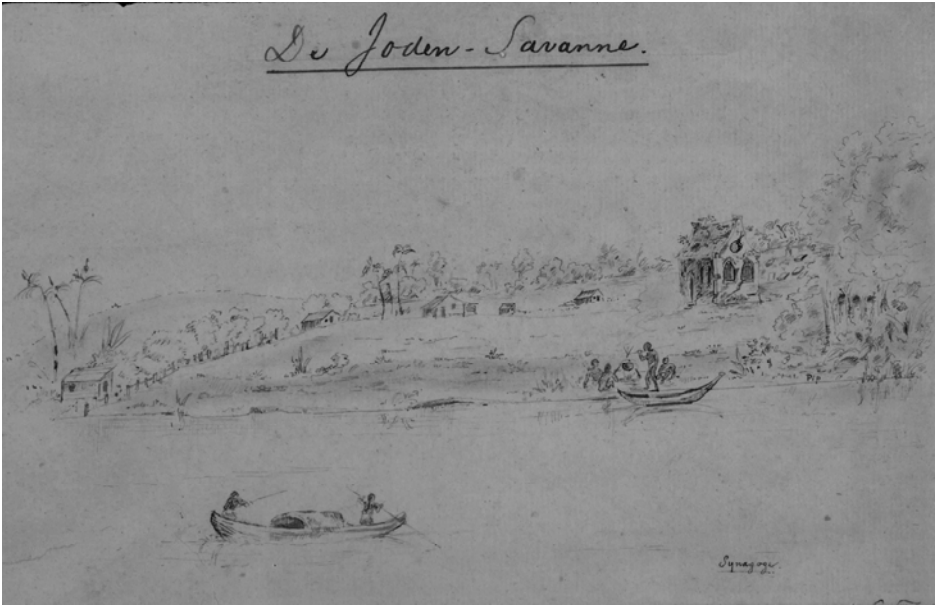
Figure 3: Drawing by G.P.H. Zimmerman (1863-1868) showing a deserted Jodensavanne
and the ruins of the synagogue (collection KIT Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam)

and slaves.[64] During this time, the township of Jodensavanne did not only function as a
religious centre, but also as a social hot spot. It was the place where the inhabitants of
Jodensavanne got married, where they worshipped, buried their death and shared the
latest gossip from Paramaribo. Even for those Portuguese Jews who were engaged in
trade and shipping, and lived in and around Paramaribo, Jodensavanne was the heart of
community life. Jodensavanne maintained its central function until the late eighteenth
century. By then, the consequences of the plantation crisis of the 1770s had changed
the foundations of the Jewish community for good. Jewish planters left their loss-
making properties in Jodensavanne en masse and moved away to Paramaribo.

At the turn of that century, the symbol of the Surinamese-Jewish plantocracy was
nearly deserted and Portuguese-Jewish community life had been fully relocated to
Paramaribo. Only some impoverished families remained, earning a meagre living from
some small trade with a nearby-stationed military post at the Cordonpad: a military
defence line designed to protect the nearby plantations against attacks from runaway
slaves.[65] In 1835, Teenstra gave a depressing description of this once illustrious place:

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[64] For a description of Jodensavanne, see also Nassy 1974b:148-152.

[65] The Cordonpad consisted of a wide bridle path with military posts at regular distances. This defence line
ran from Jodensavanne down to the Atlantic coastline. The supply post established near Jodensavanne
was called Post Gelderland. In the surroundings of Jodensavanne, long stretches of this Cordonpad can
still be traced back today.

'Everywhere one finds oppressive poverty on the remnants of previous greatness; one comes across some grey and worn-out old Israelites in old crumbling houses, surrounded by gardens run wild.'[66] By then, Jodensavanne had already lost its function as a community centre, although the synagogue remained its ritual function until the 1860s, especially for celebrating the High Holidays. After that, it fell into ruins and became overgrown by dense forest vegetation.

It was only in the course of the twentieth century that Jodensavanne gained a new function. Deeply embedded in the historical consciousness of the remaining Surinamese Jews, Jodensavanne became a symbol of a precious heritage: a long gone, but glorious past that continues to provide the Surinamese-Jewish community with an aura of supremacy and the status of an old colonial elite.[67] This image of Jodensavanne generally fails to recognize the harsh day-to-day reality of plantation life in a slave-colony. Running a sugar plantation was very labour intensive; successful operation of these plantations required a significant supply of labour. Large numbers of enslaved Africans were imported to this purpose. Jodensavanne also refers to this history of slavery and exploitation. After all, its *raison d'être* were the surrounding Jewish plantations where thousands of African slaves broke their backs and lost their lives while providing the necessary labour. Slavery was the social and economic system on which the Surinamese society thrived, and any historical study of the Surinamese-Jewish community should consider this. The harshness of a plantation life and slave economy not only affected the lives of the slaves, but took its toll among the Jewish settlers as well who had to deal with tropical diseases, high infant mortality and not to mention the constant threat of raids by runaway slaves (maroons). Evidence for this particular historical reality can be found in the oral tradition of the Saramaccan maroons, the inscriptions in the tombstones of the various Jewish cemeteries in and around Jodensavanne, or in the persistent idea of the Jewish planter as the cruellest in its sort, in Suriname's historical memory and abroad.[68] This part of the Surinamese-Jewish experience – both lived and remembered – will be given due consideration in the following chapters.

The multi-ethnic environment of Paramaribo

Jews have lived in Paramaribo from the moment of first settlement. Paramaribo was the principal place of High German Jewish settlement in Suriname. Yet, also Portuguese Jews who were not active in the plantation economy, but engaged in trade

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[66] Teenstra 1835:135-6. Teenstra's description dates from 1828 when he visited Jodensavanne.

[67] For a discussion of colonial nostalgia, and the symbolic meaning of Jodensavanne, see Chapter VII.

[68] For 'Jewish traces' in Saramaccan oral tradition, see Price 1990. The stereotyped image of the cruel Jewish planter is discussed in Chapter V

and shipping, settled in Paramaribo straight away. The establishment of a Jewish community in Paramaribo, or rather, of two Jewish communities, took place against the background of an urban environment that had evolved from a small colonial settlement to a multi-ethnic administrative centre and port community during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Even though Jodensavanne has received the lion's share of historiographic attention as the place of Surinamese Jews settlement, it was against the background of a transforming Paramaribo that the Surinamese-Jewish communities experienced some of their most dramatic changes.

When a Jewish community was established in Suriname during the mid seventeenth century, Paramaribo was no more than a hamlet consisting of only a few dozen houses (mainly governmental buildings), some inns and public houses, all located along the water's edge, called Waterkant.[69] In the course of subsequent decades, Paramaribo would grow to become a small port town. In 1788, about 1119 main houses were reported in Paramaribo, and in 1863 a total of 1643 houses were counted.[70] Paramaribo became the service centre of the colony and port of embarkation of any person or commodity to Suriname (in order to ensure that taxes were paid all colonial commodities had to pass through Paramaribo). Besides, Paramaribo was the residence of the governor, the location of the courts, Suriname's prison (Fort Zeelandia), and other administrative institutions.

Various visitors and residents have described the scenery of Paramaribo and its surroundings in dreamlike phrasings: the plantation dwellings, the Fort Nieuw Amsterdam and then – finally –Paramaribo, 'elegant and rich, with its wide and spacious streets, flanked on either side by lemon trees, orange trees and tamarind trees'.[71] The other face of Paramaribo was hidden behind this façade of 'la propreté hollandaise' (Dutch cleanliness) and colonial order that was manifested in the colonial Dutch-baroque architectural style.[72] In the backyards of the white wooden mansions, lived Paramaribo's poor in slums and ramshackle houses. In the 1820s, when Paramaribo was largely destroyed by a catastrophic fire, these small dwellings were reported to outnumber Paramaribo's main houses by a factor of three.[73]

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[69] Van Lier 1971:28-9. Upon arrival in Paramaribo in 1693, Governor van Sommelsdijck reported, that the 'borough of Paramaribo consisted of only 27 or 28 houses, mostly taverns and bars', quoted in Goslinga 1985:511.

[70] See Nassy 1974b:20 and Benjamins 1914:551. However, as noted by Rosemarijn Hoefte, these numbers presumably do not include the dwellings of Paramaribo's poor: the slaves, the free coloureds, as well as poor whites among whom where many Jews. See Hoefte 2001:11.

[71] Benoit 1839:16.

[72] Benoit 1839:16. For Dutch colonial architecture in Suriname, see Temmink Groll 1973.

[73] Hoefte 2001:11.

During the earlier stages of colonial rule, socio-demographic patterns in Paramaribo reflected the ideals of a race-based slave society. A strict division between black slaves and free whites was maintained, both on the plantations as in Paramaribo itself. Official reports prior to 1770 barely mention the presence of free blacks or free coloureds in Paramaribo altogether.[74] While it would be a misapprehension to conclude that no non-whites had settled in Paramaribo – house slaves have always been part of the colonial community of Paramaribo – it does indicate that at that time, Paramaribo was not the multi-ethnic environment it would become later. From the mid eighteenth century onwards, Paramaribo transformed from a small colonial township into a multi-ethnic urban setting and kaleidoscopic cultural environment.[75] Contemporary visitors to Suriname have noted this heterogeneous character of Paramaribo in their reports. According to John Gabriel Stedman, a captain stationed in Suriname to fight the Maroons between 1773 to 1777, the streets of Paramaribo were 'crowded with Planters, Sailors, Soldiers, Jews, Indians and Negroes', while the Dutch colonial official A.F. Lammens described Paramaribo as 'a city right out of The Arabian Nights'.[76]

Of particular relevance for this study, is the fact that from the late eighteenth to early twentieth century, the environment of the Surinamese Jews was a mixed colonial urban environment, wherein blacks, coloureds (both free and enslaved) and whites lived in close proximity. Whereas the rich white colonists occupied the street facing mansions, the blacks, the slaves – but also the poor whites – lived in the backyards.[77] Rosemary Brana-Shute aptly describes this motley collection of languages, religions, cultures, class segments, and skin colours that made up the population of Paramaribo:

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[74] Brana-Shute 1985:82.

[75] As noted by Rosemary Brana-Shute in her study of manumission in Suriname, statistics on the composition of the inhabitants of Paramaribo should be approached with great care. According to Van Lier, 10 to 30 slaves lived in each house in Paramaribo during the early nineteenth century (Lier 1971:149). These numbers seem to be overestimated, however. G.A. de Bruijne counts an average 5,2 slaves per backyard in two of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Paramaribo in 1846 and 1847. Compare Brana-Shute 1985, 93; Van Lier 1971, 149 and De Bruijne 1976:135. For the Wijkregisters between 1828 and 1845, see NA 1.05.11.09: 635-698. The registers of 1846 and 1847 are housed in the Lands Archiefdienst, Centraal Archief Paramaribo (National Archive of Suriname). See also the remarks of Hoefte on this matter, who cautions not to take the estimated slave-freemen ratio that are based on census material at face value. A person listed as white in these censuses could actually be of mixed descent, which indicates the ambiguousness of 'colour' in a racially defined society. Moreover, forms were often incomplete or not returned at all. See Hoefte 2001:21.

[76] Stedman 1988:236 and :63. Both quotes are taken from Hoefte 2001:11. Note the bias towards Orientalism in either depiction of Paramaribo. Moreover, one can not help wondering whether the list of Stedman entails some sort of colonial order, ranking from the white planter, to other white residents (sailors and soldiers), down to the category of the colonial 'others' at the bottom of the list: the Jew, the Indian and the Negroe.

[77] Brana-Shute 1990:121-3.

> Not only were resident Europeans divided by class, but they also spoke a number of languages, by necessity including the local creole lingua franca, *Sranan Tongo*, used by slaves. The majority of urban whites by the last decades of the [eighteenth] century may well have been Jews, not Christians; the Christians themselves belonged to a number of different Protestant denominations. The consequent cultural kaleidoscope that constituted Paramaribo was complicated and enhanced by the fact that a majority of its population was African and of African descent and, in the eighteenth century, neither Europeanized or Christianized. Whites were never segregated in neighbourhoods separate from blacks or coloureds. Rich and poor free blacks and whites generally lived next to each other; whites occupied the houses on the street front, in deference of their lofty status, while slaves lived in the yards behind them.[78]

In other words, in Paramaribo colonial whites (including the Jews) never lived segregated from non-whites in separate neighbourhoods.[79] There was, however, a specific pattern of Jewish settlement in Paramaribo that resulted in a strong concentration of Jewish households in certain streets.[80] For instance, a large proportion of Jewish small traders resided in the harbour district, while the 'cheap' housing along the Knuffelsgracht attracted many poor Jewish settlers. A concentration of Jewish colonists could also be found in the immediate environment of the two synagogues at the Heerenstraat and the Keizerstraat, such as for instance in the Joden Breestraat. Still, the idea of a largely separated Surinamese-Jewish community is flawed. Even though the Surinamese Jews had their own practice and place of worship, and while their social life – to a certain extent – set them apart from the non-Jewish residents of Paramaribo, they nonetheless moved around and were integral part of a highly mixed cultural environment, which they could not and did not ignore. The mixed colonial environment of Paramaribo was the social and cultural background of the Surinamese-Jewish community during the long nineteenth century. Inevitably, this particular environment left its marks on the process of localization of the Surinamese Jews.

Apart from its heterogeneous cultural composition, Paramaribo was characterized by increasing numbers of free blacks and coloured and their growing socio-economic importance. Especially during the nineteenth century, light skinned 'coloureds' gained considerable influence, affecting and complicating social relations in Suriname.[81] The history of so-called 'coloured' or mulatto Jews cannot be understood outside this framework of a creolizing Surinamese society. Of enormous

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[78]   Brana-Shute 1990:122.

[79]   In 1761, members of the Court of Police suggested the establishment of a Jewish quarter in Paramaribo; the plan was never implemented (Wolbers 1861:273).

[80]   De Bruijne 1976:197-8.

[81]   Hoefte 2001:12-3.

impact, moreover, was the abolition of slavery in 1863. During the late nineteenth century, a considerable proportion of the freed slaves left the plantation districts and moved to Paramaribo resulting in an enormous increase of the proportion of Afro-Surinamese population in Paramaribo. The city's ethnic face transformed and Sranan Tongo became the tongue of Paramaribo. The radical transformations seen in the Surinamese society, not only deeply influenced internal relationships in the Surinamese-Jewish community, but can also be traced in the relation with non-Jewish groups in Suriname.

Informal interactions and cross-cultural contacts

A significant part of day-to-day life of the Surinamese Jews involved cross-cultural contacts, in particular with the Afro-Surinamese population. Jewish children played with slave-children, and were fed and comforted by their creole nannies. At an early stage, cultural interaction became rather rule than an exception. Particularly Jewish women who lived on the plantations could lead rather isolated lives on their estates, relatively far removed from other Jews, let alone non-Jewish whites. Instead, they were surrounded by an Afro-Surinamese slave-population, perhaps some Indians and only a few whites (the average black to white ratio in the plantation district was often 1 to 65).[82]

Considering language as a cultural indicator, it is interesting to see which vernacular the Surinamese Jews used in their day-to-day activities. Given the fact that the community archives are written in Portuguese until 1837, it is sometimes believed that the Portuguese-Jewish community mainly spoke Portuguese and Spanish up to the early nineteenth century. Yet the language of official communication is not necessarily the language of everyday life. Rather, the language used in notary archives is probably a better indication of the common parlance of the Surinamese Jews. Wills and deeds always had to be read and signed by the person in question and therefore give a good indication of the language used by ordinary Jews in Suriname. Actually, the Surinamese notary archives contain few Spanish or Portuguese documents; the protocols of the Jewish notaries Abraham Bueno de Mesquita and Carrilho de Barios that cover the period between 1787 and 1825, for example, only contain occasional documents written in Portuguese. The vast majority of the wills and deeds are written in Dutch. This indicates that Portuguese Jews were more involved with Dutch culture during this period, than is sometimes believed: Dutch had become their mother tongue rather than merely a language used for communicating with 'the world outside'.[83]

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[82] Van Lier 1971:53.

[83] Note that the function of Jewish *jurator* was installed in 1754 to accommodate the Portuguese Jews and prevent them from incurring large expenses for the translation of certain notary acts into Dutch. The function of Jewish *jurator* was abolished in 1825. According to Nassy the function of *jurator* became
(continued)

Even so, the use of Dutch was not a matter of course neither, particularly in the case of the Portuguese-Jewish women who lived in the plantation districts. Many of them needed their wills translated in Sranan because they did not master any other language.[84] Take for instance Ribca Fernandes, who lived on the wood plantation Harlem. When she had her will drawn up by the Jewish notary Carrilho de Barrios, he noticed that she did not understand any Dutch. Apparently, she did not speak Portuguese either, as various notary deeds of De Barrios were written in that language. Her will was then read to her by 'the sworn translator, J.B. Louzada in the Negro-English language'. Likewise, in *Essay Historique* David Nassy complains of Portuguese-Jewish women 'continually chattering in Negro-English and surrounded by Negresses, the women and their daughters'.[85] Thus, Sranan was not just a language spoken by Surinamese Jews in communication with their slaves; for some Jews – mainly women – it was their first tongue.[86] The main social context wherein these Portuguese-Jewish women participated was a by Afro-Surinamese dominated creole environment. The often-presumed cosmopolitan worldview of the Sephardic New World communities was not theirs; in all likelihood, these women were first and foremost creole women.

In Paramaribo, Jews did not live as a secluded community either: social interactions across boundaries defined by colour and religion were part of everyday life. Some of these interactions took place in a context of master-slave relationships; others were defined by a social context that was less extreme. Particularly lower-class whites (for instance the petty shopkeepers) lived and worked side by side with Paramaribo's free black and coloured population. This sharing of social and economic spaces would make this group more inclined to mixing than the Jewish elites. Evidently, such interactions resulted in a continuous exchange of cultural notions between diverse groups. The Jewish cemeteries of Paramaribo locate several instances of tangible creole culture, most notable the creole gravemarkers. Food was also a

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virtually useless in 1775, when the *jurators* were no longer allowed to execute acts in Paramaribo (where by then the majority of the Portuguese Jews came to live). However, the protocols of Abraham Bueno de Mesquita, who was *jurator* between 1787 and 1799, and his predecessor a de Barrios (1814-1825), contain hardly any documents written in Portuguese. The majority of the deeds were executed in Dutch, which had become the mother tongue for most Portuguese Jews by then. See Schiltkamp 1982:62, and Nassy 1974b:106-7. For the original documents, see NA, 1.05.11.14:802.

[84]   NA 1.05.11.14:802: Protocol Barrios: 19-11-1819.

[85]   Nassy 1974b:154.

[86]   Sometimes Jewish men only spoke Sranan as well. Take for example Jeosua de la Parra and Judith de la Parra, born Fernandes. They lived at the plantation La Diligence located at the Suriname River. As they did not master Dutch they were assisted by a sworn translator 'in the Negro-English language', when drawing up their will. Jeosua and Judith de la Parra wished to be buried at Jodensavanne and have their graves covered with marble tombstones. Historic information on plantation-owners (mainly drawn from notarial deeds housed in the Dutch National Archive) can be found on the website of the national archive of Suriname, www.landsarchief.sr/geschiedenis/plantages (accessed, 6-7-2007).

common field of cultural interaction, traceable in Surinamese-Jewish history in the use of cassava-bread as a substitute for the *matze* in times of short supplies, or in the development of creole (Afro-Jewish) dishes such as 'pom', a Surinamese festive dish, whose origin is unclear but nevertheless passionately claimed by both Afro-Surinamese and Surinamese Jews. Another Afro-Surinamese cultural phenomenon that is the outcome of complex processes of cultural exchange, includes the complex Afro-Surinamese belief in *trefoe* (taboos on certain foods that are believed to cause leprosy) a word that is terminologically connected to the Hebrew word of *treef*, and bears some resemblance to Jewish dietary rule (*kashrut*). Other examples are *ogri ai* (evil eye) and *aiti dey*, an eight-day mourning period that prevails among the Afro-Surinamese population, and which, according to common Surinamese-Jewish belief, is a cultural blending of the seven days of mourning observed by the Jews, mixed with elements of an African cult of the dead.'[87]

That cross-cultural interactions could sometimes lead to rather peculiar events, is illustrated by the following recollection of rabbi Roos of a memorable synagogue service he conducted when serving in Suriname between 1893 and 1912:

> It had remained dry for much longer than usual, water had to be imported by train from the inland and was expensive to buy; everyone, big and small, moaned under the scorching heat. The community then decided to hold an extra service following old customs for such circumstances, with psalms of penance and sjofar-tones, reconciling words and closing prayer. [The synagogue] was packed with men and women, Jews and non-Jews [...] and when it truly began to rain at the end of the sermon [...] few of those present in the women's gallery prostrated spontaneously and, with their arms stretched towards heaven, called out: '*djoe gadoe tranga*' (the Lord of the Jews is powerful).[88]

Although daily interactions between Jews and non-Jews were crucial to the process of creolization, the ways in which creolization manifested itself in daily life are seldom documented, therefore intangible for historical analysis. However, when informal interactions gave rise to conflicts, we may be able to infer something from the testimonies put forward as evidence in the proceedings. One of such categories of

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[87] (Oppenheimer 1948:126). Note that these beliefs all relate to the supernatural. Although cultural interaction between Surinamese Jews and the Afro-Surinamese population during the centuries of mutual contact has been inevitable, any self-evident assumption of a dominant Jewish culture that influences a 'weaker' African culture, is, as noted by Richard Price, rather silly and maximalist (Price, quoted in Schorsch 2004:453. For examples of an alleged Jewish origin of these Afro-Surinamese customs, see Samson 1954b, Oppenheimer 194865-75, the Samson archive contains a copy of the article. See also Waller 1965:44-8, and Benjamins 1914:686-7. For Afro-Surinamese perception and practices on mourning, death and death rituals, see Van der Pijl 2007.

[88] Quoted in a special edition of the Surinamese-Jewish magazine *Teroenga,* dedicated to Rabbi Roos (June 1953, volume 14:7).

recorded critical events are mixed relationships and marriages: it is through analysis and close reading of marrying the 'other', that informal interactions and cross-cultural contacts are addressed in this study most explicitly.

One final remark should be made regarding the heterogeneous cultural character of Paramaribo (and the Surinamese society at large). Although Suriname was a Dutch colony for the larger part of Surinamese-Jewish history, it is important to note that during the early colonial period Suriname was not particularly Dutch in character. Many planters had little or no particular Dutch cultural background, let alone the Indian population and the imported West African slaves. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, around half of the planters population was of non-Dutch origin; they were French, German, British and Scots. Dutch colonists, including Jews from diverse origin and cultural orientation, made up the rest.[89] During the years of British Intermediate Rule (1799-1816), a consequence of the Napoleontic wars and the resulting political vacuum in the region, the number of English colonists (including some English Jews) in Suriname increased. In fact, it was well into the nineteenth century that the Dutch state increased its control over her colonies and a process of 'Dutchification' set off: culturally, through Christianization and compulsory education; and politically, through centralising administrative rule and authority. The fact that Suriname could only balance its budget with the support of Dutch state subsidy increased Dutch control over Suriname even more.[90]

In summary, the origin of the Jewish community in Suriname can be traced back to the 1660s when David de Isaac Cohen Nassy received several charters from the West Indische Compagnie to establish Jewish settlements in tropical America. Although Jews already lived in Suriname, the arrival of David Cohen Nassy marks the beginning of a period of growth that would continue up to the late eighteenth century; the period that is well-known from the stories of Jodensavanne and the Portuguese sugar plantations. Large-scale Jewish migration to Suriname ended during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Suriname had lost its appeal as a migration destination, and the North American mainland became the main destination for Jewish migration in the New World. Surinamese Jews that had been born and raised in Suriname – coming from families that sometimes had lived in Suriname for generations – were by now the majority in the Jewish community. Although there would be a continuous coming and going of Jewish migrants to and from Suriname during the nineteenth century, the Surinamese-Jewish community had become, primarily, a settlers' community. The multi-cultural and socially complex urban environment of Paramaribo became the principal locus of residence of both the Portuguese and High German Jews from the

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89   Van Lier 1971:34-7, Van Stipriaan 1998:11, and Schalkwijk 1994:71-2.

90   Van Stipriaan 1998.

late eighteenth century onwards. The informal interactions and cross-cultural contacts that were a fact of life in Paramaribo's urban environment with its multitude of languages, religions, cultures, class segments and skin colours, had far-reaching influence on the process of Surinamese-Jewish creolization.

III

MAKING A LIVING IN THE COLONY:
SOCIAL CONTEXT, ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND CULTURAL LIFE

The dominant social context of Suriname was that of a colonial order and a slave society. With the notable exception of the group of coloured Jews, Surinamese Jews belonged to the socially and legally defined group of white colonial settlers.[1] In colonial studies, European communities have been depicted as a horse riding and cricket-playing 'clique', a leisure class par excellence, with strict social boundaries regulated by an active club life that formed an essential part of daily life of the – male – colonial elite. The idea of a white aristocratic colonial elite has become particularly widely shared among historians writing about French, Dutch and British colonial communities in the nineteenth century. Take, for instance, Benedict Anderson, who depicted these colonial communities as a 'bourgeois gentilhomme, speaking poetry against a backcloth of spacious mansions and gardens filled with mimosa and bougainvillea, and a large supporting cast of houseboys, grooms, gardeners, cooks, amahs, maids, washerwomen, and, above all, horses'.[2] A similar picture is drawn by Brian Moore in his study of Victorian British Guyana as a plural society. Although Moore acknowledges the presence of a middle-class aspiring to obtain an elite status

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[1] That this categorization of the Jews as colonial whites was not so self-evident after all, will be discussed Chapter V.

[2] Anderson 1991 :150-1.

(white or coloured) that could not afford a luxurious elite life-style, the overall tone is of a white elite community that indulged itself in imported British middle-class culture.[3] Ample sources justify a similar picture of white Surinamese colonial life. Take for example Governor Jan Nepveu (1768-1779), who noted:

> The lavishness of large dinner parties and dances and so on is indescribable. Unless tables are laid with a few hundred covers and are laden with as many kinds of meat dishes, fruits, and so on, as possible – anything up to two or three hundred dishes – the host would feel embarrassed.[4]

However, this idea of a white-colonial-elite-world peopled by a 'bourgeois aristocracy' and often characterized by a so-called 'typical solidarity among whites' is also problematic, since it obscures the heterogeneity of European colonial communities, including the Jewish colonial communities.[5] As noted by Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonizers and their communities are frequently treated as diverse but unproblematically viewed as unified in a fashion that would disturb our ethnographic sensibilities if applied to ruling elites of the colonized'.[6] In fact, the presence of poor whites in white colonial communities was more significant and widespread than is generally accounted for. These needy whites defined and threatened the boundaries of European white male prestige, not only in the planter community of Deli that formed the basis of Stoler's analysis, but in other colonial environments as well.[7] In a similar vein, Franklin W. Knight points at the social heterogeneity in the group of the white colonizers across the Caribbean: the (semi-)noble families and owners of large plantations that constituted the elites of the colony; the *nouveaux* riches (the planters, bureaucrats, wealthy merchants and senior officers in the military); a 'middle-class' of

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[3] Moore 1995. Moore divides Guyana's cultural mosaic in elite Victorian culture, Afro-Creole folk culture, Indian *Bhojpuri* culture, Portuguese Latin culture and Chinese *Hua-Qiao* culture, each described in separate chapters. Although Moore claims to focus on the continuum between a 'pure' pluralist society and a class stratified social system, the division in five separate ethnic groups seems to imply a strong bias towards a cultural pluralist understanding of Guyana after emancipation.

[4] Quoted in Van Lier 1971:81. Both Stedman and Fermin mention the luxurious lifestyle of Suriname's elites during the late eighteenth century. Stedman 1988:363-366, and Fermin 1770:85-97. Van Lier cautions us not to overestimate the luxurious life-style of the colonists. While there must have been a tendency towards ostentatious behaviour, with lots of parties, drinking and foods, Van Lier notes, however, that '[t]hese forms of entertainment reached their zenith during the British interregnum. After that they deteriorated, the rapidly spreading poverty and the departure of large numbers of white families putting an end to them.' (Van Lier 1971:81).

[5] Anderson 1991 :150-3. See also Stoler 1992.

[6] Stoler 2002a:23.

[7] Stoler 2002a:36.

doctors, clergy men and middling merchants, and then, ultimately, the largest group: the poorer whites.[8]

Likewise, the Surinamese whites did not constitute an undifferentiated monolithic group as they are sometimes thought to be. Especially in the urban context of Paramaribo, the picture was far more complex than that. The group of white colonists in Suriname (including the Jews) ranged from (very) rich planters, colonial magistrates, merchants, lawyers and doctors, as well as white peddlers, craftsman, military men and small shopkeepers. Some of Surinamese Jews – or at least their ancestors – had come to Suriname as part of a colonial enterprise. Some may even have had prior colonial experience in Brazil or Cayenne, and were more or less expecting a colonial elite lifestyle in Suriname. This was Suriname's Portuguese-Jewish wealthy and white plantocracy, which could afford to adopt a leisurely life-style during the hey-days of the plantation economy in mid eighteenth century that was similar to those of colonial elites described by, for instance, Brian Moore or Benedict Anderson.[9] Others, however, hardly fit this picture: the impoverished Jews sent to Suriname by the Amsterdam community as *despechados*, or the poor migrants who came to Suriname in search for a better life. While the general notion persists that this group consisted mainly of East European Jews, in reality a considerable number of poor Portuguese Jews were sent to Suriname as well.

These destitute migrants – sometimes single men and women, often families – can hardly be considered as out-an-out colonizers. Their coming to Suriname was no more than an alternative for a more or less forced migration to Hamburg, Antwerp or perhaps Curaçao. Once in Suriname, they made a meagre living by peddling, craft-like professions or small retail businesses, or they became dependent on the poor relief of their communities. Yet, whatever their financial position or intrinsic motivation to come to Suriname, once in the colony, Jewish settlers became part of the community of white colonizers. Their white skin and free status set them apart from the slave, free black or coloured population of Suriname. The fact that the Jews were included in the category of colonial whites deeply influenced their social lives as well. As discussed in this chapter, these social contexts do not only pertain to the leisurely lifestyle of the colonial elites – the free masonry, the cultural clubs and theatres – but also to the day-to-day interactions with the lower and coloured segments of the Surinamese society.

To underscore the heterogeneous and historically shifting composition of the Surinamese-Jewish community, this chapter commences with a detailed discussion of the economic profile of the Surinamese Jews. The plantation crisis of the 1770s is an important hallmark in the history of the Surinamese Jews, as it heralded many of the changes that would unfold in the course of the nineteenth century: the (internal)

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[8] Knight 1990:144-151.

[9] Anderson 1991 :150-3; and Moore 1995.

reorientation of the Surinamese Jews due to diminishing social distinctions between the High German Jews and Portuguese Jews and the impact of the general impoverishment of the Surinamese-Jewish community on Jewish community life. Any account of the socio-economic life of the Surinamese Jews, therefore, should start with the almost canonical rise and decline of the (Portuguese-) Jewish planters' community during the eighteenth century.

1   ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The fate of a Jewish planters class

Until the late eighteenth century, the Jewish planters' community was a successful one. Economically, Jewish planters[10] were the mainstay of the Portuguese-Jewish community at that time. As the community grew, so did the involvement of Portuguese Jews with sugar planting and (to a lesser extent) the production of coffee. Their strong participation in Suriname's plantation economy has contributed to the image of the wealthy Portuguese Jew, whose mercantile spirit secured a successful undertaking in the cultivation of sugar. However, in the early years of settlement, austerity prevailed. Nassy depicts the rather sober lifestyle of the early planters:

> [T]heir mode of living was very simple and regular, luxury was a stranger to them, and their settlements were never embellished with ostentatious or useless buildings. Cleanliness, the conveniences of life, and some profusion on their tables on holidays in the Savanne: this was their entire luxury, their entire prodigality. When the holidays ended, each person returned to his settlement to see to its cultivation himself, and this was approximately also the mode of living of several Christian planters of that time.[11]

The steady progress of the Surinamese Jews in the plantation economy can be traced on the maps of that time.[12] Although the following numbers are no more than an

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[10] The term 'planter' refers to the plantation owners and the plantation management, not to those who did the actually planting, namely the slave-population.

[11] Nassy 1974b:57. Nassy does not mention any sources to found this assertion. Of course, the writers of *Essay Historique* had a clear agenda: emphasizing the importance of the Jewish community for Surinamese society, its morality and similarity with the non-Jewish population.

[12] For the Jewish involvement in Suriname's plantation sector as captured on geographical maps, see for instance the anonymous map of 1667; the Labadist Map of 1686; and the map of Alexander de Lavaux of 1737. For the later period, see the plantations listed in the various volumes of the Surinamese Almanac. The various plantation lists are digitalized by the Institute for Surinamese Genealogy and can be found on their website: http://www.surinaamsegenealogie.nl (accessed 30-6-2008).

indication of the total number of Jewish plantations in Suriname, they show the fate of the Jewish planters community. A quick-scan of an anonymous map from 1667 shows only about ten Jewish plantations belonging to Nunes, D. Casseres, Pereira, Ely, Desijlra (de Silva), Mesa, and Nasserer (Nassi), and a place called 'Jews' (probably a reference to the Jewish settlement of Cassipora). Some ten years later, the so-called 'Labadist' map of 1686 already recorded about 18 Jewish estates.[13] According to David Nassy, the Portuguese Jews possessed 40 (predominantly sugar) plantations in the 1690s.[14] The map of Alexander de Lavaux of 1737 shows the Jewish community at its peak: of the 401 plantations plotted on Lavaux' map of 1737, David Nassy counted 115 Jewish plantations, 93 located along the Suriname River (near Jodensavanne) en 22 in the Upper Commewijne region.[15]

The Portuguese-Jewish community was mainly a planters' community until the late eighteenth century, after which its position started to deteriorate. Initially, the majority of the Jewish-owned plantations were sugar plantations.concentrated inlands, along the upper reaches of the Suriname River, and (to a lesser extent) the Commewijne River. Although this land was less swampy and had been easier to cultivate at first, the sand soils were exhausted faster than the heavy clay soils on the lower reaches of the rivers.[16] During the second half of the eighteenth century many of these,once profitable plantations had become struggling timber estates instead. In 1793, circa 63 plantations were in Jewish ownership. Less than 10% of the plantations were recorded as sugar plantations; about 50% of the Jewish-owned plantations were listed as timber estates; the remaining estates produced coffee or cotton.[17] Moreover, the isolated location of the Jewish plantations in the vicinity of Jodensavanne, surrounded by jungle vegetation, made them an attractive and frequented target of

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[13] Labadists were the followers of Jean de Labadie, a former Jesuit. They established a small community in Suriname on the isolated plantation *La Providence*, in 1683. The colonization attempt turned out to be disastrous because of sickness, maroon-attacks, and failed crops. In 1719, the plantation was sold and the remaining Labadists left the colony. See Knappert 1982, and Saxby 1987.

[14] Nassy 1974b:44.

[15] These numbers should be used with caution and only be considered as indicative, since various maps in these years show different names.

[16] Van Stipriaan 1993:74-5.

[17] Surinaamsche Staatkundige Almanach 1793. Of the remaining plantations the main crop production is unknown; a few are listed as 'kostgrond', that is self-sufficient farming. Plantation lists of 1821 and 1845 show similar outcomes. Van Stipriaan noted that in 1824 about 69 plantations had a Jewish owner. Only 23 estates produced for the export (sugar, coffee or cotton), the others were timber estates who were hardly turning a profit (Van Stipriaan 1993:297). Note that plantations lists may give a somewhat distorted picture of the (Jewish) plantation sector since a considerable number of plantations had been split into smaller plots by that time. Moreover, these lists seem to be marred by some double countings.

maroon raids (attacks by escaped slaves). These maroon attacks posed a real threat to the already struggling Jewish plantations, physically as well as economically.[18]

During the late eighteenth century, planters (Jews and non-Jews alike) had become increasingly tied to mortgage-granting merchant-bankers in the Netherlands. The rising coffee prices in Europe fuelled the illusion of a flourishing plantation economy and metropolitan investors negotiated loans with any planter or would-be planter. The fate of many planters was already sealed in 1751, when the Amsterdam regent, banker and merchant Gideon Deutz declared his willingness to the then governor of Suriname, Governor Van Sporche, to negiotiate loans for plantations for the sum of one million guilders in total.[19] Many took advantage of this possibility to start a life as a planter in Suriname. These 'new' planters can be found on the plantations maps among the growing number of coffee and timber estates from the late eighteenth century onwards, and included some High German Jews as well.[20] Also Portuguese Jews, who had not been able to afford a plantation before, were enticed by the status of a plantation owner that was now so easily at hand. Many colonists were lured into loans that bore no relation to the actual value of their assets.

David Nassy gives a vivid description of the gold fever that rushed through Suriname in these years:

> [I]n the year 1769 and at the beginning of 1770, one heard no other news in the colony than that of plans for advancing money to the planter. It seemed then that the golden age had been renewed for the colony in general. The evils of the past war, the disasters, even the hostilities of the runaway slaves – all, in a word, was forgotten, and the colonists again, in their intoxication, already accounted themselves the most fortunate of those in America. […] Then, Christians, Jews, professional people, even shoemakers who did not have a penny to purchase the hides necessary for their trade – all wished to be planters, and Monsieur the agent, with a stroke of the pen, made agriculturists and planters more quickly than Pyrrha made men by throwing stones, so that one heard of nothing else but purchases and sales, and one saw shoemakers, dandies and butchers become great lords.[21]

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[18] Meaningful in this context are the vengeful words inscribed on various tombstones on the *Beth Haim* of Jodensavanne; of those who fell victim of these raids, or were renown for fighting the maroons. For an analysis of the Jewish cemeteries in Suriname, see Chapter VI.

[19] Nassy 1974b:83. Wolbers 1861:233.

[20] See the map of Alexander de Lavaux of 1770 as well as the plantations listed in Surinaamsche Staatkundige Almanach 1793.**.**

[21] Nassy 1974b:93-4.

When the bubble burst in the 1770s, many planters could not settle their debts and had to sell their estates.[22] The Surinamese plantation crisis hit hard on the Jewish community, and Jewish planters were among the first to run into difficulties to an extent they were unable to meet their financial obligations towards Dutch creditors.[23] A large number of Jewish estates were sold during this period. Once fortunate Jewish plantation owners now found themselves in a state of bankruptcy, sometimes even in absolute poverty. Consider, for example the planter Abraham Gabay da Fonseca, who though not one of the wealthiest planters of the colony, was a reasonably prosperous man. In 1767, his coffee plantation Kleyn Jalouzie was valued at Sf. 63,115 Surinamese guilders, making him a relatively well-off planter. Yet, upon his death, he had lost everything, leaving his five children and widow in state of poverty.[24] The fate of another Jewish plantation owner, who had lost his fortune and was forced to work the land himself in order to provide himself and his family with a meagre income, was described as follows by a plantation director in 1790: 'He had once been a man of property, and [had] had a timber estate, but now that all his slaves have run away to join the Bush Negroes, he has become old and poor, together with his housewife and delightful daughter he now works a small plot of land for his own subsistence'.[25]

Alternatively, take David Cohen Nassy, principal writer of *Essay Historique*. The 'blinded and intoxicated citizens' Nassy so vividly described (see above) actually included Nassy himself, too. David Nassy was a practising pharmacist and medical doctor in Paramaribo, before he himself became 'intoxicated' and purchased the coffee plantation Tulpenburg for approximately Sf. 93,000 in 1770. After increasing the number of slaves, he had the estate valued for Sf. 187,350 (which included the estate's inventory and a house in Paramaribo), an estimated value that he had largely financed by means of the Amsterdam loan funds. Yet, his efforts as a planter turned out to be a fiasco as only three years later, in 1773, Nassy was forced to sell his estate at less than half of the purchase price and thereby loosing the better part of his fortune.[26] Like many planters who shared the same fate, Nassy went bankrupt after this short-lived and disastrous career as a coffee planter.[27] Although Nassy had been a planter for only

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[22] For an analysis of the Suriname's plantation economy between 1750 and 1863, see Van Stipriaan 1993 and 1995. For the impoverishment of the Portuguese-Jewish community during the late eighteenth century, see Cohen 1991, especially Chapter 4.

[23] Van Stipriaan 1997:78. Also Nassy 1974b:83.

[24] Cohen 1991:77-8.

[25] Quoted in Van Stipriaan 1993:297. See also Cohen 1991:77-8.

[26] Bijlsma 1982:66. More examples of the spectacular impoverishment of Jewish planters in the late eighteenth century can be found in Cohen 1991:71.

[27] At one point, Nassy even fled to Jodensavanne to avoid imprisonment. Because of his debtors, Nassy was accused by the Court of Police of having withdrawn some slaves from his plantation inventory.
(continued)

three years (and not a very successful one at that), he became the personification of the 'old' Surinamese-Jewish planters society nonetheless because of the publication of *Essay Historique*. His tale is characteristic of the majority of Jewish planters: while there were still some Jewish families who owned huge fortunes at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century, an estimated two-thirds of the Jewish population had lost their wealth and lived in poverty by that time.[28]

In 1775, a group of 36 Christian planters addressed a petition to the Court of Police in which they complained about the economic crisis that afflicted Suriname: the increasing number of bankruptcies, the burden of high taxes, the difficulties caused by runaway slaves, and so on. They asked Governor Nepveu for strong measures that would improve the situation in the colony, as they feared 'to be plunged into a cesspool of misery', and share in 'the curse of the Jews of being old and poor'.[29]

The plantation crisis of the 1770s constitutes the historical crossroads where the Portuguese and High German communities met. The High German Jews had never been part of the Jewish-planter society on a large scale, but had stuck to retail, peddling and craft-like professions, such as bakers, butchers, carpenters and goldsmiths. Unfortunately, information on the economic structure of the urban-oriented High German Jews is scarce for the early colonial period. Since the majority of the High German Jews were not engaged in the colonial enterprise, the colonial archives reveal little information on their economic activities. Remarks by contemporaries like David Nassy – who displayed great disdain for the German, but especially the Polish Jews in Suriname –have contributed to the idea of the High German Jew as the typical 'smouse Jew' who, in contrast to their more well-to-do Portuguese co-religionists, struggled to achieve a meagre standard of living. Yet, it is important not to overemphasize the carefully cultivated myth of the wealthy and aristocratic Portuguese Jew versus the poor High German Jew, which does not do justice to a more subtle reality in the pre-depression years, the tremendous impact of the plantation crisis and the resulting re-distribution of wealth among the Surinamese Jews.

To begin with, economic supremacy of the Portuguese Jews during the pre-depression years was not that absolute at all. Although there were some very rich Portuguese Jews indeed, there were some very prosperous High German Jews as well. Take for example the High German Jews Isak Levi Preeger and Jacob Juda Polak. During the late eighteenth century, both men ranked among the richest of the colony. In wealth, they measured up to Portuguese Jews like Raphael Castillo and Abraham

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Eventually, the matter was settled, but Nassy had to withdraw from his function as Jewish *jurator* (a notarial function, see also note 83, Chapter II) and sworn translator of the Portuguese and Spanish language. Bijlsma 1982:66, and Schiltkamp 1982:62.

[28] Van Lier 1971:93.

[29] Wolbers 1861:308.

Robles de Medina (both archetypical planters) who are believed to have been the richest men in the colony in their time. However, merely naming rich Jews, either Portuguese or German, provides us with little information on the overall economic strength and resilience of both groups in Suriname, since the distribution of wealth within these two groups differed significantly. The influx of poor migrants during the second half of the eighteenth century had already drastically changed the distribution of wealth in the Portuguese Jewish community, even during the pre-crisis years. The crisis of the late eighteenth century only served as the proverbial last straw that changed this status quo for good. When the plantation crisis hit the Portuguese Jewish community hard, the losses of the High German community were, admittedly, less severe. In 1791, David Nassy reluctantly admits that: 'Although none of them [the High German Jews] are as rich as some of the Portuguese […] the German Jews are in much better condition than the Portuguese.'[30]

Robert Cohen makes a similar observation on the basis of an analysis of the registers of rental value tax between 1772 and 1782.[31] Cohen concluded that, while the Portuguese Jews paid an higher amount of property tax than the High German Jews in absolute terms (simply because of the larger number of Portuguese Jews), in fact the High German Jews were the highest tax-paying group of the 1780s on a per-person basis. Moreover, whereas the Portuguese community shows a trend of impoverishment, especially (though not only) among the highest echelons of their community and a consistent growth of the lower, poor brackets; the High German community underwent an opposite process, showing an overall improvement of average wealth and economic strength during the 1780s.[32] Thus, the late eighteenth century shows some important changes in the relationship between the Portuguese and High German community. This trend continued in the nineteenth century when the socio-economic profile of the High German and Portuguese Jews merged even further.

Reorientation: making a living in an urban colonial environment

During the nineteenth century, the economic position of the Surinamese Jews changed profoundly. The origin of this transformation dates back to the late eighteenth century when the Surinamese plantation sector passed through a severe crisis, and the Jewish

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[30]   Nassy 1974b:64.

[31]   Cohen used the rental value tax (*getaxeerde huurwaarden*) as an indicator of economic welfare to analyse the economic decline of the Surinamese-Jewish community in the 1780s (Cohen 1991:82-93). The rental-value tax is a property taxation that goes back to the first half of the eighteenth century. All houses and plots in Paramaribo were levied with two percent of the amount of the annual rent. The register included the name of the owner of each property, his address and the tax levied. For a brief history of this tax, see Oudschans Dentz 1910. For an analysis of this tax during the nineteenth century, see De Bruijne 1976.

[32]   Cohen 1991:92-3.

plantation community came to a dead-end. Although a considerable number of plantations were still in Jewish hands, the overall Jewish interest in Suriname's plantation sector had been drastically reduced. As a result, Portuguese Jews moved to Paramaribo, adopting ways of living like High German Jews had had since their first arrival in the colony, in small trade, craft-like professions and administrative occupations. A subsequent major event took place in 1825, when full civil rights were granted to the Surinamese Jews. Although the Surinamese-Jewish community was not unequivocally enthusiastic about obtaining civil rights, it certainly removed the barriers to a career in the colonial administration. When Suriname lost its appeal for European settlers, because of the consistent economic demise of Suriname's plantation industry, the Jews became the predominant white group in Suriname. With the legal barriers removed, the Surinamese Jews became increasingly integrated in Suriname's colonial society.

Based on the *Wijkregisters* (District registers) an economic profile of the Surinamese-Jewish community during the mid nineteenth century can be created. The District registers listed the free population of Paramaribo through door-to-door registration that was conducted annually between 1828 and 1845. The District registers are a rich source of information for urban-geographical studies, genealogical research and community-based analyses alike.[33] Table 2 lists a comparison of the district register of 1845 with data from the census of 1921. In the 1845 register, 1365 persons were registered as either belonging to the High German community or Portuguese-Jewish community. Only 190 persons (13%) reported an occupation, which accounts for approximately half of the Jewish male population between 20 and 70 years.[34] In the 1921 census, 202 persons listed a profession, which amounts to 30% of 670 Jews registered in total (table 2)

Based on the 1845 district register and the census of 1921, the overall picture of the Surinamese-Jewish community during the mid nineteenth century, is not that of a colonial elite, but of a community trying to eke out a living in Paramaribo's urban colonial environment. Many earned a (meagre) income with small trade in an environment that offered only limited possibilities. These shopkeepers and merchants, amounting to one third of the Jewish working population, had to compete with the small trade of agricultural products by slaves on behalf of the more fortunate

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[33] G.A de Bruijne has used these registers as a source for his study of Paramaribo, see De Bruijne 1976. The registers are not unambiguous, however. As discussed in Chapter VIII, census material is permeated with strong examples of colonial identity politics and the making of colonial categories (see also my remarks on the colonial archive in Chapter I).

[34] The fact that only a small amount of employed Jews was listed in 1845 does not necessarily indicate a low employability among the Surinamese Jews, but can also be a consequence of incomplete registration. Some of the more prosperous Jews may not have reported an occupation as they were living of interest.

plantation owners.[35] Craft and craft-like professions, and administrative jobs (held at the offices of plantation directors, commercial establishments and the colonial administration) were the two other main categories of employment, each accounting for approximately one quarter of the Jewish working population. Even though, according to the *Surinaamsche Almanac* of 1843, some hundred plantations were still in Jewish ownership, only seven Jews (4%) considered themselves planters in 1845.[36] As noted before, the figure of one hundred Jewish plantations is highly distorted, since many of the former plantations were divided in smaller plots. These struggling plantations yielded no more than spare-time employment and perhaps some additional family income for the majority of the Jews. A comparison between the 1845 and 1921 registration further shows a slight decline of the proportion of Jews operating in trade and retail, and a transition towards the free occupations and administrative functions, especially among the Portuguese Jews.[37]

Various historical writers have argued that the economic condition of the Surinamese-Jewish community improved drastically from the late nineteenth century onwards. And, indeed, a number of Jews can be counted among the highest officials and metropolitan representatives at the end of that century. De Bruijne found that in 1930, the Jews, next to the Dutch, constituted the well-to-do groups in Paramaribo. Among those taxed for income, Jews had the highest average income. While the Dutch and the Jews together comprised only about 4% of the total population of Paramaribo, they provided 30% of all taxed incomes.[38] One should be careful, however, not to extrapolate these findings to the entire Jewish population in Suriname. Since the income limit to be taxed amounted Sf.500 in 1930, only the middle and upper segments of the Jewish community were listed in these registers. According to De Bruijne, the group that was taxed and therefore included in the registers constituted

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[35]   G.A. de Bruijne believes that about 40% of Suriname's volume of trade was probably realised by Jewish-owned companies at this time (De Bruijne 1976:30).

[36]   Surinaamsche Almanak 1843:57-100. Only Jewish-owned plantations are included in these numbers. Instances of plantations administered by Jews, but owned by non-Jews were, however, very rare. In this connection, David Nassy raised the rhetoric question: 'Has there ever been someone from the Nation [Portuguese-Jewish] who administered a plantation owned by Christians?' (Nassy 1974b:101).

[37]   D. Regeling has suggested that this transition in economic orientation of the Surinamese Jews was primarily a consequence of the arrival of Chinese and Lebanese migrants who pushed the Jews out of business, and formed the new trade class of Suriname. Chinese migration to Suriname even resulted in an official protest by the established merchant elite. In 1911, representatives of this group requested the governor for a ban on Chinese migration, 'as it is impossible to offer any competition to the Asians, who have a fully different expectation of life' (Regeling 1922:98, and Buddingh 1995:237).

[38]   De Bruijne 1976:43.

Table 2: Occupational distribution in 1845 and 1921 as reported by the Surinamese Jews

	High German 1845 (N=115)	High German 1921 (N=90)	Portuguese 1845 (N=75)	Portuguese 1921 (N=112)	Total 1845 (N=190)	Total 1921 (N=202)
Public servants / administrative jobs (writers, messengers)	26%	33%	25%	17%	26%	24%
Colonial officials, magistrates,	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	2%
Free occupations (mainly doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists).	3%	1%	5%	10%	4%	6%
Trade and retail	39%	28%	31%	15%	36%	21%
Craft and craft-like professions (mainly bakers, butchers, goldsmiths, and single carpenters)	22%	22%	25%	32%	23%	28%
Planters	3%	1%	4%	1%	4%	1%
Teachers (includes rabbis, religious instructors)	1%	6%	1%	7%	1%	6%
Otherwise (includes police, military, nurses, overseers)	3%	7%	8%	6%	5%	6%
Unknown	2%	2%	0%	7%	1%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

about 90% of the total Jewish male population above 20 years.[39] Of those Jews who were taxed for income, 29% can be found in the lower bracket and earned between Sf.500 and Sf.1000. The majority (59%) earned between Sf.1000 and Sf.5000, and 12% of the Jewish male earned more than Sf.5000 in 1930.[40] However, at least 10% of the Jewish male population did not earn enough to be taxed for income and were therefore excluded from the registers. They constituted Suriname's poor white population who did not have voting rights.[41]

Thus, the idea of the Surinamese-Jewish community moving in the highest echelons of Suriname's colonial society during the late nineteenth century only holds true for a small segment of the Jewish community: the magistrates and colonial officials, some well-off professionals like doctors, lawyers and notaries, and a small group of the better-situated merchants and shopkeepers. This part of the Surinamese-Jewish population has dominated the image of the Surinamese Jews as a politically powerful group during this period, as they came to constitute Suriname's ruling elite together with Dutch expatriates during the late nineteenth century.[42] The remaining part of the Surinamese-Jewish community was economically more comparable with Suriname's economic middle segments (constituted further by an educated class of light-skinned Creoles and the *Boeroes,* than with the small colonial elite that consisted mainly of Dutch colonial officials.[43] Still, the strong representation of Jews in certain occupations (in trade, public services, crafts but also in the free occupations) made them an indispensable middle-class group for maintaining Suriname's colonial

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[39] De Bruijne 1976:43; also De Bruijne 2001:41. Although the total number of Jewish males on which the percentage of 90% taxation is based remains unknown, De Bruijne's calculations seems to coincide with my analysis of the census registration of 1921 by and large. De Bruijne found 208 Jews who were taxed for income in 1930 and resided in Suriname (17 taxed Jews resided elsewhere). In comparison, the census of 1921 counted about 200 Jewish men older than 20 years in Paramaribo, of whom 80% stated a profession.

[40] Personal communication with A. de Bruijne, 14-8-2007.

[41] Note that until the mid twentieth century, Suriname's electoral system was based on the payment of a minimal amount of tax.

[42] The political profile of the Surinamese Jews is discussed in broader detail in Chapter IV.

[43] See also Van Lier, who noted that 'In the period between 1863 and 1940 some shifts took place […] But nevertheless the majority of the upper class still consisted of whites, that of the middle class of Jews and mulatttoes, and that of the lower class of negroes, Hindustanis and Javanese' (Van Lier 1971:261). According to Hoetink, a basic economic rivalry characterized the relationship between Jews and coloureds in Suriname, whereby the coloured Jews acted as a buffer. Hoetink writes: '[t]he rising number of coloured engaged in lower and middle administrative positions was regarded as a threat by the Jews, many of whom had traditionally occupied these positions, and a mutual feeling of competition between the two groups became manifest in the course of the nineteenth century […] The feelings of competition between the "respectable colored" and the Jews did not, however, prevent them from closing ranks ever so often in common antipathy against the European Dutch employees, who in colonial times continued to be appointed to several of the highest administrative and governing positions in Suriname.' (Hoetink 1972:64-5.

economy: while educated Jews constituted the literate population on which the colonial bureaucracy thrived, Jewish merchants and shopkeepers supplied the necessities of economic and everyday life. For instance, Bixby Levy (a High German Jew of English descent who settled in Suriname during the years of British Intermediate Rule) appears in many plantation bookkeepings as the primary supplier of several plantation necessities.[44]

A community loosing ground: economic hardship and declining *finta*

Socio-economic changes in the Surinamese-Jewish community had a considerable impact on Jewish community life. In fact, the general economic decline and impoverishment of the Surinamese Jews since the late eighteenth century had some far-reaching consequences for the functioning of the two Jewish religious congregations in Suriname.

A substantial part of the community's income was derived from the *finta* or community tax. The *finta* was an annual and obligatory assessment of the wealth of each community member, whether they resided in Suriname or not. Even insolvent estates and trustee estates were taxed. Poverty was no reason for being excused from paying the *finta*: only those community members who lived on poor relief were exempted from paying this community tax.[45] The importance of the *finta* revenues should not be underestimated; it constituted the backbone of the community. Most communal expenses, like the building and maintenance of the synagogue, the *mikwa* (ritual bath) or the *Mahamad*'s building were financed from the income generated by the *finta*. The finta also provided the funds for poor relief, cost for providing education, the maintenance of the *Beth Haim* (cemetery), and the salaries of the rabbis and teachers. Although additional income was generated by voluntary donations, the *finta* revenues were the main source of income of the community. Since the amount of *finta* each member had to pay was income-related, the impoverishment of the Jewish community from the late eighteenth century onwards had direct consequences for the functioning of the religious congregations.

An analysis of *finta* revenues shows the economic fate of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Take the Portuguese-Jewish community: between 1770 and 1790, the *finta* revenues dropped from Sf 18,992 in 1770 to Sf 5,720 in 1790, which constitutes a decrease of nearly 70% over a period of 20 years, and indicates the extent of the crisis. This trend continued in the nineteenth century: in 1845 Sf 3,868 was collected,

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[44]   Personal communication with Van Stipriaan, 1-10-2007.

[45]   The precise *finta* regulations can be found in the community regulations. For the Portuguese community, see NA 1.05.11.18: 106, 114. According to the 1754 *Askamoth*, all members had to pay their *finta* 'uijterlijk tegen de dags voor Kipur' (at the latest before the day of Kipur). It was permitted to pay the *finta* in kind, be it with coffee beans, cacao, or sugar; a beautiful example of how plantation life penetrated Jewish religious life!

in 1855 Sf 2,140, while in 1865 the *finta* revenues amounted to no more than Sf 1,500.[46] The High German community saw a similar decline of community revenues, albeit not as dramatic as the Portuguese community did. In 1865, the High German community still derived the amount of Sf. 3,000 from *finta* levies, twice the amount of the Portuguese community.[47] Yet, the High German community had financial worries of its own. In 1835, the High German community had started the construction of a new synagogue at the Keizerstraat. During construction, it became clear that the costs would exceed the budget by no less than Sf. 15,000. After completion, the community faced a bill of Sf 58,000, a sum it clearly did not have at its disposal. Fortunately, the colonial government agreed to step in with an interest-free loan of Sf. 10,000, while an additional Sf. 15,000 was assembled by issuing shares among community members.

Various measures were taken to increase the *finta* revenues in both the Portuguese and High German community. The decline of revenues was not only an inevitable consequence of the impoverishment of community members, but was also related to the deteriorating authority of the *Mahamad* over her community members. In 1841, the Portuguese community elders turned to the governor for support as the financial situation of the congregation had become critical. Although the governor stated that though he generally would not interfere with church regulations (which he considered an internal affair), he believed in this particular case it was appropriate to take action. He approved regulations aimed to force unwilling community members to perform their financial obligations to the community.[48] In June 1841, the governor passed the decree that was based on a simple idea: any community member who defaulted on his *finta* payments 'or any other religious contribution to the community' for two years in succession, would be excluded from certain ritual prerogatives as a community member. The measures were aimed particularly at excluding the debtors from important rites and rituals surrounding circumcision, marriage and (especially) the instances of death, burial and mourning. Defaulters were thus denied use of any community service during and after burial, such as use of (community-provided)

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[46] In these years, the amount of *finta* payers varied between 285 and 350 members, meaning that the average *finta* assessments in the Portuguese community dropped from circa Sf. 60 in 1770 to little more than Sf. 5 in 1845. For the period 1770-1790, see Cohen 1991:74. For the period 1841 – 1865, NA 2.10.01:3392: 23-7-1841; NA 2.10.01:3409, 28-7-1845; NA 1.05.11.18: 14; NA 1.05.11.18:64**.**

[47] NA 1.05.11.18:511: 6-9-1866. Finta revenues over 1865 are derived from a joint request by the High German and Portuguese-Jewish communities for an increase in the annual state subsidy. An enlightening example of the changed status quo between the Portuguese and High German community is a small comment in the Minute book of the High German community of February 1815. The chairman of the High German community complains that a request for a loan by the president of the Portuguese community had remained unanswered, 'even though they have borrowed from us frequently, and we had to wait a long time before they paid-off their debts', NSA Minutes 1806-1815: 22-2-1815.

[48] Interestingly enough, only a few years later the Jewish communities were forced to modernize their church regulations as the stipulation of new set of church regulation as a prerequisite for obtaining state subsidy.

candles, gravediggers or pallbearers. Nor would there be an *ascaba* (soul-prayer) for the deceased during the days and months after his or her death.[49] Although such reprisals had existed before, the community elders were now able to prosecute defunct members before the court of law.[50]

While this measure did generate some extra community income, it failed to improve the financial strength of the Surinamese-Jewish communities on a structural basis.[51] As a result, the Surinamese-Jewish communities became more and more dependent on financial support from the colonial administration for their religious functioning from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Obtaining subsidy from colonial funds was not always an easy matter, however, and financial support became a powerful instrument of the colonial administration to increase control over what used to be internal affairs of the Surinamese-Jewish community, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century.

2   SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN THE COLONY: SOCIETIES AND LODGES

The heterogeneous economic profile of the Surinamese Jews with its sharp internal distinctions influenced patterns of social life as well. Like other colonial whites, Jews participated in the social life in the colony. These elite social environments were not daily reality for all Jewish settlers, however. Although a 'typical solidarity between the whites' may have existed between 'colonial rulers from different national metropoles', as claimed by Anderson, this colour-based bondage typically excluded the poor white settlers – at least in daily life. The social distance between the planters, the bureaucrats, and the wealthy merchants on the one hand and the poorer whites on the other was not easily bridged. A substantial part of the Jewish population therefore hardly participated in the regulated social domain of colonial elite life. They were the vettewariers (grease-merchants, small shopkeepers), the butchers, and tailors. Their social lives took place in the informal environment of family, neighbours, coffee shop

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49   NA 1.05.11.18:50: 13-6-1841, 29-6-1841; NSA Box 9 AJA: 13-6-1841. As shown in Chapter V, instances of death and burial were critical moments of negotiating group boundaries and identity claims in the Surinamese-Jewish community, transforming the cemetery into a site of creolization *par excellence*.

50   Other measurements taken in these years include the taxation of desolate estates; of community members staying abroad; and the taxation of Jewish military stationed in Suriname. NSA Brievenboek 1838-1855: 29-4-1839 and 9-3-1840; NSA Brievenboek 1839-1863: 19-9-1846; NSA Incoming letters 1839-1863: 13-2-1842; NA 1.05.11.18: 49: 31-8-1840; NA 1.05.11.18: 50: 29-6-1841.

51   Community members continued to default on their finta payments, however. On 28 May 1863, a governmental order was issued that authorized the Portuguese regents to recover defaulted finta payments from the financial compensation that slave-owning community members would receive after the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863. NA, 1.05.11.18:72: 28-5-1863.

and tavern. The cultural life as described in the following was typically reserved to the upper segments of the colony.

In the early years of Suriname's colonial period, socio-cultural life of the colonial elite entailed little more than an occasional musical evening or theatre performance. All this changed from the late eighteenth century onwards, when theatre companies, literary societies and – especially – Masonic lodges came to enliven and regulate the elite social life in Suriname.[52] In general, these societies were erected along the main social divisions of the Surinamese society. While in some cases Jews and non-Jews did join the same societies, in other cases separate Jewish societies were founded because of their forced exclusion from non-Jewish colonial elite institutions. Two societies, for example, adopted a non-exclusive membership policy: Jews could easily become a member of Het Genootschap de Surinaamsche Lettervrinden (established in 1785), while another literary society Docendo Docemur, founded by some prominent Portuguese Jews in 1783, was also visited by high-ranking non-Jewish citizens like Governor Wichers and Governor De Frederici.[53] In contrast, Jews were banned from the De Hollandse Schouwburg (Dutch Theatre) ever since its foundation in 1775, because of which the Jews promptly established their own theatre in 1776. When, in 1784, the Jews decided to house this theatre in a larger building, they explicitly stated that anybody (that is, whites and those considered as whites[54]) was welcome in the theatre except for the players and board of 'the other theatre'.[55]

These contradictory policies towards Jewish incorporation in mainstream colonial elite social life can be explained by the fact that these societies were often run by a rather small number of persons: often a single board member with anti-Jewish sentiments could easily put a stamp on the society's policy to exclude Jewish participation. However, the exclusion of the Surinamese Jews from the Dutch theatre also fits a broader pattern of increased anti-Jewish sentiments in Suriname during the late eighteenth century, as David Nassy remarked bitterly in 1788:

> But as soon as the Jews lost their well-being, and poverty made itself felt, all resources were closed to them, and only continual contempt and estrangement from all that interested them, and the insulting word *Smous* was applied in abundance to Portuguese and German Jews without distinction, until it later became the favourite word employed by the slaves

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[52] For an extensive overview of the various lodges, societies and theatre companies, see Van Kempen 2003.

[53] Nassy 1974b:117, and Cohen 1991:99-100.

[54] Light-skinned coloureds (poestice) where often included in the category of whites. See also Chapter V and VIII.

[55] Nassy 1974b:109-10.

> themselves to designate with contempt any Jew whatsoever.[56] […]
> In consequence, the houses of the Jews were no longer frequented by the
> Christians, and they were never invited to their homes on any festival or
> any private or public occasion of rejoicing […] Later on this estrangement
> gave birth to an indifference which was just as remarkable, and which was
> transmitted from father to son; the bulk of the Christians attached a sort of
> baseness to having familiarity with the Jews.[57]

Nassy linked the social exclusion of Jews to the general economic demise in Suriname
during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. However, the increase in anti-Semite
sentiments from the mid eighteenth century onwards was mainly driven by politics:
over the course of their settlement in Suriname, but particularly from the mid
eighteenth century onwards, Jews became more visible as a group, interfering in local
politics, and claiming their share of political power. This may have contributed to the
increase in anti-Semitism, which in turn may have influenced the exclusionary
practices of the societies.

Arguably the most striking from of organized social life in Suriname are the
Masonic lodges and 'closed societies'. In light of this study, Masonic and pseudo-
Masonic organisations are an important phenomenon, since Freemasonry was the most
important affiliation outside the religious community in Suriname until the mid
twentieth century – for both Christians and Jews alike.[58] Unfortunately, information on
these associations is rather scarce. The oldest lodge in Suriname was Loge Concordia,
first established in 1767, and later reconstituted in 1773. Other lodges were La Zelee
(1767) and the more exclusive lodge La Solitaire, which was mainly an association of
magistrates. Apparently, (some) Jews were not welcome in Loge Concordia at first,
since another lodge was inaugurated in that same year (1767), when 21 Jews, mainly
Portuguese, founded L'Union.[59] The fact that a new, Jewish lodge was erected cannot
be ascribed exclusively to the presence of exclusionary practices against Jews,
however, as this may also have been the result of social distinction within the Jewish
community itself. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, La
Concordia was very much a colonial bastion, solely accessible to only the richest
members of the colonial elite. As such, it probably counted some of the wealthiest

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[56] Apparently, Nassy had no problems with the word *smous* as long as it was used for High German Jews
      exclusively.

[57] Nassy 1974b:104.

[58] Also in Europe, Jews joined the lodges from the mid eighteenth century onwards.

[59] Bruijning 1977:656-7. During the nineteenth century, Jews were allowed to join, and have joined, La
      Concordia. For instance, in 1843, the board of la Concordia counted 3 Jews; in 1900, the board counted
      five Jews, while the local Grand Master was a Jew (A.J. Jessurun), see Surinaamsche Almanak 1843,
      Surinaamsche Almanak 1900:110).

Jews among its members, but certainly not those of lesser fortune or those considered to belong to a lower class.

An indication that internal community boundaries between Portuguese and High German Jews also affected relationships in the social domain is illustrated with the foundation of De Standvastigheid in 1778, which was mainly a High German Jewish lodge. According to Bruijning and Voorhoeve, the foundation of De Standvastigheid was in essence a High German secession of the Portuguese-Jewish oriented L'Union; the former was founded 'in order to live in close harmony with the others.'[60] Apparently, a separate lodge was needed to prevent conflicts between High German and Portuguese-Jewish lodge-members. A meaningful development in this context is the (re)union between L'Union and De Standvastigheid fifty years later, in 1835, which may very well be considered an indication of dissolving community boundaries between the High German and Portuguese Jews at that time. Subsequently, De Standvastigheid merged with La Concordia in 1850. The transformations seen in the Surinamese lodges is typical of a more general development that took place in the Surinamese society at large; dissolving social boundaries and the 'colouring' of the lodges characterized their history during the nineteenth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, Loge Concordia – once a white colonial bastion *pur sang* – had become a meeting place for both white and coloured elites.[61]

In line with the merging of Portuguese and High German Masonic lodges, the pseudo-Masonic lodges that came into being in that same period adopted a mixed (Jewish) membership policy from the start. The pseudo-Masonic organizations, such as the Foresters movement that became active in Suriname with the foundation of Court Charity No. 7416 in 1886, served the middle segments of society. Membership of the Foresters became popular, especially among High German Jews. For many Surinamese Jews, their membership of a lodge or court was an important affiliation besides their sense of belonging to the Jewish community. Membership of one of these associations provided Jews with something their membership of the Jewish congregations could no longer provide for: social status and social enclosure in a society where all kinds of boundaries (class, colour, enslaved versus free) had become increasingly blurred.

Because of their heterogeneous composition, these Surinamese courts and lodges were an important meeting point that gave rise to Jewish – non-Jewish interactions and relationships. For instance, according to a memorandum of 1793, a group of twenty Christians visited the Portuguese-Jewish cemetery in Paramaribo and witnessed a conflict between some coloured Jews and the white supervisor of the cemetery over

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[60] Bruijning 1977:656-7.

[61] Kempen 2003:339.

the appointed burial plot of a coloured Jew.[62] Although the document does not shed any light on the exact reason of their presence, these Christians may very well have been lodge members, attending the funeral or honouring the grave of one of their Jewish members. Lodges were not only a meeting point for white colonists. During the nineteenth century, coloured elites increasingly participated in lodges and club life. In the words of Van Lier, 'the Lodge-building may well be said to have been the most important regular meeting-ground for Europeans and mulattos.'[63]At various instances Loge Concordia and the Foresters are mentioned explicitly in the community archives as membership of the courts and lodges raised questions and brought about contradictions regarding the primary identifications and loyalties of Jewish community members (was one first and foremost a Jew, or rather a member of the Court or a Lodge)? Discussions arose in particularly regarding the highly ritualized funerals of Court and Lodge members that conflicted with Jewish burial customs. These funerals challenged the boundaries of Jewishness on the most crucial moments of identity formation: those connected to death and burial.

Regulated club life only constituted a limited part of social life and social relationships in Suriname. Informal relationships and day-to-day interactions often cut across the institutionalized boundaries of a colonial slave society. Arguably, these informal interactions lie at the heart of creolization. Rather than in official and institutionalized relationships, it is in these informal spheres that cultural connections and border-crossings mostly take place. As such, informal interactions tend to precede regulated social relationships. These daily interactions not only influenced Surinamese-Jewish self-understanding, but also affected the cultural orientation of Surinamese Jews.

In summary, the period during which the Surinamese-Jewish community experienced some of its most fundamental changes is characterized by the decline of the plantation economy, economic hardship for many Surinamese Jews, and by a re-definition of Jewish social life in the urban environment that was Paramaribo. By the end of the eighteenth century, years of war against the maroons had further destabilized an already weakened plantation sector in Suriname and ultimately led to the abandonment of Jodensavanne, the place that symbolizes the history of the Portuguese planters' community until this very day. Portuguese-Jewish community life was reallocated to the multi-cultural environment of Paramaribo. The consequences of this transition were not restricted to an economic reorientation alone, but brought along (within certain limits) a transition of a seigneurial lifestyle to an urban lifestyle. The social context of the Surinamese Jews changed from a rural slave society to an urban slave

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[62] NA, 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793. For a further discussion of this document, see Chapter VI.

[63] Van Lier 1971:279.

society, where complex social (interracial) relationships were much more common, not in the least because of the growing number of free coloureds in Paramaribo.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the socio-economic distinctions between High German and Portuguese Jews diminished: while the latter showed a trend of impoverishment, the former underwent an inverse process, showing an overall improvement of their average wealth and economic position. Both High German and Portuguese Jews found employment in (small)trade, craft and craft like professions, and administrative jobs held at the offices of plantation directors, commercial establishments and the colonial administration. The declining economic resilience of the Jewish community also affected their religious congregations. No longer able to defray the costs of religious leaders themselves, they came to depend on state support for their religious affairs.

The overall picture of the Surinamese-Jewish community during the nineteenth century is not that of a uniform colonial elite, but rather of a socially stratified community trying to make a living in Paramaribo's urban colonial environment. While some members continued to belong to the highest echelons of the colony (not only in socio-economic terms, but also with respect to political power, as is illustrated by their exclusive membership of cultural societies and Masonic lodges), the majority of the Surinamese Jews belonged to Suriname's middle-classes. A substantial group of Surinamese Jews was struggling to get by and provide for themselves day-by-day. This heterogeneous picture of Surinamese-Jewish social life brings along multiple processes of localization. Daily interactions on the marketplace, on the street, on the workplace, between neighbours, friends and family members did not necessarily have (and were likely not to have) a synchronous development with processes of localization as expressed in identifications and identity claims by community leadership. The latter tended to be more conservative, only reluctantly responding to developments and changes that took place in the informal sphere of daily interactions.

IV

COLONIAL CONFIGURATIONS AND DIASPORIC CONNECTIONS: PATTERNS OF RULE, CIVIL STATUS AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Migration and demographic patterns, changing socio-economic structures, colonial spaces, but also colonial divisions of power, local politics and diasporic connections formed the context of a localizing Surinamese-Jewish community. The colonial division of power provided an important framework for Surinamese Jewish identifications: it structured socio-political life, and determined the latitude of the Jewish community leaders to control their community members. During the era of Jewish privileges, local and personalized relationships with the governor affected the interaction between the Surinamese-Jewish communities and the colonial authorities. After 1825, when full civil rights were granted to the Surinamese Jews, the political context of the Surinamese Jews changed drastically. Home rule and a localized political context made way for a full integration in an expanding Dutch colonial state in Suriname. During the nineteenth century, the diasporic connection with Dutch Jewry came a more dominant force in the Surinamese-Jewish community. Through the interference of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs, entrusted with the supreme control of the Dutch-Jewish communities, colonial politics and – re-enforced – diasporic structures became increasingly entangled.

1 AUTHORITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Political structures in Suriname's plantocracy

The world the Jews participated in was not only tropical – and in the eyes of those who had left behind the overcrowded Jewish neighbourhoods of European cities, perhaps even paradisiacal – it was also a merciless world, characterised by exploitation and colonial power relationships. Permanent colonization of Suriname dates from the mid-seventeenth century, when the Englishman Francis Willoughby set off on expedition to the *Wild Coasts of Guiana,* claimed a piece of land of his own, and founded the colony of Suriname (1651). In years thereafter, Suriname developed into a typical plantation economy, where large scale agricultural farming on sugar, coffee, cocoa and timber estates depended on the labour of thousands of enslaved Africans.[1] In 1667, Suriname was conquered by a Dutch fleet under the command of the Zeelander Abraham Crijnssen, and remained under Dutch rule ever since, with the exception of a period of British Intermediate Rule between 1799 and 1816.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Suriname was a more or less privately owned enterprise under control of the Chartered Society of Suriname (*Geoctroyeerde Societeit van Suriname*), a partnership between the Dutch West-India Company (WIC), the city of Amsterdam and the Van Aerssens-Sommelsdyck family, who each owned one third of the colony. The Charted Society of Suriname fell under the sovereignty of the States General of the United Netherlands.[2] Although Suriname was officially governed by the Society of Suriname, the daily administration of the colony was in hands of the governor, who resided in Paramaribo. In the colonial division of power, the governor assumed an important position: he was the official link between colony and metropole.

The governor was assisted by a political council, called the Court of Police (*Hof van Politie,* later, *Hof van Politie en Crimineele Justitie*) whose members (usually ten) were elected from the free white, male and Christian (!) population and appointed for life, or until they left the colony. The relationship between the governor and the Court of Police was not free of obligations; the governor was obliged to consult the Court of Police in all 'matters of importance', and had to carry out any voted resolution by the Court of Police. The Directors of the Society of Suriname had a final say in all

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[1] For the development of a plantation colony in Suriname, see Van Lier 1971:19-37. For a compact introduction of the colony of Suriname, its political organization and main sociological characteristics during the eighteenth century, see Van Lier 1972. For an in-depth analyses of Suriname's plantation economy between 1750 and 1863, see Van Stipriaan 1993.

[2] In 1770, the shares of the Van Sommelsdijck family were purchased by the city of Amsterdam (Van Lier 1971:19).

matters, however, and any resolution or governmental decree could be withdrawn by the Society of Suriname.[3]

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Surinamese planter's elite constituted a dominant political force in Suriname, who exerted their power through their representation in the Court of Police. The relationship between the Court of Police and the governor was often tense. While the governor formerly acted as the representative of Dutch colonial rule, in practice his authority was often challenged by the Surinamese planters.[4] From the perspective of the Surinamese planters (including the Jewish planters), the central administrative power in the Netherlands did not constitute a 'real' political and administrative power that directly influenced their daily lives; most planters maintained very few direct connections with Dutch state authorities.

During the later nineteenth century, the Dutch state increased its control over her colonies: culturally, through Christianization and compulsory education; and politically, through centralising administrative rule and authority. In 1816, with the reinstallation of Dutch rule, the powers of the Court of Police were curtailed: its members were no longer appointed for life, but only for a period of nine years, local laws had to be endorsed by the Dutch King first, before they could come into effect, and the criminal judicial tasks were deleted from the responsibilities of the Court of Police.[5] Still, the rule that said that members of the Court of Police could only be chosen from the most eminent plantation owners, enabled the planters to maintain their political influence in Suriname's local environment. This political system, often referred to as a plantocracy, prevailed until 1865, when a constitution was introduced, and a new representative body was installed in Suriname: the Colonial States (*Koloniale Staten*, later, *Staten van Suriname*).[6]

The Dutch state would also increase its interference in Jewish community affairs during the nineteenth century. The (re)integration of the Surinamese-Jewish community in a Dutch political and (Dutch) Jewish religious framework, and increasing dependence on Dutch financial state support for maintaining their religious communities, framed the (re)making and negotiating of Surinamese-Jewish identity in this period.

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[3]   Van Lier 1971:47. Also Schalkwijk 1994:269-274.

[4]   For the power struggle between governor and planters during the mid eighteenth century, see Van der Meiden 1987.

[5]   Van Lier 1971:49.

[6]   Schalkwijk 1997:274-276.

Controlling the community: the Jewish privileges

Until the early nineteenth century, the constitutional position of the Jewish communities in Suriname, and their relation with the colonial administration, was based on, and secured by, a set of privileges granted to the Portuguese Jews during the early years of Jewish settlement in Suriname. These privileges were originally granted by the English colonial administration in 1665, to attract well-to-do Portuguese-Jewish settlers to populate the colony. When Suriname came under Dutch rule in 1667, the privileges were re-established and expanded.[7]

The Jewish privileges included the right of public worship, civil jurisdiction[8], the right to form their own civil guard, the acknowledgement of Jewish marital customs (which allowed marriages between close relatives) and some economic rights concerning slave trade, fishery and taxation. Additional privileges were added later. In 1669, the Jews succesfully requested to be permitted to work and have 'their negroes' work on Sundays. Further priviliges inclueded the possibility to have rebellious community members banned from the colony, and, importantly, the right to vote in the nomination of magistrates, which provided the Jews with a certain degree of political power, even though they were excluded from holding public offices themselves. On a number of occasions, the privileges gave rise to conflicts. Particularly, their right to vote and the right to trade, open shops, and 'have their wifes knitting and sewing in the doorways' provoked fierce response by Christian settlers; the latter privilege would be withdrawn in 1718.[9] Although the privileges were initially granted to the Portuguese-Jewish community, the High German Jews were also granted these rights when they established a separate congregation in 1734, with the exemption of the right for civil jurisdiction.

From the perspective of the colonial authorities, the Jewish privileges were merely a form of indirect rule of an economically important group. This particularly applies to the Portuguese Jews, as the High German regents never obtained the right of civil jurisdiction over their community members. During the early colonial period,

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[7] Documents related to the Jewish privileges can be found in Nassy 1974b:183-213. See also Oppenheim 1907.

[8] The Jews were allowed to form their own court that could edict penalties up to the amount of 600 Surinamese guilders.

[9] Schiltkamp 1963:323. The decree only refers to Jews disturbing Sunday's rest in Paramaribo. It remains unclear if this enforcement of Sunday's rest also included a ban on slave labour on the Jewish plantations. As it seems, Jewish slaves did work on Sundays. Nassy claimed that 'Saturdays were exchanged for Sundays' (Nassy 1974b:237). In 1771, the Court of Police had prepared a decree that would forbid Jews to have their slaves work in Paramaribo or along the Suriname River on Sundays, which was, apperantly, successfully prevented by the Jewish community leaders from becoming effective by pointing at their time-honoured privileges. In contrast, in Curaçao Jews were not permitted by the Christian authorities to have their slaves work on Sundays. Schorsch 2004:57, 227-8 and Nassy 1974b:193, 195-96.

when Portuguese-Jewish community life was still located at Jodensavanne, indirect rule over the Portuguese Jews was an efficient way to control a large group of colonists with minimum effort, especially since a large proportion of this group lived at the margins of the Surinamese society, far removed from the colonial authorities in Paramaribo. From the perspective of the Surinamese Jews, the meaning and importance of the Jewish privileges were twofold. First, they fixed the constitutional position of the Jews in the Surinamese society: it safeguarded their position as a religious minority, and outlined their civil and economic rights and duties. Second, they determined the framework of the internal administration of the Portuguese and High German Jewish communities, hence the power of the community leaders over their community members.

For the Jewish elite, the privileges were an important substitute for their exclusion from exercising direct political power in the colony (as non-Jewish planters could). Their title as 'Regents' provided them with enough social status to compensate for their exclusion from wielding political power and their discriminated position vis-à-vis the non-Jewish whites in Suriname. This alone appears from the fervour with which the Jewish community leaders defended their title, which was not undisputed. Already in 1695, an attempt was made to regulate the position of the *Mahamad* when Governor van Scharphuizen forbade further use of the title of 'Regents' by the Portuguese-Jewish community leaders. In a letter to the *Mahamad*, Van Scharphuizen writes: 'I have found it very strange that you despotically arrogate to yourselves the title of Regents of the Jewish community, and in consequence I inform you that I have found it good to forbid you to bear this title from now on, for there belongs to you only that of Regents of the synagogue.'[10] Apparently, the Portuguese-Jewish community leaders successfully challenged the decree, as they continued to refer to themselves as 'Regents of the Portuguese-Jewish Nation'.

Their title as 'Regents' remained an emotional subject, however. When the Court of Police decided in 1789 that the members of the *Mahamad* were no longer entitled to bear the title of 'Regents of the Portuguese-Jewish Nation', but could only bear the title of 'Regents of Synagogue', the Portuguese Jews turned to the Directors of the Society of Suriname for support. The Portuguese-Jewish community leaders complained that they (and with them the colony 'as most residents are Jews') had fallen victim to the prejudices of the members of the Court of Police. If they were no more than 'Regents of Synagogue', they argued, would they have had the privilege of political dispatch or the right for civil jurisdiction, which powers were not limited to religious affairs, but were of a political nature?[11]

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[10] Quoted in Nassy 1974b:47. See also the Governors decree of 6 May 1695 in Nassy 1974b:195.

[11] NA 1.05.11.18:93, August 1783.

The Jewish community leaders had touched upon a point that required due consideration. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, their powers clearly exceeded the authorities of a synagogue board. During that period, the internal administration of the Surinamese-Jewish communities was based on the model of the Amsterdam-Jewish community.[12] The basic principle behind the community's organization was oligarchic, meaning that the authority over the community was concentrated in the hands of a few leading figures from well-to-do families. The Jewish regents' gained near-dictatorial powers over the community members through their participation in the *Mahamad*: the community's board and official representative of the Portuguese-Jewish community and High German community (both communities had their own *Mahamad*). The community members had no say in the composition of the *Mahamad*, since only resigning *Mahamad* members were able to nominate new candidates.[13] The powers of the *Mahamad* were described in meticulous detail in the *Askamoth,* or community regulations. Both the Portuguese and High German community had their own *Askamoth* that served as a codebook for the community board, and which derived its legislative powers through Dutch royal decrees.

The power of the *Mahamad* should not be underestimated. Especially in the early period of settlement (seventeenth and eighteenth century), the *Mahamad* derived its powers from centuries-old patterns of social organization common in Jewish communities of the early-modern period. The *Mahamad* maintained order; regulated dress code, education, morals and sexual conduct; and controlled the observance op Jewish law and custom. In order to maintain discipline, and to impose their will upon recalcitrant community member, the community leaders had a whole series of disciplinary measures at their disposal, varying from simple fines, non-admission to the synagogue-services to more extreme measures such as *Herem* – excommunication – and the denial of right to burial on the community's cemetery. The community archives are dotted with examples of disciplinary actions against community members. Particularly, exclusion from synagogue services or religious ceremonies was often used as a means of controlling community members. Halfway into the nineteenth century, when the financial situation of the Surinamese-Jewish community had become even more precarious, the denial of burial space at the communal cemeteries became a popular disciplinary action against defaulters of the community tax or *finta*.[14]

The most severe punishment was *Herem*, or ex-communication. In Jewish communities around the world, *Herem* was the common punishment for offences

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[12] Bodian 1997:11.

[13] NA, 1.05.11.18:106, tract. 38; 1.05.11.18:106:114, tract. 2. For Amsterdam, see Bodian 1997: 51. Also Israel 1985:198-202.

[14] For the role of *finta* in community life, see Chapter III. For the cemetery as a site of boundary making practices see Chapter V.

against the religious codex, Jewish morality or group discipline. The principles behind this form of punishment were rather simple: by denying the perpetrator a part in community life, *Herem* used the prospect of social isolation as a deterrent. In Suriname, the meaning of *Herem* was generally considered equal to the meaning of political dispatch, namely banishment from the colony. The community leaders received the privilege in 1669; it was reconfirmed later in 1685. The right of political dispatch enabled the Jewish community leaders to request the governor to expel those individuals from the colony who had perpetrated the rules of the community and harm the 'Nation' by their 'scandalous behaviour'.[15] The fact that the *Mahamad* was also allowed to apply this severe sanction as a precaution on individuals who were suspected to become perpetrators in future, illustrates the extensiveness of this privilege.[16] As one of their most effective means of power, the right to dispatch rebellious community members was guarded anxiously by the *Mahamad* of both the Portuguese and High German community. Although requests for banishment were submitted for both religious and criminal offences, the majority of the cases concerned subversive individuals who had repeatedly challenged the authority of the *Mahamad* itself. In practice, however, the Dutch authorities could curtail the jurisdiction of the *Mahamad*, as is illustrated in the case of Jacob Juda Polak.

In 1756, the *Mahamad* of the High German community requested Governor van der Meer to banish the High German Jew Jacob Juda Polak from the colony. According to the High German *Mahamad*, he was 'a troublemaker and ill natured, who for the preservation of our peace and quiet it is not convenient to stay in this colony'.[17] Apparently, the High German *Mahamad* had run into conflict with Jacob Juda before: now, as before, the governor denied the request for banishment of Jacob Juda Polak and recommended the *Mahamad* to refrain from putting forward old requests. The governor, however, did order Jacob Juda Polak to submit himself to the authority of his religious rulers; to look upon them with respect; and to stop disobeying their

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[15]   NA 1.05.10.01: 39-5-1756. The full text of this privilege of 1669 can be found in Nassy 1974b:193. The right of political dispatch was withdrawn in 1787. From then on, serious disobedience or offences against religious or civil laws would be penalized with detention in Fort Zeelandia. NA 1.05.11.18:114, *Askamoth* 1787, tract 4. Also Cohen 1991:153.

[16]   The meaning of *Herem* as a means of social isolation could be undermined considerably by the many contacts of Jews with non-Jews, as was the case in, for instance, Amsterdam. Because of their double New Christian-Jewish identities, many Portuguese Jews had extensive social en economic connections with their Christian neighbours or business partners. In practice, there was a slim chance that those convicted to *Herem* would actually become extremely socially isolated, as intended by the punishment. As Yosef Kaplan points out, *Herem* was not this severe punitive measure *per se* and was actually used and lifted as a matter of routine for both relatively minor offences and serious infringements. Often, *Herem* was used merely as threat to bring rebellious community members back in line (Kaplan 1984:124). See also Kaplan 1993, and Bodian 1997:114-5. For the meaning of *Herem* in Curaçao, see Emmanuel 1957:95-6.

[17]   NSA Box 24 AJA: 15-7-1756 and 4-10-1756

rules.[18] Like other cases of (requests for) *Herem*, it was not so much the initial offence – which remains unclear from the archived documents – that motivated the requests for banishment, but the unwillingness of Jacob Juda Polak to accept the authority of his *Mahamad*.[19] Yet, notwithstanding the carefully defended right of political dispatch, it rarely happened that the governor was willing to acknowledge requests for political dispatch of Surinamese Jews for reasons of disrespect alone. Cases in which the governor did agree upon political dispatch tend to involve cases of social unrest that threatened the stability of the colony or cases involving criminal conviction.[20]

The incident of Jacob Juda Polak illustrates that, notwithstanding its powerful position, the Dutch colonial authorities did not recognize the authority of the *Mahamad* as totally absolute. Going by the number of conflicts that are documented in the archives, it seems that Surinamese Jews continuously negotiated and challenged the position of their *Mahamad,* and increasingly so from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it were in fact the former members of the *Mahamad* (called *Adjunctos*) themselves who often were the ones to challenge and tamper with the authority of the *Mahamad*. On various occasions, the *Mahamad* turned to the governor to support their case; members of the communities also turned to the governor whenever they ran into conflicts with the *Mahamad*.

Robert Cohen places the beginning of the deterioration of the *Mahamad*'s power in the mid-1760s. According to Cohen, the failure of the *Mahamad* to have Salomon

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[18]   NSA Box 24 AJA: 15-7-1756 and 4-10-1756.

[19]   NA 1.05.10.01: 30-5-1756.

[20]   Notorious cases of political dispatch involve the banishment of Isaac de Carilho in 1747 and that of Salomon de Montel in 1761, both of whom were dispatched after lengthy court proceedings. Especially the case of Isaac de Carilho surpassed the interests of the Portuguese Jewish community alone. Carilho, a Jewish captain of the Jewish militia and former member of the *Mahamad*, had manoeuvred himself in an impossible position when he fully sided with a group of Christian planters (all captains in the civil guard as well) in their complaints about Mauricius' governorship. This brought him in a head-on collision with the Portuguese regents, who had pronounced themselves fervent supporters of Mauricius in the power play between the governor and the (Christian) planters-class. This incident underscores the separate position assumed by Jewish planters vis-à-vis the Christian planters community; a position that benefited the governors in their efforts to play off the different planters factions against another. Salomon de Montel was banned from the colony after he clashed with the Portuguese regents on an interest charge to a fellow Jew of 5000 guilders, something that is prohibited by Jewish law. Although Montel was backed by the Court of Police, the Jewish regents found support by the governor. When Montel was persistent in his refusal to repay the interest, and did not care about any of the penalties or orders of the *Mahamad*, the governor honoured the request for his banishment from the colony. The governor proved to be susceptible for the *Mahamad*'s argument that Montel was a 'turbulent and dangerous person who had no place in the colony.' In both cases, the banishment turned out to be short-term affairs only. Once in Holland, Carilho and Montel challenged their banishment with the Estates-General in Holland, who subsequently honoured their appeal and ordered the Surinamese authorities to revoke their decision, after which both Carilho and Montel returned to Suriname and were readmitted to the Portuguese Jewish community. For the Carilho case and the conflict with Governor Mauricius, see Van der Meiden 1987 and Van der Meiden 1982. For a description of the Montel case, see Cohen 1991:128-44, 131-4; NA 1.05.04.04: 313 and NA 1.05.10.01: 525.

Montel banished from the colony after a long drawn-out conflict over usury (Jewish Law prohibits charging interest on a loan to a fellow Jew), was 'the first crack in a system of community control which was to be challenged with increasing frequency'.[21] This is not to say that conflicts over authority and rule had not taken place before. In 1749, by request of the High German regents, Governor Mauricius ordered members of that community to submit to the authority of the *Mahamad*, to show respect to the *Mahamad*, and to behave accordingly inside and outside the synagogue. The fact that the *Mahamad* needed a governor's resolution to secure their position is illustrative of its problems in maintaining authority. Interestingly enough, the governor concluded the resolution by underwriting the right of the community members 'to address the governor whenever they feel aggrieved by a decision of the *Mahamad*, provided they obeyed to the *Mahamad* in the meantime.'[22]

These kind of conflicts between community members and community leadership not only reveal contestations of power-relations within the community and a vanishing social support for a oligarchic administration of the community, but also give insight in contestations of existing community boundaries as is discussed in the following chapters. For instance, the conflict between the Portuguese regents and a group of coloured Jews regarding their status in the community (see Chapter VIII), shows that the Jewish community leaders had an interest in clearly demarcated community boundaries. As is the case with other contestations of existing group boundaries – be it about visiting the 'other' synagogue, mixed relationships or conflicting affiliations – a clearly defined community legitimized the authority of the Jewish leadership vis-à-vis the colonial administration and supported the idea of a self-evident notion of Jewishness in Suriname.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the community leaders of the Jewish communities carefully guarded 'their' privileges. Time and again, they addressed the governor for the preservation of their rights or appealed to the highest colonial power in the Netherlands (the Directors of the Society of Suriname, the Dutch parliament or – when Suriname officially became a colony of the Dutch state – the King) whenever they felt that local authorities tried to curtail their power. The arrival of new governors was always a critical moment to emphasize their established rights. The privileges were certainly not a matter of course during British Intermediate rule between 1804-1816, and it was particularly during this period that the Jewish community leaders lobbied hard to maintain them. Every time a new British governor was installed, the Surinamese Jews sent out their congratulations and expressed their hope that their privileges would continue to be acknowledged under the newly

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[21]   Cohen 1991: 134.

[22]   NSA Box 9 AJA: 19-9-1749.

appointed leadership.[23] Still, the British rulers were less sensitive to established rights of the Surinamese Jews than the Dutch authorities were.[24] The crumbling power of the *Mahamad*, the bankruptcy of the Jewish planters' community and the reallocation of Jewish life to Paramaribo, a more direct form of control over the Surinamese-Jewish population by the local authorities was warranted. Retrospectively, the period of British rule can be regarded as a temporary reprieve for the ineluctable emancipation of the Surinamese-Jews, given that Dutch Jews were already granted civil rights in 1795.[25]

Negotiating civil rights (1816-1825)

In 1825, an era ended. Not only were full civil rights granted to the Surinamese Jews, but also – more importantly, from their point of view – the privileges, which they had guarded so carefully for more than 150 years were withdrawn. On April 2nd of that year, all privileges and exceptions that had been granted to Jewish residents in the Dutch West Indische Bezittingen (West Indian colonies) were withdrawn. Henceforth Jews enjoyed the same civil rights as non-Jewish colonists. Negotiations between the Surinamese-Jewish community, the local authorities and the Dutch State authorities over their political emancipation took several years, and emancipation was certainly not embraced wholeheartedly by the Surinamese Jews. Initially, in 1816, the Surinamese-Jewish community held back, fearing a discrepancy between theoretical emancipation in speech and writing, and daily practice in Suriname. Their fear was not fully unwarranted as anti-Semitism was endemic in Suriname in these years, and Jews were excluded from the political arena.[26] For instance, in 1804 the then governor Pierre Berranger had advised against the equality of all religious groups and the eligibility of

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[23]   For instance, when the leaders of the High German community wrote a letter to Charles Bentinck in 1809, to congratulate him with his appointment as governor, they also emphasized their loyalty to the British throne, and expressed their 'belief in Your elevated philanthropy, assuring themselves of his much powerful intercession and the benefit of her rights and privileges [acknowledged] by the King of Great Britain, George III, which they have enjoyed until this present day, and hope to continue to enjoy.' NSA Box 12 Miscellaneous 1800-1899: Letter to Charles Bentinck, 31-8-1809.

[24]   Wolbers' remark, that '[d]uring the English years, the Jews were humiliated and neglected: they were not allowed to occupy public offices, or at least were not called for service,' should, however, be put in perspective. Latent anti-Semitism was endemic in these years, also under Dutch rule. Moreover, Wolbers also mentions that British officers performed plays at the Jewish theatre De Verrezene Phoenix (The Resurrected Phoenix). See Wolbers 1861:563.

[25]   Jewish emancipation in England took place gradually. Basic civil and political rights were granted in 1859. However, it would take until 1890 before all restrictions for complete equality were removed.

[26]   For a description of anti-Semitism in Suriname, see page 118-123.

all citizens for all offices, 'considering the large number of Jews in the colony, and the disarray their appointment would cause.'[27]

When Dutch rule was re-installed in Suriname in 1816, the Jewish community leaders cherished the hope that the old status quo, including their privileges, would be restored. However, when the Portuguese and High German regents pleaded their case to Governor Van Panhuys, he responded that the old privileges contradicted the maintenance of order and proper administration of justice in the colony. Van Panhuys was convinced that the new judges, who would arrive shortly, would object to the privileges, and that 'the privileges would be wiped out with a wet sponge'. Instead, the governor suggested that a new and adjusted set of privileges should be drawn up, and put forward to the King for approval. The Jewish regents arranged several meetings to discuss among community members the status of the Jewish privileges, and how Jewish interests would be served best.[28] Eventually, the Jewish communities decided to address 'their brothers in Europe' to promote their interests.[29]

One of the first obstacles in this debate was the amendment of article 26 of the new 'Codebook for the governance of Suriname' (*Regelement op het beleid van regering in Suriname)* which stated that members of the Court of Police were to be 'chosen from the most distinguished, capable, well-to-do colonists of good name and fame, being owners of plantations and thus most concerned with the prosperity of this colony, without distinction of religious Christian faith.' The wretched article reflects the fact that Jews were officially still excluded from holding higher offices in the colony. A.F. Lammens (who was one of the new judges that arrived in Suriname when Dutch rule was restored in 1816) noted in his journal that the constitutional stipulation, which stated that the members of the Court of Police should be composed of estate owners, 'severely limits the choice, as there are few non-Jewish colonists who are estate owners, and it was considered undesirable to have Jews in the Court.'[30]

The Surinamese Jews felt deeply offended by their continuing exclusion from the Court of Police, not in the least because of their 'proven yeoman services to the colony and their always and continuous utter devotion to the government', and asked some prominent Amsterdam Jews to exert their influence.[31] An appeal was made to King

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27 Wolbers 1861:501.

28 NSA Minutes 1816-1820: 26-3-1816; 3-4-1816 and 7-4-1816.

29 NA 1.05.11.18:15, Minutes 1816-1892, 24-5-1816.

30 Lier 1971:94. Lammens' remark gives a somewhat distorted view of Jewish involvement in the plantation sector in this period. Although many estates were in fact in non-Jewish hand, these were for the most part absent estate-owners, residing abroad. Characteristic of the Jewish estate-owners was their locality. Thus, within in the group of estate-owners residing in Suriname, the majority was in fact Jewish.

31 Namely, Abraham Mendes de Leon, M.J. Meyer and M. Carel Asser. NA 1.05.11.18:159, 28-5-1816.

Willem I for an amendment of the contested article. The King responded quickly and decided on 25 August 1816 that the section 'without distinction of religious Christian faith' should be understood as 'without distinction of faith'.[32]

The royal decree created a precedent for the contestation of other cases of Jewish exclusion as well. According to the Jews, the King had clearly shown his intention that religious equality should be effectuated within the Dutch territories, and therefore also in the colonies.[33] The Surinamese Jews believed that they were now entitled to take up all public offices. Victory came at a price: the newly appointed governor, Cornelis Reinhard Vaillant, expressed the expectation that, as a token of their gratitude, the Jews would renounce their privileges and return them to the King.[34] Governor Vaillant acted carefully, however, and acknowledged the delicacy of the matter. He sought advice from two prominent members of the Portuguese community Salomon de la Parra and Monsantofils, whom he believed were not only well informed about the finer details of community regulations, but also understood the intention of the government. The governor was not only interested in the general thoughts about abolishing the privileges among the Surinamese Jews, but especially 'whether those who would be in favour of abolishing these Privileges could be counted among the most prominent and notable residents, and whether that abolishment would give reason for discontent and disputes among the Jews, which may lead to disturbance of peace in the colony.'[35]

In two letters, signed by the 'individual member of the Portuguese Israelite and High German Israelite communities', the Surinamese Jews declared that:

> since we can not claim in fairness to have more prerogatives than followers of any other religion, we attest, that we will submit to the disposition of his Majesty our beloved King concerning this subject […] We would already have renounced the Privileges, through the fact that we cannot attribute it to any other cause, that the people in this land, entirely adverse to the will of the King, deny us [the Jews] the exercise of public offices, under the vain and false pretext that our Privileges are still in existence.[36]

Besides the issue related to the exclusion from public office, the Jews feared that they would no longer be able to honour the Sabbath and the High Holidays without the protection of their privileges. Specifically, the issue of guard duty dominated the

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32 NA 1.05.11.18:159, Request to the King and appointment, 20-5-1816 and 25-8-1816.

33 NA 1.05.18.18:41, Letter to Governor Vaillant, no date inscribed.

34 NA 1.05.11.18:15, Minutes, 23-12-1816.

35 NA, 1.05.11.19:159, Letter of Governor Vaillant to S. de la Parra and Monsantofils, 21-12-1818.

36 NA 1.05.11.19:159, Declaration of the individual members of the High German Israelite community, 1819; idem of the members of the Portuguese Israelite community, 1819.

correspondence between the community and the local authorities for several years, as the commander of the civil guard had denied their right to be exempted from duty during the Jewish holydays. Governor Vaillant eventually settled the matter and with promised that the Jews were not obliged to fulfil their duties in the civil guard during the High Holidays, as long as they would make up for their absent hours later.[37]

There were, however, some other grudges to be ironed out. Between 1816 and 1819, an extended and lively correspondence was conducted between the Jewish community leaders, the governor of Suriname and their Amsterdam benefactors on the various forms of exclusion and denied rights.[38] Complaints put forward by the Jews included their discontent with the fact that only one Jewish officer had been appointed in the civil guard, even though the Jews constituted a majority of the guards; as well as an incident concerning the admission of Jewish children to the private school of the teacher C.A. Batenburg (they could only be admitted upon special permission from the board of the school).

Another painful affair involved Abraham Pasqual, a Portuguese-Jewish migrant. When Abraham Pasqual arrived in Suriname on the 26 December 1816, he had been denied access to the colony by the secretary of the governor, J. Prengle. According to the captain of the ship, the skipper James Lawson, Prengle had declared that his passenger 'is a Jew, and we have already a mass of them in the colony. Yes, even more than necessary, and to prevent any more from coming, he will not be allowed to land.'[39] In this case, it was not so much the barring of Abraham Pasqual that enraged the Jewish community leaders, but rather the blatant anti-Jewish tone of Prengle's comments, especially in the context of his role as a representative of the government.[40] In some cases the Jews were put in the right (such as the admission of Jewish children to private schools) while emotion about other cases, such as the comments of J. Prengle surrounding Abraham Pasqual, petered out after several months of correspondence over the subject.

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[37] NA 1.05.11.18:15, between 21-5-1816 and 22-9-1816.

[38] NA 1.05.11.18:15, various minutes between 21-5-1816 and 17-1-1817; and NSA Minutes 1816-1820:21-10-1817.

[39] For the issue of education see NA 1.05.11.18:15, Minutes 31-12-1816; 8-1-1817 and 17-1-1817; NA 1.05.11.18:41, 22-8-1817; NA 1.05.11.18:159, 10-7-1817 and 6-8-1818. On the issue of Abraham Pascual, NA 1.05.11.18:15, Minutes 31-12-1816 and 8-1-1817; and NSA Minutes 1816-1818:29-6-1817 and 17-8-1817.

[40] See NA 1.05.11.18:41: copy of the appointment of governor Vaillant concerning the admission of Jewish children to the school of teacher Batenburg, 22-8-1817; and NA 1.05.11.19:15, Minutes, 3-7-1817.

Eventually, it would take another seven years before Jewish emancipation was accomplished in Suriname.[41] The Royal Decree of 2 April 1825 that effectuated Jewish emancipation, reads:

> [Art.1] Those who profess the Israelite Religion within our West Indian Colonies will be considered fully equal to all other residents.
>
> As a result, all privileges, permits and exceptions […] that have been granted to those who profess the Israelite Religion, are hereby withdrawn, abolished and annulled.
>
> [Art.2] The Organisation and Administration of the Israelite Church within the West Indian Colonies […] will be abolished and put out of working order, and will be replaced by the Decisions and by-laws of the Israelite church-community in the mother country […].

The emancipation of the Surinamese Jews had several important consequences. Firstly, it drastically altered the status and power of the Jewish community leadership. The community control by the *Mahamad* had already lost considerably power since the mid eighteenth century, now the *raison d'être* of the *Mahamad* changed altogether. With the emancipation, the Surinamese-Jewish community lost its political and juridical self-determination, while its leaders were deprived of effective means of control, most notably the right of civil jurisdiction of the Portuguese-Jewish regents. Community leaders lost their grip on Jewish social life as well, as individual Jews were no longer dependent on their membership of the Jewish community for their position in the Surinamese society. The mandate of the *Mahamad* was now fully restricted to the administration of the religious congregation: the day-to-day activities related to the synagogue, maintenance of the cemetery, religious education. It is only in this new and limited role that the *Mahamad* continued to represent the Surinamese Jews as a community vis-à-vis the local authorities and the Dutch government.

Secondly, the newly acquired civil status of the Surinamese Jews had implications for their relationship with the local colonial authorities, that is, the governor and Court of Police. As noted earlier, Dutch colonial authorities, in the capacity of the Directors of the Society of Suriname, did not constitute a 'real' political and administrative power that directly influenced daily life in the colony. This also applied to the Jews who were in essence a semi-autonomous community that functioned within the local political arena of Suriname. The constitutional position of the Surinamese Jews secured by the privileges, therefore, focused almost exclusively

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[41] The correspondence between the Jewish community leaders and the colonial and Dutch state authorities over the granting of equal rights and the validity of the privileges is documented extensively. See NA 1.05.10.18:159 and NA 1.05.10.18:15.

on actions and power play within this local political context. As such, the Surinamese Jews put much effort in maintaining a friendly and personal relationship with the governor since – to a certain extent – their degree of political authority and the exercise of power by community elders over community members was primarily founded on their relationship with local authorities. By supporting the governors, the Surinamese-Jewish regents tried to protect their privileged position and the power they could yield over their community members. A smooth relationship with the governor was ever more important considering the often tense, sometimes hostile, relationship with the Court of Police.

Throughout Surinamese-Jewish history, prominent community members devoted much attention in maintaining a good relationship with the governors, for instance by rendering them certain services. Governors who were known to have a close relationship with the Surinamese-Jewish community were Bernard Texier (1779-1783), Jan Gerard Wichers (1784-1790), Juriaan Francois de Frederici (1790-1799), and later Charles Pierre Schimpf (1855-1859). During the nineteenth century, the political climate in Suriname changed drastically. In contrast to the eighteenth century, Suriname was no longer a separate, 'private' enterprise; instead, it had become an official crown colony in 1816. As a result, the political arena became more directly connected to Dutch state policy. The emancipation of the Surinamese Jews was inevitable, as Dutch Jews were already emancipated in 1795. Although the governor was still an important authority in the local political context, the Surinamese Jews now also had to negotiate with magistrates far away in the Netherlands for handling their community affairs, instead of the governor 'at home' in Paramaribo.

After 1825: between marginalization and political domination

Initially, the granting of full civil rights did not bring about major changes in the political profile of the Surinamese Jews. The first Jews who profited from the new civil status of the Surinamese Jews were Salomon de la Parra and David M. Sanches: prominent members of the community who had played an important role in the negotiations over the Jewish privileges and granting of civil rights between 1816 and 1825. In a way, both De la Parra and Sanches were still exponents of Suriname's 'old' colonial order. They were among the last representatives of the once illustrious Portuguese-Jewish planter community. In 1824, Salomon de la Parra, together with his brother Samuel Haim de la Parra, owned several sugar plantations, coffee and cotton estates, and timber plantations. Since he also administered some plantations that were not his property, no less than sixteen plantations were under de la Parra's management of which twelve were producing for export. This made Salomon de la Parra one of the richest inhabitants of the colony. His Paramaribo residence was run by at least 40 house-slaves in 1811, while in 1845 he owned 51 house-slaves according to the

District registers.[42] The social and economic position of David M. Sanches was also considerable: the Surinaamsche Almanak of 1843 mentions him as the owner of nine cotton and coffee estates.[43]

Despite their wealth, De la Parra and Sanches, being Jews, were unable to translate their economic domination into political power as other non-Jewish planters of similar standing had managed since the early colonial days. Until 1825, they could never overcome their Jewishness, as is illustrated in a survey of the main plantation administrators drawn up in 1824. While other administrators were categorized according to their skill and aptitude – either as 'capable', 'solid', or perhaps 'not worth recommendation' – we find that de la Parra was simply qualified as 'a Jew' which was not considered worthy of recommendation.[44] It would take five year after the Royal decree of 1825 for both Salomon de la Parra and David M. Sanches to be appointed as the first Jews to hold office in the Municipal Council, while Salomon de la Para was appointed as a member of the Colonial Council – the highest representative body – in 1836.[45]

Twenty years later, Egbert van Emden came to dominate the political scene of Suriname. Egbert (or Elias) van Emden did not belong to one the 'old' Portuguese-Jewish families. He was a High German Jew and recent migrant to Suriname, who had come to the colony in 1818 at the age of nineteen. In 1826, Egbert van Emden married the Portuguese-Jewish girl Gratia de la Parra, daughter of Salomon de la Parra.[46] In many ways, Egbert van Emden resembled Salomon de la Parra. He was a planter, administrator, man of wealth, and meddled intensively with Jewish community affairs. Van Emden's political career included the secretariat of the government (*gouvernemenstsecretarie*) in 1820s, officer in the civil guard, and membership of several commissions. He also presided over several courts of law, and became involved in the question of the abolition of slavery. The political influence of Van Emden reached its zenith during the governance of Schimpf (1855-1859). In his *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (1861), Wolbers wrote: 'Van Emden's influence with Schimpf (governor between 1855 and 1859) became virtually unrestricted; not only

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[42] Van Stipriaan 1993:297-8. For the district registers of 1845, see NA, 1.05.08.01:688-694.

[43] Surinaamsche Almanak 1843:57-100. See also the digitalized plantation list of 1845 on the website of the Surinamese genealogical association: www.surinaamsegenealogie.nl (accessed 24-5-2007).

[44] Van Stipriaan 1993:297-8.

[45] Surinaamsche Almanak 1830, Surinaamsche Almanak 1836:4. Also Schalkwijk 1994:192; and Van Lier 1971:94-5. Schalkwijk and Van Lier only mention de la Parra, which seems to be an omission as according to the Surinaamsche Almanac both De la Parra and Sanches took a seat in the Colonial Council in 1830.

[46] The marriage lasted only for a year, as Gratia van Emden died in 1827, shortly after giving birth to a son. Van Emden remarried to Abigael de la Parra with whom he had sixteen children.

were his relatives and friends given lucrative posts, but Schimpf consulted him about everything and did almost nothing without having first asked Van Emden's opinion.'[47]

It should be noted that, by then, Egbert van Emden had converted to Christianity. Yet, even after his baptism in 1847, he could not renounce his Jewishness and remained known throughout the colony as 'the former Jew'.[48] Still, van Emden was in many ways a boundary crosser. He married twice with Portuguese-Jewish women when such marriages were still relatively rare; he was devoted to a fusion between the Portuguese and High German community almost one and half century before the merger in fact took place; and he made himself rather unpopular in the High-Jewish community with his pleas to transform the Surinamese-Jewish community from orthodox to liberal. When all his attempts failed, he denounced his Jewish faith, and was baptized in 1847; hereby setting an example for other Surinamese Jews would follow later.

Salomon de la Parra, David Sanches and Egbert van Emden formed the vanguard of Surinamese-Jewish emancipation as the first to be admitted to Suriname's higher political administration. Yet, these three men were rather exceptional cases. Even though their careers may suggest a sort of continued hegemony of Jewish planters in the Surinamese society in the post-1825 period, quite the opposite was true. The participation of Surinamese Jews in the higher colonial bureaucracy remained a rarity until 1865, when a new colonial constitution initiated a period of increasing political influence of the Surinamese Jews. This new constitution allowed the Surinamese elite to elect nine members of the newly established Colonial States (*Koloniale Staten*), while the remaining four seats were to be appointed by the governor.[49] Given that the Jews had become the largest group of permanent white settlers by then, they were assured that a considerable number of Jews would be elected by the colony's elite to hold positions in Suriname's representative bodies. Especially during the late nineteenth century, Jews occupied influential positions in Suriname's political landscape.

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[47] Wolbers 1861:749. Van Schimpf's close relationship with the Surinamese Jews was not appreciated by all. An anonymous anti-Schimpf and anti-Jewish pamphlet 'De Surinaamsche adressen'(1859) read: '[T]here is no single example where mister Schimpf appointed someone other than Israelites for a position in the judicial office, as officer at the civil guard or a position in the administrative office.'(Toes 1992:215). There were also positive reviews of Schimpf's term of office, especially by Jews. Upon his departure from Suriname, a farewell gift was signed by 67 persons, among whom 20 Jews according to the anti-Shimpf oriented *Provinciale Friesche Courant*. Four years after his death, a favourable article was published in the Surinaamsche Alamanak, then owned by the Jewish publisher Morpurgo, wherein his tolerance in religious affairs was praised: 'the exemplary regard and love with which we treated the Jewish civil servants in the office, whom under his guidance and favour were often considered for promotion.'(Toes 1992:223, 225).

[48] Wolbers 1861:749

[49] Schalkwijk 1994:198.

According to M. Schalkwijk's analyses of bureaucratic and political elites in Suriname between 1795 and 1920, the participation of Jews in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy grew from 5% in 1830, to 15% in 1860 and 30% in 1890. In 1890, Jews dominated the Colonial States with 54%.[50] The political emancipation of the Jews in the 1890s is apparent in the lists of persons that were eligible to vote for the members of the Colonial States. In 1871, 30% of the electorate was Jewish, which increased to 36% in 1890. This provided the Jewish elites with considerable political influence, as the Jewish electorate generally voted for Jewish candidates.[51] According to Schalkwijk, 'there seemed to have been a Jewish merchant-bloc that could rally about half of the vote in any campaign.' Jews also exercised influence through their domination of the judicature. Between 1890 and 1930, three Surinamese Jews presided the Court of Police while before 1920 most lawyers were Surinamese Jews.[52] This powerful position of Surinamese Jews during the late nineteenth century provoked some anti-Semitic sentiments in the colony. In 1891, the Roman Catholic newspaper *De Tijd*, complained that 'we are still at the mercy of the Jews'.[53]

From the early twentieth century onwards, the influence of Surinamese Jews on the public domain would decline. With the gradual expansion of tax-based suffrage throughout the early twentieth century, the demographic decline of the Surinamese Jewish communities, and ultimately the introduction of universal suffrage in 1948, Jews became an increasingly smaller political faction amidst the politically emancipated population of Suriname (Afro-Surinamese, Hindustani, Javanese, Chinese). In 1909, 16% of the electorate were Jews; in 1920, 10%; and finally, in 1930, no more than 4% of those eligible to vote were Jewish.[54] Likewise, the number of Jews among the bureaucratic (sub-)elite had shrunk again to about one fifth in 1920, Dutch expatriates and light-skinned coloureds had taken their place; no practitioning Jewish lawyers were to be found in Suriname by 1940.[55] Van Lier noted in this

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[50] Schalkwijk 1994:185-301. These numbers should be considered with some caution, since Schalkwijk seems to have included men as van Egbert van Emden and David Juda in his countings. Whereas van Emden was baptized in 1847, the Jewish affiliation of the Juda family (although born Jews) can be questioned as well, since many of them (including David Juda) are buried at the Oranje Tuin cemetery, which was a protestant elite cemetery. Their epitaphs give no information on their religious affiliation.

[51] Note that, until the mid twentieth century, the right to vote was conditional to registration and payment of a minimal amount of tax (*census kiesrecht*), meaning that only the male upper segments of the society were enabled to vote. In 1866, the electorate amounted no more than 217 voters, who paid at least 60 Surinamese guilders in annual taxes, that is 0,5% of the population. While in 1889, the members of the Colonial Assembly were elected by 275 voters. See Schalkwijk 1994:290-1.

[52] Schalkwijk 1994:207. Van Lier 1971:257-8.

[53] Quoted derived from Schalkwijk 1994:310.

[54] Samson 1961.

[55] Van Lier 1971:258.

connection: 'The exact time at which certain groups begin to gain or lose influence cannot be determined accurately unless this takes place through some important event or other, such as a war or revolution. But round 1910 we see more Creoles coming into prominence and gradually gaining power. In 1910 there were six mulattoes as against only three Jewish members of the Colonial States. Jewish influence diminished visibly after this year. The reason for this was both the intellectual progress of the coloured middle class and the fact that many Jewish persons failed to return to Surinam after finishing their studies in the Netherlands.'[56]

According to Schalkwijk, the increasing number of Dutch expatriates in high positions effectively put a ceiling on career perspectives of locals, both Jews and coloureds. According to a letter that was published in one of Suriname's daily newspapers in 1885, the Dutch colonial administration preferred 'independent people […] meaning that they should not have ties with local residents.'[57] The influx of Dutch colonial servants in Suriname's political administration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflects a new colonial policy to distance the local population from the governance of the colony to guarantee the implementation of policy beneficial to the mother country.

The political standing of prominent Surinamese Jews during the late nineteenth century did not concern the entire Surinamese-Jewish population. The fact that 11 out of 33 leading bureaucrats were Jews in 1890,[58] as well as the fact that Jews came to dominate the Colonial States in the 1890s does not imply an increase in political power of the whole community as such. As urban dwellers, the majority of the Jews no longer fulfilled an essential role in Suriname's colonial economy, which in turn weakened their political position and marginalized their political power.

Furthermore, the Jewish religious congregations certainly did not always profit directly from the prominent positions that some of her members may have had, as is illustrated by the increasingly precarious financial condition of the congregations in the course of the nineteenth century, in contrast to the wealth of those prominent Jews. Wealthy, prominent and politically influential Jews were not necessarily involved in affairs of the religious congregations. It is important to note that in the pre-1825 era the economic, political and religious power were often in the hands of the same group of elite Jews. One of the results of the emancipation is that these prominent Jews could

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[56] Van Lier 1971.

[57] Schalkwijk 1994:207-10. The quote is derived from one of 25 letters published in the daily newspaper 'Suriname' in 1884, under the heading 'Surinaamsche Toestanden' (Surinamese Affairs).

[58] Schalkwijk 1994: 202. In 1890, the bureaucratic elite includes members of the Government Council, the Court of Justice, as well as those working as district commissioners, judges of district courts, chief inspectors and chiefs of Public Works, Customs etc.

now wield power outside their community boundaries, as noted by Schalkwijk. [59] Obtaining and exercising power within the community boundaries had become less attractive for the Jewish elite, now that they had the means to exercise political power at a higher level. The fact that the power of the community leaders had diminished considerably with the abolishment of the privileges, and was now limited to the administration of the religious congregation, may have led to a further decreasing involvement of those prominent Jews in their respective communities.

The limits of tolerance

The Jewish privileges that framed Jewish participation in Suriname's civil society until 1825 has provided the Surinamese Jews with the image of a favoured community that could worship freely and reached the highest echelons of a colonial society. This privileged position of the Surinamese Jews is often understood as a sign of religious tolerance in Suriname, not in the least by the Surinamese Jews themselves.[60] Yet, Jewish privileges were not granted out of philanthropic considerations, but rather served various practical purposes. As noted before, the Jewish privileges settled the undefined status of the Jews, and fixed their separate constitutional position. They safeguarded their position as a religious minority, but also served as a powerful tool of distinction.

In general, the rather liberal stance of the Dutch colonial authorities towards the Jews (in the capacity of the Directors of the Society of Suriname or benevolent governors) contrasted with anti-Jewish sentiments among the larger part of the Christian colonists. Save from some incidents concerning the Jewish privileges, up-front anti-Semitism seems to have been rather unusual up to middle of the eighteenth century. According to Nassy, prosperous Jews could – to a certain extent – participate in the social world of the Christian elites (for instance, the societies and Masonic lodges referred to earlier). Still, the Jews considered themselves a discriminated group, which, in fact, they were. In *Essay Historique* Nassy complained:

> [T]hat the Jews, despite their privileges, despite the constant protections
> which they have received on the part of the Lords Proprietors [the directors
> of the Society of Suriname], and whatever their merit, their care, and their

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[59] Schalkwijk 1994:70.

[60] David Nassy in particularly has contributed to the idea of a religious tolerant colony, by the various passages in *Essay Historique* in which he elaborately praises the freedom from bigotry in religious matters. See for instance, Nassy 1974b:136. In an often quoted passage, Nassy reports the story of a multi-religious family that housed no less than five religions under one roof; a Jew who begot several children by his Afro-Surinamese 'pagan concubine', were incorporated into the Dutch Reformed Church, but intermarried with men from other Christian congregations. Nassy 1974b:242. J.J. Vrij has identified this family as the family Montel. In Vrij 2004:55. Many other examples of multi-religious households can be found in the district registers, NA, 1.05.08.01:639-694, and NA, 1.05.11.09:58-68.

zeal for the colony, are nonetheless disdained and regarded by their fellow-inhabitants as a class of men whose connections, good intelligence and friendship are always useless or dangerous for all who profess another religion.[61]

Moreover, Jews could not take a seat in the Court of Police, nor exercise any other public office other than notary or assistant tax collector until 1825. This is not to say that Surinamese Jews were passive actors in this play of distinction; probably aware of the anti-Semite sentiments amongst Christian planters, they sought the support of Dutch colonial authorities (the Directors of the Society of Suriname and the governors) – with varying success.[62] Moreover, the Jews themselves, and in particular their community leaders, fervently safeguarded their *status aparte* and were reluctant to renounce their privileges in exchange for civil rights. Their separate status not only brought about political marginalization vis-à-vis Christian whites, but also provided Jewish community leaders with substantial power and eminency over their fellow community members. This made the Jewish privileges both an extorted right of self-chosen exclusivity, made possible by the sheer size of their community and economic importance during the early colonial period, as well as a discriminatory act by the dominant group of Christian colonists.

After the mid eighteenth century, relations between Jewish and Christian colonists deteriorated. Although David Nassy ascribed the increase of anti-Jewish sentiments to the economic distress that plagued the colony, the main cause for heightened anti-Semitism is found in the political tension between Jewish and Christian planters that developed in this period.[63] A political conflict concerning the election of new members for the Court of Police during the office of Governor Mauricius (1742-1751) induced a series of anti-Semitic events in Suriname. Jews were accused of having manipulated the election of the Court of Police, by asking Governor Mauricius which candidates he preferred most. According to Mauricius, this practice was common usage by Jews and non-Jews alike, 'and as old as the Colony itself'.[64] Yet this time it provoked a serious anti-Jewish reaction.[65] In a petition to the Directors of the Society of Suriname, a group of Christian planters compared Jodensavanne with a 'den of thieves' (*dievenhol*) and a request was made to exempt Jews from the

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[61]   Nassy 1974b:103.

[62]   For instance, the relationship between the Jewish community leaders and Governor van Scharphuizen (1689-1696) was downright painful.

[63]   I largely follow Van Lier's analyses of anti-Semitism in Suriname in this period (Van Lier 1971).

[64]   Quoted in Van Lier 1971:89. For the full commentary of Mauricius on these events, see Du Plessis 1752:96.

[65]   This affair is documented extensively in Van der Meiden 1987.

election of the Court of Police, as 'under no Christian power, it is permitted or tolerated that Jews meddle with state affairs.'[66] Although the request was denied, the anti-Jewish tone was set for the series of incidents that followed. In 1761, some members of the Court of Police developed a plan for a ghetto for the ever-growing number of Jews that settled in Paramaribo. Although the Directors of the Society of Suriname did not oppose the plan, they replied that the privileges of the Jews should remain intact; the plan for a Jewish ghetto in Paramaribo was never effectuated.[67] Later, in 1775, Jews were denied access to the theatre. These incidents, although hostile in nature, never posed a real threat to the Surinamese Jews, who knew themselves protected by the Dutch colonial authorities who, in turn, were only too aware of the economic importance of the Jewish planters for the well-being of the colony.

Conditions improved somewhat during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, not in the least because of the close relationship the Jews maintained with the governors that served in Suriname in this period (Texier, Wichers and De Frederici). Still, latent anti-Semitism flitted through the colony. The often-expressed affiliation of the Jews with the governors had resulted in a general idea among the Christian planters of the Jews as sycophants of the local colonial authorities. Moreover, the ongoing threat of maroon attacks was a continuous cause for anxiety in the colony. A scapegoat was found in the person of 'the' Jewish planter, who, because of his alleged ill-treatment of his slaves, was blamed for the formation of a maroon society and the ongoing attacks on the plantations. Especially in the heat of the abolitionist debate during the mid nineteenth century, when marronage had become a memory of the past and only few Jewish-owned plantations remained, the image of the cruel Jewish planter was rampant and anti-Jewish sentiments flourished. Further incidents illustrate the prevailing anti-Jewish sentiments in Suriname throughout the nineteenth century. Several of these occasions were mentioned before: the reluctance to admit Jews in public functions, the incident over Prengle and teacher Batenburg, the snide remarks over Van Emden and the forthright anti-Semite tone in several mid nineteenth century publications. By this time the image of the Surinamese Jews as an opportunistic group, craving for power, was firmly established.

It was during the office of Governor M.A. de Savornin Lohman (1889-1891) that a complicated political conflict arose between the governor and the members of the Colonial States, by then dominated by Jews. De Savornin Lohman was already notorious for his unconcealed anti-Semitism prior to his installation in office in Suriname, and an atmosphere of distrust had characterized his arrival in Suriname. Shortly after his installation, the outbreak of popular unrest among the Afro-

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[66] Hartsinck 1770:828; Nassy 1974b:77.

[67] Van Lier 1971:90; Wolbers 1861, 273; Nassy 1974b:109-10.

Surinamese farmers of the Para-district over a tax increase caused the new governor to collide with the Colonial States. [68] De Savornin Lohman was severely criticized for his high-handed way of acting during this affair. Especially the (Jewish owned) local newspaper *De West-Indier*, became a mouthpiece of the local elites to express their discontent with the administration of Savornin Lohman. Confronted with the members of the Colonial States (Jews and non-Jews), who represented the upper middle-class and the affluent section of the population, Savornin Lohman turned to lower Afro-Surinamese classes and Moravian missionaries for support. The conflict then developed into a struggle to win over public opinion.

Initially, anti-Semitic sentiments were limited to some anti-Jewish articles in *De Volksbode*, a local newspaper that arduously supported De Savornin Lohman.[69] Meanwhile, the political strife continued, and in April 1891, De Savornin Lohman resigned from office. Savornin Lohman's resignation caused the immediate escalation of the dispute. In a reaction, *De Volksbode* published several articles in Sranan and urged the people to protest against Savornin Lohman's resignation for which the upcoming celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Colonial States would provide ample opportunity. Early in the morning of the 12th of May – the day of the celebration – a madding crowd of Afro-Surinamese had gathered in the streets of Paramaribo, shouting, plundering, and smashing windows. The unrest continued for nearly three days, and the main targets were Jewish shops and houses.[70] What had started as a dispute over the settlement of popular unrest over a tax increase, escalated into violent outbreaks primarily aimed at the Jewish population. The conflict with De Savornin Lohman was remarkable in the sense that is was one of those rare instances that the Jews collided head-on with the governor, whereas in general the relationship with colonial authorities was guarded carefully and kindled by the Jewish community leaders. The fact that the plundering clearly possessed an anti-Jewish character has raised the question whether these anti-Jewish sentiments among the Afro-Surinamese population stemmed in fact from a rancour among the Afro-Surinamese founded in a shared memory of slavery and white domination.[71]

When reflecting upon these anti-Jewish incidents in Suriname, it should be noted that the context of anti-Jewish sentiments during the middle of the eighteenth century

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[68] For a detailed discussion of these events, see Van Lier 1971:339-59. See also Ramsoedh 1993. For a Moravian perspective on these events, see Lenders 1996:337-342.

[69] Van Lier 1971:350, and Ramsoedh 1993:63. In September 1890, commotion arose over the publication of an anti-Semitic article, titled '*De leer of the Talmud* (the teaching of the Talmud)'. Unfortunately, the editions of the newspaper De Volksbode, stored at the Dutch Royal Library in The Hague, were at the time of writing not accessible for further analysis, because of their bad condition.

[70] Van Lier 1971:356.

[71] Ramsoedh 1993:69.

differed greatly from anti-Jewish sentiments during the mid to late nineteenth century. When a group of Christian planters objected to Jewish voting rights for the Court of Police, they founded their request because such a situation did not exist under any other Christian regime outside Suriname. It is exactly this grudge against Jewish political influence that explains much of the strained relationship between Jews and Christians in Suriname. After all, in Suriname, the Jews were not a small minority group, but constituted one-third to one-half of the total white population. Christian settlers came from Europe with fixed ideas on Jews and their social status, but found in Suriname a large Jewish group with all sorts of established rights and privileges. Since the Portuguese Jews had lived a rather isolated life in Jodensavanne during the early colonial period, refraining from interference with local politics as much as possible, few conflicts had emerged between Jewish and Christian colonists during the early colonial era. Through the influx of poor Jews, the relocation of Portuguese-Jewish community life to Paramaribo, and increased political assertiveness, the visibility of the Jews increased. White Christian colonists were now increasingly confronted with a relatively large group of Jews that claimed their share of social status and political power on an everyday basis. The limits of religious tolerance in Suriname were quickly reached.

The contrast became even greater during the nineteenth century, when Suriname became a so-called 'abandoned colony' (referring to the fact that many plantation-owners lived in the Netherlands and had their estates managed by local administrators).[72] The division between Jewish and whites now became – generally speaking – a division between locally-born Jews, with long family histories in Suriname, versus Dutch expatriates who came to Suriname for relatively short periods in office, after which they would return to Europe. Although there had always been a group of locally born Christian whites in Suriname, their numbers decreased considerably during the nineteenth century; in fact, over time, locally born whites were largely of Jewish origin. By default, this brought on a greater participation of Surinamese Jews in the administration of the colony. This, in turn, raised tensions, between not only the different white factions in Suriname, but also between Jews and the coloured elites, who by then increasingly entered the higher echelons of Suriname's society.[73]

The gradual incorporation of the Surinamese Jews into the colonial administration is illustrated by their expanding participation in the colonial

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[72] Jews were generally barred from these positions and could only be appointed as administrators for Jewish-owned plantations, which contributed to the pauperization of the Surinamese Jews during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Ironically, to the many Jewish planters who had lost their plantations after the crisis of the 1770s, this was the one trade they mastered, but were no longer allowed to practice.

[73] Van Lier 1971:258-265.

representative bodies, especially from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Although the dominance (politically and economically) of a relatively small group of Jews paints a rather distorted view of the general condition of the Surinamese Jews, the image of an omnipresent Jewish group that firmly controlled the local political arena – a group, moreover, that had become associated with Suriname's cruel past of slavery and domination – stirred many ill-feelings amongst other groups, especially lower-class Afro-Surinamese; feelings which reached their climax during the uprising of May 1891.

2   DIASPORIC CONNECTIONS

The emancipation of the Surinamese Jews had not only implications for their social and political involvement in Suriname. With the decree of 1825, the Jewish communities in the (Dutch) West-Indian colonies came under the supreme control of the Chief-Commission of Israelite Affairs, which resulted in a strengthening of the ties with Dutch Jewry.

The Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs

Before 1814, the Dutch Republic lacked a Jewish umbrella organisation, leaving a large degree of autonomy to local Jewish communities in the Netherlands and its colonies. This situation changed drastically when King Willem I decided to reorganize the Dutch-Jewish community in 1814.[74] Local Dutch-Jewish communities were grouped into twelve main synagogues (*Hoofdsynagogen*), each headed by a chief rabbi. A Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs (*Hoofdcommissie tot de zaken der Israëlieten*) was established under the authority of the Ministry of Reformed Churches and other Worships (*Ministerie van Hervormde en andere Erediensten;* from now referred to in this study as the Ministry of Religious Affairs).[75] The Chief Commission supervised the Jewish communities with respect to their observance of Governmental decrees and their community regulations, and advised the Dutch Government on new measures concerning the Dutch Jews. The members of the Chief Commission were appointed by the Minister of Religious Affairs and were, without exception, advocates of a rapid acculturation of Dutch Jews.[76] With the Royal Decree of 1825, the Jewish communities in the Dutch West Indian colonies (including Suriname) were integrated

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[74] For the religious politics of King Willem I, see Bornewasser 1979.

[75] According to Jacob Katz, the increase of state-involvement in Jewish affairs during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a trend visible almost anywhere in Europe. See for example Katz 1993:217-8. For the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs, and their role the acculturation of Dutch Jewry in the nineteenth century, see Wallet 2007.

[76] Blom 1995:216-8.

into the Jewish organizational structure of the mother country. As a result, the Surinamese-Jewish community came under the umbrella of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs in the Netherlands, with corresponding delegates and members in Suriname.[77]

The incorporation of the Surinamese-Jewish community into the organizational structure of Dutch Jewry, did not so much result from a strong diasporic connection between the Surinamese Jews and Dutch (mainly Amsterdam) Jewish community, but was primarily a consequence of the colonial connection between Suriname and the Netherlands, and the expanding Dutch state control of Surinamese affairs during the nineteenth century. Now that the Surinamese Jews had become part of a supra-local Dutch political structure, they were faced with new adversaries, such as the delegates of the Chief Commission. The regents could not address themselves in person to the delegates of the Chief Commission, but had to operate through the mediation of two officially appointed 'corresponding members of the Chief Commission'.[78] Diasporic connections between the Surinamese-Jewish community and the Dutch-Jewish community were re-enforced because of this reorganisation. The community leaders lost a great deal of authority over, and independence in, internal affairs as community regulations were now controlled by the Chief Commission. One of the main internal affairs that required formal approval by the Chief Commission was the design of new community regulations or *Askamoth*. The process of negotiation for these new regulations is illustrative of the complex and bureaucratic relationships between the local community and its diasporic centre; between the colony and the metropole; a relationship that was imbued by metropolitan arrogance and the haughtiness of a (former) colonial elite.

Negotiating the *Askamoth*

When civil rights were granted to the Surinamese Jews in 1825, one of the clauses stated that new community regulation should be drafted under the supervision of the Chief Commission. The old *Askamoth* would remain in force, however, until the new regulations had been put into effect.[79] In 1829, a new set of rules and regulations was

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[77] Gouvernementsbladen van Suriname, 1825 No. 3, art. 6. Although some changes took place during the nineteenth century, the Chief Commission would remain in function until 1870, when it was finally dissolved.

[78] The first local correspondents of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs were Salomon de la Parra and David Sanches, which illustrates their high social status.

[79] A clause was added, however, that those regulations which were considered conflicting with the order in the colony, would be annulled immediately, and especially the regulations which stated that 'civilian authorities would extent the necessary help to condemnations of the church councils against community members, in cases of religious offences and other acts that are not punishable by Law.' Gouvernementsbladen van Suriname, 1825, no.3 (1825).

presented to the governor. Six years later, in 1835, the draft regulations were submitted to the Chief Commission, who took no less than eight years to approve them. In the mean -time, the old regulations, which dated from the late eighteenth century, still served their purpose well. There was, however, one strong incentive to make work of the new *Askamoth* and finalize them as soon as possible: the colonial authorities had decided that state subsidy to the Surinamese-Jewish communities was subject to the completion of new and modernized community regulations.

In 1842 and 1843, the new regulations were finally approved by the Minister of State[80] and the Minister of Colonies, respectively.[81] However, when the community leaders of the Portuguese and High German community studied the new rules, they came upon a number of gaps that had 'certainly arisen due to changing spirit of time.' One of the gaps pointed out by Surinamese Jews pertained to the status of coloured Jews, slaves and manumissioned slaves in the community, given that some drastic changes had taken place in Suriname that called for due consideration. On 11 March 1841 and 11 December 1842, the Portuguese and High German community respectively had introduced new rules concerning the inclusion of coloured Jews, slaves and manumissioned slaves in their communities.[82] Not surprisingly, the Surinamese Jews felt that these new rules needed to be included in the newly approved regulations. Moreover, the Surinamese Jews felt that the Chief Commission had not given due consideration for their 'local circumstances'.[83]

The regents of both communities jointly addressed themselves to the governor on 10 April 1843, and requested a redraft of the regulations. The redraft, accompanied with an extensive memorandum, was presented to the governor and the Chief Commission in July 1845. The members of the Chief Commission reacted fiercely to the memorandum of the Surinamese Jews. Abraham Suasso de Pinto and Samuel Teixeira de Mattos, prominent Dutch Jews who were charged with the regulations of the Portuguese-Jewish community, believed that the set of regulations that had been approved were based on the provisions of the rules of 15 January 1810 which applied to all Israelite communities in the Dutch Kingdom, 'thus the Israelites in the overseas possessions will have to behave accordingly as well'.[84] Michel Henri Godefroi, a

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[80] Minister of State: *Minister van Staat belast met de generale Directie voor de Zaken der Hervormde Kerk.*

[81] NA 2.07.01.05:447, Approved Regulations of the Dutch Portuguese Israelite Head Synagogue in Suriname; idem of the Dutch Israelite Head Synagogue in Suriname, 25-12-1842 and 12-1-1853.

[82] For the story of the coloured Jews and their incorporation into the heart of the community, see Chapter VII.

[83] NA 2.07.01.05:447, Statement of explanation on the Draft regulations for the Dutch Israelite Head Synagogue in Suriname, no date. Appendix by file 543, 14-4-1847.

[84] NA 2.07.01.05:447, Comments on the Draft Regulations for the Portuguese Israelite Head Synagogue in Suriname, 29-3-1846.

Dutch Jew who would become the first Jewish Minister of Justice, and who commented on the High German regulations, reacted in the same vein.[85] The members of the Chief Commission generally regarded the objections of the Surinamese Jews as inadmissible; nevertheless, a new version of the regulations was put forward and approved by the responsible parties (Chief Commission, Minister of Religious Affair, and governor) in November 1847.

Upon reading this new version of the regulations, the Surinamese Jews protested again. This time, their discontent was fuelled by some further alterations and additions that had been made by the members of the Chief Commission, apparently without their consent. Another round of editing and redrafting ensued: the Surinamese Jews made some new alternations in the draft regulations, and once again turned to the governor for approval in May 1848.[86] Although the Governor van Raders agreed with the spirit and intention of the proposal – which were merely explanatory elucidations and elaborations on several points – he believed he was not authorized to approve the alterations of the Surinamese Jews, as previous drafts had been approved by the Minister of Colonies and the Minister of Religious Affairs (in 1842 and 1843). Believing that the Minister of Colonies was still the authorized person, the governor forwarded this case to him.[87] The Minister of Colonies, in turn, addressed himself to the Minister of Justice who had temporarily been made responsible for the Department of Religious Affairs. The Minister of Colonies believed that community regulations should not be included in colonial legislation. In his opinion, an exception could be made only for the *finta* regulations. However, he was also of the opinion that, if the councils of religious congregations were to obtain the legal authority to collect *finta*, this would come close to a form of religious coercion, something he clearly opposed. Yet, as the church council of the Reformed Church had recently put out a similar request (authorization to issue membership contribution), the Minister proposed a joint disposition that would deal with both requests.[88] The letter of the Minister of Colonies would be the last in this long drawn-out process to change the community regulations of the Surinamese Jews. In the end, the regulations that had been approved in 1842 were never put into practice in Suriname, 'because of their incompatibility with local conditions'.

What, then, is the historic importance of this correspondence about community regulations, which, ultimately, were never put into effect? The negotiations over the

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[85]　NA: 2.07.01.05:447, Comments on the Draft regulations for the Dutch Israelite Head Synagogue in Suriname, 19-1-1847. Appendix by file 543, 1-4-1847.

[86]　NA 2.07.01.05:447, Approved regulations with a covering letter from the Portuguese and High German Jewish regents, 8-5-1848.

[87]　NA 2.07.01.05:447, Letter of Governor R. van Raders to the Minister of Colonies, 17-8-1849.

[88]　NA 2.07.01.05:447, Letter of the Minister of Colonies to the Minister of Justice, 10-11-1849.

new *Askamoth* illustrate the expanding Dutch state control in Suriname, as a result of which the Surinamese Jews were to be designated as 'Dutch Israelites overseas'. After centuries of relative autonomy and localized politics, Surinamese Jews were now formally included into a Dutch-Jewish framework. This official re-integration into Dutch Jewry was not something that the Surinamese Jews had decided for themselves, but was decided for them. The impact of Dutch control on Jewish daily life in Suriname was, however, limited. Correspondence with the Chief Commission about a single item could take years. The endless bureaucracy, the large number of parties and official bodies involved – the Jewish communities in Suriname, the correspondents of the Surinamese-Jewish communities, the governor of Suriname, the members of the Chief Commission in the Hague, the Minister of Religious Affairs – and the sheer geographical distance between the Netherlands and Suriname; all this would delay matters to such an extent that it was practically impossible for the central Dutch administration to exercise their power and effectively control the Surinamese Jews. In the meantime, the Surinamese Jews could, more or less, do as they saw fit, as long as their actions did not interfere with the policy of local colonial authorities in Suriname. Eventually, it would take another 50 year, until 1893 and 1894, before new community regulations were finally introduced in Suriname.[89]

Dutch rabbis in Suriname

In 1855, the regents of the Surinamese-Jewish communities addressed the Chief Commission on a different matter. By that time, the interest in new *Askamoth* had eased somewhat as the colonial authorities had abandoned the prerequisite of new community regulations for state subsidy, and had started to financially support the Surinamese-Jewish communities (similar to the subsidy schemes that applied to Christian congregations in Suriname). Now that both the Portuguese and High German community had more financial resources at their disposal, the regents focused on counteracting the secularization of the two communities. Ever since the Napoleonic era, the Surinamese Jews had been cut-off from Europe and their mother communities in Amsterdam. In the absence of 'proper' religious guidance, the Jewish regents had taken up the religious leadership of their respective communities, besides their role as cultural and civil leaders. As the regents increasingly adopted a more autonomous *modus operandi*, the Surinamese-Jewish congregations became increasingly more secluded from the Jewish world at large. By 1855, the Surinamese Jews had been without rabbinical guidance for more than half a century. However, as the newly acquired state-subsidy was insufficient to cover the cost of two rabbis – one each for the Portuguese and High German community – the regents joined forces and opted for

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[89] NA, 1.05.11.18: 509. NSA, Minutes 1893-1895, 4-1-1894. Copies of the new community regulations can be found in Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive:114, 116.

a shared rabbi for both communities.[90] The Chief Commission was approached for its mediation in finding a suitable rabbi for the Surinamese-Jewish community as a whole.

When the regents of both the Portuguese and High German communities put forward their request to the representatives of the Chief Commission in 1855, they desired the new religious leader to be 'a man far removed from all rabbinic fanaticism […] who could preach in the mother language [Dutch]'. According to the community leaders, 'their aim was not create a new sect by displacing the Mosaic Law, but rather that, following the Mosaic Law, the prayers would be said partly in Hebrew and partly in Dutch'.[91] After the usually tardy bureaucratic procedures, the Chief Commission eventually nominated Mozes Juda Lewenstein as a candidate for the position of chief rabbi in Suriname in October 1856. Lewenstein was enthusiastically accepted by the regents of both the Portuguese and High German Jewish communities and was officially installed on 12 March 1857.[92] When chief rabbi Mozes Juda Lewenstein came ashore in Suriname in January 1858, a new chapter in Surinamese-Jewish history commenced. Rabbi Lewenstein was the first of a range of Dutch rabbis, religious teachers and cantors that served in Suriname from the mid nineteenth onwards.[93]

The Surinamese community elders strongly believed that the coming of Lewenstein would end the difficulties of Surinamese Jewry. A reformed worship, in the mother tongue (which, by then, was Dutch), accompanied with organ music and 'ridded of all frills and endless praying', would entice the community members back into the synagogue, while his religious teaching would stimulate the Jewish education of the community's youngsters.[94] Not everybody had such pastoral expectations of a chief rabbi coming to Suriname, however. B.E. Colaço Belmonte, for instance, clearly opposed the appointment of any chief rabbi. As he proclaimed, he was:

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[90] The difficult road to cooperation between both communities is discussed in Chapter VI, page 254 and further.

[91] NA 2.07.05.01:447, 17-1-1855. Years of preparation preceded the appointment of a shared chief rabbi, and desired reformation of the synagogue services. See NSA Minutes 1851-1856, between 10-8-1851 and 31-10-1855.

[92] Lewenstein's appointment was financed partly by a state subsidy of 2500 guilders. This annual subsidy was already granted in 1847, but had been left unused as it was too low to finance a chief rabbi salary and there were not enough community means to cover the total costs (another 2500 guilders). Apparently, the financial strength of the Surinamese-Jewish community had improved somewhat by 1855, since the other half of Lewenstein's salary was paid from community funds and donations from community members. See the correspondence with Chief Commission over the appointment of Lewenstein: NA 2.07.05.01:477, between 16-1-1855 and 2-4-1857; Royal decree of Willem III, NA 2.07.05.01:447, 12-3-1857.

[93] The last qualified religious leader (other than visiting rabbis) to have served in Suriname, left in 1969.

[94] NSA Minutes 1851-1856, 5-11-1851.

> [A]gainst all slavish obedience. One only had to consult history to convince oneself, not only of the moral deterioration, but also of the split and discord caused by religious leaders to whom supreme authority was assigned to […]. How should we act against such a religious leader who wants to make alterations in the service [of worship] which may be appropriate for Europe, but which are fully unsuitable for this colony?[95]

Colaço Belmonte proved to be right in his prophecy. Lewenstein's intentions and inclinations could not have been further removed from the expectations of those Surinamese Jews who had hoped for a wind of change. From the very beginning of his appointment – during his inaugural sermon no less – Lewenstein made it clear that those who had hoped for a liberal rabbi would be disappointed. He assured the community members that he would deal summarily with all local habits, which, in his opinion, were excrescences and a blot on the Jewish religion.[96] Lewenstein clashed repeatedly with the community leaders during his time in Suriname The conflicts between Lewenstein and the community leaders show the fundamental differences between a traditional Dutch rabbi and a colonial Jewish community that had experienced two centuries of relative autonomy, and developed practices and understandings that fitted this small-scale colonial setting. Conflicts between both parties revolved around various issues, but can be easily reduced to conflicts over religious authority.[97] The community leaders, who had *de facto* been the religious leaders for half a century, were faced with a chief rabbi who now claimed a final say in religious matters. In contrast, the community leaders felt that Lewenstein was appointed under their authority and that, therefore, they had the final say in all matters related to the (religious) governance of the community.

The ensuing conflict on religious authority was put forward to the Chief Commission. Lewenstein was the first to address the Chief Commission and ask for their support. The Commission, in turn, asked the Surinamese Jews for a response and thus a lengthy correspondence was maintained between the two quarrelling parties and

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[95] Belmonte's proclaimed aversion to 'all slavish obedience' acquires additional significance in the light of his pamphlet *West-Indie en zijne belangen en Dr. W.R. van Hoëvell in zijn 'Slaven en vrijen': slavernij – emancipatie – kolonisate:* an explicit defence of the system of slavery in Suriname (Belmonte 1855).

[96] NSA *Intreepredikatie* (Inaugural sermon) Lewenstein: 22-1-1858. See also Meijer 1955:36, and Samson 1939.

[97] This is not to imply that creolization of the Surinamese Jews did primarily convoke conflicts within the field power relations and authority structures. Conflicts between community leaders and religious leadership over religious authority were an important characteristic of the Surinamese-Jewish communities. However, often these conflicts pertained to issues that touched the essence of the creole Jewish community the Surinamese Jews had become, and will be discussed in the upcoming chapters. Conflicts pertained to issues such as mixed marriages and the meaning of *halakhic* versus colour-based community demarcations; the violation of *kashrut* and the meaning of an orthodox Jewish lifestyle in a tropical environment, and various conflicting religious and social conventions.

the Chief Commission, the contents of which betray a seemingly irreconcilable cultural gap between the creolized community the Surinamese Jews had become by then, and this Dutch rabbi.[98] Although Lewenstein's complaints focused on five points, his main grudge seems to have stemmed from the loose interpretation of *halakha* in Suriname, in combination with the affront of being denied the final say in these matters. Particularly the unconditional acknowledgement of certain marriages that were against orthodox Jewish law and custom, and the incorporation of non-Jews into the community, were a thorn in his flesh. Other complaints involved the acknowledgement of locally trained ritual butchers, and the lack of observance of *kashrut* (food laws).[99]

At first, the Chief Commission's reaction was rather reserved. A new legislation on the supervision of church communities, issued in September 1853, had returned the authority and mandate for self-rule of religious affairs to religious congregations that were acknowledged under Dutch law (Jewish and non-Jewish alike).[100] Consequently, the Chief Commission was no longer authorized to interfere with internal (religious) affairs. Moreover, considering the 'special conditions and colonial laws' in Suriname, the Chief Commission believed that the liberties of the Surinamese community should be curtailed as little as possible.[101]

More outspoken and explicit, however, was an advisory letter in this matter to the Chief Commission drawn up by A. de Pinto and A.B. Wolff, dated a few months later. The letter reveals a more deeply rooted conflict within the Surinamese community itself. What seemed to have been merely a single-issue conflict between Lewenstein and the community leaders concerning religious authority, turned out to be a profound contradiction that touched upon the religious and cultural foundation of the Surinamese-Jewish community. The arrival of Lewenstein only served as a catalyst that exposed the ongoing rift between the continued localization of Jewish religious customs to the Surinamese context on the one hand, and a (re)orientation towards the global diaspora as represented by the *halakhic* conception of Judaism on the other hand. Lewenstein obviously embodied the latter, and most Surinamese-Jewish community leaders the former. More importantly, Lewenstein found support with some community members, including one of the correspondents of the Chief Commission in Suriname. In their advice to the General Assembly of the Chief Commission, de Pinto and Wolff fully sided with Lewenstein, and made it clear that,

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[98]   See NA 2.07.05.01:447, Correspondence between 4-9-1860 and 27-11-1862; and also Meijer 1955.

[99]   NA 2.07.01.05:447, Letter of M. Lewenstein to the Chief Commission, 18-10-1860.

[100]   *Wet op de Kerkgenootschappen*, issued at 10 September 1853. See www.kerkrecht.nl (accessed 30-6-2008).

[101]   NA 2.07.01.05:447, Letter of the Chief Commission to M.L. Barnett, corresponding member of the Chief Commission, 1-5-1862.

as far as they were concerned. The community leaders should acknowledge Lewenstein's authority in religious matters.[102] However, they also acknowledged that the Chief Commission was no longer the authoritative body in these matters, and they explicitly put forward their point only as an advice to Lewenstein and the Surinamese-Jewish community leaders, who, in their opinion, should settle the matter among themselves.[103]

Historic fate had it that Lewenstein died before matters could escalate any further. His death in 1864 also ended the relations between Surinamese-Jewish community and the Chief Commission of Israelite affairs. Ultimately, the Chief Commission was dissolved in 1870, in line with the changed policy towards autonomous self-rule of religious congregations under Dutch law. The reconnection of the Surinamese-Jewish community to the Dutch-Jewish community proved to be more lasting, however, since the Surinamese-Jewish community leaders continued to ask the Dutch-Jewish community for support and advice when appointing religious leadership. It is through the succession of Dutch rabbis, religious teachers and cantors that would serve in Suriname until 1969 that the Surinamese Jews were brought back into a (Dutch-)Jewish religious framework.

After the death of Lewenstein, some efforts were undertaken to find a new rabbi that would serve both the Portuguese and High German communities, but to no avail. The Colonial States (with its strong Jewish representation) continued to urge, fruitlessly, for the appointment of a chief rabbi at each yearly discussion of the colonial budget. Important obstacles were not only the lack of candidates willing to serve in Suriname, but also the mutually strained relationship between the High German and Portuguese-Jewish communities at the time. During the late nineteenth century, relations between both communities were frustrated up to the point that it came to an official schism between the two church councils. The Portuguese and High German community each went their own way up to 1894, after which they gradually attempted to seek rapprochement.[104] In the meantime, the search for religious leadership continued.

Following the disturbing events of May 1891, when Paramaribo was the scene of anti-Jewish riots after the discharge of Governor De Savornin Lohman, both communities strongly felt the need for religious leadership. In August of that year, the regents of the Portuguese community addressed themselves to the Amsterdam chief rabbi Izack de Juda Palache – and requested his cooperation 'for the good of the

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[102] NA 2.07.01.05:447, Report of A. de Pinto and A.B. Wolff to the General Assembly of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs, 27-11-1862.

[103] NA 2.07.01.05:447, Findings of the General Assembly of the Chief Commission to Lewenstein and the corresponding members of the Chief Commission in Suriname, 29-1-1863.

[104] NSA Minutes 1893-1985, 2-4-1894.

Portuguese community.' The regents provided Juda Palache with a gloomy description of the deplorable condition of the community. Because of the lack of a local religious leader or cantor, and no financial means to attract one, the synagogue had been closed for more than six weeks now without any prospect of change in the nearby future. Furthermore, no support what so ever was to be expected from the 'sister community'. The colonial authorities had agreed on a subsidy of maximum 1750 guilders for the appointment of a religious teacher, and the Portuguese community leaders asked rabbi Palache to mediate in finding a suitable religious teacher 'also capable of presenting short sermons, but especially someone with a good appearance and a good organ [voice] preferably unmarried and between 25 and 35 years old'.[105] However, except for two persons 'who were not recommended', Palache was not able to find a suitable candidate who could function as religious teacher and cantor. The Portuguese regents, not fully devoid of melodrama, feared that their community was on the verge of closure.[106]

Eventually, Juda Palacha roped his brother-in-law, D.J. Querido, to help and take-up the vacant position. Querido's Surinamese adventure would be short-lived, as it would for those who succeeded him. In 1894, Querido and his wife S. Querido-Palache left Suriname after a flaming row with the church council of the Portuguese-Jewish community. It was the governor and the Court of Police who eventually granted Querido an honourable discharge and declared all decisions made by the church council to be unlawful.[107] Upon Querido's departure, the quest for another candidate was started yet again. It proved no simple affair to find young men willing that were willing to serve in Suriname. For instance, one suitable candidate reacted that he would not be persuaded to come to Suriname 'since he had heard that [in Suriname] the breaking of Sabbath and High Holidays, the violation of the *kashrut* and mixed marriages and so on are almost universal, and that as a consequence, the religious state of Surinamese Judaism is extremely unfavourable.'[108] Meanwhile, the

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[105] NA 1.05.11.18:540, 7-8-1891. In addition to the subsidy of the colonial funds, a collection was held among the members of the Portuguese-Jewish community. A total of 2527 guilders was collected, varying from gifts of 1 to 400 guilders. NA 1.05.11.18:540, 17-7-1892.

[106] NA 1.05.11.18:540, 29-2-1892.

[107] See the correspondence between Querido and Samuel D. Fernandes, who was the secretary of the Portuguese-Jewish community and sided with Querido during his conflict with the church council. After his return to Amsterdam, Querido found it hard to find a new position as a religious teacher. In 1904, Querido was appointed as a cantor in the Portuguese-Jewish community of Curaçao, Mikwé Israel, for the period of six months. The letters of Querido cover the period from 14 November 1894 to 24 November 1895. Parts of Fernandes' personal archive, such as these letters and other personal documents, including an exchange of letter with some relatives (presumably his sons) concerning the administration, and day-to-day worries of the plantations Vriendschap and La Liberté got mixed up with community documents. See NA 1.05.11.18:540.

[108] Correspondence between Querido and Fernandes (NA 1.05.11.18:540, 7-9-1895). Eventually the teacher D. Klein was appointed in Suriname in 1896. NA 1.05.11.18:540, 10-5-1896 and 19-6-1896.

High German Jewish community had started their search for a religious leader in 1891 too, which resulted in the appointment of rabbi Jacob Samuel Roos in 1893.[109] The efforts of High German Surinamese Jews were somewhat more fruitful compared to of the Portuguese-Jewish community; rabbi Roos would eventually end up staying in Suriname for 12 years.

In the course of the twentieth century, a number of Dutch religious teachers came (and went) to Suriname. While the duration of their stay varied greatly, they all shared the same experience of repeated confrontations with community leaders over religious authority and the boundaries of Surinamese-Jewish identity. These conflicts often resulted in a – temporary – return to more traditionalist (*halakhic*) notions of Jewish identity. Besides the debates on the status of local religious traditions (*minhag*), other important obstacles were the practices pertaining to so-called proselytes (converts) and the rights of 'false' (*onechte*) Jews (uncircumcised Jews and non-observing Jews). The confrontations were not only limited to issues pertaining to the boundaries of the community, but also focused on essential characteristics of the communities themselves along the dichotomy of orthodox versus liberal. The localization of the Surinamese-Jewish community, and the development of a creole mentality among the Surinamese Jews, often ran contrary to the principles of the global Jewish diaspora. The debates that started in the mid nineteenth century continue until this present day.

3   HOW A COMMUNITY WAS FORGED

Ever since their first settlement, the Jewish colonists were faced with challenges brought about by their new environment: a slave society and a colonial order. In the slave-society of Suriname, the Jews belonged to the group of colonial whites, although a small proportion of the Suriname Jews were the offspring of white Jewish men and Afro-Surinamese women (be it slave or free). Being a Jew meant being subordinate to Jewish rules and jurisdiction, and dependent on a Jewish social network for matters such as education, marriage, and burial grounds. The *status aparte* of the Surinamese Jews was physically embodied by the very existence of Jodensavanne, and legally embedded in the Jewish privileges and denial of civil rights.

The turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century marks a turning point in Surinamese-Jewish history in many ways. Years of war against the maroons (escaped slaves) had destabilized an already declining plantation sector in Suriname. Following the financial crisis at the Amsterdam stock exchange between 1772 and 1773, many planters could no longer settle their debts and were forced to sell their estates. An

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[109] For detailed information on rabbi J.S. Roos and his time in Suriname, see the special edition of Teroenga of June 1953. According to the *Surinaamsche Bode* of 24 April 1907, Roos had 'corrected many false assumptions pertaining to the Jewish teaching that existed with non-Jewish people.' Quoted in Teroenga, *14:7 (June 1953)*.

estimated two-third of the Jewish population lived in poverty. Economically, the decline of the plantation economy lessened the socio-economic gap between the High German and Portuguese Jews. Contrary to the Portuguese Jews, who became increasingly more impoverished due to the collapse of the plantation economy, High German Jews, who never participated in the plantation economy at a large scale, experienced an improvement of their average wealth. With the demise of the plantations, Portuguese-Jewish community life was reallocated to the multicultural environment of Paramaribo, where they came to share the same environment as the High German Jews, who had always lived and worked in Paramaribo. Jews found employment in (small)-trade, crafts, and administrative jobs held at the offices of plantation directors, commercial establishments and the colonial administration.

Because of the economic demise, Suriname lost its appeal as a migration destination. Large-scale migration came to an end during the early nineteenth century, and with that, the constant influx of European-Jewish migrants also ceased. Demographically, the Surinamese-Jewish community transformed from a migrant community into a settlers' community. This transformation fostered the development of a creole Jewishness in Suriname and a drift away form traditionalist Judaism, as is illustrated by the snide remarks of a Dutch rabbi regarding the 'extremely unfavourable religious state of Surinamese Judaism' discussed earlier. However, it were the numerous cross-cultural interactions of everyday life in Suriname that ultimately gave content and meaning to the creoleness that came to characterize the Jewish life in Suriname. These interactions ranged from the forced intimacy of plantation life in an environment dominated by Afro-Surinamese, to the dynamics that result from living in the multicultural urban environment of Paramaribo, where from the late eighteenth century onwards a growing number of mixed relationships gave rise to ever more complex social relationships. These interactions were responsible for various examples of cultural production, although – as noted before – tangible examples of cultural production were rather rare cases in Surinamese-Jewish history. Cultural production was, however, not entirely absent, as is underscored by concrete manifestations in fields as speech, foods and (as will be discussed in the following chapter) cemetery space.

Politically and religiously, the nineteenth century sees important changes as well. While the Surinamese Jews would decline in numbers, from approximately 1365 in 1845 to 670 in 1921, they gained political power at the same time. With the elimination of the Jewish privileges in 1825 and simultaneous the granting of civil rights, Surinamese Jews were fully incorporated into the colonial state. A whole range of new job opportunities was opened to them, and Jews were now eligible for high positions in the Suriname's colonial civil service as well. In practice, some obstacles had to be by-passed before full-participation was actually realised. There was a latent dissatisfaction among Christian settlers with regard to the high social and political standing of some prominent Jews in the colony. The events of May 1891, moreover,

show that also anti-Jewish sentiments were latently present among the Afro-Surinamese population.

Throughout the nineteenth century, we see a slow but sure expansion of Jews into the colonial administrative bodies. More than 50 percent of the elected members of the Colonial Assembly in the 1890s were Jews. These new political achievements had some consequences for the communities as well. A leading position within the community was no longer the only means for exercising power and obtaining some form of authority. In fact, it was no longer understood that Jews who played in important role in the political arena, were also closely involved with community affairs. Thus, while influential Jews may have been important for the general perception of the Jews as a powerful group in the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially the 1890s, the religious communities did not stand to gain directly from this small group of highly influential Jews in the upper echelons of Suriname's society.

As for the religious context, diasporic connections of the Surinamese Jews were predominantly restricted to religious relationships, import of religious attributes, advice of the Amsterdam *Bet Din* and succession of rabbis and religious teachers who took up service as religious leaders of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Although migratory patterns show some ties with St. Eustatius, diasporic economic networks seem to have been less dominant in the Surinamese-Jewish communities than elsewhere in the Caribbean. The Surinamese-Jewish community was not essentially a trade community, but rather a locally oriented agricultural and retail (local trade) community; its principal characteristic being its locality rather than its diasporic connections. Still, because of the reorganization of Dutch Jewry, and especially through the installation of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs in the early nineteenth century, diasporic connections between the Surinamese-Jewish community and the larger Jewish community were strengthened. The community leaders lost a great deal of authority and independence over internal affairs, both at a social and religious level; community regulations were now controlled by the Chief Commission. Any changes in the internal organization or the religious rules had to be approved by the Chief Commission and ratified by the Minister of Religious Affairs before they could come into effect. Clearly, the mediation by the Chief Commission in religious affairs renewed ties with the Netherlands and the Dutch-Jewish community. Such is illustrated by the various Dutch rabbis who served in Suriname during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Even when this control declined, the Jewish regents never regained their previous position of power because of the granting of civil rights and the abdication of the Jewish privileges.

To sum up, it may be said that the Surinamese Jews transformed from a socio-economic important ethnic group with a separate juridical status during the eighteenth century, into a small and increasingly marginalized church community from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Notwithstanding the incorporation of individual Jews in the top of the colonial administration, the Surinamese-Jewish community as a whole

lost their significance as powerful, ethnically distinct group. As a consequence of, and parallel to, these extraneous developments, a number of conflicts arose within the Surinamese-Jewish communities, especially pertaining to different notions of Surinamese Jewishness. These conflicts and discussions resulted from a field of tension created by the combined processes of creolization and localization, and a reviving of diasporic identifications in the Surinamese-Jewish community, and are the focus of the following part of this book.

PART TWO

CULTIVATING DIFFERENCES,
LOCALIZING BOUNDARIES

V

ECHOES OF THE OTHER: LOCATING JEWS AND IMAGINING JEWISH DIFFERENCE IN SURINAME

> 'In Suriname, Jews are held in deep contempt not only by the Christians, but also by the negroes, so that the latter do not consider them [the Jews] as whites; if they spot two Christians and a Jew, they say: *Toe Bákkra lange wan Joe* (two whites and a Jew).'[1]

The carefully constructed identification of the Surinamese-Jewish elite as colonial whites presupposes a self-evident connection between whiteness and Jewishness. In the race-based slave societies of the New World, the Jews could become whiter than they could ever have been in Europe at that time. By identifying themselves as white, the Jews claimed a dominant position that was associated with white identity; a position that, according to W.E.B. du Bois, was 'codified in law and institutionalized in access to power. It was reproduced through a variety of social economic and political practices, and expressed in ritualized performances that ranged from the privilege of having in the bests seats in churches, down to demonstration of power by striking an enslaved body with a whip.'[2] However, as illustrated in Teenstra's quotation, Jewishness and whiteness did not go hand-in-hand by default, not even in Suriname. Whether the quotation is based on historical fact or merely concerns a fictitious conversation between two slaves – primarily underlining the author's perception of Jews – remains unknown. In either case, it does suggest that in

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[1] Teenstra 1842:45.

[2] David Lambert following W.E.B du Bois (Lambert 2005:36).

Suriname's race-based society, whiteness was not an absolute marker. Whiteness as a racial category was, ultimately, as ambiguous as any other. In the context of colonial Suriname, one should differentiate between the various meanings of 'white' as a denominator for skin-colour, legal category, Christian confession, and European origin.[3] Although Jews were legally considered as 'white' in Suriname – with the exception, of course, of the coloured Jews – they were not necessarily acknowledged as such, nor can one presume the Jews to possess the prerogatives or social standing that are associated with a colonial white identification.

In this chapter, the perspective from the previous chapters, which focused on Jewish self-understanding, is overturned. Addressing the identification of the Surinamese Jews as perceived by the maroons, enslaved Africans and white Christians shows a notion of Jewish whiteness that is not only ambiguous, but also conditional and subjective to the vantage point of the observer. Three different perspectives are considered in this chapter, which underscore these discrepancies. Firstly, from a maroon's perspective, the Jew appears unequivocally as a white man. Somewhere along the line, however, the white man transformed into a 'Dju', the Sranan/Saramaccan word for Jew. More complex is the second image of the Jew as the personification of the cruel planter. This perspective was widespread at the time of abolitionist polemic writings of the mid nineteenth century, and still resonates in contemporary historical memory of many Surinamese. In this chapter I will argue that the image of the Surinamese Jew as the perennial cruel planter, finds its origin in a long European tradition of anti-Semitic thinking and stereotyped representations of the 'Jew' in a somewhat adapted version made relevant for the Surinamese context. The third perspective considered here is that of a European outsider, the Antwerp globetrotter and painter P.J. Benoit, who displays ambivalence towards the status of the Jews. His group of 'whites' does not incorporate the Jews; instead they are ranked amongst the free population together with the free 'creoles', free mulattoes and free negroes. Furthermore, it is through his painting of a poor Jewish shopkeeper that the dilemma of poor colonial whites is illustrated best. The presence of a growing number of poor Jews in a society legitimized by European white supremacy undermined the racialized boundaries of colonial rule (pace Stoler).

The ambiguities of Jewish whiteness are analyzed further from the perspective of the Christian planters and the colonial authorities in the second part of this chapter. While the Jews were incorporated into the dominant white sectors of the Surinamese society, the Surinamese Jews were effectively disqualified at the same time. Ideas among white Christian settlers over the location of the Surinamese Jews in Suriname's social hierarchy clashed with the actual political power and numerical dominance of

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[3]   In Van Lier's *Frontier Society* the category of 'whites' (*blanken*) in the above quote was translated as 'Europeans'. Once again, this indicates the synonymous use of both terms in Suriname, as well as the clear ethnic charge of the category of 'Europeans' (Van Lier 1971:94-5).

Surinamese Jews. The outsider status of the Jews is exemplified by their separate status in the colonial institution of the civil guard, as well as by their categorization in colonial censuses and population registers. From the perspective of the colonial authorities, Jewish whiteness was just one out of many identifications of the Jews in Suriname. During the early colonial period, it was primarily their religious 'otherness' that caused the Jews to be separated as a distinct category in the population registrations. Their classification as 'natives' together with the Afro-Surinamese population in the Colonial Reports in the late nineteenth and early eighteenth century raises the question whether a creole image of the Jew had emerged by that time.

1   PERSPECTIVES ON JEWISH WHITENESS, DOMINANCE AND COLONIAL 'OTHERNESS'

The 'white man': a maroon's perspective

According to Richard Price, the Jew was unequivocally a 'white man' as seen through the eyes of maroons: a notion of whiteness that transcends skin colour alone, but is an amalgam of both skin colour and dominance. Unfamiliar with the idea of Jewish 'otherness', the only things that mattered to the maroons' subordinate position was the light skin of the Surinamese Jews and their dominant status as slave-owners. The following Saramaccan folk-tale that is handed down through the ages illustrates this perspective. Richard Price recorded this oral history from descendants of the Saramaccan maroons.[4] As the voices of the enslaved and the maroons are seldom heard in the colonial archives, oral history provides a rich source for their subaltern perspective:

> Lánu's wife – I don't know if she was a girlfriend or a real wife – worked in the white man's house. Once she gave her husband a drink of water. ([whispering:] But they tell me it was really sugar-cane juice, because that was the "water" the white man normally drank.) Well, they saw that and said, "The woman gave Lánu sugar cane juice!" and they whipped her. They beat the woman until she was dead. Then they carried her to him and said, "Look at your wife here." Then they whipped Lánu until he lost

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[4]   In 1976 and 1978, Richard Price collected the historical knowledge of Saramaccan Maroons concerning the formative years of their society (Price 1983, and Price 1990:6-7). The Saramaccan Maroons (one of the six maroon groups in Suriname) descend from enslaved Africans, who escaped slavery in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and found shelter in the dense rainforest of Suriname's interior. The plantations from which the Saramaccan maroons escaped were located along the shores and creeks of the Suriname River, where many Jewish plantations (including Jodensavanne) were situated.

consciousness, and they left him lying on the ground. Then, the spirit of his wife came into his head, and he arose suddenly and ran into the forest. […]

[Lánu's younger brother] Ayakô had a sister [called Seeí] on the same plantation. One day she was at work, with her infant son tied to her back. The child began crying, but the white man didn't want her to sit down to nurse it. But it kept on crying. She kept working. The child kept crying. Then the white man called her. "Bring the child over here and I'll hold it for you." So she took the child off her back, handed it to him, and returned to work. He grasped the child upside down by the legs and lowered its head into a bucket of water until he saw that it was dead. Then he called the woman and said [gruffly], "Come take the child and tie it on your back." So she did so. She returned to work until evening, when they released the slaves from work. The child was dead, stiff as a board.

Well, Dabítatá [Ayakô] saw this and said, "What sadness! My family is finished. My sister has only one child left, and when she goes to work tomorrow, if the child cries, the white man will do the same thing again. I'll be witness to the final destructions of my family… Then he prepared himself [ritually] until he was completely set. And he escaped. He ran off with his sister and her baby daughter. [5]

Lánu and Seeí belonged to the same plantation, owned by a Jewish planter called Imanuel Machado – the one who is referred to as the white man. After their flight, Lánu, Ayakô and Seeí were reunited and joined with other maroons. They called themselves 'Matjau-people' after their former master Imanuel Machado.[6] In 1690, one of Machado's plantations was attacked and burned down and its owner was killed:

There had been a great council meeting in the forest. You see, the white man who had whipped Lánu didn't own just one plantation. They decided to burn a different one of his plantations from the place where he had whipped Lánu because they would find more tools there. This was the Cassewinica Plantation, which had many slaves. They knew all about this plantation from slavery times. So, they attacked. It was at night. They killed the head of the plantation, a white man. They took all the things,

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[5] Price 1983:45-9, based on various testimonies recorded between 1976 and 1978.

[6] Several Saramaccan clans are named after their former Jewish masters. Plantation slaves were part of the assets of the enterprise and not privately owned by the master of the plantation. They referred to the plantation by using its owner's name and in turn identified themselves with the plantation on which they worked and lived. The practice to adopt their owners' names follows from this pattern of identification amongst plantation slaves. As the founders of one clan usually escaped from the same plantation, the name of 'their' plantation owner was used to represent the bond and history that they shared (personal communication with A. van Stipriaan). Thus the founders of the Nasí clan, for instance, escaped from plantations belonging to the Nassy family near Cassipora Creek; the Kasitu clan refers to the plantation owned by Joseph Castilho, and the origin of the Matjáus can be linked to the planter Imanuel Machado (Price 1990:52).

everything they needed. And then they sacked the plantation, burned the houses and ran […]. They went and stood watch patiently, until they saw him, then they killed him. And they set fire to the plantation.[7]

In Saramaccan oral history, Jewish planters such as Imanuel Machado are referred to as 'the white men': their white status is undisputed, their Jewishness ostensibly irrelevant. The identification of Imanuel Machado as 'the white man' is based on Richard Price's conviction that Ayakô's raid corresponds with a maroon attack that was documented by David Cohen Nassy as Suriname's first slave revolt in *Essay Historique* (1791).[8] The attack on the Cassewinica plantation and the killing of Imanuel Machado has become a hallmark event in the early colonial history of Suriname. This and other stories of maroon attacks,[9] and the subsequent hunting down of the maroons, have determined the representation of early plantation life in Suriname.

The reference in Saramaccan oral history to Jews as 'the white men' may seem obvious, but does raise questions regarding an omnipresent image of the 'Jew' in Surinamese history. The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari once noted that '[e]ven Jews must become-Jewish [sic].[10] Even though Ayako's tale is recorded in the late twentieth century, it can be assumed that in the early days of slavery the concept of the 'Jew' was unknown to the enslaved or escaped maroons. Nevertheless, somewhere along the way, Jewishness became a meaningful identity, also from an enslaved or maroon's point of view as illustrated by the following account of an attack on plantation Mayacabo, located along the upper shores of the Para River.

On the 5 November 1751, at seven o' clock in the morning, Ester Francina van Hertsbergen and her husband, the planter Jacobus Cordova[11], had just finished their morning coffee after which Cordova left for a fishing trip along the river shore.

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[7] Price 1983:51-2. It should be noted that these tales were recorded three centuries after the events took place. Although in many occasions, Richard Price has managed to link the legendary tales with documentary sources of those early days of slavery, it should be noted – as Price does – that the Saramaccan oral tradition is the outcome of a complex process of learning and reshaping of the past. For instance, the Saramaccan believe all of their eighteenth century founding fathers to be escaped slaves, rather than maroons born in the forest, even when they were actually born later (Price 1983:82, 102).

[8] According to Nassy, a similar attack in 1738 that destroyed the life and plantation of the Portuguese Jew Manuel Pereyra marked the beginning of the war against the maroons that would continue until a peace treaties were signed in 1760 and 1762. Later descriptions of these events heavily relied on Nassy's account (Nassy 1974b:58-9). See also Koenen 1843, 293-302; Wolbers 1861:137 and further. For the maroon wars, see Hoogbergen 1990.

[9] Jodensavanne was located at the edge of the plantation society and particularly prone to maroon attacks.

[10] Deleuze 1988:291-2.

[11] The testimony is taken from Ester Francina van Hertsbergen, the planter's wife.

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. van Hertsbergen heard panic-stricken screaming: '*O! God. Juffrouw daar zijn de weglopers!*' (Oh! God. Miss, there are the runaways!) upon which she hid in her room, together with her 14 months old son. Within moments, the maroons had forced themselves into the room, however, and violently tore the clothes of her and her young son's body. As she stood naked and petrified by fear, she was ordered to wait and stand sill. Then, one of the maroon attackers started to speak to her in a language she could not understand, but recognized as Portuguese. When she did not respond, her interrogator tried to wrench her child out of her arms. Frantically holding on to her baby, the man stepped back, bend his bow and aimed at her body. At this point, the leader of the maroons appeared with an old man, who told the other maroon to leave her in peace. Shortly after, the old men asked Ester Francina van Hertsbergen if she was a Jew. 'No!' she responded; actually, it was the first time she ever visited the plantation. The answer apparently satisfied the maroon, as he blew his whistle and gathered a group of about 150 maroons. He gave her a message for the colonial authorities about three whites they had captured during an earlier raid and who were still alive, and they left; slapping her in the face in passing, and taking with them thirteen slaves. When all was quiet, Ester Francina van Hertsbergen went looking for her husband, whom she found, in a slave-cabin, deadly wounded by three arrows in his body and with a battered skull. He died shortly after. [12]

This woman's account provides an alternative perspective on dominance and power relations in a slave-society. Not always were the colonial whites the ones in charge, or the ones assuming a dominant position. Especially in the plantation district, the numerical dominance of the slave-population over the whites who lived in isolation, surrounded by the forest and under constant threat of an invisible enemy, warrants a critical stance towards the idea of an omnipotent colonial governance. Furthermore, it is striking that in this particular instance it was her non-Jewish identity that saved her life. Given that one of the maroons spoke Portuguese, it is likely that at least some of the maroons formerly belonged to a Jewish plantation; the explicit inquiring into the Jewish identity of this planter's wife implies a dislike towards Jews amongst the maroons involved in this raid. The events described in this testimony correspond with several nineteenth-century accounts that mention a particular resentment against Jewish slave-owners amongst the slave-population. Yet, in contrast to Ester Francina van Hertsbergen's story, these later commentaries were generally based on hearsay. [13]

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[12] Drawn from Price and De Beet 1982:74-6.

[13] Oostindie 1993:8.

The fact that the word 'Dju' (Sranan and Saramacca for 'Jew') entered the lexicon of the enslaved suggests an altered perception on Jewish whites among the slave population. It would be interesting to know when this transformation took place, when the white-man became a *Dju*, and under what circumstances he was referred to as such. Although there is no definitive answer on how and when the word 'Dju' came into existence, it must have been during the early years of colonization. In fact, a mixed English-Portuguese based Creole language was spoken on the Portuguese Jewish plantations referred to as *Dju-tongo* (Jewish language) until it gradually disappeared and was replaced by Sranan.[14] The conceptual idea of Jewishness as something essential different from non-Jewishness was clearly an idea that had been introduced from Europe. Arguably, as long as there were no specific connotations, neither negative nor positive, associated with Jewish slave-owners, the Jewish or non-Jewish identity of his master must to have been irrelevant from an enslaved or maroon's perspective. Although 'Dju' may have had a somewhat different connotation as 'Jew', the transformation of the 'white man' into a 'Dju' does indicate differentiation of the Jews from the other whites by maroons and enslaved Africans. As such, it is a strong example of the appropriation of a European cultural construction by the slave population in the early days of slavery, but also suggests a renegotiation of Jewish and non-Jewish relationships in Suriname in the early years of colonization, when the Jews were set apart from non-Jewish white settlers.

Echoes of the 'other': the image of the cruel Jewish planter

Cruel, merciless and irrational: the representation of the Jew as the worst of all slave-owners is perhaps one of the most controversial colonial images of the Jew in Suriname. Ostensibly, one expects the image of the cruel Jewish planter to stem from the interaction of Jews and enslaved Africans over the course of history. At first sight, the image of the Jewish planter bears much resemblance with Ayakô's tale: both perspectives emphasize Jewish dominance and their status as slaveholders. However, whereas cruelty was detached from the Jewish identity of the 'white man' involved in Ayakô's tale, – only his white skin and dominant status mattered – it is in the image of the Surinamese Jew as the perennial cruel planter that we find a clear undertone of Jewish 'otherness'. As is argued below, the image of the cruel Jewish planter primarily reflects the perspective of Christian colonists and European abolitionist writers, which

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[14] According to Hartsinck (1770), 'The Saramaccan tribe was reinforced from time to time, by fresh escapes from our plantations, especially from the Jews for which reason they add a broken Portuguese to their Negro English language'. While in the remote villages of Upper-Saramacca, 'their language is coarse, they mostly speak Negro Portuguese (Hartsinck :756, 812). In 1783, Schuman wrote, 'Djutongo is what the Negroes here call the Negro language mixed with Portuguese. The Saramaccan Negroes have Djutongo.' Quoted in Smith 2002:140. For the discussion on Djutongo, see Smith 2002 and Huber 1999.

subtly overturns a notion of Jewish whiteness and colonial elite status into a subordinate discourse of Jewish 'otherness'. Here, the Jew enters the Surinamese scene as a local equivalent of the eternally accused Jew: he (and she!) is the one who destabilizes the colony with his cruel and irrational behaviour towards the slave-population. As such, this image should be placed in a context of a long European tradition of anti-Semitic thinking and stereotyped representations of the 'Jew' made relevant for the Surinamese context. Yet, notwithstanding these European roots, the image of the cruel Jewish planter reflects much of the ambiguity of the Jewish positioning in Suriname: as creole whites and as a former planter's class with a history of long-term residence in Suriname; a history, moreover, that has long been identified with the 'golden era' of Jodensavanne and sugarplanting. The result is a rather complex vernacular of Jewish 'otherness' that finds its origin in the Surinamese society of the late eighteenth century, and was subsequently rewritten during the heydays of the abolitionist debates in the mid nineteenth century; an image that still reverberates in the historical consciousness of many Afro-Surinamese up to this very day.

The image of the cruel Jewish planter dates back to the end of the eighteenth century, when maroon attacks afflicted the Surinamese plantations.[15] Situated at the frontiers of the plantation society, the Jewish plantations surrounding Jodensavanne were particularly vulnerable to maroon attacks. Many plantations suffered losses, not just physical assets, but also human lives. Expensive and dangerous expeditions were organized to hunt down the escaped slaves. Stories of maroon attacks, murder, escape and revenge, can be traced in both Surinamese-(Jewish) historiography and Saramaccan oral tradition. Yet, while a sense of nostalgia and collective Jewish heroism prevails in Jewish historiography, Saramaccan oral history emphasizes the cruelty and human suffering inflicted upon them by white planters. As noted in the discussion on Ayakô's tale, a Jewish or non-Jewish identity of a master was irrelevant from an enslaved or maroon's point of view as long as there were no normative associations attached to Jewish slave-owners. In Ayakô's tale, cruelty was connected to a white skin, and detached from a Jewish identity.

Various late eighteenth century geographies and travel accounts describe the problem of marronage that was experienced by Surinamese planters in general, and Jewish planters in particular. It was commonly held that maltreatment of slaves was the immediate cause of these maroon attacks. As some of the most famous cases of maroon attacks and collective escapes took place on Jewish plantations, these events

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[15] One of those rare commentaries that actually portray an alternative image of the Jewish planter dates from the early eighteenth century. In 1731, a German soldier who had worked as a plantation-supervisor for two years wrote: 'By the Jews they [the slaves] are treated more charitable, and except for the fact they have two days of every week, Saturday and Sunday, they release the old ones. Therefore the primitive say: 'he who is owned by a Jew is in luck.' Quoted in Samson 1947:9

fostered the idea that Jewish planters generally maltreated their slaves.[16] An early record of this idea dates from 1749, when a violent confrontation between Jewish militia and a group of maroons resulted in the death of Abraham de Britto. In the subsequent course of affairs, the Jewish community elders tried to prevent the sale under distress of de Britto's plantation Berseba, arguing that the deceased had given his life to protect his family and possession against the maroon raids, upon which his creditors reacted that the maroons were 'runaways from the Jews, who escaped because of bad treatment.'[17]

The image of the cruel Jewish planters who have themselves to blame for their bad managerial skills is a recurring theme in various historical writings that now comprise the classic works of Surinamese historical literature. Particularly in the perception of late eighteenth century observers, the harsh treatment of their slaves, the lack of discipline and order on the Jewish plantations, and the erratic way in which they dealt with the slaves (first too intimate, then too cruel) were to blame for it. Interestingly enough, many of the accounts of Jewish atrocities do actually point at the Jewish planters wife as the perpetrator, which further underlines the 'unnatural' and denigrated behaviour of the Jewish planters.

Seen in this light, the image of the cruel Jew was the Surinamese interpretation of what David Lambert refers to as a 'war of representation'. According to Lambert, the white West Indian slaveholders occupied an important place in anti-slavery discourse, and were often represented as 'profit-obsessed, degenerated creoles', as white 'others' against which metropolitan British identity was formulated.'[18] In Suriname, where many Christian planters had left the colony after the slump of the plantation economy, the Jews came to represent the white creole population during the nineteenth century, which made them the prime targets of Dutch abolitionist discourse. An almost literal interpretation of the Jewish slaveholder as a profit-obsessed and degenerated creole is expressed by Dutch abolitionist W.R. van Hoëvell, who states: 'There are many Israelites [in this colony]. Do we wrong them when we call many of them penny-pinching [*schraapzuchtig*], always ready to profiteer with the blood and

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[16] The attacks on the plantations of the Jews Imanuel Machado in 1690 and Manuel Pereyra in 1738 have become hallmark events in Suriname's historic consciousness, as has the (peaceful) escape of a large group of slaves from plantation Retour, belonging to Salomon de la Parra in 1761. Apart from maltreatment, imminent sale is often mentioned as a reason for escape. For instance, in July 1738 circa thirty slaves ran off from the plantations of the widow of Mozes Marques and David and Abraham Pereyra (presumably the sons of the planter Manuel Pereyra who was shortly before killed during a maroon attack), see Dragtenstein 2002:115.

[17] Quoted in Dragtenstein 2002:118. The fact that the community leaders stood up for individual community members, probably contributed to the idea of a Jewish 'bloc', whereby the Jewish community were addressed collectively and condemned as a whole for the conduct of individual Jews.

[18] Lambert 2005:15-6.

sweat of their slaves, and like all coward characters, cruel against their subordinates?[19] Here, the dominance that is normally associated with whiteness is now represented in a sub-ordinate discourse of Jewish 'otherness'.

Gert Oostindie has noted that the image of the cruel Jewish planter is related to the representation of Suriname's slavery system as the all-time low point in the history of slavery. The writings of Voltaire and J.J. Hartsinck, but especially John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a five years' expedition, against the revolting negroes of Surinam* (1796) have contributed to a widespread idea of Surinam's slavery system as the most cruel in its time.[20] A century later, this idea was embraced by writers such as W.R. van Hoëvell, M.D. Teenstra, and J. Wolbers, whom all were leading figures in the Dutch abolitionist movement, and repeated by many others from then on.[21] The works of many of these writers implicitly or explicitly identify the Surinamese-Jewish planter, and especially the Jewish planters wife, as the main antagonist. The Jews were, however, not the only groups accused of maltreating their slaves. The Labadists, a utopian religious community that operated some plantations far up the Suriname River during the late seventeenth century, apparently acquired a reputation among the Dutch for unusually cruel treatment of their slaves too.[22] Similarly, poor slave-owners and coloured slave-owners were believed to be more cruel, more uncivilized towards their slaves than well-to-do slave owners.[23] One cannot avoid the impression that an equivalent mechanism is at work here as in the Jewish case: religious or social 'others' are disqualified by accusing them of excessive behaviour towards their slaves.[24]

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[19] Hoevell 1855: Vol I, 87.

[20] Oostindie 1993.

[21] This particular representation of Surinamese slavery is extensively discussed by Gert Oostindie (Oostindie 1993). During the early 1990s, the image of the Jewish planter in Suriname was mobilized by the anti-Semitic movement 'the Nation of Islam' of Louis Farrakhan, who claims that the Jews were the main ones to be held responsible for the transatlantic slave trade. The relation between Jews and slave trade is another classic example of the Jew as the 'eternally accused'. The allegations of Jewish involvement in slave trade surpass actual Jewish participation in the transatlantic slave trade. For instance, in the Nazi-movie *Der ewige Jude*, 98% of the trade in white female slaves was controlled by Jews. Farrakhan's polemics provoked several (Jewish) scholars into a reaction, for example, Drescher 1993, Faber 1998 and Davis 1994. See also Oostindie 2007.

[22] Wolbers 1861:67-70

[23] According to Van Hoëvell, 'The slaves are fearful of such masters [Jews] with reason, as in general they and the free coloureds are the cruellest masters. The poor cloths of the unfortunates who are in the power of these tyrants [*slavenbeulen*], their emaciated appearing, and their hunted looks are the proof of the maltreatments to which they are exposed to at a daily basis, and the little they are provided with for their maintenance. These days, the Israelites are rather poor; and especially from this poor folk, many of whom still own several slaves, the slaves have to endure most misery and cruelties'(Hoevell 1855:Vol.1, 80).

[24] For a final say to be given in this matter, empirical and comparative research should be conducted of the living conditions and threatment of Jewish and Christian slaves, however.

J.J. Hartsinck (1770) was the first to introduce the idea of the cruel Jewish planter in *Beschryving van Guiana.*[25] Hartsinck, who never visited Suriname and based his testimony on hearsay, stages the maroon captain Quakoe, a former slave of Sara de la Parra, to ventilate his ideas. During the peace-negotiations with the Aucaner maroons in 1759, a member of the delegation asked Quakoe what plans he had for future raids. Quakoe answers: 'That the Jews should thank God and them [the maroons and peace delegation] that, for now, the Jodensavanne will not be completely destroyed [...].' Quakoe went on and told about his plans to wish the Jews a 'cheerful Passover':

> They would mingle amongst the Jewish houses with their fuels [*brandstoffen*] around mid-night, with fifty men hidden at both sides of the Savannah, so that when the plan was put into effect, and the Jews set off for their boat, those fifty men, who were well armed, could kill them [the Jews] without mercy, and after that would destroy the plantation Machanaim and take its slaves.[26]

When a member of the delegations asked why he was so vengeful towards his former mistress Sara de la Parra, he replied that she had tormented him for many years and although he had brought her many profits, 'she wanted to cut his nose and ears as a reward.' But in order not to jeopardize the upcoming peace he decided to abandon the idea of further attacks: 'I missed her five times, let her live now.'[27] Although Quakoe's actions and vengeful words towards the Jews must be primarily understood as a reflection of a deep-rooted hatred of an abused slave against his former master – rather

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[25] Hartsinck:795.

[26] The fact that maroons planned their attacks on Jodensavanne during the High Holidays indicates their familiarity with the Jewish rhythm of life and calendar of feast. Actually, one of the most renowned maroon attacks on Jodensavanne – and the subsequent chase of the maroons by the Jewish militia – occurred during Yom Kipoer in 1743. The man-hunt against the maroons was lead by David Nassy, who at that point was of an advanced age and had already led dozens of maroon expeditions. Various maroon villages were burned down, their fields destroyed; many maroons were killed or caught. However, maroons managed to poison the wells upon which David Nassy and his troops had to withdraw. The Yom Kipoer expedition would be Nassy's last: he died soon afterwards. Today, his tombstone is a living remembrance of this episode in Jodensavanne. See Koenen 1843:297-8; Nassy 1974b:68-9. For a discussion of Nassy's tombstone, see Chapter V. The stories of a maroon attack during Yom Kipoer appealed to the imagination and to a general sense of vulnerability during the High Holidays. Legend has it that slaves planned to attack Jodensavanna during Yom Kipoer, but the plans were betrayed by one of the slaves. Arms were brought inside the synagogue; when the slaves approached the synagogue, the Jewish men put their black and white praying cloth (talieth) over their head and pretended to be ghosts. The frightened slaves dropped their guns and ran away and hence the community was saved without even having to resort to violence (Lehmann 1993:241-2).

[27] Hartsinck:795; and Dragtenstein 2002:189. Sara de la Parra died only a few months later and was buried at the *Beth Haim* of Cassipora. Her tombstone is an account of her qualities: her virtue and generosity. See also the information related to the Auca plantation on http://landsarchief.sr/geschiedenis/plantages (accessed 30-6-2008).

than a general resentment of Jews among slaves – Hartsinck presented them as such nonetheless.

Hartsinck's writing and ideas that link Jewishness and cruelty was expanded by Stedman in his famous 'Narrative'. Stedman is, however, far more outspoken. The preface of the 1796 edition by Johnson and Edwards reads that 'the Dutch are not the only guilty; but that to most other nations, and particularly the Jews, is owning this almost constant and diabolical barbarity.'[28] Since the publication of Stedman's original manuscript of 1790 by Richard and Sally Price, it has become known that the 1796 edition had been drastically altered by the publisher.[29] Still, also in his original manuscript of 1790, Stedman openly shows an antipathy towards the Jewish planters, and especially towards their wives (note that the atrocities in the following excerpt were not witnessed by Stedman himself, but were based on hearsay):

> This day I was also informed of some Cruelties which I must Still relate before my Departure, as motives to deter others from the abominable Practices. Some at which Humanity must Shrink and Seeken – what Reader will believe that a *Jews[s]* from a Motive of *Groundless* Jealousy /for such her Husband made it to appear/ -I say who can believe that this unprecedented Monster put an end to the life of a young and beautiful Quadroon Girl, by the infernal means of plunging a red hot Poker in her Body, by those parts which decency forbids to mention, while for a Crime of such a verry [sic] hellish nature, the Murderer was only banished to the Jew Savanah, a Village I shall afterwards describe besides paying a trifling fine to the Fiscal who is a Magistrate.

> Another Young Negro Women having her ankles chained so close together, that she could hardly mover her feet, was knocked down with a Cane by a Jew, till the blood streamed out of her head, her arms and her naked Sides[30].

In *Essay Historique*, David Nassy stages a maroon – called Fosso – to countervail the cruel image of Jewish planters, and emphasize the friendly relationship between de Jewish militia and the pacified maroons. In 1761, after a large outbreak of no less than sixty slaves from the plantation 'Retour' belonging to Salomon de la Parra , a group of nine Jews, accompanied by forty-eight 'good slaves', had set-off to trace the escaped slaves.[31] They searched for almost three weeks but to no avail. When they had run out

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[28] Stedman 1972:Preface.

[29] Stedman 1988. Despite the changes made by the editors, the 1796 edition influenced the representation of Suriname as slave colony and the Jewish planter as cruel and heartless. The original manuscript was published nearly two centuries later in 1988.

[30] Stedman 1988:115-6.

[31] See also Nassy 1974b:86.The escape from the plantation 'Retour' of Salomon de la Parra is a
(continued)

of provisions, they visited the maroon village of Juca with whom a peace treaty had been signed earlier. The maroons agreed to provide shelter and provision to the Jews. At that point, Fosso – an old villager – addresses his fellow tribesmen:

> See, my children what I have told you a thousand times about the Jewish people, my old masters; they are not like the other white people whom we have seen; they love God, and they will never do anything before praying to Him, and serving Him with respect. Let us try, then, for the love of this God Whom they worship, to employ the means to aid them in their enterprise.[32]

According to David Nassy, the maroons assembled and decided to give an escort and provisions to the militia, while they would send another escort to look for the fugitives.[33]

Nassy's efforts to provide an alternative image of the relation between Jews and Afro-Surinamese have had little effect on the representation of the Jewish planter. Stedman's and Hartsinck's rendition of the 'Jew' as a harsh and cruel master, as well as the link between Jewish maltreatment and marronage, appears in various nineteenth century writings. Especially in the work of those writers involved in the abolitionist movement, such as Van Hoëvell, Teenstra, and Wolbers, the Jew – and especially the Jewish female – became to personify the excrescences of slavery in Suriname.

It should be noted that of these three writers, only Teenstra had actually visited the colony in person. According to Teenstra, the Jews were not only disdained by the Christians, but also by the slave population: 'One can terrify a negroe slave by saying: 'if this or that happens again, I will sell you to a Jew', knowing that Jews and especially Jewesses are very cruel and ruthless, giving their slaves a lot of work, much beating and scarce provisions.'[34] Teenstra believed that a friendly and mild treatment ensured an easy control of the slaves. In contrast, the Jews acted too familiar with their slaves, and lacked the pride that characterized non-Jewish whites, according to Teenstra:

> How different it is with the Jews and Jewesses; they are too familiar with their slaves, they consort with them (say the more elevated whites), and want to restore their control with severe punishment. This is especially the

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remarkable case of marronage considering the large number slaves involved and the fact that the slaves escaped without having done the least harm to their master. De la Parra himself was surprised that the group of escaped slaves also included his wet-nurse Amimba, who had already received her letter of manumission (NA, 1.05.05.05: 313).

[32] Nassy 1974b:87-8.

[33] Nassy 1974b:87-8.

[34] Teenstra 1842:45.

case with the Jews, who do not keep appropriate distance, and as a consequence lose their authority and esteem; they are also controlled by their impulses, and punish immediately, in no proportion to the offence, and never with calmness, as a result to which the punishment far exceeds the offence. First, one hears a Missie laugh and play intimately, and then one hears her say words of comfort to the negroe slaves: *matie – boen hatti – switie mofo*, etc.[35]

Likewise, Van Hoëvell and Wolbers refer to excessive cruelty of Jewish planters.[36] Van Hoëvell (who did not visit Suriname either) reiterates Teenstra's remark over the alleged anxiety of the slave-population for Jewish masters:

> In general, slaves consider it as one of the biggest catastrophes that can happen to them, when they become the property of an Israelite – and half of the free population of Paramaribo are Israelites! […]
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> The slaves are fearful for such masters with good reason, because in general they and the free coloureds are the cruellest masters. The scarce clothing of the unfortunates who are under control of these tyrans, their emaciated appearance and the despondency of their gazes are the proof of the maltreatment to which they are exposed to on a daily basis and the little that is given to them for their maintenance. In general, the Israelites are rather poor nowadays, and especially of such shabby folk, of whom many still own several slaves, the slaves have to endure the most misery and cruelties.[37]

Further, following Teenstra, Van Hoëvell reports on the curious relation between a Jewish woman and her female slaves. Van Hoëvell tells in meticulous detail how the Jewish woman sat down to eat with her slaves on the ground – the mistress amongst the slaves, forks nor spoons were used – and used her whip when one of the slaves was too greedy.[38] Van Hoëvell's account of the Jewish slave-owners illustrates the various ways in which Jews were discursively excluded from the category of non-Jewish whites: they were not only cruel against their slaves, they were also poor, shabby, and at best comparable with the group of free coloureds. As such, Van Hoëvell's account exemplifies the use of a racialist imagery to disqualify the Surinamese Jews.

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[35] Teenstra 1842:46.

[36] According to M. Kuitenbrouwer, Van Hoëvell's attack on Jewish slaveholders provoked the Surinamese- Jewish lawyer B.E.C. Belmonte in to the only publication in which slavery was defended during the 1850s. However, Belmonte does not at any point refer to Jewish slave-owners in his publication and should therefore be read as a defence of the planter's class in general. See Kuitenbrouwer 1995:75 and Belmonte 1855

[37] Hoevell 1855:Vol.1, 80-1.

[38] Hoevell 1855:Vol 1, 81.

By the mid nineteenth century, the image of the cruel Jewish planter had become a 'historical fact'. In his monograph on Dutch Jewish history, Koenen (1843) echoes the image of the Jewish planter that was by then firmly established. He narrates in great length of the 'brave military acts of the Jews' against maroons, but also of 'the aversion of the oppressed Negroe for the Israelite master [which] was much bigger than for the Christian planter; and the Jew was harsher for the poor slave, than his countryman of a different faith'.[39]

The canonization of the idea of Jewish cruelty also appears in Wolbers *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (1861). His work was neither a geographical description, nor polemic writing, but a historical monograph of Suriname. The resonating image of the brave but cruel Jew in *Geschiedenis van Suriname* indicates that halfway into the nineteenth century the image of the cruel Jewish planter had become part of Surinamese historiography. Many of the reported cases of Jewish atrocities mentioned earlier by others found their way to Wolbers. In fact, when comparing the different accounts of cruel Jewish planters, it appears that the various writers re-used the same stories over and over again. Sara de la Parra is staged several times in Wolbers, and both Teenstra (1842) and Van Hoëvell (1854) mention a Jewish female who acted 'without pride' and sat down to eat with her slaves.[40]

Whereas the anti-Jewish sentiments in the writings of Teenstra and Van Hoëvell are rather outspoken, Wolbers conception of the cruel Jewish master is inferential: he explicitly mentions the Jewish identity whenever Jewish planters were involved, whereas in other cases the ethnic or religious affiliation of the planters are not defined. By calling planters 'the Jew or the Jewess such and such', they are effectively stripped of their individual identities; the only thing that matters is their Jewishness.[41] Connecting Jewishness and cruelty was a subtle way to position even the richest Jews amongst the 'others'.

What remains, is the issue of the cruel Jewish female. The notion that Jewish women were the ones who were particularly cruel to their slaves is recurring theme in the representation of the Jewish planter. While this image is still more or less implicit in the late eighteenth century writings of Gabriel Stedman, half a century later Teenstra and Wolbers are straightforward and explicit in their accusations of the female Jewish slave-owner as described in the above. It has been acknowledged that

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[39] Koenen 1843, 293-302.

[40] Compare Hartsinck:795; Wolbers 1861:142, 155, 289-90; Koenen 1843:300; Hoevell 1855;Teenstra 1842.

[41] Recall the survey of the main plantation administrators in 1824, earlier referred to in Chapter IV, wherein comments and qualifications were given beside all the names. Behind the name of Salomon de la Parra, who was the most successful Surinamese planter and administrator of the 1820, managing sixteen plantations, it says: 'is a Jew'. No further comments were required (Van Stipriaan 1997:91).

women play an important role in de symbolic construction and representation of collectives, whereas in popular imagination women are often associated with the collective itself.[42] Although the centrality of Jewish women in the representation of the Jewish planter can partly be explained from the vantage point of Jewish stereotyped representation, it can also be seen as a variation on the theme of the planter's wife.

Take, for example, Susanna du Plessis who has become the personification of cruel planter's wife and one of the icons of white domination in modern representation of slavery in Suriname. The story of the beautiful mulatto girl Alida whose breast was cut off by an enraged Susanna du Plessis appeals to the imagination of many in Suriname. The same holds for another story related to Susanna du Plessis, who drowned a crying baby because its enslaved mother did not manage to comfort the child, and subsequently giving the mother 300 to 400 lashes when she tried to retrieve the body of her baby from the river.[43] Again, it was Stedman's description of du Plessis' atrocities that shaped the later depiction of the archetypical cruel planter's wife. Both stories have become recurring themes in the representation of slavery in Suriname.

This is not the place to address the representation of planter's wives, and Susanna du Plessis was not Jewish. Sara de la Parra, however, was. Although Sara de la Parra has not become as disreputable as Susanna du Plessis in modern-day representations of Surinamese slavery, the representation of both women in Stedman's Narrative, and repeated by nineteenth century anti-slavery literature, is analogous.[44] In the accounts of the atrocities committed by Sara de la Parra and Susanna du Plessis against beautiful mulatto girls, one can identify the time-honoured tradition of depicting women as either eligible or horrendous.

Although no research has been done in the matter, many have asserted that the image of the harsh Jewish planter is not founded on any historical proof. Yet, one can wonder whether such an endeavour would be valuable and methodologically achievable.[45] Slavery was a cruel and inhumane system, and no doubt, there have been Jewish slave-owners who maltreated their slaves or have, in fact, been cruel to them. In this sense, the Jewish planters and slave-owners did not differ from Christian planters. Clearly, not every account of Jewish maltreatment of slaves can be dismissed as an anti-Semitic statement. The fact that David Cohen Nassy asked the colonial

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[42] Yuval-Davis 1989.

[43]   The analogy with Seef's story referred to earlier is evident.. For the story of Susanna du Plessis, see Stedman 1988:267-8; for the historic reproduction of these story in various representations of slavery in Suriname, see Neus-van der Putten 2003:126-130.

[44] For a study of the imagining and historical figure of Susanna du Plessis, see Neus-van der Putten 2003.

[45] Compare in this connection Oostindie's reflections on the validity of classifying systems of slavery in terms of a mild to cruel continuum Oostindie 1993.

authorities for ten to twelve trustworthy Indians to protect the Jewish plantation 'because he did not trust his own slaves', indicates a distressed relationship between this planter and his slaves, but this does not bear any relation to his Jewish identity.[46] The archive of the Council of Police contains several cases of maltreatment of slaves; some of them pertain to Jewish slaveholders. In general, the offenders were fined. For example, Salomon de la Parra and Joseph Haim Pinto were both fined to pay 200 and 100 guilders for the 'cruel bodily harm' of a female slave of Salomon de la Parra.[47]

The Jewish community archives reveal little information on living conditions of slaves on Jewish plantations or households. In some cases, slaves appear as nominal participants, as witnesses of a certain offence, or – in exceptional cases – as community members. Yet, slavery is a theme that is generally not covered, in fact absent, in the Jewish archives: the archives mostly document the day-to-day administration of the congregations, in which slavery did not play an important role.

One of the few documents found in the Jewish community archives that explicitly deals with slavery concerns a memorandum of 1781. In that year, the Portuguese Jewish regents addressed themselves to Governor Bernard Texier concerning a complaint on the behaviour of some of the community members. In a memorandum the *Mahamad* writes that 'some of her member and residents of Jodensavanne on various occasions have punished their slaves along the streets, but especially around the *Hazara* or fence of the synagogue with *spaansche bokken* [a cruel and much resented way of flogging slaves], and therefore use a holy place as a theatre of justice. Moreover, it is evident that in a civilized place, it is not permitted to execute public punishments, in whatever case, without consulting a higher authority first.' All attempts of the *Mahamad* to keep their community members under control had been in vain, hence their request for the governor's intervention. A governors' publication was proclaimed in the synagogue (a common practice to have decrees or resolutions announced to the community), which explicitly forbade the residents of Jodensavanne to punish their slaves around the synagogue fence with *spaansche bokken*. Any offender would be handed over to the *Raadsfiscaal* (public prosecutor) and punished accordingly.[48] Some may be tempted to consider such a document as 'proof' for the alleged cruelty of Jewish planters. Yet, the only thing they prove is the essential sameness of the Jewish and Christian planters community as stories of abuse and affective relationships between master and slave alternate in both groups.[49]

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[46] Dragtenstein 2002:116.

[47] NA, 1.05.10.02:112, 1-3-1781.

[48] NA, 1.05.04.02: 375, page 496a-b.

[49] In contrast, the Surinamese colonial archives also house documents that support more affective relationships between Jews and their slaves, particularly the various requests for manumission by Jewish slave-owners. The planter Josias Pardo, for example, requested freedom for his female slaves Niobe,

(continued)

The question remains whether the claim of a broadly shared resentment against Jewish masters among the Surinamese population, is based on historical fact. Stedman based his testimony on hearsay, as did Hartsinck. In fact, nearly all accounts of cruel behaviour of Jews and a supposed disdain of the Jews by the Afro-Surinamese population derive from non-resident writers who never visited Suriname. As noted by van Lier, leading members of the Jewish community were closely involved with the pro-slavery movement during the mid nineteenth century, which fostered anti-Jewish sentiments in Suriname during this period.[50] Indeed, most accounts of cruel Jewish planters date from the mid nineteenth century, when the discussion over the abolition of slavery was most heated (the writings of Teenstra, Koenen, Van Hoëvell and Wolbers all date from the mid nineteenth century).This leads me to conclude that the image of the cruel Jewish planter was pre-eminently a construction of the nineteenth century, when Jews no longer participated in Suriname's plantation economy at a large-scale.

Still, somewhere along the way, before or after the representation of the cruel Jewish planter had been canonized in Surinamese literature and historiography, the idea entered Afro-Surinamese historical memory. During the events of May 1891, anti-Jewish sentiments amongst Paramaribo's black population manifested themselves for the first time in an explicit and public way. Presumably, Moravian missionaries, who by this period had gained much influence under the Afro-Surinamese population, played a central role in the dissemination of the popular image of the Jewish slave among the Afro-Surinamese. Official Moravian documents give ample prove of ongoing anti-Semitic thinking among the different branches of the Moravian missionary movement: while the Surinamese Jews are generally referred to in these document as 'a Jewish clique' from whose 'tyranny and perverted exercise […] the people' had to free themselves. Although no direct reference to the stereotype of the Jewish planter is found, the general anti-Semitic tone in these documents is evident, and it does not seem farfetched to assume that the Moravians did foster anti-Jewish thinking among the Afro-Surinamese population.[51] The representation of the

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Alcioe and Iris in 1759, 'considering their extraordinary devotion during my protracted illness and old age […] they nursed me not as slaves, but as if they were my own children'(quoted in Vrij 1998:131). Other examples of manumission by Jewish slave-owners can be found for instance in the digitized historic database *Surinaamse manumissies 1832-1863* of the National Archive in The Hague. See http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/vrij-in-suriname (accessed 30-7-2007).

[50]   Van Lier 1971:67.

[51]   As noted by Maria Lenders in her study of the Moravian activities in Suriname, this event was in fact an escalation of a relationship that already been discordant over the past decennia. Not only had the Moravians been outspoken proponents of the abolition of slavery; according to Lenders, the many small but flourishing shops owned by Moravians were a thorn in the flesh of Jewish trade-people. Lenders 1996:340. Note, that the counter-discourse against the Moravians as ventilated in the Jewish owned newspaper *De West-Indier* was not less rancorous. In the various editions of *De West-Indier*, the Moravians were compared with a 'Trojan horse' and a 'cancerous tumour', and it was probably best to

Surinamese Jew as a harsh and cruel slave-master has proven to be a persistent idea that lingers through the representation of Surinamese slavery until this very day.[52] During a meeting of the Chambres of States of Suriname (*Staten van Suriname*) in 1947, the nationalistic politician W. Bos Verschuur attempted to prevent the settlement 30.000 displaced Jews in the Saramacca district. Bos Verschuur claimed that the arrival of large numbers of Jews would open up old wounds: 'Although the Surinamese population can not be reproached for anti-Semitism, the former role of Jewish immigrants as plantation- and slave-owners were of such nature, that not all memories thereto have been erased.'[53]

The image of the Jewish planter is complex, and reveals some of the ambiguity of a Jewish status in colonial Suriname. The dominancy, that is normally associated with whiteness, is effectively counteracted by representing Jewish slaveholders as a degenerated stock, who brutalized their slaves in their blind pursuit of financial gain: a representation that overturned a notion of Jewish whiteness and colonial elite status into a subordinate discourse of Jewish 'otherness'. As the image of the cruel Jewish planter primarily reflects the perspective of Christian colonists and European abolitionist writers, it illustrates the ambiguous position of the Jews in Suriname's white community, primarily during the nineteenth century, when Suriname had become an 'abandoned colony' and Jews became the largest remaining group of local whites. In Suriname, it were especially the Jews who became the white 'others' against

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throw them out of the country (Lenders 1996:340).

[52] Some Afro-Surinamese whom I confronted with this image during my stay in Suriname were not familiar with this imagery. Other did ventilate a notion of Jewish difference, but believed that Jewish slave-owners were in fact known for their mildness rather than their cruelty. Additional research is required to pronounce upon the general idea of Jewish cruelty in Afro-Surinamese historical consciousness.

[53] *De West*, 31-3-1947. Bos Verschuur did not express the only critical voice in this matter. The coverage by the newspaper *De West* between March and July 1947 gives a good impression of the emotions (some of an aggressive anti-Jewish and anti-white tone) triggered by the Freeland League among different groups in Suriname. During a public meeting in Theater Bellevue on 1 June 1947, emotions ran particularly high. Caprino, one of the speakers, declared 'to have no special feelings against the Jews in particular, but that he had learned at his mother's knee to distrust anything that is white and comes from outside Suriname' (*De West,* 2-6-1947). The most explicit anti-Jewish sentiment was the commentary of T. Comvalius, who feared a return to the situation of the 1890s, 'when all high positions were appropriated by them [the Jews] and others [coloureds] were excluded, until the outburst of 1891 […] Jews just do not give up power, once they have it at their disposal.' According to Comvalius, no more than 10.000 Jews should be allowed to settle in Suriname, only on designated places and without obtaining civil rights. Jewish intellectuals should only be allowed to work for fellow Jews, and they should not be allowed to work as civil servant or public employees (*De West* , 16-4-1947). The Surinamese Jew H. Samson, a fervent proponent of the Jewish colonization plan, believed that the hesitation amongst the Afro-Surinamese population expressed a fear for a renewed domination 'of the white race', while all those of mediocre intelligence feared to be surpassed by 'clever Jews' (*De West*, 9-4-1947).

which a Dutch metropolitan identity was formulated.[54] This notion of Jewish colonial 'otherness' was not only based upon the image of the Jewish planter, however. Poor Jews equally contributed to an ambivalent imagery of the Surinamese Jews as can be illustrated by a painting of P.J.Benoit.

The Surinamese Jew as colonial ' other'? A painting by P.J. Benoit (1830)

Between 1829 and 1830, the Antwerp globetrotter and painter P.J. Benoit visited Suriname. His travel-account *Voyage à Surinam*, but especially his illustrations, contributes to our contemporary imagining of daily life in colonial Suriname.[55] *Voyage à Surinam* contains a large number of drawings that represent daily life in Paramaribo, on the plantations and in the rainforest. Although Benoit's interest especially concerned the Amerindian and Afro-Surinamese population, some of his paintings depict European residents (planters, soldiers, merchants).

The colonial society Benoit entered when he set foot on the shore of Suriname had undergone some drastic changes in the preceding decades. Especially the urban society of Paramaribo had been subject to fundamental change. Interracial relationships had created a group of coloureds of varying shades of skin colour. Although official colonial policy was aimed at maintaining a socioeconomic and institutionalised distance between the colonial whites and free blacks and coloureds, in practice black, coloureds and whites lived in close proximity. Moreover, mixed-colour relationships had created social patterns that crosscut the attempts of the colonial authorities to create a racial segregated society.

The economic crisis of the 1770s further complicated the already complex social mapping of Suriname. The crisis had depleted the white population of Suriname. Many whites had left the colony, others – especially the Jewish population – stayed behind. During the late eighteenth century, the number of poor whites further expanded by the influx of destitute Jewish migrants. By the time of the nineteenth century, the overall socioeconomic positioning of the Surinamese-Jewish community was no longer that of a colonial elite. The majority of the Jews earned a meagre income in Paramaribo's urban colonial economy as small traders, as butchers and carpenters, and as lower public servants in the expanding colonial bureaucracy. According to Teenstra, their income seldom surpassed their most basic daily provisions.[56] For many Jews, the narrative of colonial eliteness, still proudly upheld

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[54] Following David Lambert's analysis on white identities in the British West Indies during the age of abolition (Lambert 2005:15-6).

[55] Benoit 1839.

[56] Teenstra 1842:37.

some decades earlier by the Portuguese Jewish community leaders, had become a nostalgic memory of better days.

It is in the representation of the poor Jew that Jewish ambivalence in Suriname is probably illustrated best, very much like Ann Stoler's study of the Deli planter's community. Stoler argues that colonial communities should not be considered in terms of race (whiteness) alone, but also in terms of class, class-consciousness and, most importantly, the interdependency between the two. Poor whites posed a serious dilemma for the colonial elites all over the colonial world because they undermined the racialized boundaries of colonial rule.[57] Edward Long has articulated a striking example of this practice in a Caribbean setting in his *History of Jamaica,* published in 1774:

> The lower order of white people […] have commonly more vices, and much fewer good qualities, than the slaves over whom they are set in authority; the better sort of whom heartily despise them, perceiving little or no difference from themselves, except in skin, and blacker depravity. By their base familiarity with the worst disposed among the slaves, they do a very great injury to the plantations; causing disturbances, by seducing the Negroes [sic] wives, and bringing *odium* upon the white people in general, by their drunkenness and profligate actions.[58]

In Suriname, poor whites threatened the boundaries of European colonial rule. In 1781, the Court of Police debated on the dilemma posed by European immigrants, who – having been unsuccessful in their attempts to gain fortune in Suriname – had lost 'courage, hope and everything, and their behaviour is even worse than that of the slaves, which turns them into objects of ridicule and contempt'. The poor white who in fact did manage to gather fortune in the colony also posed a dilemma to the colonial elites, as they tend to 'forget their mediocre state and consider themselves equal to the most prominent citizens'.[59] Recall, moreover, the disdain David Nassy displayed for the – in his eyes uncivilized – Polish Jews migrants, who he clearly perceived to be a blot on the reputation of the Portuguese-Jewish community. As noted by Franklin W. Knight, these antagonistic feelings of class prejudice among white elites (both visitors and long-term residents) were in constant tension with the more widespread feeling of racial bondage that emanated from living in a colony among a far greater number of enslaved Africans and their descendants.[60]

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[57] Stoler 1992.

[58] Quoted in Knight 1990:151.

[59] NA, 1.05.10.02:112, appendix to the minutes of the Court of Police, 28-2-1781. See also Vrij 2005:28.

[60] Knight 1990:151.

This link between race and class is immanent in the nineteenth century discourse on race, that did not only embraced colonized people but also 'les negres blancs' or 'white negroes', a group that included the working class, domestic workers, women, Irish, prostitutes and Jews.[61] Even though skin-colour was an inadequate marker of power in these cases, the language and imaginary of race and racism was used to articulate (class-) differences nonetheless. In the words of Anne McClintock: '[r]acial stigmata were systematically, if often contradictorily, drawn on to elaborate minute shadings of difference in which social hierarchies of race, class and gender overlapped each other in a three-dimensional graph of comparison.'[62] Put differently, the rhetoric of race was used to invent or emphasize difference in social status, or – in modern language – between social classes. The connection between class and race is intriguing and contributes to the understanding of Jewish representation in Suriname.

Let us now turn to the paintings of P.J. Benoit. One of his drawings depicts two shopkeepers in the Saramaccastreet: a Jewish small trader (*vettewarier*) with his Amerindian clientele, next to an Afro-Surinamese tailor (*snerie*) and his slave customer (figure 4). Benoit writes in his travel account:

> The most remarkable shops in this street [Saramaccastraat] carry names such as *vettewarier* [fête-ware, bazaar]. They are mostly run by Jews who, just like in Europe, master the art to draw customers and do business with all classes of the population, be it through a sell or through exchange of goods. One will find many different types of merchandise that have nothing in common. One can find Dutch cheese, a piece of mousseline, ham [!] from Bayonne, a jar with hair-cream, a wig and toys displayed on the same shelf. Some stores are rich and well-stocked, you can find anything you need, including food, clothing and furniture.
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> Tailorshops are sometimes run by slaves, who own slaves themselves. I once saw a negro, not wearing anything, having his measurements taken for a suit in one of these tailorshops. He was standing on the doorstep such that passers-by could see that he would soon be in the possession of a suit, which is a luxury for a negro and reason to be proud.[63]

Benoit's stereotypical portrayal of the Jewish shopkeeper is evident. Although no explicit reference is made to the Jewish identity of the *vettewarier* in the title of the painting, the picture leaves little to the imagination to point out his Jewishness. The

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[61] Anne McClintock provides a stunning collection of colonial comparisons between slums and slave ships, Irish, Jews, apes, women et cetera. McClintock 1995:52-3.

[62] McClintock 1995:54. A good example of this practice is a nineteenth-century pamphlet claiming, 'the wives and daughters of the rich manufacturers would no more associate with a factory girl than they would with a negro slave.' Cited in McClintock 1995:403, note 87.

[63] Benoit 1839:22
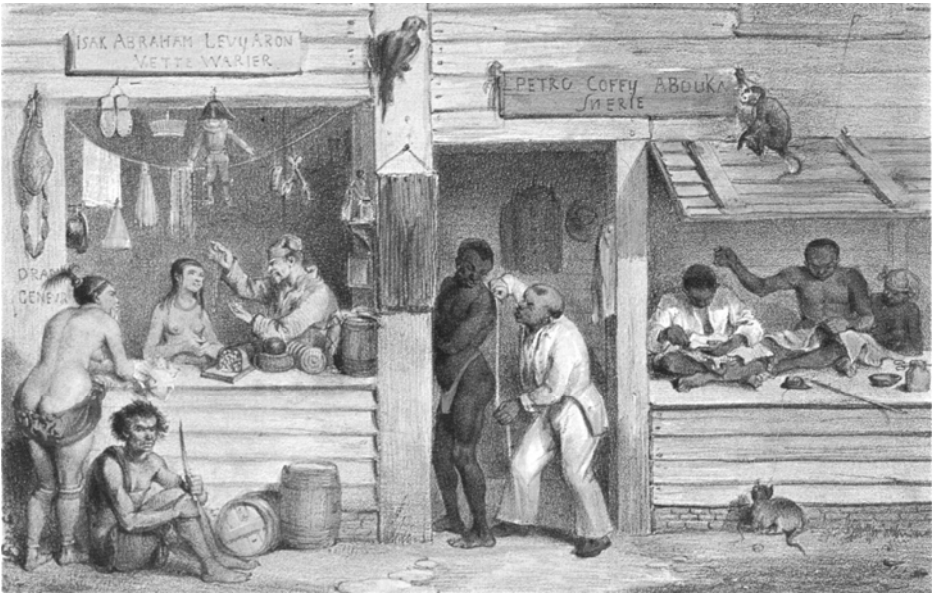
Figure 4: Painting of two shop keepers by P.J. Benoit (1838)

Figure 5: Painting of P.J. Benoit (1839) of five slave-women

name Isak Abraham Levy Aron is shown above his head; his posture, facial structure, shape of the nose, is typical of the caricatured image of Jews of that time. As noted by many, (physical) stereotypical representation is a powerful tool for erecting and maintaining social boundaries.[64] Especially the body, 'the one thing that all human beings have in common' is a symbolic site for inscribing difference and a subordinate position.[65] The physicality of the Jewish small trader is the counter-image of the white colonial, the typical planter as depicted in some of the other paintings of Benoit.

How should we read this painting? Should we read it as a constructed display of equal social status of poor Jews, free blacks and Indians in nineteenth-century colonial Suriname? Does it depict the trinity of Suriname's colonial 'others': the 'Indian', the 'Negro' and the 'Jew'? Did Benoit intend to depict this poor Jew as a 'white negroe'? Intentional or not, the painting is a good example of how racialist imagery was used to underline the social distinction between poor colonial whites and a white colonial elite, namely ranking the poor and needy whites amongst Suriname's (free) blacks and coloureds. On the other hand, this painting can also be read as a non-normative depiction of Suriname's complex colonial reality, wherein poor whites – recall that one third to one half of the Jewish community was considered poor at this time – and coloured or free black people lived side by side, sharing the same space and undermining the notion of a colonial segregated society. The first reading appears to be closer to the intentions of the maker. Such a reading is not only in line with the stereotypical depiction of the main characters in this painting, but also follows Benoit's written representation of the Surinamese Jews in his accompanying travel account:

> The population of the city of Paramaribo counts ninethousand to tenthousand residents, consisting of whites [*blancs*], Indians or Caribs, mulattos, negros, mestizos, etc. […] These nine thousand to ten thousand souls can be classified as follows: one thousand to eleven hundred whites, not including the garrison, nine hundred to one thousand German and Portuguese Jews, six to seven hundred creoles, negros, mulatos, etc., and seven to eight thousand slaves of all sorts of colour. […] The total number [of whites at the plantations] will be about eleven hundred, and together with the whites in the city, about two thousand and one hundred and fifty in total. When adding all free inhabitants, Jews, creoles, mulattos and negroes, we come to a population of four thousand freemen and fortyfive thousand to fifty thousand slaves […].[66]

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[64] For example, Hall 1997, Donald and Rattansi 1992 and Gilman 1991. For recent examples of visual discourse on the Jewish and Muslim Other, see Parfitt 2004.

[65] Eisenstein 1996:34-5.

[66] Benoit 1839:19-20.

In his description of the population of Suriname, Benoit displays his ambivalence towards the status of the Jews in Suriname. Benoit's group of 'whites' does not incorporate the Jews; they are named separately or ranked amongst the 'free population' together with the free 'creoles', free 'mulattos' and free 'negroes'.

This practice of excluding the Jews from the dominant category of (non-Jewish) whites can be further illustrated by another drawing that depicts five slave women, one of whom is Jewish. The title of the drawing reads: 'Five slave-women on their way to church on a holiday (figure 5). On the right a Lutheran woman, next to a Jewess, a Calvinist and a Moravian woman. In the centre a young Christian Creole slave, on her way to church on Palm Sunday.'[67] Each woman is portrayed in a slightly different way. Whereas the Christian women show virtue and decency, the Jewish female slave is depicted as a frivolous character, with waving hair and loose clothing. At the risk of over-interpretation, it is remarkable that in neither of Benoit's paintings does the Jew emerge as the typical colonizer. Arguably, these paintings are a visual representation of the Jew as one of Suriname's colonial 'others' during the nineteenth century from the vantage point of the non-Jewish whites. Even when Benoit's intentions were to paint daily life-scenes in Suriname in 1820s, he painted a reality in which the perception of the Jew as a colonizer was no longer a matter of course, at least in the perception of this contemporary visitor to Suriname.

My intention with the above is to point out one of the many paradoxes of Surinamese-Jewish representation, not to compare an alleged colonized condition with the harsh reality of the truly colonized in Suriname: the enslaved Africans, the Amerindian population and the indentured labourers from overseas. Benoit's depiction of the poor Jewish *vettewarier* and the Jewish slave women raises further questions concerning the status of the Jews in Suriname's social structure, and the conditionality of their inclusion in the dominant category of colonial whites, rich or poor. By the time of the nineteenth century, Jewish families had lived in Suriname for nearly centuries and had correspondingly – as a result of mixed relationships –put on some 'couleur locale', which may have contributed to a further ambivalent representation of the Surinamese Jews. Although this also applied to some Christian planter families, the long history of the Jews in Suriname has profoundly affected the image of the Surinamese Jews, while it the image of the (European) Christian community as being 'white' remained largely unchanged and in tact.

Ultimately, the various images of the 'Jew' that prevailed in Suriname, did not develop in a vacuum, but arose in a particular social and political context. Here, the full complexity of Jewish identification reveals. On the one hand, Surinamese Jews were represented as the suppressers, the slaveholders, the 'white men'. Yet, despite

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[67] Benoit's reference to a 'Jewish slave-woman' supposes the inclusion of (some) slaves of Jewish origin in – at least – a socially defined community.

this dominant status, which fits their white identities in a colonial world, they shared in the ascribed characteristics of the ones they dominate. The imagery of the Surinamese Jews shows that also in colonial Suriname a strict dichotomy between colonizers and colonized does not always fit the unruliness of everyday life.[68]

In the remaining part of this chapter, the ambiguities of Jewish whiteness are analyzed further, but now from the institutionalized perspective of the colonial authorities. Throughout the colonial period, the Jews in Suriname were bounded and classified by the colonial administration in a number of ways. In general, one could say that the Jews were perceived by Christian colonists as 'white but Jewish'; they moved in a twilight zone between racial inclusion and religious 'othering'.

2   'WHITE BUT JEWISH': LOCATING JEWS IN SURINAME'S SCHEME OF COLOUR

The idea of the Jew as 'the white man' is an amalgamation of two images of the Surinamese Jew, which were virtually unknown in the metropole. 'The white man' does not only refer to the perceived white skin of the Jew, but also refers to his dominant position as colonizer and absolute master over the enslaved Africans. The self-evident envisioning of the Jew as a 'white man' in Ayakô's tale, contrasts with a more ambivalent classification of the Jewish whiteness that can be traced in the classification of Jews by the colonial authorities and white Christian settlers.

The Surinamese Jews shared their position of religious outsider with other religious minorities, most notably the Catholics, but also the Labadist. Yet, whereas the latter groups were officially included in the dominant category of Christian whites once they had been accepted into the colony, the Jewish position was far more unstable. Groups with an ill-defined social standing, such as the Surinamese Jews, are often referred to as 'in-between': a concealing term that tends to simplify social complexity. Robert Young referred to the 'in-between limbo world' in which colonial Jews lived.[69] Yet, the position of the Jews in Suriname was not something 'in-between'. In Suriname's full spectrum of power relations, and between the two poles of newly arrived black slaves and Christian white elites, the Jews did not assume an 'in-between' position. As whites, as slave owners, as public servants, as magistrates, as members of the Colonial States, Jews in Suriname were clearly positioned at the dominant end of the scale; labelling them as 'in-between' would conceal their unconditional hegemony over the unfree population of Suriname. Still, notwithstanding their affiliation with the colonial whites of Surinam, there is definitely something 'distinct' to the Surinamese Jews.

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[68]   Compare Memmi 1990

[69]   Young 2001:422.

The categorization of the Jews was not static, but liable to change, as were in fact all categories that the colonial decision-makers tried to define in Suriname. A strict division was maintained between black slaves and white colonists during the early colonial period, both in the plantation districts as in Paramaribo. The ideal of a race-based slave society is reflected in early colonial population registers where one was either white (Christian or Jewish), or slave (Indian or African). Over the course of history, the colonial society of Suriname became infinitely more complex. Numerous mixed relationships – ranging from abusive master-slave relationships, lasting and affective, but illegitimate relationships down to officially acknowledged mixed marriages – created numerous new groups that demanded a continuous re-adjustment of the official colonial categories. While the category of the mixed blood *mulatto* appeared as a separate category in early colonial documents, a much more refined and sophisticated system of colonial classification appeared during the late eighteenth century that came to include categories as *castice* and *poestice*.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the colonial administration distinguished various categories for those of mixed ancestry: *carboeger* (with one black and one mulatto or Indian parent), *mulatto* (one black and one white parent), *mestice* (one white and one mulatto parent), *castice* (white and mestice), and *poestice* (white and castice).[70] Thus although a *poestice* had only one black great-great grandparent and was often phenotypically white, he or she was officially considered coloured, albeit not in all circumstances. For instance, *castices* and *poestices* were included in the white companies of the civil guard. This rule also applied to *mestices*, as long as they were born in wedlock. Similarly, in the Jewish community, *poestices* were considered white in so far that they were entitled to the full-member status of the *Yachidim* (with the precondition that they were born within wedlock). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the more generic designation of coloured or 'couleurling' came into use (analogous to the designations of 'gens de colour' and 'free people of colour' in the French and English colonies).

Social life was even more complex than was officially represented in the colonial archives. Ideas about class and social status; predominant value judgements that were attached to the various forms of miscegenation; the appearance of new religious groups during the nineteenth century: these aspects further complicated the ethnic-social mapping of Suriname. Within the scope of this changing social map, the Surinamese Jews were classified by the colonial authorities as a separate category. The position of the Surinamese Jews in the colony's civil guard is a clear example of how

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[70] Rosemary Brana-Shute noted that during the later nineteenth century, the use of many terms to indicate various degrees of miscegenation fell into disuse 'because of the inability of the terms to convey the many possible combinations that resulted form intermating'. Brana-Shute 1985:227. For the incorporation of light skinned 'coloureds' in the white civil guard, see NA 1.05.10.02, 28-2-1781. See also Vrij 2005:28. For the full-membership of poestices in the Jewish community, see NA 1.05.11.18: 106, 114.

the Jews were officially set apart from the Christian white settlers in an institutionalized setting.

A closer look at how population registrations were conducted illustrates the variable position of the Jews in Suriname's scheme of colour and ethnic relationships. Over the course of time, the Jews had moved from being included in a white but religiously distinct category, to an intermediate classification as locally-born 'Europeans' referred to as 'natives' (*inboorlingen*). The meaning of these categories – created to fix and control a culturally diverse population – were not static in themselves, but were liable to change over the course of history, alongside a transforming Surinamese population; the same population these categories were supposed to fix. As the unstable categorization of the Jews in Suriname most likely results from interplay between the socioeconomic and political position of the Jews in the colony, and metropolitan ideas on Jewish social and racial status, I will start this section with some brief comments on European notions on Jewish whiteness in the age of colonial expansion.

Shem's legacy: an undefined status in the age of colonial expansion

In his recent study *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (2004), Jonathan Schorsch argues that the status of the Jews within the scheme of ethnic relations and colour hierarchy was more ambivalent than simply 'white' in the early modern era. According to Sander L. Gilman, it was not only the colour of skin that caused scientists to question Jewish racial status, but also other 'signs', such as kinky hair and the shape of the nose.[71] Actually, Jewish skin-colour and racial status appears as an undefined and variably category in the dominant racial discourse that was based on a black-to-white continuum, often referred to as 'swarthy', or a combination of 'dark' and 'pale'.[72]

When colonial expansion increased racial preoccupation in Europe, the status of the Jews remained uncertain. The dominant scheme of colour that was used to legitimize racial hierarchy, slavery and colonial domination, was based upon the

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[71] Gilman 1994, 371-3 and Goldstein 2006:45.

[72] For instance, in 1643 Isaac de la Peyrère exemplifies a conditional perception of Jewish skin-colour, when he contended that once Jews would convert to Christianity, they 'will no longer have this dark complexion […] they will change faces, and the whiteness of the complexion will have the same brightness'(Schorsch 2004:180). In 1691, Francois-Maximilian Mission objected against the notion of Jewish blackness, although his phrasing does give the impression that this idea was, in fact, widespread: 'Tis also a vulgar error that the Jews are all black; for this is only true of the Portuguese, who, marrying always among one another, beget Children like themselves, and consequently the Swartiness of their complexion is entail'd upon their whole Race, even in the Northern Regions. But the Jews who are originally of Germany […] are not blacker than the rest of their countrymen' (Gilman 1991:172). More examples of ambiguous Jewish white- and blackness in early modern Europe can be found in Schorsch 2004 600, 191; Gilman 1991 and Goldstein 2006.

biblical story of Noah's sons 'from whom the whole earth was overspread', and Noah's curse of his son Cham, who was condemned to eternal servitude and submission to his brothers Shem and Yefet, after having gazed at the naked body of his father Noah.[73] Although the biblical text refers to servitude as the nature of Noah's curse, and not blackness, many church fathers and later Christian thinkers linked black slavery to the descendents of Cham, as the inevitable outcome of Noah's curse.[74]

In the colour scheme and racial hierarchy that was derived from this biblical reading of the world's physiognomic differences, white Europeans, who were believed to be the descendants of Yefet (referred to as 'white and beautiful'), were destined to dominate the African descendants of Cham, who in turn was referred to as 'black as a crow', or 'black and ugly'. The colour and status of the Jews, however, who were believed to be Shem's descendants, whose legacy had 'its beginning in the land of Israel and thenceforth towards the east' (hence Asia), was unclear. While referred to as 'black and pleasing' in early manuscripts, Shem was later Europeanized and became 'white and pleasing'.[75]

A different, but equally widespread, idea among Europe's racial scientists hold the Jews for a 'mongrel race', which, because of intermixing with Africans during the period of Alexandrian exile, had come to share much of the physiognomy with Africans.[76] According to Eric L. Goldstein comments on the Jew's dark hair, 'sensual' lips and 'swarthy' complexion, dominated racial thinking in America well into the twentieth century.[77]

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[73] Genesis 9:19. Note that the 'whole world' refers to the continents east of the Atlantic Ocean that were known then.

[74] For a genealogy of Noah's curse in Christian, Jewish and Islamic discourse, see Schorsch 2004, 17-49, 135-165.

[75] Jonathan Schorsch situates this revision of Shem's skin colour in the sixteenth century (Schorsch 2004:18,184,191).

[76] Gilman 1994:370. Tudor Parfitt noted that an Israelite discourse was immanent across the African continent, wherein close relations were supposed between the Jews and a whole range of African tribes. The idea that specific African tribes were of Israelite origin had become widespread by the end of the nineteenth century, both in the colonial imagination of the African continent as well as in certain section of the ethnic groups it self Parfitt 2005.

[77] For instance, Charles E. Woodruff, author of *The Effects of Tropical Light on White Men,* argued in 1905: 'the Semitic type is the link between the Negro and Aryan, and indeed its southern branches are called negroid.' In another publication, *The complexion of the Jews* (1905), the same Woodruff wrote: 'if the Albino skin is zero as to pigmentation, and the black negro is ten, the blond Aryan would be one and the fairest Jew a three or four'(Gilman 1994, Goldstein 2006:376). Illustrative of the contemporary self-understanding of Jewish whiteness was a manifestation in Tel Aviv on 13 March 2002, when peace activists laid out black and white mock coffins, covered with Israeli and Palestinian flags, to represent the Israelis and Palestinians killed in 18 months of Intifada. Was it a deliberate choice to use white coffins for the representation of the 341 Israelis killed and black coffins to represent the 1,057 Palestinians casualties?

In general, one may conclude that no simple, definite notion on Jewish colour and racial status existed in Europa at the time of colonial expansion. In the New World setting of colonial societies, where the Jewish skin colour could be compared to 'black slaves or copper-toned Indians'[78], it was difficult to persist in the idea of Jewish 'blackness' or 'swarthiness' altogether. Here, Jews could become or claim to be whiter and more similar to the dominant white Christian segments than they ever could have in the Old World context of early modern Europe. Yet, even in the colonial societies of the New World, Jewish whiteness was circumstantial and did not imply full equality with Christian whites, as illustrated by the comments of Maria Nugent, wife of George Nugent: governor of Jamaica between 1801 and 1806. When visiting a theatre performance in Jamaica's Spanish Town in 1803, the Nugent confided to her diary that 'the audience were of all colours and descriptions; blacks, browns, Jews, and whites'; one trenchant remark that sharply outlines the distinct status of this Caribbean Jewish community.[79]

The comments of these visiting spectators of colonial societies reflect the ambiguous status of the Jews in then prevailing notions over skin-colour and racial status. Likewise, the position of the Jewish group in Suriname was ambivalent. Although Jews were incorporated in the dominant group of colonial whites in Suriname, as was often the case in other race-based societies, their status did not come without reservations either. The outsider status of the Jews is exemplified by their separate status in the colonial institution of the civil guard, as well as by their categorization in colonial censuses and population registers.

Confronting Jewish difference: the case of the civil guard

The 'white-but-Jewish' status of the Surinamese Jews was emphasized by the colonial administration in several ways. For example, as shown by Jean Jacques Vrij, the *Burgermilitia* (civil guard) was an effective instrument to reinforce colonial policy, and align colour and social status during the mid eighteenth to mid nineteenth century.[80] Every district had its own militia, while Paramaribo's civil guard counted several militias. Their function was both defensive and ceremonial, and every free man

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[78] Fredrickson 2002.

[79] Wright 2002:148. That this ambiguity of Jewish whiteness was not reserved to non-Jewish spectators alone appears from the comments of Sidney Mendelssohn, a Jewish mining magnate in South Africa, who believed some of the faces of the black men working in his mines 'so indubitably 'Jewish' that he was tempted to greet them as brothers in this foreign land.' Quoted in Parfitt 2005:12.

[80] According to Vrij, the colour-based militia policy came slowly under pressure after 1836, and was eventually revoked in 1850 (Vrij 2005). This alignment between colour and social status was a common phenomenon in this period in Suriname and can be found in the Jewish community as well. As discussed in Chapter VII, the separate status for coloured Jews in the Jewish community, installed in 1754 and abandoned in 1841, is indicative of this policy towards free coloured in Suriname in this period.

had to participate in its drills and exercises. Separate militias were established for whites and the free (black and coloured) population of Suriname. Jews participated in both the white and coloured militias, but always enjoyed a *status aparte.* The transition of lighter-skinned infantry members to white infantries strengthened the symbolic function of the separated militias. In 1781, it was decided that from then on, all *castices* (with one black great-grandparent) were included in the white militias, as well as those *mestices* (with one black grandparent) who were born in wedlock. Later policies included the separation of coloured and black militia members, and the reorganization of the different race-based infantries into one, wherein white dominance was pursued.[81]

The incorporation of Jews in Suriname's civil guard deviates from the standard model of Jewish exclusion from civil guards in Europe at that time. Given the small number of white colonists vis-à-vis the numerical dominance of the slave-population, as well as the ongoing maroon-war, excluding the Jews from the civil guard was simply not an option. That is not to say that Jews and Christians were considered equals. In Jodensavanne, a separate Jewish militia was established that fell under Jewish command; its main raison d'être was to defend Jodensavanne and the nearby Jewish plantations from maroon attacks. Although the erection of a separate Jewish militia was mainly a consequence of the concentration of Jewish plantations in the district of Boven-Suriname (Upper-Suriname, also referred as 'the Jewish Division'), it is telling that Christians who worked and lived on the Jewish plantations were not included in the Jewish militia, but fell under the command of the civil guard of Thorarica.[82] To emphasize the separate – lower – status of the Jews further, it was ruled in 1707 that whenever the militias of the various districts would march together, the Jewish militia of Boven-Suriname would take the position at the rear of the troops.[83]

Jews living in Paramaribo were included in mixed Jewish – non-Jewish militias. Again, this does not indicate equality between Jews and Christians. The rank of

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[81] The practice of including light-skinned coloureds into the category of whites also had implications for their status in religious communities. Earlier, I referred to the case of the white Jew Mr. Emanuels, who disputed his loss of full membership of the High German Jewish community after his marriage to a light skinned coloured women (a *poestice*), in 1826. In his lengthy plea, he argues that 'the law distinguishes a castice from other coloureds, and orders him to fulfil his militia services together with the whites, as will be known to the board.' Since his new wife was even lighter skinned than castizo, Mr. Emanuel argued that she should be considered white, and therefore he should not have lost his privileges as a community member (NSA, Miscellaneous, 27-12-1826).

[82] Schiltkamp 1963:466-7.

[83] Vrij forthcoming. Jean Jacques Vrij generously provided me with a concept paragraph of his forthcoming book *Ambivalent Burgerschap.* Although I give full credit to Vrij for his findings, the responsibility for their use and application in this study remains ultimately mine. The original text of this decree can be found in NA, 1.05.10.02: 128, 15-12-1707, currently not accessible due to its poor condition.

officer, for example, was not accessible to Jews until 1814.[84] Notable exception to this rule are the free blacks and coloureds militias, where Jewish coloureds have taken up the rank of non-commissioned officers since the establishment of separate coloured militias in 1775. Ironically, also in this occasion, primary motives to condone this practice were born out of practical necessity: it would have been impossible to find enough literate men to assume positions as officers when Jews would have been exempted. It thus had little to do with a different status of coloured Jews among coloureds compared to the status of white Jews among whites. Among the coloured Jews who took up the rank of sergeant in the coloured militia appear two familiar names: Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto, who assumed a leading role in the conflict over the coloured Jews and the status of the Darhe Jessarim in 1793 (see Chapter VII). However, no full equality existed between Jews and Christians in the coloured companies either, as only Christian coloureds could be appointed to the higher officer ranks. Whereas Ruben Mendes Meza was only a lower rank officer, his Christian half-brother Gerrit Evert de Courval (they had different fathers) held the rank of captain.[85]

On several occasions, the civil guard of Paramaribo became the stage of conflicts between Jews amongst themselves, and between Jews and their Christian commanders. It should be noted that it was the Court of Police that formulated colonial policy pertaining to the civil guard; often it were the same Christian commanders who were elected members of that Court. Not surprisingly, therefore, anti-Jewish sentiments of Christian colonists found their way into the official and classifying practices of the colonial administration and directly influenced the position of the Jews in the civil guard. As noted earlier, the relationship between this representative body – dominated by whites Christian planters – and the Jewish faction was often tense, if not downright hostile. Vrij rightly asserts that whenever the governor did not restrain their actions, measures taken by the Court of Police regarding Jewish participation in the civil guard often reflect the general animosity among the Christian colonists regarding the Jewish settlers, as well as their apparent need to institutionalize difference vis-à-vis the Jews.[86]

One such incident occurred in 1742, when the members of the Court of Police deliberated whether the establishment of a separate Jewish militia in Paramaribo

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[84] Salomon de la Parra was the first Jew who held an officer's rank in 1816. Some years later, in 1830, Salomon de la Parra would also be the first Jew to be appointed to the Municipial Council; while in 1836, de la Parra was the first Jew who took a seat in the Colonial Council. Eventually it was a Christian commander who petitioned for the withdrawal of the discriminating act towards Jews, arguing that this act had result into precarious social situations as it had happened that prominent Jews actually had to serve under commend of one their Christian employees in civil life (Vrij forthcoming).

[85] Personal communication with J.J. Vrij, 29-9-2006.

[86] Vrij forthcoming.

would be desirable. The growing number of Jews living in Paramaribo had resulted in increasing numbers of Jews participating in the mixed militias; the Court of Police feared 'numerous disorders between Christians and those of the Jewish Nation.' Although this particular plan was never realised, the Portuguese Jews living in Paramaribo were effectively segregated some fifteen years later. It was decided in 1758 that Portuguese Jews could no longer participate in the mixed Jewish-Christian militia of Paramaribo; henceforth they were to be included in the Jewish militia of the district of Boven-Suriname. The legitimization of this decree was found in arguments that had taken place between Jewish guard-members and their Christian officers after a maroon attack on one of the plantations (Palmeneribo). In plain anti-Semitic terms, the Court of Police accused the Jews of 'laziness and malevolence in exercising public services.' In other words, the Jews were accused of 'bad citizenship'.[87] This particular act was supported rather enthusiastically by the Portuguese Jews, as it would exempt them from a detested public service. In 1772, when marronage and maroon attacks were rampant, and after complaints of Christian commanders over rich Portuguese Jews 'who did even not contribute in the slightest to public services', this rule was adjusted to only include those Portuguese Jews who actually owned property in Jodensavanne.[88]

The fact that High German Jews were – by and large – exempted from this exclusionary practice can be traced back to a number of reasons. First, relatively small numbers of High German Jews were present in Suriname at that time, as large-scale immigration of East European Jews had not yet begun. Second, and more importantly, there were considerable practical impediments to the mandatory attendance of High German Jews in the militia. The High German population generally dwelled in Paramaribo while the drills were conducted in Jodensavanne where most of the Portuguese Jews resided. Attendance of the drills, therefore, not only demanded explicit approval by the Portuguese regents[89], but also required about ten hours of travel by boat.[90]

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[87] Vrij forthcoming. Original document: NA, 1.05.10.02:150, 19-4-1758, currently not accessible due to its poor condition.

[88] This requirement was further specified to include only Jews who owned into cultivated property in 1776. Vrij forthcoming. Original documents: NA, 1.05.10.02:86, 3-8-1772; 1.05.10.02:94, 2-7-1776 and 19-8-1776, currently not accessible due to their poor condition.

[89] Recall that Jodensavanne was private property.

[90] In 1804, the High German regents addressed the Governor William Carlyon Hughes, when four High German Jews were called to stand guard at Jodensavanne by the Portuguese Jewish captain I. de Meza. Although Jodensavanne was practically deserted by then, it was still owned by the Portuguese Jewish community. As a defence against maroon attacks, the colonial authorities had erected a military post at Jodensavanne. The post was guarded by civilians from Paramaribo in rotational shifts. The High German Jews, however, claimed that they – being High German – did not fall under the command of a Portuguese officer. Their request was not only ignored by the Court of Police, but they were ordered to
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That is not to say that there were no conflicts regarding the position of High German Jews in the civil guard. In 1765 for instance, the High German community leaders addressed the director of the Society of Suriname with the allegation they had been offended by the Christian militia commanders. The significant part was that the Jews had been put at the rear of the troops during exercise drills. Particularly humiliating, in the eyes of the High German Jews, was that they were ridiculed by the slaves, who walked behind the troops and who had noticed the dishonour and obstinacy amongst Christian settlers who were compelled to march with the Jews.[91] Besides issuing complaints against this particular incident, the High German regents requested that High German Jews were to enjoy the same right as the Portuguese Jews to send a substitute to the exercises (often a poor community member who received payment for this service) instead of serving in person, something the governor was willing to grant, but the Court of Police had persistently refused up to then.

Finding no audience for their grievances, among neither the Court of Police nor the governor, the regents of the High German community turned to the Society of Suriname in Amsterdam. Both parties elaborately and extensively argued their cases. Although the missive of the Court of Police reveals an unconcealed contempt for the High German Jews, it was not an anti-Jewish statement pure and simple, but also a display of class-sensibilities within the group of colonial whites. According to the Court of Police 'the High German Jews, only consisted of five or six prominent families and further vagabonds who were not even here at the time of the granting of the privileges […] It would be of utmost oddity when they would enjoy all the benefits of other residents, without having to perform its duties.'[92] The directors in The Hague, however, sided with the High German regents, and ordered the governor to permit the High German Jewish community to participate in 'the citizens' drill' with the same rights as the Portuguese Jewish community, and 'that they should not be ranked after all the other companies, but be placed according to the other citizens by their respective districts.'[93]

The position of the Jews in the guards remained a recurring issue. Following the incidents during the funeral of Governor Texier in 1783, the relation between the Jewish civil guards and their Christian commander became even more strained. During the installation of the new governor ad Interim Beeldsnijder Matroos, the High German community once again accused their Christian commander of not honouring their privileges; the Jews had again been positioned separately from the rest of the

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send some extra four men as well (Samson 1950).

[91] NSA, Minutes 1763-1771, 12-6-1765

[92] Vrij forthcoming. See also: NA, 1.05.10.02:326: 124-126, 28-5-1765.

[93] NSA, Minutes 1763-1771, 12-6-1765. Also Nassy 1974b:207-8.

guard and behind the Christians.[94] The various conflicts concerning the position and deployment of the Jewish militia underlines the symbolic importance of the civil guard, both as an instrument for colonial classifying practices, as well as an arena of anti-Semitic encounters.[95] Especially from the mid eighteenth to mid nineteenth century, colonial policy towards the Jews was inclined towards differentiation. Their classification as a separate category was made explicit by the colonial authorities in various ways, and illustrates their separation from Christian white colonists as a group and their *status aparte* in the Suriname's civil society.

From 'white' to 'native': Jews and the census

Colonial censuses and various other types of population counts are illustrative of how uncertain and fickle the status of the Jews was within Suriname's official scheme of colour and ethnic relationships. The colonial census was a typical nineteenth century phenomenon, not only in its construction of colonial categories or in the imagining of the colonial order, but also in it its mode of systematic quantification.[96] Benedict Anderson has described the census as an effective 'institution of power' that was used by the colonial state, *inter alia*, to imagine its dominion and the human beings it ruled.[97] The census quantified the very basis of colonial control by determining who was 'white' or 'native' and by putting these identifications into numbers and fixed columns. As such, the classification of groups in colonial censuses and population counts was seldom accidental. Aside from the census forms themselves – where the definition of social categories and the criteria used to differentiate among the population are telltale signs of the time – it is especially the structure and way of presenting that are telling. For instance, the universal practice of putting 'Europeans' or 'white Christians' in the first column, or at the top of the lists of census tables, marks the difference between the ruling whites and other groups.[98]

Anderson, drawing on a study of Charles Hirschman on census categories in Malaysia, notes that as the colonial period progressed, the census categories became more racially defined. And indeed, the number of categories and sub-categories in the colonial (British) Malay censuses are stunning, especially when compared to the rather

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[94] NA, 1.05.05.06: 385, 11-1783. For a discussion of this particular incident, see Chapter VI.

[95] For instance, NSA, Box 8 AJA, 20-8-1772; NA, 1.05.04.06: no. 256-258; NA, 1.05.05.06: 385, 11-1783; NA, 105.11.18: 41, 11-3-1816, 15-3-1816, 2-4-1816. Also Schiltkamp 1963:562, 1076.

[96] Anderson 1991 :168.

[97] Anderson 1991 :163-4. For an analysis of colonial manipulation of identity, and social classification in a (former) slave society, see Domínguez 1986. Of the same author, see also Domínguez 1989. On role of the census in the making of communities, see Anderson 1991 .

[98] Also noted by Hirschman 1987:557.

'sober' classifications in the Surinamese censuses.[99] A critical note on Anderson's assertion that colonial (census) categories only became more visible and exclusively racial during the later colonial period is warranted, however: although this may have been the case for the Asian and African colonies, it does not apply to the race-based slave societies of the New World, at least not in the time-frame mentioned by Anderson (late nineteenth to early twentieth century). In Suriname, the whole system of slavery was legitimized by a racial definition of the population. Racial classifications were already visible in travel accounts, geographical description or levy-lists of the late eighteenth century. It was a relatively small step for these racial categories to be quantified in the censuses and population registers of the nineteenth century.

Particularly relevant for this study is the apparent uneasiness of British census-makers about the proper place of those marked as 'Jews'. Hirschman notes that: '[i]t was only during the colonial era that Jews were listed as a sub-category under the racial classification. Anti-Semitism and the image of Jews as a race were well established among the middle and upper classes of Victorian England. Jews and Armenians were listed just below Europeans in the 'unorganized' ethnic classifications of 1871 and 1881. When the classification was reorganized in 1891, however, Jews and Armenians were places under 'Others', near the bottom of the list.'[100] Likewise, in Suriname, the classification of the Jews in population registrations reveals some of the complexity of their social standing. A historical analysis of the classifications and categories in censuses and population registers informs us of changes in the position of the Surinamese Jews as seen through the eyes of the colonial officials who fixed the categories of these population counts.[101] In some registers the Jews were included in the category of 'Europeans' or 'whites' (which were often used as synonyms), while in others they were listed as a separate category, or classified as 'natives' (*inboorling*).

The evolution of population registration and census-taking is closely tied to transformations seen in Suriname at that time: the creolization of a race-based slave society, the abolition of slavery, and the expansion of Dutch colonial bureaucracy. Up to the abolition of slavery in 1863, the population of Suriname was generally subdivided into whites, free coloureds, and slaves. This tripartite classification is based on the two criteria free-or-slave and colour. These categories were practically synonymous in the early colonial period, since every white was free and every non-white was enslaved. However, as time (and the process of miscegenation) went on, the

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[99] For instance, in the 1911 census, no less than 31 'European and Allied Races', and 22 'Malays and Allied Races' were enumerated, alongside 26 other categories. Compare Anderson 1991 :164-5; and Hirschman 1987.

[100] Hirschman 1987:569

[101] Phrasing borrowed from Charles Hirschman (Hirschman 1987:557).

preoccupation with colour in population-classifications increased. For instance, the District registers, a door-to-door registration of Paramaribo's free population were part of a broader set of arrangements to improve the registration of Paramaribo's free coloureds between 1828 and 1845. Apart from colour and a free-or-slave status, religion served as an often-used criterion for classifying the population of Suriname.

Early attempts by the colonial authorities in Suriname to enumerate the population took the form of (poll)tax rolls. The 1684 poll tax roll (*Hoofd en Ackergeldt)* simply counted 'whites', 'negroes' and 'Indians', the latter two categories being synonymous for the enslaved. Relevant for this study are the separate entries for Christians and Jews. While the Christians were ranked according to the place of residence, a separate list was created for 'all persons of the Jewish Nation.' Christian and Jewish children were also enrolled separately. Although the Jews were conceived as whites (at this point in history a group of coloured Jews had not yet come into existence) and were taxed accordingly, they were unmistakably set aside from the dominant Christian settlers. This distinction between Jewish and Christian tax-rolls may derive from one of the Jewish privileges of 1659. In article eight of foresaid privileges, David Nassy was empowered 'to grant freedom to his colonists for so many years as shall seem advisable to him' from tithes (*tienden*) together with freedom from all poll-taxes and other imposts for a period of maximum twenty years. Although by 1684 this particular privilege had ended, it may have stimulated Jewish segregation from the Christian colonists, as did some of the other privileges.[102]

The colonial census of 1811 was the first official census of Suriname, and as such the first official quantification of the population of Suriname.[103] It was issued by Charles Bentinck, governor of Suriname under British rule to get an 'an accurate statement […] of this colony in general, and of each colour and sex in particular, including whites, free people of colour [& negroes] and slaves.'[104] Later, the British subdivided the census records into two sections: one for 'white inhabitants' and one for 'free coloured and black residents'. The structure of the 1811 census records does not include religious affiliation. The Jews were included in the same category as the white population, and only recognizable as such by their family names.[105] Yet, their

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[102] Nassy 1974b:185.

[103] Wolbers 1861:564. Some years earlier, in 1805, London had ordered a house-to-house registration of the residents of each house, Christians or Jews; whites, free coloureds or blacks. In addition, the owners and administrators (Christian or Jews), number of plantations and the number of slaves (black or coloured, male or female) present on those plantations were to be registered. Presumably, this registration never took place as no trace of it has been found so far.

[104] Quoted in Hoefte 2004:156. The original census records are housed in the Public Records Office in London. The National Archive in The Hague deposits a microfilm version.

[105] Note that during the nineteenth and twentieth century, a Jewish name became increasingly more unreliable as an indicator for a religious Jewish identity, due to mixed relationships. Today some Jewish
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must have been some sort of registration of the Surinamese Jews after all, as Governor Bonham was able to report to London in 1812 that the Portuguese Jewish community consisted of 745 whites and 79 coloureds, while the High German community counted 547 whites and 16 coloureds. According to Bonham's report, the Christian community consisted of 757 whites, meaning that two-third of the whites were in fact Jewish.[106]

In most colonial population surveys, the Jews were separated from the non-Jewish whites, particularly in the structure of the official reports and documents. In his description of Suriname in *De landbouw in de kolonie Suriname* (1835), M.D. Teenstra presented various representations of the free population of Paramaribo, each providing a different perspective.[107] The first representation reproduced here (figure 3a) is rather straightforward. Teenstra divided the population of Paramaribo into three main categories: whites, coloureds and blacks. Each category is subdivided in four sub-categories: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Moravian, and Jewish. According to this statistic, the Jewish community consisted of 1136 white Jews, 49 coloured Jews and 1 black Jew in 1831.[108] In this particular presentation, colour is considered the primary attribute, religion secondary. Note that the Jews are put in the ultimate column, which assumes a hidden hierarchy in the sequence of columns. In another set of columns (called 'recapitulation'), Teenstra merges the different groups into a new ordering (figure 3b). Colour, religion and ethnic origin are mixed and mingled into a rather curious matrix: the Jews (white, coloured and black together) are listed in the second column, after the white Christians, but before the categories of 'coloured', 'slaves', 'free indigenous', 'other freemen', and 'free strangers'.[109] Teenstra's representation of the colonial community in Paramaribo is illustrative of the immanent desire to control and fix a population that by then had moved beyond the fixed and controllable, and was characterized by its many shades of colour and various religious

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names, that once indicated a Jewish family background, have become Afro-Surinamese family names, such as for instance the names of Samson, Brandon, Polak and Emanuels. See also Ten Hove 1996 and Da Costa 2004.

[106] The total number of free coloureds and blacks counted 2980, thus the total free population amounted 5104. Other interesting information provided by Bonham involves the slave population: he differentiated between 7115 house slaves (*particuliere slaven*), 42,223 plantation slaves and 1387 'Jewish' slaves. According to Bonham, the Portuguese Jews owned 824 private slaves, while the High German Jews owned 563 private slaves. However, these numbers should be approached with suspicion, as they imply a rather odd ratio of exactly one slave per Surinamese Jew. Presumably, these numbers are either based on estimates, or erroneous calculations. See Wolbers 1861:565.

[107] Teenstra based himself on the District registers of June 1831 (Teenstra 1835:101).

[108] In 1842, Teenstra counted 1258 white Jews, 65 coloured Jews and one black Jew. As most Jews lived in Paramaribo (about 1200) they dominated the group of about 800 white Christian settlers (Teenstra 1842:34).

[109] Teenstra 1835:101.

affiliations. Moreover, his classification of the Jews between the white Christians and the coloureds shows uneasiness as to how to conceive the Jews as a group.

A similar ambivalence towards the Jews as a group is displayed in the annual Colonial Reports (*Koloniaal Verslag*).[110] A brief look at the successive reports shows that the classification of the Surinamese population was rather rudimentary until 1860s: one was classified as free or unfree, male or female. As the colonial state expanded in Suriname, the colonial reports became thicker, while the census-taking and statistics became more sophisticated. Some early reports introduced colour as a distinct category, but mostly these early reports were rather sober still. Over time, the reports show an increased urge for collecting and presenting all sorts of data, covering such diverse fields as the colony's demography, religious communities, tropical diseases, agricultural yields, verdicts from the Council of Police, colonial finances, employment et cetera. Especially, the reports of the early twentieth century (between 1907 and 1920) show some remarkable changes in form and content in comparison to the earlier reports. The 'old' method of differentiating the population of the colony by colour of skin had been sacrificed, by then, for a modern classification based on a combination of race and nationality, referred to in Dutch as landaard (figure 3c).[111] A closer look at the population charts in these years shows a uniform template: the Europeans – as always – were listed in the first column, followed by the categories of 'Dutch-Indians', 'British-Indians', 'Chinese', 'natives', and 'others'.

The location of the categories of the Dutch-Indians, British-Indians, and Chinese after the Europeans reflects the growing concern with the number of indentured labourers in Suriname in this period. Notably, the population charts of the Colonial Reports do no longer mention the Jews as a separate category.[112] It may be tempting to conclude that their numbers were simply too small to warrant a separate category. However, this would be inconsistent given that the small (if not smaller) group of Europeans were not only included as a separate category, but were even listed in the first two columns with an even more detailed sub-division into Europeans who were born in the Netherlands and Europeans born elsewhere. It is unlikely that the Surinamese Jews were included in the category of Europeans, as the number of reported Europeans seems to be too small to account for the total.[113] Presumably, Jews

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[110] The annual Colonial Report on the West Indies was published between under different titles 1847 and 1930.

[111] Note that the separate concepts of 'race' and 'nation' as we know them today were often used synonymously in censuses and population counts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

[112] In contrast, in an alternative representation of the Surinamese population of the Colonial reports, the Jews are explicitly mention: in the categorization of the various religious groups in Suriname, the Jews are listed separately next to Protestants, Lutherans, Catholics, Moravians, Free Evangelists, Episcopalists, Muslims, Hindus, and Confucians.

[113] Take for example the report of 1920. In this year, 1109 Europeans were listed in total, while in another
(continued)

Table 3: Structures used in population surveys and censuses

a)	Whites				Coloureds			Blacks		
	Protestants	Catholics	Moravians	Jews		*idem*			*idem*	

b)	White Christians	Jews	Coloureds	Slaves	Free Natives	Free Foreigners

c)	Europeans		People from Dutch-Indies	People from British-Indies	Chinese born outside the colony or with Chinese father or mother	Natives	Others
	born in the Netherlands	born elsewhere					

were included in the remaining category of the 'natives' or locally born (referred to as *inboorlingen*), the category which was largely made up by the Afro-Surinamese population, excluding the Amerindians or maroon population.[114] This would make the category of 'natives' a rather ambiguous one since it would include the Afro-Surinamese population as well as the Jews (whether the small group of locally born Christian whites were also included in this category remains unclear), whereas the categories of 'Europeans', 'Chinese', 'Dutch-Indians' and British Indians' are all racially biased.[115]

Arguably, the inclusion of the Jews in the category of 'natives' – the one but last in the list, together with the Afro-Surinamese population – indicates their localization and their perception as locals by the colonial officials. If the common practice of putting 'Europeans' or 'white Christians' in the first column does represent a difference in status between the ruling whites and the other categories (as argued before), how, then, should we understand the incorporation of the Jews in the ultimate category of the 'natives' in a period when they were – politically speaking – a powerful group?[116] The assertion that this was a symbolic act to deny the Jews a colonial elite status notwithstanding their political dominance is, of course, speculative. It does indicate, however, that, by the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, the position of the Jews in the Surinamese society was more complex than

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chart 778 Jews were reported to live in Suriname in that same year.

[114] The Amerindian and maroon population were excluded from the population statistics.

[115] Note that in Teenstra's representation, half a century earlier, the word *inboorlingen* was only used to refer to locally born whites like the Jews, although they were occasionally referred to as 'white Creoles' as well. Locally born Afro-Surinamese were referred to as Creoles; not as *inboorlingen*.Teenstra 1842:9.

[116] Marten Schalkwijk suggests that the Jews were set aside from the category of 'Europeans' because a large number of Jews had possibly become coloureds by this time. However, during the nineteenth century, the number of coloured Jews never exceeded the 100 persons. Compare NA, 1.05.11.18:13, 11-06-1837. Schalkwijk 1994:86; Wolbers 1861:565;Teenstra 1835:202.

ever. The separate column for Europeans, illustrated the dissociation of the 'Hollanders' from locally-born whites. The latter group was increasingly affiliated with the coloured elite. Although the community of colonial whites had never been homogenous to begin with, the crumbling alliance between Dutch colonial officials and locally-born whites was a unique feature of this period. Estrangement among the different sections of the elite was mutual: whereas local elites (both Jews and the coloured elite) were deeply suspicious of the Dutch officials, Dutch expatriates were in turn often openly disdainful towards the Surinamese population, their distinctive behaviour and aberrant speech.[117] Whether these these Dutch colonial officials did perceive the Jews as colonial subjects, as white Creoles and Europeans of a lesser stock, or equals, remains ultimately unknown. In this connection, Van Lier believes that towards the twentieth century, the attitude of the Dutch in respect of the Jews changed, in reflection of the more tolerant ideas concerning Jews in Europe. However, in the end, Jews 'continued to be treated with a certain reserve and to be regarded as "different".'[118]

In an era when 'Christian', 'white' and 'European' were used as synonyms, a Jewish status brought along a fair degree of ambivalence, as I have argued in this chapter. The ambivalent status of the Surinamese Jews can partly be explained by the fact that in Suriname, Jews counted a small, minority-group of coloured Jews, and even some black Jews. The group of coloured Jews were an important part of the history of the Surinamese-Jewish communities, and impeded a self-evident connection between Jewishness and whiteness. Yet, there is more to Jewish ambiguity in Suriname than can be explained by the presence of coloured Jews alone. After all, the Dutch Reformed Church counted many more coloured members than the Jewish communities, but is still perceived as, essentially, a white colonial bastion.

Some conclusions can be drawn, based on the perspectives discussed in this chapter. First, Jewish 'otherness' was but one of several salient identifications of the Surinamese Jews. In the race-based slave society of Suriname, colour and legal status, were – next to religious status – the main criteria for classification. The paradox of the Surinamese-Jewish experience is that exclusionary practices of the white Christians, or even hard identity politics by the Dutch colonial administration (both are not always easy to distinguish), were a direct consequence of the Jewish incorporation in the dominant category of colonial whites. The ardently defended privileges not only secured the position of the Jews as a dominant group of colonists in Suriname, it also provided the requisites for many of the exclusionary practices by the Christian white colonists thereafter. In this sense, the history of Jewish representation in Suriname

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[117] Van Lier 1971:264-8.

[118] Van Lier 1971:264.

shows the interplay between 'othering' oneselves and being 'othered'. This double vision can be traced in the various Jewish representations and classifications discussed in this chapter. Only in the Saramaccan oral tradition does the Surinamese Jew appear in a rather singular, unambiguous form: here, the Jew is simply 'the white man'. In contrast, Jewish 'otherness' was continuously underwritten by the Dutch colonial administration, by granting them specific privileges and denying them civil rights, but also by their separate classification in early population surveys, such as in the poll-tax registrations, and their position in the institute for colonial identity politics *par excellence* – the civil guard; a consequence of a dominant European paradigm of Jewish 'otherness' that remained firmly engrained in the minds of the white (non-Jewish) planters and colonial authorities.

From the late eighteenth century onwards, the representation of the Jew became more complex. In part, this was a direct consequence of the increasing complexity of ethnic and social relationships in Suriname. The emergence of a coloured middle class and – later – a coloured elite during the nineteenth century complicated Suriname's social mapping. The ongoing process of miscegenation had created countless sub-categories in an already heterogeneous society. Although Jews regarded themselves as superior to the coloured elites, and were treated as such by the other whites as well, they sided with the coloured elites – as locals – in their shared mistrust of Dutch colonial officials, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century. These developments clearly challenged and obscured their unequivocal identification as a colonial elite and as political associates by the Dutch. These processes were reinforced by some dramatic changes in the Surinamese-Jewish community itself, which accelerated during the nineteenth century. From the late eighteenth century onwards, the Jewish group had become more heterogeneous, increasingly challenging the image of the Surinamese Jew as an elite community. The influx of destitute Jewish migrants, the presence of a group of coloured Jews, and the impoverishment of Jewish planters; all these developments no longer warranted a univocal image of the Jew as the colonizer. Benoit's paintings of a poor Jewish shopkeeper and the coloured Jewish female slave illustrate that halfway the nineteenth century, Jews were no longer envisioned as colonizers by default.

During the nineteenth century, locally based images of the Jew and a European tradition of Jewish 'othering' coexisted and intersected. The image of the cruel Jewish planter is a complex image, which contains all sorts of historical ideas: the Jews as the dominant white colonizer, the Jew as the degenerated creole, and the Jewish female as the doubly burdened 'other'. Although the image of the cruel Jewish planter shows much resemblance with the Saramaccan image of the Jew as 'the white man', this idea was primarily a white construction fostered by and Old World tradition of Jewish stereotyping. The different and sometimes countervailing images of the Surinamese Jews show that historical representations are neither consistent nor necessarily related to historic reality. For instance, the image of the cruel Jewish planter arose in a time when the Jews were disappearing as an important and influential fraction in the

Surinamese plantation industry, while their classification as natives together with the Afro-Surinamese population in the colonial reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century occurred at a point in time when the Jews assumed renewed political power. From a contemporary point of view, it seems logical to assume that the Jews would affiliate with the Dutch colonial officials and vice versa. Their classification in the Colonial Reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, suggests otherwise. Their classification as natives indicates their conception by the Dutch colonial officials as 'locals' and can be regarded as a strong sign of their localization, even indigenization.

SPACES OF DEATH, MIRROR OF THE LIVING: THE CEMETERY AS A SITE OF CREOLIZATION

> Closed are the portals of their Synagogue,
> No Psalms of David now the silence break,
> No Rabbi reads the ancient Decalogue
> In the grand dialect the Phrophets spoke.
>
> Gone are the living, but the dead remain,
> And not neglected; for a hand unseen,
> Scattering its bounty, like a summer rain,
> Still keeps their graves and their remembrance
> green.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote these lines in his poem *The Jewish Cemetery at Newport* in 1854.[1] Although the poem refers to the old Jewish graveyard at Newport – presumably the oldest Jewish graveyard in northern America – his emotional contemplation might just as well have been inspired by the *Beth Haim* at Jodensavanne. That long deserted Jewish settlement with its ruined synagogue, the scattered horizontal tombstones that dot the green grasses of the burial grounds, the Portuguese and Hebrew names; the Hebrew names that may seem so utterly misplaced in the tropical environment of Suriname. The once flourishing Surinamese-Jewish

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[1]   Longfellow 1882:467.

community can now be found – literally – on the various Jewish burial grounds at Jodensavanne and in Paramaribo.

The Portuguese and High German community archives and the various archives of the Dutch colonial administration, contain several accounts and fundamental conflicts related to burial rites, gravestones, and the allocation of burial plots. Upon close reading, the archived recordings of these critical events can be perceived as contemporary critiques of the dominant claims of Surinamese-Jewish identity at a certain moment in time. Yet, the stories surrounding the cemetery not only reflect changing cultural identifications, but also actively produce and reproduce these identifications as well. The conflicts in itself were not necessarily representative for daily routine in the Surinamese-Jewish community. Decades could pass, without any documented conflict to happen. The outcomes of these incidental events, may have had considerable impact, however, as they affected the course of events afterwards. This applied in particular to those cases that were seized as guiding principles for future demarcations of community boundaries.

This performative working of death, burial and the cemetery is demonstrated by the various cases in which cemetery-related stories and conflicts immediately gave rise to a redefinition of a collective identity. Meanwhile, a sense of belonging is reconfirmed with each death and each burial, while iron fences are a constant reminder of a deceased's deviation of dominant claims of collectivity. That these contestations and deviations are at play up to the present day, is illustrated by the recent story of a little girl's funeral (not Jewish herself, but with a Jewish grandfather) who could only be buried at the community cemetery under the strict condition that her grave was to be fenced off from the rest of the community.

Like any history, these stories can be approached and understood in different ways. The story of the musician whose grave was adorned with an extravagant monument and who became involved (post-mortem) in a conflict concerning his Jewish identity and the meaning of his final resting place, can be read as a story of extravagant sepulchral art versus more sober Jewish burial customs. Yet, the same story can also be understood as a struggle for religious authority and community power between the *Mahamad* and its religious leader, whereby the eccentric behaviour of a deceased community member is nothing more than a pretext to challenge authority within the community on matters that concern the boundaries of Surinamese-Jewishness. Before turning to these and other stories, I will comment briefly on the interconnection between death and cultural identification, and make a short tour along the Jewish cemeteries of Suriname.

1   SPACES OF DEATH, MIRROR OF THE LIVING

Although cemeteries provide for a practical necessity – the disposal of corpses – they are also places full of meaning. As still testaments of the community's dead, cemeteries are placea where people can remember their deceased loved ones: a spouse,

a child, a parent, a brother, a sister or friend. Not just sites for individual remembrance, cemeteries are powerful monuments for collective memory as well. They are *lieux de mémoire:* places were collective identities are located, constructed, contested and changed. Indisputably, the Jewish cemetery is an important symbol of the long and troublesome past of the Jewish people. The worldwide interest in Jewish cemeteries is enormous. Interestingly enough, it does not focus on the burial places of active, flourishing contemporary Jewish communities, but on cemeteries that have long been abandoned and whose function today is purely a symbolic one; symbols of vanished Sephardi splendour and erased Ashkenazi cultural life.

Likewise, in Suriname, the historical site of Jodensavanne symbolizes the Golden Age of the Portuguese-Jewish plantocracy of the eighteenth century, while its ruins epitomize the years of decline thereafter. David Cohen Nassy, the Surinamese-Jewish community elder at that time, already lamented the diminishing wealth and status of the once illustrious Sephardi community.[2] Ever since, a notion of past glory and history coming to an end continues to be the Leitmotiv of Surinamese-Jewish historiography and historical consciousness. In this notion of a fading past, a central role is reserved for the Jewish cemeteries of Suriname. Some may even argue that the entire historical Surinamese-Jewish community is remembered and cherished through its cemetery. The *Beth Haim* at Jodensavanne is one of the few tangible remnants of a past long gone and probably no historical figure, monument or building is a stronger symbol for Surinamese-Jewish history (although the Nassy family may be considered a worthy alternative).

Throughout the twentieth century, several efforts have been made to clear the site of Jodensavanne from its luxuriant overgrowth, but mostly to no avail. The isolated location, the persistent tropical vegetation and the civil war of the 1980s have undone all previous attempts to renovate the burial grounds. It was not until the late 1990s when, with renewed interest, local enthusiasts and academic researchers discovered the importance of the Surinamese-Jewish cemeteries as a source of genealogical information and have come to appreciate it as a historical site of great symbolic value. In the year 2000, Jodensavanne was added to the world monument list of hundred most endangered sites by World Monument Watch. Once again, the site was restored and this time it was made accessible to visiting tourists as well. Today, the cemetery and the ruins of Jodensavanne are carefully cleaned, tombstones are deciphered and

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[2]   Nassy 1974a. Historians engaged with historical memory and the perception of the past have argued that the notion of modern time as something different from the past, finds it origin in the Napoleontic wars that caused a 'total rupture of experience' and created an (idea) of a broken relationship between past and present (for instance, Lowenthal, 1996:7, Fritsche, 2004). In the specific context of colonial Suriname, the plantation crisis of the 1770s caused a first break in historical awareness of the Portuguese-Jewish plantocracy. The discussion about the role of colour and social status in demarcating community boundaries (late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century, see Chapter VIII) reflects an awareness that 'times have changed', and the legitimacy of old rules was no longer self-evident.

listed, and cemetery maps are drawn, while an excursion to the site of Jodensavanne has become a regular item of any organized trip to Suriname, for both Jewish and non-Jewish tourists. Jodensavanne has clearly exceeded its symbolic function as purely a site of Jewish historical memory; the site is now firmly embedded in Suriname's national heritage.[3]

Equally indicative for the symbolic value of Jodensavanne are the conflicts between the Portuguese-Jewish community and the colonial administration over the rights of ownership of Jodensavanne in 1908, when the colonial administration sold a piece of land that was claimed by the Portuguese-Jewish community as private property. The claim of the Jewish regents, based on the historic donation of 100 acres of land by Governor van Scharphuizen in 1691, was denied, with exception of the land that contained the burial grounds and the remnants of the synagogue.[4] In 1935, exasperated by the construction of a citrus plantation that deprived the local Amerindian population from their small farm grounds (but perhaps even more so by the construction of a house on Jodensavanne), the Portuguese Jews addressed the governor again. Once more, only the ruined synagogue and cemetery space were acknowledged as Jewish communal property.[5] Detached from the contemporary Jewish community, Jodensavanne transformed into an historic relic of a past long gone, and became a geographical reference point for Surinamese Jews; a place of belonging that enabled them to associate between their family histories, an imagined past and a tangible legacy.[6]

The present fascination with the Jewish cemetery should (at least partly) be linked to the contemporary 'memory boom': the enormous growth of interest in (the products of) historical remembrance that has taken place since the 1980s.[7] History has

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[3] As noted by David Lowenthal, history and heritage are not only at odds with one another (whereas the first gives an intepretation of 'what has happened', the latter passes on myths of origin), but are also mutually dependent. In the words of Lowenthal, 'what commences as heritage becomes history'. Yet history also needs heritage. Heritage is backed by volunteers and (state) support, and can make history 'relevant' (Lowenthal 1996:119-126, 167-172).

[4] Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive:17.1-17.9.

[5] Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive:255.1-155.4, 256.

[6] For a collection of anthropological essays that discuss the relationship between locality and belonging, and the ways in which a sense of belonging is often constructed around actual, fictitious and memorized space, see Lovell 1998.

[7] Winter 2001. According to historian Jay Winter, who introduced the notion of a 'memory boom', the growing interest in historical remembrance during the closing decades of the twentieth century can be linked to the previous century's history of warfare and violence and the consequential acknowledgement of victims of war and conflicts. A similar observation has been made by David Lowenthal who bumps into heritage 'everywhere'. Lowenthal explains the modern preoccupation with heritage by the increasing nostalgic perception of our past, caused by – what Lowenthal refers to as - technofobia, growing longevity, and massive flows of migration; developments that fostered the feeling that people are cut off from their own pasts (Lowenthal 1996:ix, 1-10). See also my discussion of colonial nostalgia

become a profitable industry. Books, films, museum exhibitions, centres for genealogical research: the past is sold in many forms and formats. History has become an important means to situate family stories in a wider context. Pierre Nora emphasizes the importance of the 'acceleration of history' in the increased contemporary interest in remembering the past:

> An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear – these indicate a rupture of equilibrium. … We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.[8]

Yet, notwithstanding the importance of the cemetery as a place of historical memory and remembrance, the Surinamese-Jewish cemeteries are neither simply nor solely *lieux de mémoire*. The different styles of tombstones and grave markers are also the silent witnesses of a community that has undergone changes throughout its history; changes that are projected into eternity. These silent witnesses of change are active statements of identity of a living Surinamese-Jewish community, now and before. Stories of conflicts about gravestones, burial rites and cemetery space transform the cemetery from an icon of a long gone past into a microcosm of cultural change and conflicting identifications within the Surinamese-Jewish community.

Many have acknowledged that death, funerals and cemeteries are highly ritualized domains – both in time and space.[9] In their study on the anthropology of death mortuary ritual, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf argue that in all societies 'the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Life becomes transparent against the background of death, and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed.'[10] Several studies on death and burial related issues have shown that customs and attitudes surrounding death reflect the most important cultural values of people or groups of people.[11] Yet, despite (or maybe because of) the symbolic importance of death and burial, the relation between society and cemetery seems paradoxical. Jean Baudrillard argued that:

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and historical memory in Chapter VII.

8   Nora 1989:7.

9   See among others, Huntington and Metcalf 1979, Gennep 1960 and Bloch and Parry 1982.

10   Huntington and Metcalf 1979:2.

11   For instance, Field, et al. 1997, Reimers 1999, De Witte 2001, Jonker 1995, Jonker 1996, Luria 2001, Bloch and Parry 1982, Huntington and Metcalf 1979 and Venbrux 1996.

> There is an irreversible evolution from savage societies to our own: little by little, the dead cease to exist. They are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation. They are no longer beings with a full role to play, worthy partners in exchange, and we make this obvious by exiling them further and further away from the group of the living.[12]

Baudrillard's argument may apply to modern western societies with their long history of expelling their dead from the field of vision of the living – by banishing them from their residential areas, by building brick cemetery walls or (as the ultimate form of expelling the dead from our world) by launching human remains into outer space – but poses some problems when applied to colonial, or non-Western societies.

In Suriname, burial grounds that were once purposefully located at the geographic periphery of society, are now situated in densely populated areas. Take the Kwattaweg in Paramaribo: various cemeteries – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – are located along this road. What, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, was the periphery of Paramaribo has become an urban environment where the dead share their space with vagrants and motorized traffic. Death also keeps coming back in a symbolic sense, because death cannot be separated from the world of the living, and can even 'create' the living world as is shown in the following paragraphs.[13]

The main premise of the meaning and importance of cemeteries is that – besides being important reflective events, mirroring life values, collective identities or communal boundaries – rituals surrounding death and burial also create, change and mould these identifications.[14] In other words, death and funerary rituals are performative actions. They create new understandings of the present that serve as a starting point for future collective identifications. Thus, in contrast to Baudrillard's statement that the dead 'are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation, no longer beings with a full role to play', I argue that with each dead, and each repeated death ritual, community identifications are re-enforced, and group boundaries are actively (re)created.[15] In a similar vein, deviant rituals or offensive tombstones challenge existing notions of commonality by community members, while community leaders use the cemetery to cultivate differences, for instance by differentiating between

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[12] Baudrillard 1993:126.

[13] Still, also in modern western societies death is 'an outsider that keeps coming back to the world of the living' (Small 1997:205). Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey show that, far from being 'invisible' or sequestered from daily life, the dead are powerfully present through all kind of material objects, such as photographs, letters, heirlooms or idiosyncratic gravesite displays (Hallam and Hockey 2001).

[14] Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry came to a similar conclusion in their edited volume on funeral rites and ceremonies, where they argue that death and death rituals are not so much '[…] 'a society' responding to the 'sacrilege' of death, but are themselves occasions for creating that 'society' […].' See Bloch and Parry 1982.

[15] Baudrillard 1993:126. For a similar argument, see Francis, et al. 2002.

'good' burial ground for prominent members of the community, and 'bad' burial plots for the sinners, the poor or – as in the case of Suriname – for the slaves and the coloureds.

The performativity of death and burial becomes particularly relevant in the context of diaspora communities or cultural minority groups. The cemetery space offers an opportunity for drawing social boundaries and territorial demarcations against other social collectives, whilst the act of the funeral offers an opportunity to enhance an identity or origin that is under pressure from the surrounding culture.[16] In the contemporary multi-ethnic environment of Suriname, it is sometimes said that every group has its own cemetery: 'the Creole have their cemetery, the Javanese have their cemetery, and the Hindustani have their cemetery, which means that there is no mixing, not even after death.'[17] The performativity of death and burial also appears on the Jewish cemeteries. The demarcation between Portuguese and High German Jews, between coloured Jews and white Jews, between Jews and non-Jews, is constantly performed anew with each burial. Differences are made tangible by gravestones, fences and the location of burial plots.[18] A similar argument is made by Doris Francis et al., who note that for 'communities whose identities lie at a distance, the cemetery is also a memoryscape, a reflection of their homeland and an expression of collective experience.'[19] Yet, besides being a place for distinction, the cemetery was also a place for mixing, as the cemetery is equally the place where mixed-married couples were buried side by side. Their graves turn the Jewish cemeteries into the still witnesses of localizing community boundaries.

2   A TOUR OF SURINAME'S JEWISH CEMETERIES

Several Jewish cemeteries exist in Suriname. Two Portuguese-Jewish cemeteries are located in or nearby the site of Jodensavanne; the other cemeteries, including the High German cemeteries, are located in Paramaribo. Most are no longer in use and have transformed into historical sites or even tourist attractions, as is the case for the old gravesites at Jodensavanne.

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[16]   See for instance Jonker 1996 and Reimers 1999.

[17]   Quoted in Thije 2007, 96.

[18]   Some interesting cases of identity politics at Jewish cemetery space can be found in Hagoort 2005 in her study of the *Beth Haim* of the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam.

[19]   Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou 2002:105.

The cemeteries of Cassipora and Jodensavanne

The oldest Jewish graveyard – the Cassipora cemetery – is situated near Cassipora Creek, about a mile from Jodensavanne, and dates back to the mid seventeenth century.[20] As Jewish worship does not require a specific building, the purchase of a cemetery – generally euphemistically referred to as *Beth Haim* (literally meaning House of the Living) – was often the first communal act when a Jewish community was established. The Cassipora cemetery, which houses about two hundred tombstones, is badly accessible and surrounded by dense tropical vegetation.[21] Due to its isolated location, the graveyard is invested with an aura of oblivion. Little is known about this place. Jewish colonists settled on plantations around Cassipora Creek before moving to Jodensavanne. Presumably, the settlement near Cassipora functioned as a small social and religious centre, before the establishment of Jodensavanne some years later. In his *Essay Historique,* David Nassy speaks about a small township with a small synagogue where the colonists could worship and assemble. No remnants have been found of such a communal building, only the graves remain. In 1791, when Nassy wrote his *pièce de résistance*, the old cemetery at Cassipora Creek was only used every so often for the burial of members of 'the old families' who preferred to be buried nearby their ancestor's graves.[22] Since then, the cemetery became forgotten and sank into oblivion. In 1998, the tombstones were unearthed and cleaned from the overgrowing local vegetation, only to be covered by overgrowth within several years.

The second cemetery at Jodensavanne, which is commonly referred to as the *Beth Haim*, was established along with the construction of the synagogue Berache ve Shalom at the end of the seventeenth century. The first identifiable burial (marked by a gravestone) dates from 1693; people were buried here throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century.[23]

In appearance, both the tombstones at the Cassipora Cemetery and the *Beth Haim* at Jodensavanne resemble the Jewish burial grounds of the Amsterdam mother

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[20] The oldest tombstones found by the TRIS (Troepenmacht in Suriname, former Dutch military forces in Suriname) in 1967 supposedly dates back to 1667; however this tombstone can no longer be found on the Cassipora cemetery. See De Bye 2004.

[21] During the 1998 cleaning operation led by architect Rachel Frankel and historian Aviva Ben-Ur, 214 gravestones were found, photo-surveyed and inventoried. See http://www.cvexp.org/newsltr/surinm99.htm (accessed 30-6-2008).

[22] Nassy 1974a:51.

[23] The total amount of Surinamese Jews interred at the *Beth Haim* of Jodensavanne is difficult to estimate. The cemetery contains 452 gravestones. This seems to imply that many graves never received a gravestone, as the actual number of interred must have exceeded this figure. One should bear in mind that some of the interred probably could not afford an expensive gravestone, made from marble or bluestone, which had to be imported from Amsterdam at that time. Instead, the majority of the burial plots have probably once been adorned with wooden grave markers that obviously have not stood the test of time in Suriname's humid tropical climate in Suriname and have wasted away by now.

community in Ouderkerk or the sister community at Curaçao.[24] Characteristic of these cemeteries are the horizontal gravestones made from various types of limestone and marble. Like the Portuguese-Jewish cemeteries at Ouderkerk and Curaçao, the gravestones are inscribed with three languages: Hebrew, Portuguese and Dutch. Some stones are decorated with detailed ornamental engravings, as was customary for seventeenth-century Jewish tombstones. They reveal the religious status of the deceased: the grave of a *Cohen* (priest) decorated with the image of a pair of hands symbolizes the act of priestly benediction, while an image of a circumcision knife indicates the grave of a *Mohel* (circumciser). Other images depict the interrupted course of life of the dead: the hand of God cutting down a tree symbolizes a life taken before its time, whereas a full-grown tree with many branches depicts a long and fruitful life blessed with a large offspring.[25] The European orientation of the cemeteries of Jodensavanne and Cassipora does not necessarily indicate a diasporic cultural orientation, as most, if not all, tombstones were imported from Amsterdam.[26] The costs of transport in combination with the material costs of marble and bluestone, and the labour-intensive work of sculpting, made the tombstones a cultural product that was typically reserved for the elites.[27]

When strolling around the scattered tombstones, the quietness of the place and the tropical heat makes one muse on the isolated life of those buried here. A recent cleaning operation of the cemeteries at Jodensavanne and Cassipora and deciphering of the tombstones (led by architect Rachel Frankel and historian Aviva Ben-Ur) have brought to light some interesting epitaphs that reveal the harsh reality of daily life on the sugar plantations of Jodensavanne. Take the tombstone of Esther Cohen Nassy, the beloved wife of David Cohen Nassy, the author of *Essay Historique*, who died in a smallpox epidemic in 1789, after '26 Years, 2 months and 6 Days of Marriage', leaving behind her mourning husband David Nassy.

Or take the tombstones of young women who died during childbirth. Especially moving is the poetic epitaph (in Hebrew and Portuguese) of Rebecca Henriquez da Costa, who died in 1771 and was buried on the Cassipora cemetery:[28]

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[24] According to architect Rachel Frankel, who was in charge of the latest cleaning operation of the Cassipora and Jodensavanne burial grounds, the main aberration of the Cassipora cemetery is its rather unusual northeast orientation of the majority of the tombs, instead of being more traditionally east-facing one. Frankel 2001: 409.

[25] For a study of iconography on the Surinamese-Jewish cemeteries, see Ben-Ur 2004. For a study of sepulchral art on Jewish cemeteries, see Schwartzman 1993. For the Beth Haim of Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, see Vega 1975 and Weinstein 1979; for Curacao: Emmanuel 1957 and Weinstein 1992.

[26] Ben-Ur 2004:47.

[27] Ben-Ur 2004:49.

[28] All epitaph readings and translations in this section are derived from: Ben-Ur and Frankel forthcoming). See also http://people.umass.edu/juda390d/info/epitaphs.html (accessed 30-6-2008).

On the day of my abundant joy
illness suddenly overcame me
Birth pangs and rupture
overwhelmed me
I gave birth and died, like a blossom
I turned away
And the fruit of my womb was
brought with me to the grave
Woe alongside joy, birth pangs
alongside song I was what I brought
My kin mourned for me, as did all
passers-by
You who passes by, if you have a
human heart,
Shed your tears upon my bones

Another aspect of daily life in Jodensavanne is found on the stones of David Rodrigues Monsanto and Emmanuel Pereyra, located at the *Beth Haim* of Jodensavanne. Both boys were killed during a Maroon attack. The words on their tombstones express feelings of pain and hatred, and reflect the hazards of those living at the frontier of the slave economy of eighteenth century Suriname. The epitaph (in Portuguese) of David Rodrigues Monsanto reads:

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to
whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!

Tombstone Of the Curtailed
Young Man David Rodrigues Monsante
Who Was Killed By the Cruel Uprising Negroes
On 29 Av the Year 5499 Which Corresponds
To 4 September the Year 1739
May His Blood be Avenged

Perhaps the most famous tombstone of the Cassipora cemetery belongs to another member of the Cohen Nassy family: the planter and captain David Cohen Nassy.[29]

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[29] The Nassy family played an important role in the forging and development of the (Portuguese) Jewish community in Suriname. As a professional colonizer, David Cohen Nassy (1615-1685) initiated the establishment of a Jewish community with his organised group migration in the 1650s. His sons Samuel Cohen Nassy (who donated several acres of ground at Jodensavanne for the building of communal institutions in) and Joseph Cohen Nassy were notorious for their expeditions against maroons. A century later, another David Cohen Nassy was a leading member of the Portuguese-Jewish community, and co-authored *Essai Historique sur la colonie de Surinam*.

Nassy's epitaph is a testimony of his Surinamese-Jewish legacy, which contains a mix of traditional Jewish elements, next to references to that historical burdened but essential part of Surinamese-Jewish history, namely slavery. The epitaph reads (in Hebrew):

> And David rested with his ancestor
> [engraving of priestly hands]
> Tombstone of the burial place of the venerable
> Elderly man, the exalted lord,
> Man of valour, man of many deeds,
> The officer David, son of Jacob
> HaCohen Nassy, whom God took
> with a good name to his world after he returned
> from beating the black slaves on
> the 19th of the month of Kislev [etc.]

These tombstones are powerful examples of how grave markers are indeed the silent witnesses of a community's historical experience. Without any restraint, the epitaphs tell the story of a colonial Jewish community whose daily life was deeply affected by colonial power relations. Throughout the eighteenth century, organized raids by escaped slaves (called maroons) posed a serious threat to Jodensavanne and its surrounding plantations. The isolated location of Jodensavanne and the plantation-houses, the impenetrable surrounding forest, with its many swamps, the highly uneven black-to-white ratio in the plantation districts, and the persisting rumours of maroons attacks must have created an atmosphere of enormous fear and uncertainty among the Jewish villagers – especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, when the maroons fought a series of guerrilla wars against the plantation society and white colonists.[30] A Jewish militia was formed to protect Jodensavanne against these attacks and to avenge the losses, and maroon attacks were often followed by organized maroon hunting expeditions. As a captain of the Jewish militia, David Cohen Nassy was notorious for his activities and achievements during these expeditions. He died in 1743, at the age of 67, after coming back from a failed expedition.[31]

A third cemetery at Jodensavanne is strictly speaking not a Jewish cemetery. This so-called Creole Cemetery, containing about 140 marked graves, is somewhat cloaked in mystery. It was long assumed to be a slave cemetery, until this idea was questioned by New York architect Rachel Frankel, who headed the 1998-clearing

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[30]   For the maroons wars, see amongst others Hoogbergen 1990, Dragtenstein 2002 and Price 1990. For a published historical account of these confrontations between maroons and colonial militias, see Stedman 1988.

[31]   Nassy 1974b:69.

project of Jodensavanne and Cassipora. Frankel argues that the cemetery's early burials are most likely the graves of the free offspring of Portuguese-Jewish fathers and African mothers who were not accepted as Jews because their mothers were not Jewish.[32]

Although this assumption may appear logical, especially in the perspective of today's dominance of *halakhic* notions of Jewish identity, it does not apply to seventeenth and eighteenth century Suriname. Actually, there are numerous examples of children of mixed relationships between Jewish males and female slaves or free coloured women who became members of the Jewish community even though their mothers were clearly not Jewish. It appears that the *halakhic* factor was not as decisive in determining Jewish identity in seventeenth and eighteenth century Suriname, as it would become later.[33] In Paramaribo, Jews of mixed Afro-Jewish descent (called mulatto Jews) were buried within the cemetery space of the *Beth Haim* in both the Portuguese and High German Jewish communities, albeit on separate aisles designated for the burial of *Congreganten* (in the Portuguese Jewish burial register referred to as *carrera dos congregantos*).[34] The burial register of the Beth Haim at Jodensavanne does not mention such separate aisles, but refers to several gravestones as belonging to free coloured Jews, such as *la sepulture una mulata libre llamada Simha* (the gravestone of a free mulatress, called Simha) who died in May 1791, or *sepulture una mulata libre llamada Jahel* who died in June that same year (note that neither of the women were referred to by a family name).[35]

Still, the status of the Creole cemetery is an intriguing issue. Although there is no evidence that this cemetery was already in use during the eighteenth century when Jodensavanne still functioned as the centre of Portuguese-Jewish community life, the idea of the early Creole Cemetery as some sort of mixed Jewish-Afro-Surinamese graveyard is a tempting one. In fact, the High German community archives mention the existence of a category of Jewish mulattos 'belonging to *Yachidim*': presumably slaves, who, because of their slave status, were not accepted as members of the religious community.[36] The High German community did reserve burial space at the

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[32] Frankel 1999:3.

[33] For a discussion of *halakha* and colour in the negotiation of Surinamese Jewishness, see Chapter VIII.

[34] NA, 1.05.11.18:137. *Congreganten* were community members with limited rights only, see also page 208-213; and 270-284.

[35] NA, 1.05.11.18:423

[36] NSA *Escamoth* 1734-1821, 5-11-1780. Until the 1830, slaves were generally kept outside the religious congregations in Suriname. To my knowledge, no evidence has surfaced that indicates the admittance of slaves to the Jewish communities before that time, at least not officially. Neither the community regulations of the Portuguese-Jewish community, nor the High German community, mention slaves as a category among their members. This changed in the 1830s, however. After the introduction of the new Manumission Law of 1832 (which obligated the incorporation of manumissioned slaves into a religious

(continued)

Beth Haim specifically for this group, however, indicating that even though they did not belong to the religious community, they were somehow considered to be part of a socially defined Jewish community. If the High German community did recognize such a group, have the Portuguese-Jewish community done so as well and assigned burial plots to Jewish mulattoes 'belonging to *Yachidim*'?

R. da Costa has suggested, however, that the Creole Cemetery is of a much later date, which would deny any direct relationship between this cemetery and the Portuguese Jewish community of Jodensavanne. According to Da Costa, slaves from neighbouring plantations requested the Portuguese Jewish regents for their own burial ground towards the end of slavery (slavery was abolished in Suriname at 1 July 1863). According to Da Costa, a piece of land a few hundred yards away from the *Beth Haim* was assigned to this purpose. The burial place was referred to by the local population as *Nengre Berpe*.[37] I have not been able to locate the said request in the community archives. The Creole Cemetery poses some additional problems, though. Take the simple fact that this cemetery is still recognizable as a burial place. Grave markers of slave graves – if marked at all – were made of wood. Normally, they would not have withstood the ravages of time especially considering Surinam's extreme tropical climate. The fact that this burial ground is still dotted with wooden grave markers makes an early colonial dating implausible.

The more recent graves at the Creole Cemetery, with stone tablets and Christian symbols that date from the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century, indicate its prolonged use by people living in the vicinity, long after Jodensavanne had been deserted by the Portuguese Jews. Although the names of the interred suggest some connection with a Portuguese-Jewish past (for instance Louisa G. Lobles, Annaatje van la Parra, Abraham Garcia Wijngaarde, Jacob Rudolf Cotin), names and family names are generally highly unreliable identity markers in Suriname. The prefix 'van' in family names (as in Annaatje van la Parra) indicates a slave origin; the family-names Wijngaard and Wijngaarden were given to manumissioned slaves of the De la Parra family (a prominent Portuguese-Jewish slaveholding family with a long family history in Suriname); the name of Cotin suggest a link with the nearby plantation Quemabo, owned by the Coutinho-family during much of the nineteenth century.[38] The assumption that these persons came from Jewish ancestors is unsubstantial, however.[39]

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congregation, Christian or Jewish, in order to get their letter of freedom) slaves were incorporated into the community in anticipation of the manumission. See also Chapter VIII.

[37] Da Costa 2004:21.

[38] http://nationaalarchief.sr/geschiedenis/plantages/index.nl.html (accessed 30-6-2008). 'Wijngaarde' is the Dutch word for vineyard, while the Spanish word 'parra' means grapevine. For manumissions and family names, see http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/vrij-in-suriname/index.html (accessed 30-6-2008).

[39] For instance, Berg 2001.

Unless other archival documents are found, the exact use and function of this creole graveyard will remain speculative. The importance of the Creole Cemetery goes beyond the question whether the Creole Cemetery was actually a slave's or freemans' cemetery, or one transformed from the one in the other. Equally relevant is the particular style of grave markers found at the Creole Cemetery (figure 6).[40] Immediately eye-catching are the many vertical grave makers that are scattered around the burial site: wood carved sticks of about a 1.15-meter high and 22 centimetres wide, with a round or heart-shaped top. Similar wooden grave markers can be found at several plantation cemeteries in Suriname. Equally interesting is the grave of Louisa G. Lobles, which seems to be a combination of creole and Jewish vernacular forms. The grave has two grave markers: a wooden vertical grave marker with a heart-shaped final stands at the head of a horizontal tombstone, which is engraved with another heart symbol (figure 7).

Frankel believes the heart shapes are stylized forms of a *sankofa* used by the Akan people of West Africa[41], while the engraving of a heart symbol on Louisa Lobles' tombstone is believed to represent an *akoma,* symbolizing love, faithfulness, patience and tolerance.[42] Frankel's suggestion poses some problems, though. The imported slaves from Africa to Suriname did not belong to one dominant group or culture, but represented a mixture of Africans from various regions.[43] Studies of creolization have shown that the process of creolization is too complicated to assume a self-evident connection between numeral dominance and influence on the making of Afro-Surinamese culture.[44] Moreover, the wooden sticks also resemble wooden headboards found on nineteenth century African-American graveyards in North Carolina. As indicated by M. Ruth Little, many wooden markers on African American graveyards that date from nineteenth century are characterized by gently curving tops:

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[40] Also Frankel 2001:425-6.

[41] Nowadays Ghana and Ivory Coast: a region that accounts for an approximated 30% of the slave trade to Suriname (Van Stipriaan 1993:314).

[42] Frankel 2001:425-6. *Sankofa nananom se yenkyi* is an Akan saying whose literal translation means 'retrieving the past is no taboo, thus says the ancestors', and is believed to symbolize the importance of learning from the past, to connect between past, present and future, between ancestors and the living. An alternate symbol frequently associated with the first interpretation of the term *sankofa* is the *sankofa* bird, which is also referred to as the bird of passage. The *sankofa* bird is always looking backwards, thus facing the past and representing the importance of remembering the past, of going back to our roots in order to move forward. Some feel that this bird represents both life and death. See http://www.duboislc.net/SankofaMeaning.html and http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana/Writing_Systems/Adinkra_page1.html (both accessed 30-6-2008).

[43] Van Stipriaan 2000:13.

[44] For instance, Van Stipriaan 2003.

Figure 6: Wooden grave markers at the Creole Cemetery at Jodensavanne

rounded, squared off, or diamond shaped. M. Ruth Little believes these forms to be mimicry of the bold curves of Baroque headstones, popular in the late 1700s and early 1800s.[45] It is difficult – if not impossible – to provide a definitive answer regarding the exact origin of these wooden grave markers.

Jewish cemeteries and creole grave markers in Paramaribo

Paramaribo houses three Jewish cemeteries that are all located along the Kwattaweg. The Old Portuguese and High German graveyards – only separated by a small path – were brought into use around 1700. As noted by Aviva Ben-Ur, the small path symbolizes a fragile division, inscripted in the cemetery space, which could not prevent various forms of boundary-crossings between both groups. According to

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[45] Ruth Little 1998.
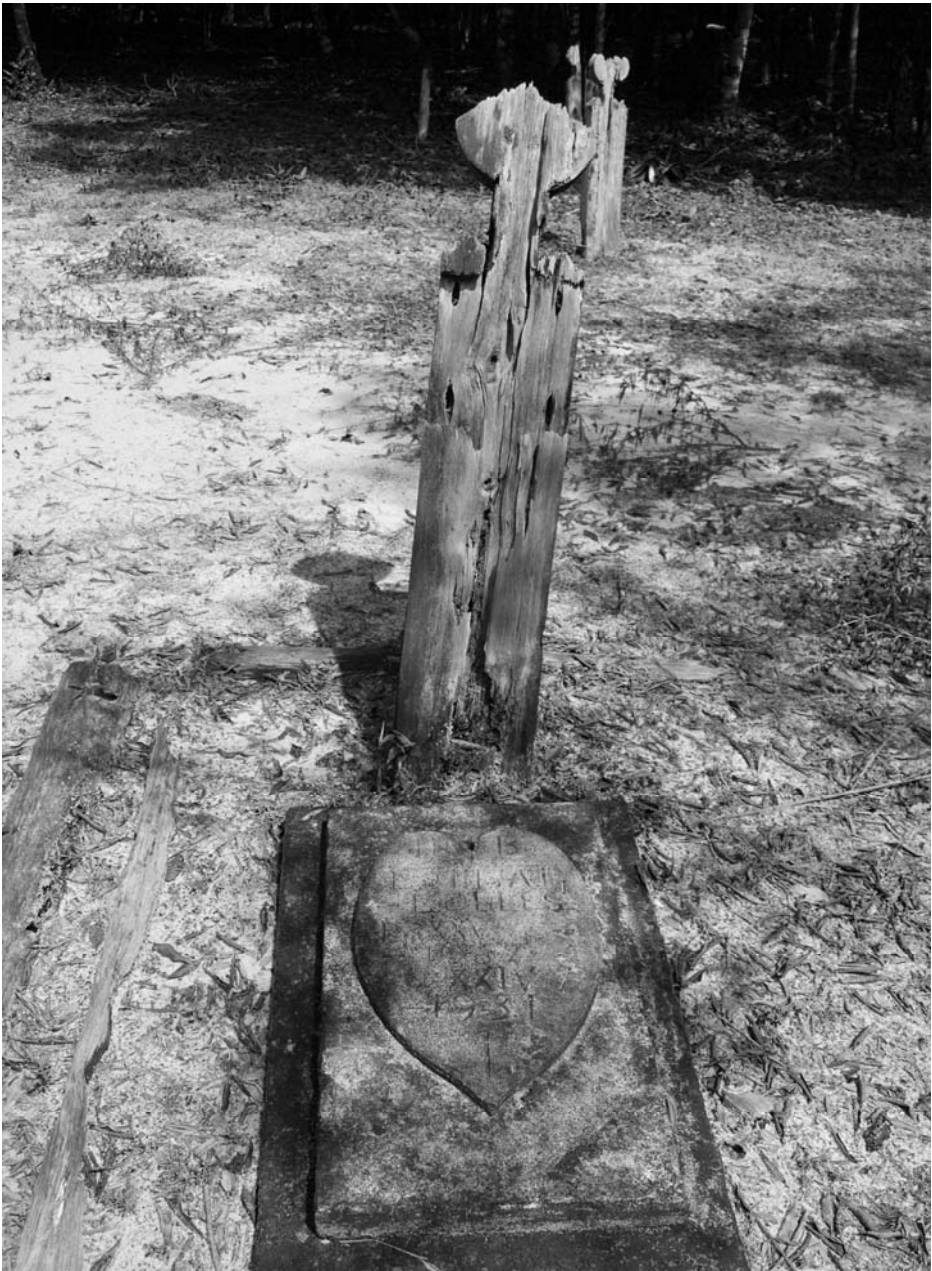
Figure 7: Heart-shaped wooden tombstone

Ben-Ur, 'Evidence of cultural borrowing, shared space, and intermarriage is readily apparent. Tombstones in the Ashkenazi cemetery were laid flat, in consonance with

In 1959, the adjoining Portuguese-Jewish cemetery was cleared and the dead reburied in the new Portuguese-Jewish cemetery, opened in 1868. Today, the remaining Old High German cemetery, overgrown with weeds and neglected by the community, has become a children's playground, a public dumping place for the surrounding neighbourhood and a spot frequented by the local drug addicts. Only recently, when the local authorities threatened to confiscate the plot of land, did the community decide to restore the site. At the time of my visit in January 2003, all the dirt had been removed, the ground raised, and the gravestones stripped from the abundant local flora. Despite these efforts, the cemetery remains oddly out of place in this neighbourhood. The gravestones, with all the engraved images of a traditional Jewish cemetery, such as the priestly hand of the *Cohen*, the knife of the *Mohel*, a cut down tree symbolizing a broken life, lay hidden in the grass. The small brick walls that once supported the horizontal grave tablets have nearly all disappeared; locals have used the tombstones for other purposes.

At the far side of the road lies the new High German cemetery. This large burial site of the High German community contains an estimated 1500 graves and is still in use.[46] The cemetery reminds the visitor of the vibrant Jewish community that once existed in Paramaribo. Names inscribed on tombstones refer to family histories that have continued elsewhere: Coerland, Machielse, Durkheim, Presburg are no longer known family names in Suriname. The new cemetery of the Portuguese-Jewish community is located a few hundred yards further down and largely resembles the High German cemetery. Both cemeteries offer a fascinating landscape of two centuries of changing Surinamese-Jewish sepulchral culture. Horizontal bluestone tablets supported by a small brick wall dominate the site, the predominant style in which the Surinamese Jews buried their dead in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Gone are the rich engravings that are so typical of the Jodensavanne and Cassipora cemeteries, though some of the stones are adorned with modest engravings. The majority of the tablets have rather sober epitaphs: the name of the deceased, dates of birth and death, sometimes accompanied by identifiable Jewish symbols, such as a Star of David or a *Menorah* (a seven-branched candelabrum and one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith).

Crisscross between the tombs, vertical wooden stakes indicate the existence of many more graves; some have fallen over and are scattered on the ground, hidden between the grass-covered soil (figure 8 and 9).[47] The wooden grave markers are

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[46] In 1943, Ph.A. Samson counted 1471 graves, of which 372 children's graves – located at the centre of the cemetery. The first interred was Ribca Jacob Polak, who died in 1825. See, Samson 1943a.

[47] In fact, at the time of my second visit to Suriname in 2006, many wooden grave markers – especially the ones that had fallen over – had disappeared.

unmistakably identical to the grave markers found on the Creole cemetery. The stakes have the same form and height, and are headed with heart or round shapes. Similar wooden grave markers also appear on (non-Jewish) graveyards like 'Oud Linah's Rust', a cemetery for the poor, and even at the 'Oranje Tuin' (Suriname's old elite cemetery, where many of colonial elites, magistrates and their families are interred). There is one important aberration however: to underline the Jewish identity of the interred, many wooden grave makers have a large Star of David attached to the stake. An exact dating is difficult as the extremely weathered wood makes inscriptions impossible to decipher. Yet, those inscriptions that are still readable belong to graves from the late eighteenth to early twentieth century.[48]

A beautiful example of such a grave marker belongs to Abhraham who was born in 1861 and died in 1932. His name and dates of birth and death are inscribed on a wooden Star of David and attached to a wooden stick with a triangle head, which seem to be a simplified reproduction of the curved heart shaped symbol (figure 10). More recent grave makers are notable for their steel or aluminium Star of David. Surrounded by traditional Jewish tombstones, their deviant forms represent a strong example of creolized Jewish grave culture.

The tombstones and grave markers that have been put there in modern times are still changing, adapting to new trends in burial practices. Especially striking is the appearance of tiled horizontal tombs (in white or pale blue) on both the High German and Portuguese cemeteries. This type of tombstone is very popular among the Afro-Surinamese population and commonly seen at cemeteries throughout Suriname, but is rather distinctive from Jewish tombstones. Perhaps the most eye-catching example of a creolized tomb can be found on the Portuguese cemetery. Two horizontal tiled tombs are accompanied by wooden grave markers and heart shaped heads at the top end of the tombs, while the Star of David is replaced by a heart symbol (figure 11). In both design and symbolic expression, these two graves are very similar to the one of Louise G. Lobles found at the Creole Cemetery. They are unmistakably creole. Only their location on a Jewish cemetery provides these graves with a Jewish identity.

How should we interpret this use of creole grave markers at the Surinamese-Jewish cemeteries? Are these grave markers an expression of a creolized Surinamese-Jewish identification? Did relatives of the deceased place these grave markers, thereby creating a cultural boundary within the apparent homogenous space of the Jewish cemetery? Or do the creole grave markers at the Portuguese and High German cemeteries not so much result from Jewish identifications, but rather from economic and institutional constraints? Tombstones were generally placed a year after the burial had taken place. During that first year, graves were marked by a wooden stake alone.

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[48]   Ruth Little 1998:32, 42.

Figure 8: Tombstone and wooden gravemarker at the High German Jewish cemetery in Paramaribo

Figure 9: Round-shaped wooden gravemarkers at the High German Jewish cemetery

Figure 10: Wooden gravemarkers with Star of David at the High German Jewish cemetery

Surinamese Jews, who could not afford a bluestone tomb for their deceased family members (or who simply had lost interest) may never have replaced the wooden grave marker after the first year of death.

Yet, despite this reservation (and a general caution against over-interpretation), there is significance attached to these wooden grave markers given their specific creolized form. The curved wooden grave markers with a round or heart-shaped head had become the dominant form of wooden grave markers in Suriname during the nineteenth century and appear on many cemeteries in Suriname, including the Jewish ones. Presumably, the carpenter (most likely of Afro-Surinamese descent)[49] was ultimately responsible for the typical shape of the gravemarkers. He would produce a grave marker in the style he was familiar with: a wooden stake with a round or heart-shaped head. Whatever the exact origin of these forms –West-African symbolism as argued by Frankel, mimicry of Baroque curved headstones as argued by Little, or a mixture of both – the wooden grave markers do present a strong example of creolization on the Jewish cemeteries.

Here the problems of a historical analysis of creolization surface. Phenomena of creolized culture, represented here in its material form, reveal little to nothing as to how these processes of change and adjustment have actually taken place. As cultural expressions, they can only retrospectively reveal that something has taken place. Questions related to the origin of a certain style of grave markers remain unknown or trigger more questions (for who eventually decided on the shape and form of the grave markers?). The only information we have at our disposal is their final appearance on the burial sites. In the words of anthropologist Richard Price: 'Like physicists with their Big Bang Birth-of-the-universe, we can theorize the event (or the process) but we seem ever unable effectively to observe it'.[50] Consequently, enigmas will last and a good deal of speculation is inevitable.

The cemetery site alone would leave us with mysterious grave markers and a bulk of question marks indeed; the localization of the Surinamese Jews and the development of a creole mentality among them can be traced in archived documents as well. As is shown in the following stories, it is in the archives that the performativity of death, burial and cemetery is reflected most powerful. At times, the expressions or contestations of identity claims during these events are a matter of reading between the lines. In other cases the identity questions that are at stake are made explicit. This is

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[49] Carpenter was typically an Afro-Surinamese profession, also within the Jewish communities. The District registers of 1845 listed two Jewish carpenters who both were of mixed Afro-Jewish descent. The census of 1921 registered no Jewish carpenters. Ad de Bruijne found that in 1930, 99% of the carpenters were of Afro-Surinamese descent. Among a group of 195 carpenters, only one had a different ethnic background: Hindustani. See De Bruijne 2007:15.

[50] Price 2001:58.

Figure 11: Creolized tombstone at the Portuguese-Jewish cemetery in Paramaribo

especially the case when major conflicts are concerned that forced the parties to have their position documented in detail.[51]

3   CRITICAL EVENTS AT THE SURINAMESE-JEWISH CEMETERIES

From the eighteenth century onwards, mixed marriages and mixed relationships became recurring source of conflict.[52] Both High German and Portuguese regents were regularly involved in these arguments put forward by community members. It is through these critical events – often recorded extensively in the minutes – that community leaders would have a decisive influence on the re-shaping of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Throughout the history of the Surinamese-Jewish community, three 'border disputes' prevailed: the matter of the coloured Jews, Portuguese and High German mixed marriages, and mixed Jewish-Christian relationships. Similar issues dominate conflicts surrounding the cemetery; disputes over funerals and cemetery space, as recorded in archived documents, provide an accurate representation of changes that took place in the Surinamese-Jewish community.

A rough classification can be made between critical events that pertain to conflicts on the legitimacy of community boundaries, and those that pertain to conflicts regarding the performance of Jewish burial rituals. Whilst the use of the cemetery as a boundary-making space in communal identity politics has been at issue since the day of first settlement (the first case considered here dates from 1790), conflicts related to gravestones and burial rituals predominantly seem to have been a more recent, predominantly early-twentieth-century affair. Consider, then, the following six events, presented here in chronological order, as case studies of different aspects of processes of creolization of the Surinamese Jews from the late eighteenth century onwards.

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[51]   Unfortunately, I have not found any documents in the archives that relate to origin and use of the wooden grave markers.

[52]   Note that mixed relationships between white women (Jewish or Christian) and black or coloured slaves was strictly forbidden by the colonial authorities. Until 1817, mixed relationships and marriages between white men and Afro-Surinamese women where officially forbidden as well, but tolerated by the authorities. In 1686, Governor van Sommelsdijck had prohibited all sexual relations between white men and female slaves on penalty of a fine of 2,000 pounds of sugar (Schiltkamp 1963). In 1761 the fine was increased to 200 guilders, however as nobody paid this fine, the amendment was added in 1784 that the fine would only be imposed when the relationship between 'whites and female slaves' would cause disturbances on the plantations. In 1817, the useless article was removed altogether (Van Lier 1971:76). From the mid eighteenth century, common law marriages (known as *'Surinaams huwelijk'*) between white men and coloured women became recurring events. In this connection, see also my remarks in Chapter VIII, note 39.

The burial of the coloured Jew Joseph de David Cohen Nassy (1790)

On 26 November 1775, the *Gabay* (treasurer) of the *Hebra Gesed* (the burial society) of the High German community turned to the *Mahamad*, uncertain how to act in the certain cases of death of *Congreganten* within the community 'among whom several mulattos and mulatresses.' This brings us to an important internal distinction within the Surinamese-Jewish community. Both Portuguese and High German communities differentiated between *Yachidim* and *Congreganten*. Whereas *Yachidim* were full-fledged community members, *Congreganten* were community members with limited rights only. The group of *Congreganten* included intermarried persons who had lost their status of *Yachid* after their marriage, as well as those born out of wedlock. A community member could also be temporarily degraded to the status of *Congregant*, as a punishment for religious offences and show of disrespect to the *Mahamad*. After the offender had shown remorse, he or she could be readmitted to the rank of *Yachidim.* Most *Congregants* were coloured Jews however, who, because of their mixed Afro-Jewish descent, assumed a secondary status in the religious Jewish communities.[53]

The *Gabay* of the burial society was uncertain whether he was obliged to bury coloured *Congreganten* at the *Beth Haim*. The *Mahamad* responded quickly to the problem set forward by the *Gabay* and decided that: 'in the case of death, admitted *Congreganten* are to be buried on a, for that purpose, designated area at the *Beth Haim*'. In the case of a burial request of not admitted persons, namely those who are neither full members nor *Congreganten*, the *Hebra* was ordered to consult the *Mahamad* before taking any further actions.[54] The letter of the *Gabay* concerning the burial of 'mulattos and mulatresses' indicates the ambiguous position of coloured Jews in the Surinamese-Jewish community.

The short notice in the minutes of the *Mahamad* reveals the meaning of the Jewish cemetery as a boundary-making space. In this case, physical boundaries were explicitly constructed and maintained by the fences that demarcated the cemetery; fences that represented the 'ultimate' and external demarcation between a Jewish and non-Jewish environment. Equally important were internal boundaries, albeit less visible, but nonetheless highly contested as was the case of the separate burial plot that was especially designated for *Congreganten*. In many Jewish communities around the world, the deceased were buried in a row in chronological order of their deaths; separate plots were assigned to the apostates, the criminals or those of evil-repute who 'deserved' to be buried separately. In the race-based society of Suriname, colour was the primary criterion that determined whether one was to be buried separately or not,

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[53] See NA 1.05.11.18:114, tract 1. The distinction between *Congreganten* and *Yachidim* will be discussed on several occasions in the following chapters.

[54] NSA Minutes 1772-1787: 26-11-1775; NSA *Escamoth* 1734-1821: 26-11-1775.

underlining the importance of colour in the making of Jewish boundaries in Suriname.[55]

Yet, despite the clear instructions that had been issued by the High German regents in 1775, the custom of burying coloured Jews separate from other community members gave rise to a controversial conflict that shook the foundations of the community in 1790 . It all started with the death of the Jewish mulatto Joseph de David Cohen Nassy.[56] Nassy was one of the leading figures within the Darhe Jessarim (also referred to as the Siva), which was mainly a fraternity for coloured Jews of the Portuguese-Jewish descent that was established in 1759. Although initially supported by the Portuguese regents, the relationship between the fraternity and the community leaders grew more and more tense over the years, eventually leading to overt hostility in Spring 1790.[57] Being a *Congregant* of the Portuguese-Jewish community, it was beyond discussion that Joseph (de David Cohen) Nassy was entitled to a burial plot on the Portuguese cemetery. However, what did cause a collision were the burial rituals used by the mourners and the exact location of Joseph Nassy's grave. This conflict – which at first glance seems physically and topically confined to the cemetery – turned out to be a dispute over authority, rule and community boundaries.

Orthodox-Jewish funerals are generally characterized by their uniformity over time and space, and are conducted with a rather strict set of burial rituals. During the *Tahara,* the deceased is ritually cleaned as water is poured over the body while prayers are recited. After the ritual cleansing, the body is dressed in white burial shrouds (*Tachrichim*), symbolizing purity and equality among the dead. According to Jewish law and custom, every Jew should have a *Tahara,* since it completes the Jewish life cycle. Jewish funeral services are brief and simple. Rather than an attempt to comfort the mourners, the funeral service is primarily directed at honouring the deceased:

...

[55] Roth 1973:276. Racially segregated burials also occurred in the seventeenth-century Amsterdam-Jewish community, as noted by Jonathan Schorsch, see Schorsch 2004:195. For examples of slaves burials and the burial of blacks within the fences of the Amsterdam *Beth Haim*, see Hagoort 2005:36-7, 50-1. The practice of racially segregated burial plots was also common practice on eighteenth and nineteenth-century cemeteries in North America. Angelika Krüger-Kahloula found that African-Americans had to accept the least wanted burial plots, occupying the periphery of the cemetery, and were often buried in the section for criminals or 'strangers'. The symbolic importance of a grave's location also appears from the fact that in some family burial grounds, favourite servants were buried in the white section of the burial space Kruger-Kahloula 1994. In his poem *In the Churchyards at Cambridge* (1858), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow attaches a more cynical meaning to the practice of burying slaves in the proximity of their masters: 'In the village churchyard she lies/ Dust is in her beautiful eyes/ No more she breathes, nor feels, nor stirs;/ At the feet and at her head/ Lies a slave to attend the dead/ But their dust is white as hers […]', derived from Kruger-Kahloula 1994:138. See also Longfellow 1882:465.

[56] Robin Cohen was the first to elaborate on this case. See Cohen 1991:168-72. The original documents can be found in the archive of the government secretary. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 21-04-1790; 22-04-1790; 28-04-1790; 2-9-1793; 7-3-1794. Note that at the time of this conflict, this custom was not only practiced by the High German Jews, but also by the Portuguese-Jewish community in Suriname.

[57] The conflict over the Darhe Jessarim is discussed in Chapter VIII in broader detail.

several psalms and prayers are recited, and the noble aspects of his character and good in his life are highlighted. This latter part of the traditional funeral service used to be an honour reserved only for prominent member of the community; today, it is a standard element of any Jewish funeral. Another important part of a Jewish funeral involves the *Levaja*, or funeral procession, during which the dead person is escorted to his or her final resting place. Like the funeral service, the *Levaja* is an important means to show respect to the deceased. The actual burial should be in a fenced off Jewish cemetery, buried among fellow Jews.[58]

Considering the importance of a Jewish funeral as a means of honouring the death, denying several parts of the funeral service or denying 'good' burial space was an important way to cultivate internal differences inside the community, or emphasize the (lower) social status of certain community members. This is exactly what happened in the case of Joseph Nassy. In the words and perception of some leading members of the Darhe Jessarim:

> One of the brothers of the Darhe Jessarim named Joseph de David Cohen Nassy, who was devoted to the Jewish religion, had come to pass, and was to be buried accordingly. During the burial on 18th April 1790 of the body of Nassy on the Portuguese-Jewish Cemetery, the Darhe Jessarim was faced with a grave that was located in a swamp and only one foot deep.
>
> [W]e jointly addressed the White Jews [*Blank Jooden*] in charge and asked for what reason the grave was located in such an unfitting place and was only one foot deep at best. Upon which they answered 'because it was by order of the Lords of the *Mahamad* to bury the body of Nassy in that place.'
>
> Upon which the Darhe Jessarim politely requested to have a grave prepared that is better or higher up since it is unfitting to bury the body in the grave that had been prepared that was shallow and located in a swamp. This request was answered with 'You people have got nothing say here and if you don't shut up we will make you shut up.'
>
> At that hour, one of the reigning members of the *Mahamad* was present, named Bibas, as were also a large number of Christians. The latter also made known their indignation and lamented on how the body had been treated […]. [59]

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[58] Lamm 2000.

[59] Memorandum of the Coloured Jews to Governor De Frederici, NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793. With this memorandum, the coloured Jews petitioned for recognition of a fraternity of coloured Jews, over whose existence they had run into conflict with the Portuguese-Jewish leadership. I will extensively address this conflict in Chapter VIII.

In the end, despite the protests of the coloured Jews, Joseph de David Cohen Nassy was buried in the shallow, swampy grave after all. For the coloured Jews, the 'bad' burial plot assigned to Joseph Nassy was just another act of exclusion from the side of the white community leaders. An act, moreover, that the coloured Jews must have perceived as humiliating, as Joseph Nassy assumed a leading position in the Darhe Jessarim during life, which presumes his belonging to the emerging class of coloured elites.

Not surprisingly, the Portuguese-Jewish regents maintained a slightly different view on the course of events. According to the *Mahamad*, the coloured Jews (or Jewish mulattos as they were referred to by the Portuguese regents) regarded Joseph Nassy as the chairman of their society and had organized a funeral with all the rituals and decorum of a regent's funeral (in Suriname special rituals and accompanying honours were reserved for the regents of the community).[60] The *Mahamad* was infuriated about such disrespect to the community rules and the members of the *Mahamad*, and considered the intended burial as a direct assault on their position as regents of the community.[61] Moreover, the *Mahamad* believed that the coloured Jews had brought the event upon themselves since they had refused to sign the community register and as such were currently of an undefined status (note that it was not so much their Jewishness that was called into question, but their membership of the community).

The quoted passage, which is taken from a 20-page long memorandum of two coloured Jews of Portuguese descent, representing a group of circa 35 coloured Jews, to Governor De Frederici, in which they put forward a thoroughly substantiated complaint about their status in the Portuguese-Jewish community, raises several questions. Although the story of Joseph Nassy shows that the cemetery space was used to differentiate between coloured and white Jews, illustrating the importance of the cemetery as a boundary-making space, the question arises why this caused such an outrage among the coloured Jews specifically at the time of Joseph Nassy's funeral. The passage reads as if the coloured Jews were confronted with this practice at the very moment of his burial. Should we conclude from this that, up to that moment, the Portuguese-Jewish community – in contrast to the High German community – did not have specific regulations to provide for a separate row for coloured Jews and *Congreganten* on the *Beth Haim*? Was this perhaps the first time that a separate burial space had been assigned to a deceased coloured Jew? If so, this would explain the outrage of the coloured Jews. Such an explanation seems rather unlikely, however,

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60 NA 1.05.11.18:114, *Askamoth* 1787, tract 25.

61 Letter of the Portuguese Regents to Governor De Frederici, NA 1.05.10.01:527, 7-3-1794. Also Cohen 1991:163.

considering the fact that other exclusionary practices vis-à-vis coloured Jews can be found since the mid eighteenth century.

And what was that 'large number of Christians' doing on a Jewish cemetery? Even though the whole event took place in Paramaribo, the mention of a great number of Christians on a Jewish cemetery is remarkable to say the least.[62] Were the Christians perhaps visiting the grave of a fellow member of their freemasonic society? Although this is sheer speculation, the presence of a large number of Christians on the cemetery and in the company of a member of the *Mahamad* shows that social relations between Jews and Christians were an important part of social life in Suriname, even at a place that is burdened with as much meaning and symbolism as the cemetery. The reference to the Christian witnesses of the event was clearly part of the strategy of the coloured Jews to extend the meaning of this conflict beyond the boundaries of the Jewish community itself. The coloured Jews claimed that the Portuguese regents had acted arrogantly towards the Christian community, not only by acting against Christian standards of decency, but also by being more racialist than the Christian community did (although this clearly did not affect their wish for recognition by the Portuguese-Jewish leadership). The coloured Jews 'failed to understand on which grounds the [white] Jews could arrogate themselves more privileges than the Christians, who are so much superior to them'.[63]

According to the coloured Jews, the exclusionary practices in the Jewish community towards coloured Jews were in fact contrary to civil law.[64] With this statement, the coloured Jews show their involvement in, and familiarity with, local power-relations in Suriname, which were characterized by recurring tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish sections over the Jewish privileges and their involvement in local politics during the late eighteenth century.

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[62] Rachel Frankel assumes that Joseph de David Cohen Nassy was buried at the cemetery of either Cassipora or Jodensavanne (see Frankel 2001:413). Although the archived documents do not specify the place of burial, there are plenty indications, however, that the events took place in Paramaribo, such a as the presence of twenty Christians and the fact that the Darhe Jessarim was based in Paramaribo. Moreover, in their memorandum to the governor, Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto (as the representatives of the coloured Jews), explicitly state that Joseph de David Cohen Nassy was buried at the *Portugeesch Joodsche Kerkhoff*, which indicated that he was buried at the Old Portuguese cemetery along the Kwattaweg (although I have not found his name in the burial register of the Portuguese Jewish community). This cemetery no longer exists, as it had been cleared in 1959. The tombstones of that cemetery have been replaced and are now displayed in front of the synagogue as a permanent memorial of that past. Yet, none of those tombstones belongs to Joseph de David Cohen Nassy. Possibly, Joseph Nassy's his grave was marked by a wooden grave marker that has probably decayed since.

[63] For the position of coloureds in the Lutheran and Reformed churches, see Chapter VIII.

[64] Memorandum of the coloured Jews to Governor De Frederici, NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

'Bad' Jews on the *Beth Haim*? The burial of Isaq Simons (1825)

Going forward in time, another interesting case of a rather different order occurred in 1825. This time it was not the colour of skin that mattered, but the 'non-Jewish' behaviour of the deceased. Isaq Simons was not a religious Jew. Actually, during his life Isaq Simons hardly seemed interested in his Jewish background. He never 'lived as a Jew' nor did he pay any *finta* (the congregational tax) during his life. However, upon his death the High German *Mahamad* received a request for his burial at the *Beth Haim*. The community leaders saw themselves posed before a dilemma: was Isaq Simons entitled to a burial plot at the community's cemetery? Under normal circumstances, every community member had the right to be buried at the community's cemetery, provided that he or she was not a debtor to the community. But was Isaq Simons a member of the community?

Up to that point in time, being a Jew and being part of a Jewish community was considered as being one and the same. Membership was not a matter of free choice: any High German or Portuguese Jew that resided in the colony was a member of respectively the High German and Portuguese-Jewish community by default, and certainly did not have the possibility to refuse membership.[65] Such a fixed notion of the Jewish identity and community was in the direct interest of the colonial authorities. Their system of indirect rule of the Surinamese-Jewish community was only viable when community boundaries were strictly maintained, which meant that every Jew in Suriname was to be included. It was only because the Surinamese setting was so compact and small that such a strict control of community boundaries was possible at all. However, the change of the civil status of the Surinamese Jews in 1825, in combination with the ongoing process of secularization and the increasing number of mixed marriages, compelled Jewish community leaders to rethink the concept of community membership. Surinamese Jews were no longer dependent on their membership of a Jewish community for their position in the Surinamese society, nor could the *Mahamad* enforce Jewish community life upon its members any longer.[66]

Eventually, the *Mahamad* decided that Isaq Simons – being born as a Jew – was to be buried at the *Beth Haim*. It was to be made clear, however, that he was not a fully accepted member of the community; therefore, he would be buried in a fenced off burial plot, separated from the all other graves, and his funeral would be unaccompanied by any of the prerogatives reserved for the burials of *Yachidim* or

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[65]   Compare NA 1.05.11.18: 114, tract 1. and NA 1.05.11.18:106, tract 25.

[66]   This question became less pressing when, under influence of Dutch rabbis in Suriname, halakhic notions of Jewish identity were enforced in Suriname during the mid nineteenth century onwards. However, halakhic notions of Jewishness were on their part increasingly challenged during the twentieth century, when mixed marriages became rather rule than exception in Suriname, see also Chapter VIII..

Congreganten, such as *ascaba* (soul prayer), *terra santa*[67] or the burning of candles. In other words: it would be just a bare funeral. When the *Mahamad* informed the *Gabay* of the *Hebra Chesed* of its decision, he reacted disgruntled, and he downright refused to be involved in the burial of Isaq Simons. He would only convene his bearers for the burial of a *Yachid* or *Congregant*, and to him Isaq Simons was neither.

> [T]ell the chair [of the *Mahamad*] that I know the Law [of Mozes], and that the chair does not. He should look them over in the *Mahamad* [the regulations of the *Mahamad*]. I will not have my fingers burned on the burial of Isaq Simons. Only if the chairman can prove that Simons is a *Yachid* or *Congregant*, I will order my bearers, otherwise I will not.'[68]

The *Gabay* was stubborn and a man of principles. Even after repeated demands of the *Mahamad*, he kept refusing to bury the corps of Isaq Simons. In the end, it was the *Gabay* who drew the short straw as Isaq Simons was buried on the *Beth Haim* after all, and the *Gabay* was dismissed because of 'disobedience and disrespect towards the *Mahamad.*'[69]

Related to the case of Isaq Simons, it is noteworthy that the regents of the High German community introduced a new rule in June 1841 that stated that any community member who defaulted on his *finta* payments 'or any other religious contribution to the community' for two years in succession would be excluded from certain ritual prerogatives as a community member, particularly the rituals surrounding death, burial and mourning. Defaulters were denied use of any community service during and after burial such as the use of community-provided candles, gravediggers or pallbearers. Nor would there be an *ascaba* (soul prayer) for the deceased during the days and months after his or her death.[70] In 1879, this measure was extended with a new rule that no defaulter of the community was allowed to place a tombstone on the *Beth Haim*, nor were family members allowed to place a tombstone for a person who had been in debt to the community during life.[71] Although these measures were

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[67] In the High German community, *terra santa* is a funeral ritual whereby sand is scattered in the eyes and the mouth of the deceased. The Portuguese-Jewish ritual of terra santa deviates from the High German ritual in the sense that the sand is not thrown in the eyes and mouth, but on the chest of the deceased. The Surinamese custom deviates somewhat from the Dutch-Jewish funeral ritual. According to the Amsterdam Rabbi B. Drukarch, in the High German community in the Netherlands, sand is scattered in the face of the deceased. Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive: 357.27a, Correspondence between Drukarch and Samson concerning funeral rituals, 5-9-1965.

[68] NSA Minutes 1820-1827, 28-4-1825.

[69] NSA Minutes 1820-1827, 31-10-1825.

[70] NA 1.05.11.18:50, 13-6-1841; 29-6-1841; NSA Box 9 AJA, 13-6-1841.

[71] NSA Incoming Letters 1871-1912, 12-9-1879.

primarily driven by the precarious financial situation in the High German community, they do illustrate once more the symbolic meaning attached to death and the cemetery.

Creating a precedence: Mr Pinto and Mrs Pinto-Fernandes (1891)

Surinamese Jews continued to tinker with the very essence of Jewishness and, hence, with the boundaries of their community. Nearly fifty years later, in 1891, a discussion strikingly similar to the discussion on Isaq Simons' Jewish identity arose in the aftermath of the burial of Marianna Fernandes. This case is especially interesting since the regents seized it as a guiding principle for the future.[72] What had happened? Marianna Fernandes, a member of the Portuguese-Jewish community, was married to W. Pinto, who apparently was of High German Jewish descent. Upon her death, which ended a long sickbed, Pinto requested the High German *Mahamad* for permission to bury her at the *Beth Haim* of the High German community.[73] This was not an uncommon request, as women generally came to belong to the community of their husbands.[74] A growing number of mixed marriages had resulted in increasingly blurred boundaries between the Portuguese and High German communities at that time. As a consequence, it had become a regular occurrence that members of the Portuguese community were buried on the *Beth Haim* of the High German community, and vice versa.[75] So, when W. Pinto turned to the community's leadership (by then referred to as 'church council') for permission to bury his wife at the High German cemetery at his own expenses, they saw no objections and Marianna Fernandes was buried at the *Beth Haim* of the High German community. Barely a few months after the funeral of Marianna Fernandes in June 1891, W. Pinto requested a burial place to be reserved for him, adjacent to the grave of his recently deceased, beloved wife Marianna Fernandes. This second request, the reservation of a burial plot for W. Pinto himself, provoked a heated discussion on the definition of Jewishness, community boundaries and burial rights.

W. Pinto, although born out of Jewish parents, was never circumcised. Therefore, he was never admitted as a member of the High German community. Marianna Fernandes, also born out of Jewish parents, belonged to the Portuguese-Jewish

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[72] NSA Minutes 1888-1895, 18-6-1891.

[73] Pinto already got permission from the *Mahamad* of the Portuguese community to bury his wife at the *Beth Haim* of the High German community four months earlier. See NA 1.05.11.18:540, 16-2-1891.

[74] For a discussion on women and community boundaries, see Chapter VII.

[75] The Portuguese-Jewish female Abigael Ballin (born Mesquita) came to belong to the High German community after her marriage to the High German Jew B. Ballin. Shortly before her death on 3 November 1866, she had made the request to be buried at the *Beth Haim* of the Portuguese community, where her close relatives are buried as well. After some discussion, and against the will of the chair, the *Mahamad* decided to have Abigael Ballin buried at the graveyard of the Portuguese-Jewish community, and to take care of the costs for the pallbearers (NSA *Minutes 1866-1888:* 3-11-1866).

community. Despite their civil marriage, their status as husband and wife had never been religiously consecrated; thus, strictly speaking they were not married as far as the community was concerned. The *Mahamad*'s considerations of Pinto's request were carefully reported in its minutes, giving them the status of 'a guiding principle for the future':

> [T]hat the request by Mr. W. Pinto to the church council is connected to his since long expressed wish to be circumcised after his death, enabling him to be buried at our *Beth Haim*. That a permission of the reservation of the indicated burial plot will enable him to act accordingly.

> That – according to Jewish Law – an uncircumcised Jew born out of Jewish parents is excluded from any participation in Jewish life and rituals during life, but can be buried on Jewish hallowed ground after death. That the right of burial at a *Beth Haim* cannot be denied to him [W. Pinto]. That this [permitted right] is consistent with a previous advice of Rev. Dr. Dunner, Chief Rabbi in Amsterdam, with the addition that such a burial should take place at a separate spot.

> However, that as a consequence of the abolition of the old and no longer existent distinction between so called *Congreganten* and *Yachidim*, as decreed by resolution in the Minutes of 12/19 May 1841, burial on separate sites is no longer permitted, since the appointment of less honourable burial plots compared to others would bring along exactly this [no longer permitted distinction between members]. It follows from this, that, should Mr. W. Pinto be buried at a Jewish cemetery, his grave should be situated in a row where others are buried as well [that is, not separated from the rest of the community].

> Remains to consider, concerning the second request [the reservation of a burial plot]: 1) Whether the privilege of reserving a burial plot, is only to be allowed to members of the community, and 2) whether such permission – in case – is a tacit acknowledgement of a civil marriage, which is not consecrated according to Jewish law.

> […]

> That it would not be consistent with fairness, since it is established that someone in the circumstances of Mr. W. Pinto is allowed to be buried on a Jewish cemetery, to deny him this right with the pretext that he was not a member of the community at the time of his request. However, that appliance of this rule brings along his [W. Pinto's] admission into the heart of the community, in a way inconsistent with Jewish Law.

> That, since members of both Jewish communities are buried on each others graveyards, adjacent to the graves of family members, for which purpose they had reserved burial plots previously; which proves that one does not necessarily needs to be a member of this community to enjoy this privilege [to reserve a burial plot next to a family member].

> For these reasons, the reply to the first request of Mr. W Pinto [i.e. the burial of Marianna Fernandes on the High German cemetery] should be that not being a member of the community does not interfere the request in itself, nor the compliance with that request. That, regarding the second request [that is, the reservation of a burial plot for Mr. W. Pinto], out of lack of expertise, the church council has asked the chairman to turn to a foreign authority for advise in this matter. That meanwhile, it would be incorrect to obstruct a possible grant of the request of Mr. W. Pinto. […]

> Therefore, the church council has decided to leave vacant a burial plot adjacent to the grave of Ms M. Fernandes, with the addition that the ultimate destination of this burial plot is upon the decision of the church council.[76]

The story of Marianna Fernandes' burial reveals changing group identifications and the associated complexity of defining community boundaries. The second paragraph of this 'guideline', says 'that an uncircumcised Jew born out of Jewish parents is excluded from any participation in Jewish life and rituals during life, but can be buried on Jewish hallowed ground after death.' Here, as in the rest of the quotation, death is revealed as an important rite of passage that enables a person who has not been a member of the community during his or her lifetime, to become one after upon passing away. This different definition of community boundaries and collective identity during life and death is a recurrent theme in the various stories related to the cemetery. Death fixes identity; not for a moment, a few hours or during Sabbath service. This makes the cemetery such a sensitive place for negotiating identity and explains the reluctance of the community leaders to accept these persons of uncertain identity at their cemetery.

The intriguing question remains why people wish(ed) to become a member of the community only after their death? Were these people who never showed the faintest interest in religious participation during life, suddenly religiously inspired to the extent that they wished to be buried according to the dominant religious customs within their referential community upon the time of death? In this connection, Eva Reimers, who conducted a study of burial customs in Sweden, remarks that 'regardless of the level of personal religious commitment of those involved, the choice of religious affiliation at rites of transition is of symbolic significance.' Even though Sweden is often considered as one of the most secularized countries in the world, 90% of the Swedish population chooses a funeral in accordance with the rituals of the Lutheran state church. This is not likely to be the result of a sudden conversion of all those Swedes who face their final hour, but should be attributed instead to the symbolic value of the Church of Sweden. The funeral is conducted in an similar way as were funerals of

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[76] NSA Minutes 1888-1895, 18-6-1891.

one's ancestors, which implies that the deceased and the mourners become incorporated into the community of others 'who bury this way'.[77] Similarly, the wish to be buried on a Jewish cemetery is not a sign of Jewish religiosity per se, but rather the wish to be regarded as member of the Jewish community, especially at time of death, the moment when dynamic and floating identities during life become static, and enter eternity.

Dario Savreeda (1911): Allegro and Andante

In 1911 a conflict arose between the rabbi, Mr. Roos, and the High German community leaders. Immediate cause of the quarrel was the rather eccentric grave monument of the musician Dario Savreeda (whose real name was Daan Samuels), placed by the relatives of Savreeda upon his death (figure 12). Rabbi Roos protested fiercely against the approval of Dario Savreeda's grave monument, which he found utterly offending. According to the rabbi, the monument was in violation with article 120 of the community regulations (*Askamoth*), which obliges the *Mahamad* to guard against the erection of any gravestone that is 'inconsistent with the ritual regulations concerning religious customs or offensive to the Jewish feeling.'[78] Apart from the Star of David, the gravestone of Dario Savreeda was decorated with a bust sculpture of Savreeda himself and some non-Jewish symbols, such as the Christian symbol of the cross, and two plaquettes (cast from bronze) that depict two music tempos: Allegro and Adante. Allegro is depicted as a powerful man who carries away a woman in his arms, against which another woman – lying on the ground – resists desperately. Andante is depicted as a man and woman intimately entwined. According to a report in a local newspaper, the representation of the Adante was of such 'calm intimacy that all questions become silent'.[79]

Especially the depiction of the Christian symbol of the cross was a thorn in the flesh of the rabbi, who protested fiercely against this violation of orthodox-Jewish tradition. In a long exposé to the *Mahamad* (who apparently had approved the memorial stone of Dario Savreeda), the rabbi substantiated his objections to the grave monument as follows:

> After the death of Savreeda, his sister informed me that the deceased had made his own epitaph, consisting of some German lines of poetry and a music theme, expressed through musical notes and musical symbols. No objections would have arisen on my part against such an epitaph. But what do we see instead? The erection of a monument with a bronze bust!

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[77] Reimers 1999.

[78] See letter Roos, NSA Incoming letters 1871-1912, 17-5-1911; also NSA *Escamoth* art. 120.

[79] Samson 1943a.

Nothing whatsoever is customary at a Jewish cemetery, and it sure does come close to being 'inconsistent with the ritual regulations' [as stated in article 120 of the Eskamoth]. Would a sketch of the monument have been shown in advance, than this part would have been refused. Now it is there, only the consideration that the bust is not produced 'en face', but more in a tablet form can make us decide to resign to the presence of the bust [at the *Beth Haim*].

Secondly: the depiction of the sign of the cross preceding the date of death. Although the use of the sign of the cross as indication of an *obeniet* [deceased] is nowadays detached from a strictly Christian meaning, the Christian origin of the sign of the cross cannot be ignored and should not be used for Jewish occasions. In this particular case, the meaning of the sign of the cross is rather significant, since preceding the date of birth, we see the depiction of the *Magen David* [Star of David]. In such usage, both symbols become contradictions and can be read as 'born as a Jew, died as a Christian'. Considering the persistent rumours regarding Savreeda's conversion to a different confession, this reading should be stopped. The removal of the cross, therefore, is an absolute and imperative demand.

Thirdly: two bronze statues, named Allegro and Andante, are represented in a way that is less appropriate for a cemetery in general, but can certainly not be tolerated on a Jewish cemetery. Although the statues are attached to the gravestone, I do believe that – with some goodwill – they can be easily removed, on which I hereby strongly insist.

Finally, I urgently request the *Mahamad* of this community to strictly uphold to article 120 of the *Askamoth*, by demanding inspection of the design and epitaph of each tombstone or headstone in advance. Before placement of any gravestone can be allowed, the religious leader should be consulted first.[80]

The members of the *Mahamad* were less offended by this monument than rabbi Roos. However, when confronted with the protest of the rabbi they were forced to reconsider whether the grave monument of Dario Savreeda indeed constituted a violation of orthodox-Jewish Law. One of the members of the *Mahamad* stated that 'they should have taken care that no gravestones were placed against the Jewish tradition beforehand. Now, with the monument already in place, it was too late to act. And the bust and the sculptures of Allegro and Andante? These should be interpreted as musical symbols and nothing more!' Although this member of the *Mahamad* expressed his appreciation for the ritual knowledge of the rabbi, he urged him to consult Europe for additional advice before taking any decision as, in the past, the rabbi had opposed certain matters, which actually had been allowed in Europe.

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[80]   Letter Roos, NSA Incoming letters 1871-1912, 17-5-1911.

A second member of the *Mahamad* saw no difference between the statues on the grave of Dario Savreeda and some other sculptures to be found on the cemetery. Although this member of the *Mahamad* somewhat objected to the depiction of the cross on the gravestone, he did not question the Jewish identity of Dario Savreeda. In his opinion, the Jewishness of the object should not be searched for in the object itself, but in the intention of the maker. In other words, the cultural meaning of Savreeda's peculiar grave monument lies in Savreeda's ambiguous Jewish identity rather than in the object itself:

> [A]lthough Dario Savreeda disguised his Jewishness, he was a typical Jew. The symbol of the cross loses its meaning on a Jewish cemetery and it is too far-fetched to attach any meaning to this symbol. […] He would not have been buried at the Jewish cemetery, if he had not died as a Jew. About the tablets [with the depictions of human figures], I would regret any damage to the grave monument, especially since this would offend the outside [Christian] world.[81]

After some discussion, and considering the fact that they lived in a Christian society and did not wish to cause offence, the *Mahamad* decided that it would be best to suggest to the rabbi to have the cross removed, but leave the rest of the monument intact.[82]

The attempt of the *Mahamad* to reach a compromise fell on deaf ears. The rabbi stood his ground and stuck to his demand to have the statues removed. He had already agreed upon permitting the bust-sculpture, which was 'a huge concession and major self-conquest on his account'. This was as far as he was prepared to go. Nonetheless, he left some space to the *Mahamad* to manoeuvre this slippery ground:

> [I]f, considering the circumstances, the Council deems it best to come to a decision in contravention to his [Mr. Roos] protest on the subject of point three, he will resign oneself to this resolution free from rancour, provided that the Council will make note of his unaltered protest in its minutes.[83]

According to the archived documents, the *Mahamad* decided accordingly: the cross was removed from the gravestone, but the statues were left intact.[84] However, the

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[81] NSA Minutes 1909-1919, 22-5-1911.

[82] NSA Minutes 1909-1919, 22-5-1911.

[83] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 5-6-1911.

[84] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 5-6-1911. On 9-9-1911, Roos would deliver a funeral oration at the altered grave of Dario Savreeda.

statues must have been removed at some point, since they do no longer accompany Savreeda's memorial stone today.

Five years later, a sequel to the case of Dario Savreeda occurred, when the *Mahamad* received a request to place the urn with the ashes of Dario Savreeda's widow, Flora Savreeda, at the *Beth Haim*. This was a bridge too far, even for the *Mahamad*. Consequently, the request was refused 'because Mr. Roos had made it abundantly clear that such [the placement of the ashes at the cemetery] is in blatant contradiction with Orthodox Judaism'.[85] The objection of Mr. Roos and the *Mahamad* is based on the fact that cremation is not a common Jewish custom. Disposal of the dead by burial is considered a religious commandment by orthodox Jews, based on the rabbinic idea that cremation is a denial of the belief in the resurrection of the body. Since ancient times, rabbis have found proof for this position in the biblical text of *Deuterium (21:23)* 'his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt surely bury him the same day,' and in *Genesis (3:19)* 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'[86] The fact that Flora Savreeda was cremated suggests a converted or non-Jewish origin, and therefore a mixed marriage between her and Dario Savreeda, although this conjecture is speculative.

(In)appropriate ceremonies? The burial of C. Samuels (1913)

In 1913, two years after the Savreeda controversy, the High German cemetery became the arena of yet another dispute on Jewish traditions and identity. This time it was not the eccentric gravestone that provoked the unrest (figure 13), but the burial rituals accompanying the funeral.

Coenraad Samuels was a Forrester and member of the Court Charity.[87] The Court Charity was a pseudo-Masonic society that, like other Masonic organizations, was accustomed to conduct certain ceremonial rites at important rites of passage in the life of its members. When Samuels died in 1913, his burial was conducted according to

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[85] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 10-5-1916.

[86] Roth 1973:1072-3. Roth also notes that cremation is not unknown in the Jewish world. It is suggested that interment is nothing more than a custom (instead of a religious commandment). As long as the body is brought into contact with the earth as soon as possible, it does not matter how the corpse is disposed of. There are many examples of rabbis who permitted the ashes of a cremated person to be interred in a Jewish cemetery. American Reform rabbis are even permitted to conduct cremation ceremonies since 1892.

[87] The Ancient Order of the Foresters (established in Suriname in 1866 with the foundation of Court Charity No. 7416) is one of the pseudo-Masonic organizations in Suriname. Membership of the Forresters became popular, especially among the High German Jews. Today most members of the Forresters are Christians and of Afro-Surinamese origin. For Jewish participation in (pseudo)-Masonic organizations, see Chapter III. For the Ancient Orders of the Foresters, see Mulder 2006 and Esajas 1995.

Figure 12: Grave of Dario Savreeda

Forrester's ceremonial customs, including clapping of the hands and the use of copper shovels. Presumably, Forrester rites were followed during the rituals of death, ourning and during the first part of the funeral as well. Not surprisingly, the event was frowned upon by some community members. During the next gathering of the Mahamad, one of its members raised the question whether this mingling of Jewish and Masonic burial rites should be permitted.

The different opinions expressed in the *Mahamad*'s meeting represent dissent within the community regarding the direction and pace of cultural change. One member (Polak) fiercely opposed the appearance of strange cultural elements in the Jewish cemetery. Polak was renowned for his orthodox perception of Judaism, which had caused him to clash with community members on several earlier occasions.[88] Not all the members of the *Mahamad* shared his opinion and orthodox position, though: one member responded 'that it was not up to Polak to oppose the ceremony of the Forresters, since the Freemasonry knows similar rites.'[89] Apparently, Polak was a member of one of the Masonic lodges whose ceremonies he did not oppose. Moreover, some 30 years earlier, the burial of a High German Jewish freemason had raised some questions concerning the decorations of the coffin. The *Mahamad* that presided the community at the time had then decided that decorations were allowed during the first part of burial ceremony, but should be removed by the members of the freemasonry that were present at the ceremony prior to entering the mortuary. The second part of the burial ceremony had to be conducted in strict accordance with Jewish orthodox rule.[90]

As the *Mahamad* was not entitled to make a decision in this matter, since it pertained to a religious issue, it sought advice from the person who functioned as the religious leader of the community at that time, the *Hazan*. When asked for his opinion, the *Hazan* remarked that the burial of Coenraad Samuels had indeed been accompanied with rites and acts that were not in line with the Jewish rite, and advised

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[88] Another interesting conflict, involving dress code and Freemason customs, occurred in 1910, when one of the community members (Wijnschenk) requested to participate during the Sabbath service, in honour and remembrance of his recently deceased father. Polak, then chair, had given his approval as long as Wijnschenk would appear in the synagogue properly dressed, that is, in black clothes. Wijnschenk responded that while the Forresters and Loge Concordia have strict dress codes, the regulations of the church do not mention anything on clothing restrictions. According to Polak, Wijnschenk had 'appeared in clothes that had made him unfit to be called up, as it has always been custom to appear during the High Holidays in church black clothing whenever one had to perform a religious task'. The other members of the church council criticized the 'obstinate behaviour' of the chair. It was decided subsequently that from then on a community member was 'dressed' when the upper part of the body was covered in black, and that according to this new mandate Wijnschenk was in fact properly dressed. See NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 23-6-1910.

[89] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 1-5-1913.

[90] NSA Minutes 1880-1893: 15-5-1882.

Figure 13: Grave of Coenraad Samuels

the *Mahamad* to write the Court Charity that the Jewish rite requires simplicity at the *Beth Haim*. [91] Certain rites like the clapping of hands and the use of copper shovels were contrary to the Jewish Codex and acceptance of these rites would provide a precedent for other, future abuses. Interestingly enough, the *Hazan* did not agree with the chair of the *Mahamad* to write a similar letter to the freemasonic Loge Concordia, which included many Jewish members. The *Hazan* stated that:

> [h]e had once observed the burial ceremony of the Freemasonry, when gloves were thrown in the burial pit. This ceremony took place in the presence of the rabbi [Roos], who did not object to this ritual.[92]

At this point, the chair meddles in the discussion and adds that, although the burial of Samuels was, to his knowledge, the only Forrester member to be buried at the High German *Beth Haim*, he had witnessed several Forrester burials at the cemetery of the sister community (the Portuguese-Jewish community). He had never noticed any objections to such funerals from the side of the Portuguese-Jewish community. Eventually, the *Mahamad* decided to accept the rituals of the Freemasonry, but to urge the Court Charity to refrain from ceremony in the case of a Jewish Forrester funeral.[93]

Sarah's Hofje

Today, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the community is still changing, resulting in new discussions not only on burial rites but also on the spatial ordering of the cemetery. Take a little girl's funeral some years ago.[94] The girl, who died after a tragic accident, was not a member of the Surinamese-Jewish community; however, her grandfather and great-grandparents did belong to a Jewish family with a long family history in Suriname. Moreover, the grandmother is known for her interest in

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[91] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 1-5-1913.

[92] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 1-5-1913.

[93] NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 1-5-1913. The use of Freemasonic rituals at the *Beth Haim* continued to be a contentious point in the High German community. In 1933, an Amsterdam rabbi was asked for advice whether the clapping of the hands and the throwing of gloves in the grave were Jewish customs or not. Apparently, only 20 years after the incident over the burial of C. Samuels (when these rituals had in fact been acknowledged as Freemasonic or pseudo Freemasonic), the question had been raised in the High German Community over the origin (Jewish or not) of those same funeral rituals. See, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive: 357.24, Letter of B. Israel Ricardo, Rabbinate of the Portuguese Israelite Community, 12-7-1933. Again, in 1958, advice was sought over the mixing of Jewish and Freemasonic rituals in Suriname. This time it concerned the Surinamese custom to put Freemason symbols (such as a hoe, compass and carpenter square) on the coffin of a Jewish mason. Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson archive: 527:27b, Letter to Hakehila, 21-1-1958.

[94] This story has been related to me during my visit to Suriname in 2003. As these events had occurred very recently, and to respect the privacy of the people involved, I will refrain from mentioning exact date and name of the persons involved.

preserving the community's history. Ironically, she has been especially committed to the maintenance of the various Jewish cemeteries in Suriname. When the girl died, the family wished to bury her on the High German cemetery, near the graves of the girl's great-grandparents. Initially, the family's wish was ignored based on the rule that only members of the community can be buried on the Jewish cemetery. However, after intense and careful consideration (of course under severe time-pressure considering the pending funeral) and after consulting the Amsterdam community for advise (considering the many mixed Jewish-non-Jewish marriages in the community and to prevent possible future conflicts) it was decided to fence off an area of the cemetery to accommodate the family's wish.

That area is now referred to as *Sarah's Hofje,* after the girl who was finally buried there, apparently incorporated but clearly separated from the rest of the community. Her separate status is not emphasized by the iron fence alone. To underscore her non-Jewishness the girl's grave is oriented north south, in contrast to the traditional Jewish east-west orientation, which characterizes the other tombstones at the cemetery. Soon after this precedent, *Sarah's Hofje* would come to include the grave of another child, who, like Sarah, was the offspring of a mixed marriage and whose grave was likewise north-south oriented.

In recent years, the Surinamese-Jewish community renounced its orthodox signature and joined the liberal Jewish community, which is characterized by a more liberal stance towards mixed marriages, and accepts children from non-Jewish mothers as full community members. We can only presume that this transformation may prevent many future conflicts concerning the funeral of people who intermarried and their offspring.

4 THE CEMETERY AS A SITE OF CREOLIZATION?

The popular saying that 'in time of death all men are the same' simply does not hold true. Burying the dead in simple cloths or coffins as a symbol of sameness does not make them a homogenous category. Differentiation is as important in the world of the dead as it is in the world of the living. Social, cultural and ethnic categories are not temporarily set aside at the time of death, burial or bereavement. If anything, their meaning intensifies, as I have demonstrated by presenting some critical events that surrounded the Surinamese-Jewish cemeteries. Various conflicts and discussions coinciding the death or burial of community members show that death and funerals can trigger fundamental questions on the status and legitimacy of collective identifications and group boundaries.

From a historical point of view, the interests of the Jewish cemetery are manifold. Apart from its function as a *lieu de mémoire*, a place of funeral art and an important source for genealogical information, rites and rituals surrounding death and funeral do not only mirror collective identities or communal boundaries, but also actively create, change and mould these identifications. They create new

understandings of the present that serve as a starting point for future collective identifications. Iron fences, the location of burial plots, and the use or denial of certain funerary rituals cultivated differences between Portuguese and High German Jews, between coloureds and whites, and between Jews and non-Jews. The cemetery is, however, not only a place of memory and identification, but also a place of forgetting. As such, cemeteries and cemetery-related issues provide a fruitful site for exploring localizing boundaries and creolizing mentalities. Although some of the denials and exclusions within the Surinamese-Jewish community can still be recognized in today's cemetery space, others can only be found in the archives. Many cannot be reconstructed anymore.

Throughout the centuries of Jewish settlement in Suriname, the physical appearance of Jewish cemetery space changed profoundly. The transforming tombstones and wooden grave markers that dot the burial grounds of the High German and Portuguese-Jewish communities in Paramaribo are a clear indication of a creolizing Surinamese-Jewish community. The *Beth Haim* of Jodensavanne resembles the *Beth Haim* of the Amsterdam mother community, with its adorned tombstones with epitaphs in Portuguese, Hebrew and (some) in Dutch. During the nineteenth century, creole gravemarkers were incorporated into the Jewish cemeteries in Paramaribo: woodcut headstones with heart-shaped or round heads, similar to gravemarkers found at several plantation cemeteries in Suriname, and often decorated with a Star of David. Jewish grave culture continued to localize and to adapt to the peculiarities of Suriname's creolized environment. The increasing number of tiled tombstones in white or pale blue (a type of tombstones generally associated with the Afro-Surinamese population) indicates that the process of Surinamese-Jewish localization continued throughout the twentieth century.

Likewise, the diverse discussions and conflicts surrounding death and burial mirror a history of changing cultural identifications among the Surinamese Jews. Stories of cemetery conflicts show the importance of the cemetery as one of the spaces where ideas of bounded groupness were created and contested. The topics of cemetery conflicts reveal the trajectory of localizing community boundaries among the Surinamese Jews. Although the conflicts not always preluded change, they do mirror discussions over Jewishness in Suriname at different moments in time. Who was considered a member of the community, and on what grounds? That halakhic rules were not a matter of course to determine community membership is shown by the burial of coloured Jews who descended from white Jewish men and non-Jewish Afro-Surinamese women (free or enslaved). The incorporation of colour in the community and the cemetery space is, in my opinion, a strong indication of the creolized mental framing of the Surinamese Jews during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Conflicts concerning burial and boundaries involved other issues than colour alone. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, non-observance and mixed relationships became the direct cause of continued contestations of community boundaries.

The cemeteries also elicit some questions, which are not easily answered, but will be examined further in the chapters to come. The case of Dario Savreeda and the issue surrounding mixed Jewish-Freemason funerary rites show a connection between social status and cultural adaptation. The differentiation between the incorporation of burial ceremonies from the elitist Freemasonry and the more middleclass oriented Forrester's into the death repertoire of the Surinamese-Jewish community explicitly points to the existence of such an interconnection between social status and cultural change. For long, the Jewish community assumed an ambiguous position in Suriname's society and as such, it had to take notion of the dominant white colonial society with which it identified. In the case of Dario Savreeda, it was the potential reaction of the non-Jewish Christian environment that influenced the ultimate decision whether non-Jewish elements were to be accepted on the Jewish cemetery. 'With regards to the tablets, I would regret any damage to the grave monument, especially since this would offend the outside world,' stated one of the members of the *Mahamad*, when discussing the grave monument of Dario Savreeda. And in the end it was the realization that they 'live in a Christian community' that made the *Mahamad* decide to leave the monument in tact, rather than give in to the demands of the rabbi, thereby making a conscious (strategic) decision to prevent possible conflict with the dominant Christian colonial elite.

Another consideration, also triggered by the case of Dario Savreeda and Coenraad Samuels, pertains to the role of non-observant Jews and religious leaders in processes of changing identifications. At the time of the events surrounding Savreeda and Samuels, secularization had increasingly drawn the Surinamese Jews away from their orthodox cultural tradition. Both the cases of Isaq Simons 'who never lived as a Jew', and Mr. and Mrs. Pinto-Fernandes (uncircumcised, born-out-of-wedlock, and only wishing to become community members after death) point at the existence of a group of non-observant Jews in Suriname. Although there have always been deviant Jews, their numbers grew during the nineteenth century. The exact dimension remains unknown, however, as they typically manoeuvred outside the scope of the community leadership and thus remained outside the community archives. Their stories were recorded only in cases of conflicts. A similar observation can be made for those Jews who were still registered as members, who perhaps attended the synagogue services during the High Holidays, but otherwise seldom visited a regular Sabbath service, nor maintained a kosher household. Obviously, religious observance was no matter of course in Suriname. For many, a Surinamese-Jewish identity was primarily an ethnic marker, a social status, and a cultural anchorage in Suriname's multicultural and colour-sensitive environment, rather than a religious affiliation.

The clashes between Dutch Jewish teachers and Surinamese-Jewish community leaders remind us that the Surinamese-Jewish community was not a monolithic bloc, neither socially, economically, nor religiously. In fact, the Surinamese Jews represent different voices – some liberal other orthodox – hence different identifications. In general, the Dutch rabbis and religious teachers that served in Suriname represented a

conservative cultural counterforce in Surinamese-Jewish collective identifications. This position brought them in repeated collision with obstinate community leaders who were reluctant to accept the authority of outsiders who, in their eyes, were unfamiliar with the specificities of the Surinamese-Jewish community.

Finally, the case of Dario Savreeda points to the importance of interpersonal relations. Although the exact nature of the marriage between Dario and Flora Savreeda remains speculative, it is evident from other cases and archived documents that community members who engaged in mixed marriages were catalysts of new ideas, and crucial actors in the process of Surinamese-Jewish localization. As is shown in the following chapters, the reasons for changing conceptions of Surinamese Jewishness and for localizing boundaries are multiple, but diasporic consciousness, religious leadership, social status and mixed relationships feature as the main factors.

VII

NEW WORLD IDENTIFICATIONS, OLD WORLD SENSIBILITIES: ON ELITENESS, RELIGIOSITY AND SOCIAL STATUS

In 1683, Abraham Idaña (an Amsterdam merchant and Portuguese Jew of *converso-*origin) reported of the *estraña naturaleza,* the 'alien native character' of the German Jews in that city:

> They [the German Jews] observe the same holy Law of Moses with its rituals as the Portuguese, but in matters of governance, they are different, because they are of an alien native character, and for this reason, even if today many of them are wealthy, they are held in low esteem, for in fact they are debased in spirit.[1]

What is striking in these quote is not only the firm belief in a cultural difference between Portuguese and High German Jews (including Polish Jews), but also, as noted by Miriam Bodian, the fragmented Portuguese-Jewish self-identifications that were based on two clusters of ideas: one associated with religion and Jewishness, and the other with Portugueseness.[2] The notion of cultural differences between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jewry underscores the divergent importance of locality in the cultural rooting of diaspora communities. For Portuguese Jews, their membership of the 'Portuguese Nation' entailed much more than a pure religious identification as a 'Jew'.

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[1]   Quoted in Bodian 1997:153.

[2]   Bodian 1994:48.

The sense of 'being Portuguese' was initially reinforced by the *converso* experience and shared habits of language and culture rooted in the Iberian Peninsula; it became a social status only later.[3] The clear ethnic overtone in Portuguese-Jewish self-understanding, in which lineage was of overriding importance, stands in stark contrast to High German identifications that seem to lack such a socially and ethnically defined self-understanding.[4] Without denying the ethnic dimension of *Yiddishkeit*, the High German Jewish experience was firmly established and rooted in a Jewish tradition that was spread over a large territory, and lacked a notion of commonality based on origin, lineage and social status.

During the era of colonial expansion, cultural differences between Portuguese and High German Jews were transplanted from the 'Old World' into the 'New World', where their meaning altered. In Suriname, internal differences between the Portuguese and High German communities became centred on the issue of a colonial elite status – and the dilemmas such an identification raised – versus religiously defined notions of Jewishness. Despite prevailing notions of difference between both groups; in real life, boundaries between both groups became increasingly more diffuse due to socio-economic and demographic developments from the early nineteenth century onwards, as appears from the numerous disputes put forward by individuals of these communities during this period. This chapter explores some of the arenas where the differences between the Portuguese and High German Jews in Suriname were cultivated, nourished and renewed most clearly. The events that are discussed in this chapter show that Surinamese-Jewish localization not only involved an inherent tension between irrevocable changes and quests for authenticity, but also that notions of authenticity are contested per se.

1   COLONIAL ELITES AND RELIGIOUS SUPERIORITY

Negotiating an elite status

When David Nassy snobbishly remarked in 1788 that the German Jews of Suriname were among the best mannered of their kind, save 'several ridiculous superstitions, and a little too much bigotry', but that they had been spoiled by a 'prodigious number of Polish Jews who came to Suriname at intervals and introduced their manners', Nassy

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[3]   Bodian 1997.

[4]   Bodian argues that the importance of lineage in Portuguese-Jewish identifications originates in the complex internalization and inversion of the Iberian values *hidalguía* (noble lineage) and *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) in *converso* self-understanding. 'Jewish blood, despised by the majority, became the ultimate lineage': the cultivation of Jewish blood provided the conversos with a sense of authenticity and superiority vis-à-vis the 'Old Christians' (Bodian 1994:62).

revealed an important contradiction and interior boundary within the Surinamese-Jewish community.[5] He differentiated between not only a pseudo-aristocratic Sephardic Jewry and the 'common' Ashkenazi Jewry, but also referred to a distinction between the – in his view – relatively well-mannered German Jews of Suriname and uncivilized Polish migrants. In a similar vein, when Nassy complained that the word *Smous* was applied 'in abundance to Portuguese and German Jews without distinction' – even by slaves, he was not so much offended by the use of the word *Smous,* as long as it was not applied to Portuguese Jews.[6]

The disdain that Nassy displayed for his German, but especially for his Polish co-religionists, was not uncommon in his days. The aloofness of Portuguese Jews towards High German Jews has been noted by several writers. Many Portuguese Jews felt superior to their High German counterparts whom they deemed to be less civilized. Undeniably, both groups originated from very different backgrounds. The Portuguese Jews originated from Sephardic families invested with an aura of aristocracy; their cultural background was Iberic, their mental framework cosmopolitan.[7] The majority of the High German Jews (including the Polish Jews) by contrast, came from the traditional East European *shtetl* environments or impoverished Jewish quarters in the expanding European capitals.[8] In fact, encounters between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews had been highly problematic throughout the Jewish world. The contact between both groups dated from the mid seventeenth century when – because of deteriorating conditions for Jews in central and Eastern Europe – more and more Ashkenazi Jews came to the hotspots of Sephardi Jewry, such as Amsterdam and the West Indian colonies.[9]

Not only were the High German and East European Jews culturally distinct from the Portuguese Jews, they also tended to belong to other – lower – social strata. In Suriname, Portuguese Jews supported their claim to superiority by their involvement in Suriname's plantation economy. Even the dramatic impoverishment of the Portuguese community and the influx of poor Portuguese-Jewish migrants during the

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[5] Nassy 1974b:64.

[6] David Nassy's writings reflect the ideas of Isaac de Pinto, whose letter to Voltaire in 1762 (*Apologie pour la nation juive*) was drenched with the notion of Sephardi superiority. De Pinto's 'apology' was primarly aimed at the Portuguese Jews, who 'do not wear a beard and are in no way different in their clothing; their rich engage in scholarship, in elegant ways, and in ostentation to as great a degree as the other people of Europe from whom they differ only in religion.' (Hertzberg 1968:291).

[7] Swetschinski 2000.

[8] *Shtetl* were rural Jewish communities that characterized much of Jewish community life in the East European territories, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. *Yiddishkeit* was the predominant cultural value in the *shtetl*, were life was directed at living the life of a 'good Jew' (Roth 1973:1466-74).

[9] For seventeenth-century Amsterdam, see Bodian 1997:125–31.

late eighteenth century,hardly affected the Sephardic myth. Impoverished Portuguese Jews continued to belong (or perceived themselves as belonging) to a different social group than most High German Jews. According to Bodian: 'The Ashkenazim were generally persons for whom poverty had become a way of life, while in contrast many of the 'Portuguese' poor (though not all) were recently impoverished or did not feel themselves to be part of a permanent culture of poverty.'[10] Although Bodian's observation is based on seventeenth-century Amsterdam, the situation was not that different from Suriname in the eighteenth century, possibly even into the early nineteenth century. Nassy's remark concerning the nature of Suriname's Jewry is a good illustration of this prevailing notion of Sephardi eliteness in times of poverty, and acquired additional significance when one realizes that he had lost the better part of his fortune during the economic crash of the 1780s. His precarious financial situation did not restrain him from assuming an elitist and high-handed attitude.

The distinction between the Portuguese and High German Jewish community in Suriname was primarily based on ethnic and social differences, that is, notions of eliteness; while the Portuguese Jews claimed to be a social and cultural elite, the High German Jews claimed to be of religious superior stock. Illustrative to this alleged religious superiority of the High German Jews is a public conflict in 1783.[11] On 29 September 1783, the Portuguese Jew Joseph Arrias reported to the Council of Police that he had been assaulted and severely beaten by several High German Jews. Cause for this maltreatment was a blazing row over the Jewish involvement in the funeral procession of Governor Bernard Texier.

This is what happened: as members of Suriname's free population, the Jews had to participate in the civil defence of the colony. On the day of Governor Texier's funeral, the Civil Guard – including the Jewish guards – was called upon to join the cortege as a guard of honour.[12] It was a Friday. The funeral procession had already passed, but the ceremony was still continuing, when the clock struck five … Sabbath had begun. The Jews present in the cortege were immediately confronted with a moral dilemma: should they observe the Sabbath or honour Governor Texier's funeral? Some High German Jews who did not want the break the Sabbath left the procession and handed their weapons to their slaves. This evoked dissension between some Portuguese Jews and High German Jews, which ultimately escalated and resulted in the alleged assault on Joseph Arrias.

According to Joseph Arrias, several High German Jews, among whom Meyer Levij Arons, dropped their weapons and left the funeral procession when the clock

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[10] Bodian 1997:126.

[11] This conflict and its aftermath are extensively documented. See NA 1.05.04.06: 326.

[12] In contrast to the Civil Guard of Paramaribo, the guards from the plantation districts – including the Jewish militia – seldom participated in the ceremonial activities.

struck five and Sabbath began, stating that they refused to carry any weapons during Sabbath. Joseph Arrias testified:

> Meyer Levij Arons said: 'I refuse to carry any weapons on Sabbath and I have sent my weapons home'. Heimans said that he would do the same. Then I responded – stepping aside with my hand on my sword: 'I will make sure that this will not happen. I have heard the orders of the Court [to attend the funeral procession] and I will not expose myself to any offence.'

> Meyer Levij Arons then said to me: 'Don't you know that our rabbis have forbidden us to carry weapons on Sabbath?' On which I responded: 'Yes, I do know that, but the orders of the Court are different, and I will obey them.' Meyer Levij Arons responded angrily: 'Then you are a villain, you are a bad Jew!' So I asked him if he was a good Jew, and he said 'yes'.

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> Later, we walked to the street of the Government where our *snaphaene* [rifles] were collected – I was still carrying my sword. When we arrived, Salomon Goedschalk snapped: 'If we were in Holland we would have thrown you under the bridge'. Then I answered: 'Why – because I obey the orders of the Court? – Thank god we are not in Holland, but in Suriname. Here, only those people who are possessed with sentiments like yours would do such things!' On which Meyer Levij Arons shouted: 'You are not a Jew; you are a scoundrel and a villain; if you were in Holland, you would have been drawn and quartered. You do not have a religion – You are not a Christian, nor a Jew!'[13]

The argument ended in a fight. According to Joseph Arrias, he was beaten several times while he lay defencelessly on the ground. In the lawsuit that followed, various people were heard, and their stories reported.[14]

Among the parties heard were the captains of the Civil Guard, who – following colonial policy – where all non-Jewish whites.[15] They confirmed the story of Joseph Arrias. Yet, they also stated that the conflict had not been limited to only a few men but that, in fact, the majority of the Jewish guards had 'handed their weapons to their Negro's, and intended to leave the funeral procession, as others had already done.' Only when they (the Christian captains) had threatened to arrest any disobedient Jews and transport them to Fortresse Zeelandia, did these Jewish guards decide to stay until the funeral ceremony was finished and the Civil Guards were officially dismissed. The

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13   NA 1.05.04.06: 326.

14   NA 1.05.04.06: 326.

15   The Jews that clashed with their Christian captains during the funeral of Texier were thus part of the mixed companies of Paramaribo, and not the Jewish militia of Jodensavanne.

Christian captains seized the opportunity to express their general dissatisfaction with the behaviour of the Surinamese Jews, and advocated the necessity that 'these and similar disobediences of the Jewish citizens, which occur on a daily basis, should be corrected. Especially considering the discontent felt by a great deal of Christian citizens concerning the many privileges given to the Jews'.

The settlement of this case caused quite a stir in itself. The Court of Police decided that there was no ground for individual prosecution. Yet, they found it necessary to undertake action. To prevent similar incidents from happening it was resolved that the Jews were no longer welcome to join any festivities or ceremonial affairs in Paramaribo, without discharging them from any of their other duties in matters pertaining to civil defence.[16] In a joint complaint of the Portuguese and High German regents, the Jewish community leaders protested wholeheartedly against this discriminating act. The humiliation of a forced absence during the upcoming installation of the new governor Wichers, while the militia of free blacks and coloured would attend, would be enormous. According to the Jewish regents, this would make them contemptible even in the perception of the slave population, as it would imply that Jewish residents were of lesser status than manumitted slaves!

The Court of Police – sensitive to the argument that this would harm the status of all whites, and not alone the Jews – was willing to re-admit the Jewish citizens to public exercises and drilling on the old rules and customs, but maintained the verdict that 'in view of certain irregularities perpetrated by several individuals of their community, as well as by the unseemly encounter of the regents of their community, in regard to the most noble strict governor ad interim, Monsieur W. J. Beeldsnyder Matroos, on the occasion of the interment of the noble strict governor general Bernard Texier, they have been found guilty of impropriety and disrespect towards the [governor]'.[17]

In due course, the despised notification was rectified by the new governor, J.G. Wichers, in 1786, who upon his arrival in the colony, found 'Suriname's Israelites in sackcloth and ashes, bitterly complaining about the wrongs done to them as a nation, because of the unruliness of a few'. Although Governor Wichers believed that some of the High German Jews 'excessively cling to their customs', and that the chairman of the Portuguese-Jewish community – who 'was not in the least addicted to the law of Moses or to Rabbinic institutions' – had been overly enthusiastic in expressing his ideas (read: insulting the governor), he believed there was no ground for punishing a

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[16] NA 1.05.04.06: 326; NSA Minutes: 27-12-1784.

[17] Decree of 15-12-1784, NA 1.05.04.06: 326. The comment on 'the unseemly encounter through one of the regents of their community etc.' refers to an insulting letter by one the Portuguese regents, Mr. de Barios, to Governor ad interim Beeldsnijder Matroos. Presumably de Barios wrote this letter to express his discontent with the fact that the entire Surinamese-Jewish community (read: Portuguese community) was punished over the behaviour of some High German Jews.

whole nation for the actions of a few, especially since those few had been found not-guilty in the first place.[18]

Good Jews

The conflict over Bernard Texier's disturbed funeral entails several expressions of what constituted 'good' Jewish behaviour in Suriname. With the flaming row between Joseph Arrias and Meyer Levij Arons and Salomon Goedschalk, the troubled relation between Portuguese and High German Jews was reduced to the issue of religious observance. What was to prevail: observing the law of the Sabbath or obeying the orders of the colonial administration? Meyer Levij Arons and Salomon Goedschalk blamed Joseph Arrias for his un-Jewish behaviour. They suggested that in the Netherlands such behaviour (breaking the Sabbath) would not be tolerated. 'You do not have a religion – You are not a Christian, nor a Jew', they snarled at him. For them, being Jewish entailed unconditional commitment to that religious group. By attaching more importance to fulfilling his duties as a free citizen of the colony than observing his religious duties as a Jew, Arrias placed himself outside the Jewish group. Arrias in turn argued that they lived in Suriname, 'not in Holland', thereby implying that – to him – Jewishness in Suriname was somewhat different from being Jewish in the Netherlands. Even Governor Wichers seemed to have certain fixed ideas what constituted 'good' Jewish behaviour: the non-observance of De Barios, the Portuguese regent in question, was evidently not included.

These contested notions of Surinamese-Jewishness form the raw material on which performances of superiority and difference were based: the High German Jews as obstinate religious fanatics, the Portuguese Jews as elitist and non-observant, and finally – from the point of view from the non-Jewish, Christian Civil Guards – all Surinamese Jews as a privileged and overindulged group. A similar connection between superiority and difference is observed in a conflict in 1796, when a High German Jew ran into trouble after insulting the Portuguese community leaders, calling them adulterers and pork-eaters. Deeply offended, the Portuguese *Mahamad* turned to the High German regents for intervention. To avoid a legal procedure of 'Jews among each other', which would expose the Surinamese in unfavourable way to the non-Jewish, Christian section of Suriname's society, the Portuguese regents demanded a public apology in the Portuguese synagogue instead. The High German regents were not susceptible to this sudden expression of group solidarity by the Portuguese *Mahamad*. They refused, 'considering the disdain shown to them, and the manifold arrogant terms' used by the Portuguese *Mahamad*.[19]

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[18] NA 1.05.04.06: 326.

[19] See Cohen 1991:37, 296-7.

The Portuguese Jews , or at least their community leaders, were writing their own colonial narrative – literally – with the publication of Nassy's *Essay Historique* in 1788. And indeed, the central message of Nassy's *Essay Historique* is the major contribution of the Portuguese Jews to the development of the colony of Suriname. Repeatedly, it is emphasized that as colonists, the Portuguese Jews do in no way differ from the non-Jewish, Christian, settlers in Suriname. In Nassy's positioning, the Portuguese Jews are the benevolent and enlightened white colonists who are not appreciated as such by the dominant group of Christian colonists.[20]

This notion of similarity with the non-Jewish colonial whites contrasts sharply with the notion of difference, that is propagated vis-à-vis the High German Jews, and especially the Polish Jews among them. In daily life, this colonial elite identification of the Portuguese Jews was expressed in numerous ways, often by mimicking 'other' elite worlds. Even when this notion could in fact no longer be upheld in day-to-day life (for reasons of a changed social reality), it has remained a persistent idea in defining the inner-group boundaries of the Surinamese Jews. The Portuguese Jews became the impoverished – once illustrious – Sephardi plantocracy; an image initiated by David Nassy and repeated by many.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Portuguese and High German Jews saw themselves as to essentially different groups. Whereas expressions of High German notions of Jewishness were wrapped around religiosity and little framed by Suriname's colonial context, Portuguese-Jewish identity was, to a large extent, based on their membership of the Surinamese plantocracy, and the social status of a colonial elite. This differentiated self-understanding between the religious High German Jews, versus the elitist, but non-obervant Portuguese Jews, became a Leitmotiv in Surinamese-Jewish history. One could wonder whether the continued attachment to religiosity in the self-understanding of the High German Jews was not – in a similar way as the Portuguese notion of eliteness – primarily a way of appropriating social status. Religious observance provided the High German Jews with an aura of respectability that was denied to them hitherto.

Although differences between both communities can be partly related to cultural sensibilities present in the European centres of Jewish settlement, in the race-based slave colonies of the New World these differences became part of a racial discourse. Needy whites posed a considerable headache for the ruling elites, because they

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[20] Robert Cohen noted that Nassy's perception of religious toleration, Jewish emancipation and Jewish history was heavily influenced by the ideas of non-Jewish writers who dominated his personal library. Nassy's library was a impressive display of Enlightenment thinking (Jonathan Israel once referred to David Nassy as one of the 'leading figures of the Dutch colonial Enlightenment', see Israel 1995). Arguably, Nassy's identification with the white Christian elites in Suriname was part of his general identification with the non-Jewish world. Note that in his 'Lettre-Politico-Theological-Morale sur les Juifs etc.', Nassy remarked that he deliberately had only referred to non-Jewish writers in *Essay Historique*, assuming a higher level of objectivity among non-Jewish writers (Cohen 1991:116).

threatened the boundaries of European colonial rule based on racial differentiation and social status. Many of Suriname's white poor settlers were Jews. Among them were former planters who had lost their fortunes after the plantation industry collapsed in the 1770s. Others were poor migrants who were sent to Suriname by the Amsterdam-Jewish community to take the pressure off the Amsterdam poor relief system. These poor Jewish settlers lived side by side with the free black and coloured population of Paramaribo, and threatened the carefully constructed colonial narrative of the Portuguese-Jewish community. And although there were many Portuguese Jews among these destitute Jewish settlers, East European Jews came to dominate the image of this group.

This contrast between prevailing notions of colonial eliteness and increasing pauperization can be illustrated with a painting by P.J. Benoit discussed earlier (see Chapter V). In this his painting of the shop of the High German *vettewarier* (retail-trader) Isak Abraham Levy Aron next to the shop of the black *snerie* (tailor) Petro Cofey Abouka, one clearly observes a world of difference between the representation of this poor white High German Jew – together and in social association with a black tailor – and the carefully constructed self-image of the Portuguese Jews as colonial elites, as displayed in for instance *Essay Historique*. In Suriname's colonial context, social differences between the Portuguese and High German communities should also be understood in relation to a colonial discourse of racial differentiation and social status, in which colour – including whiteness – became the overriding principle of social structuring.

In this connection, it should be noted that claims of superiority or 'real' Jewishness as seen in Suriname, reflects a worldwide and complex Jewish discourse wherein social or religious superiority are claimed by both High German and Portuguese Jewish polemic writings. Rather than supporting any claim of superiority or authenticity, these writings primarily underscore the notion of difference that has prevailed between both communities since long. According to Sander L. Gilman:

> The superiority of northern Jews (Askhenasic) over southern Jews (Sephardic) is an argument from the general realm of scientific racism in the nineteenth century about the improvement of the race the farther north or east (to a point!) one goes ('Caucasian' versus 'Semites'). By the late twentieth century, the social situation in Israel seemed to present this superiority as a given. Jewish scientists of the late nineteenth century often reversed this argument, seeing the Sephardic Jews as the better type. In the recent literature on the intelligence of the Jews, written after the post-Shoah constitution of the State of Israel with its 'Eastern' and 'Western'

> Jews, the idea of the superior intelligence of the Ashkenasic Jew has reappeared … [21]

The words of Gilman clearly show a sharp contrast between the notion of Ashkenazi superiority with alternative views that 'postulated the Sephardic-Jewish experience as the 'real' world of the Jews.' 'Ashkenazi' and 'Sephardi' are thus shifting cultural labels, whereby a superior status, whether socially, culturally or religiously defined, could (can) be appropriated as either a Sephardi or an Ashkenazi ethnic identifier. Who could claim a superior status and on what grounds, differed according to the context wherein this differentiation was used, or the subclass a group wished – or not wished – to identify with at a certain moment in time and place.

In the Surinamese context, both groups claimed their share of social status and superiority. The Portuguese Jews 'were' the prototypical Surinamese Jews: elitist and class-conscious, colour-sensitive, and somewhat dogmatic in religious affairs; a colonial elite that resided in the large mansions of Paramaribo, surrounded by slaves (of course) and who actively participated in lodges and societies. The High German Jews on the other hand (or at least their regents) claimed to be the 'real' Jews': orthodox and obstinate, and were perceived as such by non-Jews as well. This much appears from the commentary of Governor Wichers, who believed that the High German Jews 'excessively clung to their customs'. The High German Jews 'were' not only the observant Jews, but also the lower-class 'smous' Jews: shopkeepers and craftsmen who were less class-conscious and colour-sensitive than their Iberian co-religionists. This notion of difference between Portuguese Jews and High German Jews has proven to be remarkably persistent and a conception that outlived Suriname's social reality by a very long time – if it ever fitted reality at all.

The Jewish historian Jaap Meier, who lived and worked in Suriname for several years in the 1950s, noted a 'special Surinamese-Jewish mentality'. Referring to the Portuguese Jews, he wrote:

> One the one hand, Judaism was – in contrast to Europe – a social privilege. Belonging to this group, meant belonging to a kind of nobility. As a direct outcome, they must have been tempted to perceive their Jewishness (initially also, later mainly) as a social criterion from the early days, with the consequence: the loss of the essence of religious life. The latter may have been affected by the immense isolation [of Jodensavanne] at the edge of the jungle as well.[22]

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[21] Gilman 1996:6-7.

[22] Meijer 1955:9.

With regard to the Jewishness of the High German Jews, Meijer writes: 'Of a social tradition – entrenched in the Surinamese past – was no question. They were Jews – just like that'.[23]

2   MAKING AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES

On forced inclusion and community control

Differences between the Portuguese and High German communities were not only propagated by speech, but also involved tangible and practical measures. The most notable boundary-making event was, no doubt, the establishment of two separate communities in 1734, each with their own institutions: synagogues, cemeteries and *sedakas* (poor relieve system).

During the early years of settlement, the Portuguese-Jewish community had been the sole Jewish congregation in the colony. High German Jews who settled in Paramaribo were automatically incorporated into the Portuguese community. They attended the synagogue services in Jodensavanne or visited the house of prayer in Paramaribo, and were submitted to the authority of the Portuguese *Mahamad* at Jodensavanne. However, when the number of High German Jews in Suriname grew, tension between the two groups increased. In 1716, the Portuguese *Mahamad* decided to separate the High German nation 'from our holy church of Yachidim'.[24] Initially things were settled in a pragmatic fashion: a separate house of prayer for the High German Jews in Paramaribo was erected at the Keizerstraat – also visited by Portuguese Jews staying in Paramaribo – while the High German Jews officially remained part of the Portuguese-Jewish community and continued to be subjected to the authority of the Portuguese regents.

As this solution failed to resolve the ongoing quarrels, the Portuguese community leaders finally requested the governor for an official separation in 1724, which caused the relation between the two communities to deteriorate only further. In 1729, the governor called on the directors of the Society of Suriname to settle the conflict. It was not until January 6, 1734 that the separation was formalised. The newly established High German community was called Neve Shalom (House of Peace). The prayer house at the Keizerstraat was transferred to the High German Jews and initiated as a synagogue, while the Portuguese built a new prayer house at the Heerenstraat in

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[23]   Meijer 1955:13.

[24]   The archived documents of the separation and the separation act itself can be found in
NA1.05.04.02:256: no. 50-65.

Paramaribo, Sedek ve Shalom, initiated in 1736.[25] Not only religious institutions were separated: both communities created their own well-fare provisions, like a court for orphans and insolvent estates (*wees- en boedelkamer*), and *sedaka*.[26] Especially from the mid eighteenth century onwards, all sorts of do's and don'ts were declared to assure the segregation of both groups, varying from cemetery-related identity politics, to restrictions relating to visiting the 'other' synagogue and mixed marriages.

Visitors to Suriname were sometimes surprised to find two fully separated communities at – what seemed to be – the edge of the world. Take, for example, a report of rabbi Haim Isaac Carigal 'from the Holy Land of Israel', who visited Suriname in 1793, to a befriended Jewish merchant in Newport: 'In this firm the Portuguese funds are kept separate from those of the Germans, and the boy, whom I brought with me, being German, they do not pay for his maintenance […] I warned you of all this before, but you objected that this company had large funds and that they would be sure to pay for the expenses caused by that boy.'

Following the early years of separation, it was presumably the geographical distance between both groups that ensured the separation was observed by members of both communities as a matter of course. Most Portuguese Jews lived in and around Jodensavanne, while the growing number of German and Polish Jews were housed in Paramaribo; a good day's travel apart from each other. As such, no additional resolutions were issued to enforce this separation upon the community members. As Paramaribo became increasingly a place of residence for the Portuguese Jews as well, physical separation disappeared, causing more intra-community contacts. From the mid eighteenth century onwards, the relationship between the Portuguese community and the High German community became more troublesome, mainly driven by the actions of the respective *Mahamads* who endeavoured to maintain the boundary

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[25] On 5 January 1735, the separation act was signed in the presence of Governor De Cheusses. It was decided that the High German Jews would keep the prayer house at the Keizerstraat, but would pay half of its taxed value to the Portuguese community within a period of six weeks. The Portuguese would be allowed to use the synagogue as along as they did not have a prayer house in Paramaribo for their own use. On 12 July 1735, the leaders of the newly established High German community paid the sum of 2912 guilders and 20 cents to the Portuguese-Jewish community. See NA 1.05.04.02:256.

[26] Until 1828, the Portuguese and High German community had their own orphan's court. This changed when the Jews were granted full civil rights and their Privileges were withdrawn in 1825. Subsequently, in 1826, the Jewish community leaders requested the governor to abolish the Jewish court for orphans, arguing that it was no longer useful to maintain the Jewish courts now that they had obtained full civil rights. The Jewish orphan's courts were officially abolished in 1828; an exemption was made for those unfinished cases already under attendance of either the Portuguese or High German court. Particularly the Portuguese community had a great number of estates under control, some of which had considerable amounts of cash. Given the practical difficulties to identify all heirs of the deceased , it often took a considerable amount of time before the community courts could finalize the case and distribute the inheritance to the rightful owners. It would take until 1 July 1839 before the Jewish courts for orphans and insolvent estates was finally dissolved. In 1843, papers of the dissolved Jewish orphan's courts were burned. NA, 1.05.11.13; NA, 1.05.11.18:161. Also Samson 1957.

between both communities through active intervention. As it happened, the Surinamese Jews would increasingly engage in mixed Portuguese-High German activities, for example, by visiting the 'other' synagogue on a regular basis. Crossing the threshold of the other synagogue meant – literally – crossing the community boundary and withdrawing oneself from the regents' control.

The Portuguese *Mahamad* was the first to act in September 1753, and declared that any transgressors would be fined a hundred guilders. The High German Jews followed suit, and issued a similar degree that strictly forbade her members to visit the Portuguese synagogue.[27]

Naturally, rules are there to be broken, or at least amended: with little regard for these decrees, Surinamese Jews continued to attend the synagogue services of 'the sister community', giving rise to various disputes with their community leaders. These conflicts generally involved attempts by the Jewish regents to forcefully include their own members, rather than to exclude visiting members of the 'other' community.

For instance, the High German Jew Juda Jacob Coerlander ran into conflict with his regents after visiting the Portuguese synagogue during one of the main Jewish holidays (*Soekot*) in 1789. According to Coerlander, the motivation behind the law that forbade community members to visit the other synagogue was to prevent community members from refraining from paying their *finta*, or community taxes. Since Coerlander had paid his *finta*, he did not see why he could not visit the Portuguese synagogue, especially since he had witnessed the High German regents, visiting the Portuguese synagogue on several occasions themselves. How could the regents, Coerlander argued, who violated the community laws themselves, ever have the right to punish others for doing the same?

Juda Jacob Coerlander turned to the governor to resolve this matter by writing a memorandum in which he pleaded that not only he, but all Surinamese Jews, should be granted the freedom to visit any 'church' if they so pleased.[28] Although the outcome of this request remains unclear, the Portuguese-Jewish community altered its community regulations in that same year, and added the rule that 'Members and *Congreganten* have the freedom to congregate with the High German Jews'. One important conditional clause stated that whenever the community leaders suspected any disdain for their own synagogue, the visits would be forbidden, and any violation of the prohibition would be fined accordingly.[29] Presumably, with this rule the Portuguese

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[27]   Later, the fine of twenty-five guilders was increased to a hundred guilders when High German Jews continued visiting the Portuguese House of Prayer in Paramaribo. NSA *Escamoth* 1734-1821: 19-09-1753.

[28]   NSA Box 4 AJA: 28-10-1789.

[29]   In case of disobedience, the transgressor would be fined by 150 guilders for the first violation, 250 guilders for the second time, and in case of a third time, the person would be punished 'as a rebel', implying a request for banishment. NA, 1.05.11.18:1789, tract. 12.

regents hoped to prevent further conflicts in the future, without giving up control of synagogue-attending entirely.

The conflict over visiting the Portuguese synagogue was not the first time Juda Jacob Coerlander ran into conflict with the authorities in Suriname (Jewish or governmental)[30], nor would it be his last time. In 1795, after six years of repeated disputes, he once again ran into difficulties when he refused to carry out his task as a pallbearer for a deceased community member, who in his eyes was a *chazier-eater* (pork-eater) and as bad as today's *parnassims* (regents)'. Deeply insulted, the *Mahamad* turned to Governor De Frederici and asked for appropriate punishment (banishment) of Coerlander as the 'burden of governance' had become nearly unbearable.[31] Apparently, the request was denied by the governor, as Coerlander continued to challenge the authority of his regents. In 1802, he visited the synagogue in 'inappropriate attire' by wearing a jacket. When he was requested to leave the synagogue, he refused, only further disturbing the synagogue service by his emotional reaction and behaviour at the scene. The regents, tired with his ongoing maladjusted behaviour, turned to the governor and asked – again – for his banishment from the colony, thereby referring to the Jewish privileges and in particular the right of political dispatch. Although the latter request was denied, Juda Jacob Coerlander was sentenced to four days of imprisonment in Fort Zeelandia, after which he was obliged to ask the High German regents for forgiveness for his inordinate behaviour.[32]

The resolution of the governor is a striking example of how High German community boundaries were maintained: it was made clear to Juda Jacob Coerlander that membership of the community was not optional, based on free will or without obligations, but was determined and predisposed by birth. He could not withdraw himself from the authority of the regents, for instance, by visiting the 'other' synagogue, even if he wished to do so. At the same time, the governor underlined that High German regents could not, as it were, take their hands of Coerlander; as community leaders they, too, were obliged to maintain responsibility over Coerlander as a community member. This forced inclusion of community members was one of the

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[30] Prior to the 1789 issue on visiting in the Portuguese synagogue, Coerlander had run into conflict with Governor Wichers and the directors of the Society of Suriname over a financial sum of 6000 guilders in 1776. The negotiations between Coerlander, the Society of Suriname and the prosecutor in The Hague (who acted as the representative of governor Wichers) took several months. Repeatedly, Juda Jacob Coerlander broke off negotiations or insulted his opponents by his short-tempered behaviour. In the end, Coerlander had to content himself with a compensation of about 2000 guilders, after he had turned down an earlier (and higher) offer. On which Governor Wichers reacted: 'I feel sorry for that man. He throws away the egg, and keeps an empty shell'. See, NA 1.05.10.02:933, December 1776 to January 1777.

[31] NSA Box 13 AJA, Letter of the High German regents to Governor De Frederici, March 1795; Box 13 AJA, testimony of several community members against J.J. Coerlander, 11-3-1795; Box 7 AJA: Reaction of the High German regents on a Memorandum of J.J.Coerlander, June 1801.

[32] Samson 1943b:5.

pillars on which the authority of the Jewish regents was based. Anyone who called himself a Jew was subjected to the rules and regulations of either the Portuguese or High German community. The principle of forced inclusion was made explicit by the Portuguese *Askamoth* of 1754, in which it is stated that 'all those who are of the Portuguese of Spanish Nation, and who live in this colony, except those mentioned in Tract. 26. Art. 5 [those married to High German women], will be considered as *Yachid*, and are subject to all *Askamoth*, as long as they will be a resident of this colony'. A later version of the *Askamoth*, dated 1789, contained a similar paragraph.[33]

As it appears, keeping community members 'in' was at least as much an issue and source of conflict as keeping outsiders 'out'. This also emerged from the cemetery-related conflicts discussed in the previous chapter. In the end, Jewish community leaders were often inclined to (marginalized or conditional) inclusion, rather than straightforward exclusion as is illustrated by the burial of the coloured Jew Joseph Nassy in 1790, or the fenced off burial plot of the non-observant Jew Isaq Simons in 1825. Recently, a similar mechanism was at work with the creation of Sarah's Hofje. Jews of questionable status, and the non-Jewish offspring form mixed marriages are buried at unwanted burial plots, or fenced off from the main cemetery. This inclination towards conditional inclusion certainly applied to the coloured Jews. Even in the case of non-observant community members, or members that defaulted on their finta payments, exclusionary measures – ranging from denying access to certain religious prerogatives to the denial of burial space at the *Beth Haim* – were only intended as temporary punitive measures. Eventually, the offenders were expected to pay their debts and comply with the rules and regulations of the community.

In this connection, David T. Goldberg underlines that power and conflict are not only at play in identity strategies when used as a mechanism of (forced) exclusion: identity claims can also keep people in who don't want to be in. Forced inclusion can be established, for instance, by insisting on an essential racial character or by requiring racial, ethnic or religious solidarity.[34] In Suriname, this mechanism of forced inclusion could only be maintained as long as the community control of Jewish colonists was based on the principle of indirect rule.[35] The colonial authorities had much to gain from clearly defined community boundaries, as it provided them with the necessary framework for a successful execution of indirect rule of the Surinamese Jews. Blurred boundaries between Portuguese and High German communities would infinitely complicate the control of the Surinamese Jews as a group since it would blur questions of authority and rule over each Jewish individual in Suriname; something that was clearly undesirable from the point of view of the colonial authorities.

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[33] See NA 1.05.11.18: 106, 114.

[34] Goldberg 1994:12.

[35] See my earlier comments on the Jewish privileges as a form of indirect rule in Chapter IV.

After 1825, the interests of the Jewish regents and the colonial authorities became more conflicting: clearly demarcated community boundaries were still beneficial to Jewish community leaders in their quest for authority and power over community members, but were no longer of concern to the colonial authorities. The reallocation of Portuguese Jewish community life to Paramaribo, and the political emancipation of the Surinamese Jews had removed all legal distinctions between Jewish and non-Jewish white residents in Suriname. Jews now came to fall directly under the authority of the Dutch administration regardless of their observance or religious affiliation.

Marrying the other (I): High German – Portuguese mixed marriages

Arguably, the most far-reaching measure to guard community boundaries was the prohibition on mixed marriages between High German and Portuguese Jews.[36] Nowhere were the inner group boundaries between the Portuguese and High German Jews more clearly defined than in the community policy concerning mixed relationships between these two groups.[37] The objection against mixed Portuguese and High German marriages was not a Surinamese peculiarity, but also applied to other Jewish communities in Europe and the Americas. For instance, in the London community, the names of High German women who married Portuguese men were not listed in the community registration. Generally, these women were referred to as *Tudesca*, the somewhat disparaging designation used by Portuguese Jews to refer to High German women or High German servants. In Amsterdam, Portuguese Jewish men who married High German women lost their community rights, while their offspring was buried on separate aisles: '*la carrera mais inferior*'.[38]

Marriages between High German Jews and Portuguese Jews were fiercely opposed by the community leaders. The earliest mixed-marriage regulations date from the mid eighteenth century. In community regulations of 1754, the Portuguese *Mahamad* included a law that said that 'all those who will marry High German Jewish women will be degraded as *Yachidim* and considered *Congreganten*'. In 1789, this rule was reconfirmed with the addition that it also applied to women who would marry High German or Polish men. In 1772, the High German community issued a similar decree, which explicitly stated that those marrying mulattos or Portuguese would be

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[36] This paragraph concerns the mixed High German – Portuguese marriages. Interracial and Jewish-Christian marriages will be dealt with in the following chapter.

[37] Several scholars have recognized the significance of marrying the 'other' in relation to the making of group identities. For the meaning of the mixed marriage in a colonial environment, see Stoler 1997. For the meaning of mixed Sephardi and Ashkenazi relationship in Amsterdam and elsewhere see for instance Bodian 1997 and (Faber 1992: 62).

[38] Hagoort 2005:148-9.

turned down as members and demoted as *Congreganten*.[39] Surprisingly, these regulations were strictly obeyed. The register of marriages between 1778 and 1817 does not list any mixed marriage during the late eighteenth century.[40] In fact, the first known mixed marriage performed in Suriname dates from the early nineteenth century (1807). Apparently, the prospect of loosing ones status as a *Yachid* was a sufficiently strong deterrent to withhold people from marrying the 'other'. This is not to say that during this period no mixed married couples lived in Suriname; these couples had however married abroad.

In this connection, Eva Abraham-van der Mark has suggested in her study of patterns of marriage and concubinage among the Sephardi merchant elite of Curaçao, that marriages became a valuable resource in itself in a community that depended on family networks for its wealth, power and status.[41] The practice of marrying across the Atlantic cemented existing trade-relations, created new ones, and contributed to the perpetuation of the 'broader' Jewish community of the New World. In these marriages, women where expected to preserve the purity of bloodlines, thus perpetuating the group and safeguard the community values. According to Van der Mark, marriage to a person not approved by the family, led to loss of status or even forced migration. Pursuing van der Marks line of reasoning to the Surinamese case, the absence of mixed marriages until the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century was not only the result of power play and boundary guarding by the Portuguese and High German regents, but can also be explained as a consequence of family strategies and differences in wealth and social status. Possibly, it was only after the impoverishment of the Portuguese Jews and financial improvement of the High German Jews, that High German Jews became acceptable as marriage candidates, since both groups considered themselves to be more on equal social footing with each other.

The first to successfully challenge the ban on mixed marriages, were migrants who had intermarried abroad prior to their arrival in Suriname. Hartog David Judah had married a Portuguese-Jewish girl named Ribca Torres in St. Eustatia in 1788 where mixed marriages were actually allowed.[42] Nevertheless, the regents decided that Hartog David Judah should abide by the decree of 1772, and therefore would loose his prerogatives as a *Yachid*. Hartog David Judah appealed to Governor Wichers to challenge the decision of the High German *Mahamad*, arguing that the decree could never apply to his case as it refers to those who would marry a member of the

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[39] ARA 1.05.11.18:106, 114; NSA *Escamoth* 1734-1821: 2-2-1772.

[40] See NA 1.05.11.16, Old Archives Civil Registry:6. Registers of (intended) marriages of Jews, before the Council of Police, 1778-1817. Also Cohen 1982a.

[41] Abraham-van der Mark 1993. See also Faber 1992.

[42] Since this marriage took place in St. Eustatia, it is not included in the Robert Cohen's analysis of (the absence) of mixed marriages between 1788 and 1800 referred to above.

Portuguese-Jewish community in Suriname, and not to those who had intermarried abroad. According to Hartog David Judah, there had been similar cases before in both communities; in all cases, it was decided that the ban on mixed marriages did not pertain. Governor Wichers supported the appeal and ordered the High German community leaders to re-admit Hartog David Judah as a *Yachid* and acknowledge Ribca Torres as a member of the High German community.[43]

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of mixed marriages caused emotions to run high in both communities. The first (documented) mixed marriage performed in Suriname dates from 19 June 1807, when the High German Jew Isay Marcus Samson married Blanka de David Mercado Bom Rey, who was of Portuguese-Jewish descent. In the following years, mixed marriages became recurring events.[44] In 1813, that is, towards the end of British Intermediate Rule (1799-1816), a conflict arose over a marriage that was disapproved of by the Jewish regents. The protagonist was Semuel Haim de Mordehay de la Parra, a Portuguese who had married the High German Hanna Marcus Samson. Once married, he received a letter from the *Mahamad* in which he was informed that he had lost his full membership of the Portuguese community.[45] Now, the marriage between Semuel Haim de la Parra and Hanna Marcus Samson was clearly not the first mixed-marriage Suriname. What makes this case different, however, is that Semuel Haim de la Parra did not accept his degradation to the status of *Congregant* without a struggle. When his request to be re-admitted as a *Yachid* was ignored, Semuel Haim de la Parra turned to Governor Bonham for help. The English colonial administration was often inclined to support the regents in cases of conflict with community members, as it was also in their best interest to maintain the authority of the Jewish regents as part of the overall colonial administrative apparatus. This time, however, it was the *Mahamad,* who drew the short straw. The British administration was less sensitive to Jewish privileges and the status of the Jewish regents than the Dutch rulers were. Governor Bonham decided in de la Parra's favour and ordered the abolition of the unpopular decree. No longer would a Portuguese *Yachid* be listed as a *Congregant* after a marrying a High German woman.[46]

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[43] Samson 1956a.

[44] See NA 1.05.11.16, Old Archives Civil Registry:6. Registers of (intended) marriages of Jews, before the Council of Police, 1778-1817.

[45] No letter was sent to Hanna Marcus Samson nor do I expect to any other female to have received an official notice in similar cases. In orthodox Jewish communities, synagogue-life is predominantly a male affair in which women play only passive roles. Women may attend synagogue services as spectators (not as active participants) but are not obliged to. Their religious roles focuses on the domestic sphere.

[46] NSA Memorandums of the Government 1813-1819: 8-12-1813, 12-5-1814 and 26-5-1814.

When Bonham's edict came to the attention of the High German community leaders, they acknowledged the advantages of such a ruling (peace and quiet!), and petitioned the governor for a similar resolution for their community:

> Whereas the Regents, Deputies, Representatives and late Regents of the German Jewish Nation, have addressed a Remonstrance to me, and therein for reasons set forth, conclusively prayed, that it might graciously please me with respect to their Nation, to abrogate all the Resolutions relative to the marrying of a German with a Portuguese Jew, as it has pleased me to do so, with respect to the Portuguese Jewish Nation, by an Appointment on a Petition presented to me on the 15th November 1813 by Semuel Haim de la Parra; and as I am inclined to let the German Jewish Nation enjoy equal privileges with the Portuguese,
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> I therefore, by Virtue of the Supreme and Sovereign Power, vested in me in this Colony, have judged proper and meet, to abrogate all Resolutions respecting the marrying of a German with Portuguese Jew, and to render the same without effect, giving and granting accordingly to all and every one, belonging to the German Jewish Nation, as well as those that are already intermarried with a Portuguese, as those that may so inter-marry hereafter, the Right of being a Member of their Persuasion.[47]

The sequence of events in 1813 and 1814 leaves some questions unanswered, however, especially pertaining to the why's and the wherefore's of this British intervention in Jewish community rules. Presumably, the High German community leaders felt that they were not authorised to change their own community regulations, as their legality was based on governmental approval. The reasoning and motivation of the Jewish community leaders which led them to readily accept Bonham's policy cannot be explicitly inferred from the archived documents either, although it is very likely driven by the increasing number of mixed relationships between Jewish men and Afro-Surinamese women at that time. Possibly, marrying to a Jew from the other community became less threatening when compared to mixed marriages with Suriname's coloured population. Besides, as the influx of large numbers of Jewish migrants had come to an end, the community leaders probably realized that it would become increasingly more difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the internal group boundaries, given the small size of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Acceptation of intermarriage between the two communities was the only way for a sustained viability of their group as a whole.

Regardless of the precise motivation of the community leaders, intermarriage between Portuguese and High German Jews was no longer an issue with the

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[47] NSA Box 3 AJA:26-5-1814.

implementation of Bonham's resolution. I have only come across one conflict that involved a mixed Portuguese – High German marriage in the period after 1813. In this instance, the issue at hand was not so much the marriage in and of itself, but rather that the woman in question was born out of wedlock, an act considered a violation of Jewish law in itself. Jacob Isak Soesman was a High German Jew who had lived with Ester Jacob de Meza, belonging to the Portuguese-Jewish community, like a wedded couple ('in den echten staat') since 1809, but was not formally married to her.[48] Now, twelve years later, they had legally married, thereby legitimizing their children. After the wedding, Soesman received a letter from the regents stating that he was degraded as a *Yachid*, and listed as a *Congregant* from then on. The reason was not so much that his wife was a member of the Portuguese community, but that she was born out of wedlock. Although Jacob Isak Soesman requested several times that he, his wife as well as their children would be readmitted as *Yachidim*, his appeal was denied.[49]

During the nineteenth century, mixed marriages occurred in ever-increasing numbers, a process that has not changed since. Other forms of mixing came to dominate community affairs, however, such as the issue of interracial and Jewish-Christian relationships.

Belonging and widowhood: the story of the widows Da Fonseca and Levij Hart

Bonham's resolution had an aftermath some ten years later, as it had not foreseen what the consequences would be for the status of widows. What was to happen if they outlived their spouses? To which community did they belong then: the community they were born in, or the community of their deceased husbands? The status of intermarried widows would give rise to a fundamental disagreement between the High German and the Portuguese community in 1822-1823. Two women were involved: Judith Meyers, who originally belonged to the High German community, but who had become a member of the Portuguese community after her marriage with Eliau da Fonseca, and Rachel Nunes Ribeiro, born Portuguese, and crossed over to the High German community upon her marriage with Levij Hart. Both women were known and referred to by their late husband's names – hence the widows Da Fonseca and Levij Hart.

Upon first reading, conflicts pertaining to the status of intermarried widows appear to gravitate on the role – and control – of women in the making of community boundaries. Various scholars have argued that debates considering the status of

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[48] I assume that the woman involved was white, since no reference was made to colour in the archived documentation, either by Jacob Isak Soesman or by the High German regents. As colour was still a much-debated issue at that time, it would not have been left unnoticed if applicable. For the importance of mixed non-legal unions in Caribbean societies, see Smith 1996.

[49] NSA Box 25 AJA, Requests to the Regents 1817-1829, 5-1-1821; NSA Minutes 1820-1827: 7-1-1821;

women in a community are in fact implicit discussions on identity, ethnicity or group culture.[50] Boundaries for women were (are) often not the same, nor did (do) they have the same meaning as for men. The fact that women completely lost their ethnic affiliation or community membership after their mixed marriage – while men only lost their privileges, but maintained their group membership as a *Congregant* – illustrates this duality.   Still, the question of widowhood does not relate to symbolic constructions of group identity alone, but had important practical and financial implications too. For who was to be held responsible for the maintenance of poor widows? Who should foot the bill for their living expenses and that of their children, not to mention the cost of their funerals? These questions were particularly pressing considering the precarious financial situation of both the Portuguese and High German communities in the early nineteenth century. For the women involved, the question of their belonging was far from symbolic either: their social security was at stake!

The Portuguese regents believed that widows should continue to belong to the community of their deceased spouses. In other words, their change of identity, that took place upon the instant of marrying the 'other', was a permanent affair by default. So, when the widow Levij Hart turned to the Portuguese community (the community she was born into) to ask for poor relief support in 1816, the Portuguese regents believed that she should have claimed High German poor relief instead. After all, once the wife and now widow of a High German Jew, she was regarded High German herself, and as such entitled to poor relief from the High German community. But she did not, and in contradiction to community policy, the Portuguese community had accepted the request, and the widow Levij Hart was given an allowance by the Portuguese *sedaka* for a number of years. Only in 1821 did the Portuguese community leaders hit upon their mistake, triggered by the actions of widow Da Fonseca, who as a widow of a Portuguese *Yachid* should have turned to the Portuguese poor relief for assistance, but had instead turned to the *sedaka* of the High German community:

> Recently, the mistake made by our predecessors has been discovered – the late Levij Hart was a High German Israelite. Consequently, his wife or widow could no longer be part of the Portuguese community, even though she was born in that community.[51]

The Portuguese regents immediately sent their secretary to inform the president of the High German community of their findings. The Portuguese regent argued that the widow Levij Hart (as a widow of a High German Jew) belonged to the High German community. Therefore she should pay *finta* to the High German community, and request for an allowance from the High German poor relief; the widow Eliau da

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[50]   See, for instance the work of Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis: Yuval-Davis 1989 and Anthias 1992.

[51]   NSA Miscellaneous: 4-7-1822.

Fonseca would be taxed by the Portuguese-Jewish community, and – if necessary – be supported by the Portuguese poor relief. The Portuguese regents fully expected the High German community leaders to agree on them. However, to their utter amazement, the latter responded that Judith Meijer, widow of the Portuguese Israelite Eliau da Fonseca, was accepted again as a member of the High German community, while Rachel Nunes Ribeiro, widow of the High German Israelite Levij Hart, had to remain with the Portuguese community.

On 4 July 1822, the regents of the Portuguese community turned to the governor to address the matter of intermarried widows. In their letter, the regents elaborated the animosities that separated the communities in the 1730s, 'which still causes much mutual embitterment, even up to the point that all marriages and alliances by marriage between both communities were forbidden', and praised the governor's decree of 1813. According to the Portuguese community leaders, the decree was a deed of peacefulness and Enlightenment that ended the maliciousness and damaging nature of the ban on intermarriages (which of course they had promulgated themselves in the first place).

> It appears the *Memorianten* that under the same decree [that is, the resolution of 1813] – as which it has always been understood – that at the death of an Israelite, his widow and children will continue to belong to the community to which he belonged. Besides other examples that could be presented as documentary evidence, it satisfies here to mention the case of a certain female, the widow Abhraham Levij, born Lijons, before marriage belonging to the High German community and after her matrimonial union crossing over to the Portuguese-Jewish community, after the death of her husband, continued to belong to the latter community [the Portuguese], and after her recent death has been buried at the cemetery of the Portuguese-Jewish community; – And, decently, how could this be otherwise?
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> 1) Which widow would not prefer to be buried next to her husband?
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> 2) Would it not be objectionable if the children would belong to community to which their father belonged, while their mother would have return to the community to which she belonged originally? As a consequence of which mother and children would no longer belong to the same community!
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> 3) Would this not result in yet another major difficulty? As it is, the estate of a deceased, as long as not fully solved and transferred to the inheritors, remains assessed to church tax. Since the widow is often the universal or partial inheritor, she – in case she would have

> to return to her original congregation – would have to pay church tax to both communities.[52]

The Portuguese Jews continued their plea to the governor:

> To pass over this [disagreement] in silence, would have some very damaging consequences. Laws and customs would be harmed, and one would no longer know how to act in similar cases. Besides, one of the widows – and both find themselves in an unfortunate position – is not assessed for any church tax, while the other is double taxed. Moreover, the friendly relationship between both communities would be seriously harmed. Above all, it will inevitably result in difficulties in case of death of either one of the widows, and both communities would claim the right to bury her on their cemetery.[53]

The High German regents in turn denied that there had ever been a generally accepted custom that widows and children continued to belong to the community of their deceased husbands or fathers, nor that this was in any way part of the mixed marriage resolution of 1813 – in which they were actually right. According to the High Germans, the arguments of their Portuguese counterparts had only hypothetical meaning. The argument that every widow wants be buried next to her husband was meaningless in the case of the widow Levij Hart, since the burial plot had already been used for another burial. Moreover, the marriages of both widows had remained childless.

Arguably, the objection made by the High German regents that the arguments put forward by their Portuguese counterparts were indeed putative, perhaps even opportunistic, is supported by the financial implications of the matter at hand. Assuming that the estate of the deceased Portuguese Jew Eliau da Fonseca would have been more substantial that of the deceased High German Jew Levij Hart, it seems reasonable to assume that widow Levij Hart was in more dire need of financial support than widow Da Fonseca. And indeed, while the community leaders were fighting over the status of their widows, the widow Levij Hart found herself in an awkward position. Penniless and rejected by both communities, she was more or less left to her own devices. The Portuguese regents believed that by marrying a High German Israelite she had become a member of the High German community for life, whereas the High German leaders thought that she should return to the community in which she was born. On 13 March 1822, she desperately implored the Portuguese leader to re-install

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[52] NSA Miscellaneous: 4-7-1822.

[53] NSA Miscellaneous: 4-7-1822. See also the various documents between 29-10-1821 and 9-1-1823 in NSA Miscellaneous.

her as a member of the Portuguese community so that she would be able to obtain financial support with an allowance from the poor relief:

> I do not have a penny to buy me even the simplest cloth. Since I am Portuguese by birth, and have lost my husband childless, one has to understand that I am already a member of the holy community B.V.S.[54]

The efforts of Rachel Ribeiro were fruitless. Neither community was willing to shift their ground and it was only after intervention of Governor De Veer that the matter was settled. In 9 January 1823, Governor Abraham de Veer passed his judgement and decided in favour of the Portuguese point of view.

> That an Israelite woman, who by marrying an Israelite belonging to other […] community, crosses over [*overgaat*] to the community of her husband. To which she will continue to belong during marriage and after the death of her husband, even if their marriage will remain childless.
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> That corresponding our foresaid regulation, Rachel Nunes Ribeiro, widow of Levij Hart of the High German Israelite community will continue to belong to that community, and that Judith Meijers, widow of Eliau da Fonseca of the Portuguese Israelite community, will be a member of the last named community.[55]

With the resolution of Governor Abraham de Veer, the conflict on belonging and widowhood was finally solved. The governor's decision in favour of the position of the Portuguese community reflects a principle of community making in which the boundaries of the group are most frequently determined by either birth or marriage. In the case of mixed married widows, the instance of marriage surpassed the instance of birth in the making of community boundaries. Interestingly enough, in both the mixed marriage resolution of 1813, as well as the controversy over the status of the widows Da Fonseca and Levy Hart, it was the governor who ultimately decided on the demarcation of Jewish community boundaries in Suriname.

3 BLURRING BOUNDARIES AND PREVAILING NOTIONS OF DIFFERENCE

In the light of the cases presented above, how should we understand the continuously changing relationship between Portuguese and High German Jews? Ever since their

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[54] NSA Miscellaneous, 13-3-1822. B.V.S. means Berache ve Shalom, the name of the synagogue at Jodensavanne, sometimes used to refer to the community.

[55] NSA Minutes 1820-1827, 9-1-1823.

separation into two communities in 1734, the Surinamese Jews underwent various modes of disconnection and reconnection: many examples can be found in the archives which bear witness to a continuous cycle of estrangement and rapprochement that gave rise to changing community boundaries. When, at a certain moment in time, some boundaries seemed to evaporate, other boundaries would become more important. The causes for this shifting back and forth could be quite straightforward: if, for example, a conservative Mahamad was in charge of either community, rules and regulations would often be applied more strictly and a more orthodox understanding of community rules would prevail.

The 1820s mark an interesting case in point, as it was during these years that the community elders of the High German community enforced a strict observance of community rules in order to redefine their community boundaries. The increased number of conflicts over visiting the other synagogue, or the dispute over the status of mixed married widows exemplify this period of renewed awareness of community boundaries. Although community boundaries were increasingly contested from the late eighteenth century onwards, notions of cultural difference between both groups remained intact for a long time even when they seem to had lost every foundation in everyday life.

Reluctant overtures

The mid nineteenth century marks the beginning of a trend towards rapprochement on a more organizational level, as is exemplified by joint synagogue services, sharing of Rabbis and – eventually and ultimately – the merging of both communities in 2001. The road to conjunction was full of bumps and potholes, however. Illustrative of the delicate relation between both communities is the long period that it took to come to a joint synagogue service. Although negotiations were started as early as in 1822, it would take more than thirty years before a joint service was realised with the installation of Lewenstein in 1857. As noted earlier, these rapprochements were primarily motivated by financial and economic necessity, as the major socio-economic changes in the aftermath of the plantation crisis precluded the maintenance of two separate, fully functional communities in Suriname. With a declining memberschip from the mid nineteenth century onwards, it became increasingly more difficult to maintain even one community.

The reluctant association between High German and Portuguese Jews undermined the upkeeping of community boundaries, and forced the Surinamese Jews to rethink existing notions of difference. Blurring community boundaries on an organizational level did not automatically result into vanishing notions of difference. In fact, quite the contrary happened: the joint services forced Portuguese and High German Jews to reflect on their feelings of difference and commonality. When community boundaries came under increased pressure, a demand and quest for authenticity grew, resulting in a continuous flow of expressions of discomfort with the changing reality of Jewish community-life in Suriname.

For instance, when the prominent High German Jew Egbert van Emden devoted himself to the union of both communities in 1836, the High German community leaders were favourably disposed towards his proposal. The Portuguese-Jewish regents, however, reacted highly dismissive. They believed that a union as proposed by Van Emden demanded 'equally ponderous arguments of both communities,' something they clearly believed was not the case. They further argued that:

> As there are no other schisms between both Israelite communities in this colony than separated worship, while in social life the Israelites […] are so much fraternized, a union between both communities is absolutely unnecessary.[56]

Although the words of the Portuguese regents may appear cryptic; their frantic denial of any 'other schisms between both Israelite communities' expresses in fact a hidden notion of difference, despite overlapping boundaries in 'real life'. The idea of a union between the two communities was clearly abhorrent to the Portuguese-Jewish community leaders; the attempts of Egbert van Emden to unite both communities failed.

In the 1850s, an alternative option was discussed. As the idea of a full union had proven to be unfeasible because of the opposition among the Portuguese community leaders against such a merger, the High German community leaders suggested a joint service with the upkeeping of two separate communities, as this would lower the costs of worshipping, without demanding a full merging of both communities.[57] The Portuguese leadership agreed, and in November 1851, the first joint service was organized. Barely six month later, in May 1852, the community councils concluded gloomily that 'the effort to accomplish unity and association among the Israelites of this colony has ended in failure.' According to the community leaders, most of their members had proven to be unwilling towards alternately worshipping in the 'other' synagogue where they had to denunciate their established rights, and many conflicts had occurred concerning seats and religious honours.

Two years later, new efforts were made for an association between the two communities. This time around, plans for a joint service included the installation of a shared rabbi. Although the installation of chief rabbi Lewenstein in 1857 did bring about a conjunction on an organizational level, it did not dissolve any of the notions of difference between both groups. In the years following the death of Lewenstein, the

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[56] NA 1.05.11.18:47, 5-12-1836; 6-12-1836. NSA Minutes, 18-12-1836. See also Samson 1954a.

[57] Some community members clearly preferred a more far-reaching union between both communities. Note the sarcastic tone in the words of the chair of the High German community who stated that 'for years, there has been talk of a union of the Netherlands Israelite and the Portuguese Netherlands Israelite communities. … [such a reunion] has been considered impossible, even preposterous, by some who lack the same degree of civilization as some of their co-religionists.' NSA Minutes 1851-1856, 10-8-1851

communities drifted apart even further, up to the point that all communication between both church councils was broken off during the late nineteenth century.[58] It was only halfway into twentieth century that renewed efforts for a joint service were successful.[59]

In search for authenticity and differentiation

The events during the second half of the nineteenth century indicate a Jewish community in search for a new rationale against the background of a radical changing society: the heydays of Suriname's plantation economy had become a permanent memory of the past, and Suriname was creolizing rapidly. Slavery was abolished in 1863, and the mixed urban environment of Paramaribo had become the habitat of the Surinamese Jews. Moreover, secularization, mixed marriages, financial hardship, and the diminishing size of the communities and increased difficulties to reach a *minjan* in both communities, forced a far-reaching cooperation between both communities. Rabbi Roos sketched a dim scenario of the state of community affairs in 1909:

> Death and migration has caused the community to mourn the loss of community members who can hardly be missed. Also financially has the community grown worse. Today the situation is gloomy. There is no growth through migration, and the number of members continues to decline. Community members perceive their duties differently than required.[60]

Amidst all changes, notions of difference between High German Jews and Portuguese Jews continued to be cultivated. During the nineteenth century, it were merely the Portuguese regents who upheld boundaries, and resisted a merging of the Portuguese and High German communities. In contrast, at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, the High German community leaders increasingly became the ones who cultivated differences vis-à-vis the Portuguese Jews.

The complexity of this enforced self-consciousness of the High German Jews is beautifully illustrated by a seemingly small, but symbolically interesting, event that occurred in 1897. In March of that year, one of the members of the High German church council (Polak) proposed that from then on the prayer for the governance and administration of the colony (a regular element in the liturgy) would no longer be said in the Spanish, but in Hebrew instead. Polak argued:

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[58]   NSA Minutes 1893-1895, 2-4-1894.

[59]   Joint services were organized since 1944.

[60]   NSA Minutes 1895-1909, 8-6-1909.

> The usage of the Spanish language in some parts of our liturgy is, although explainable from the genesis of our community, preposterous for a Netherlands Israelite church community that has existed independently for more than a century. Respects for ancient customs may have been a justifiable motif for maintaining a relic of a past long gone. Now that this language is no longer understood, nor pronounced appropriately by most of our community members, time has come for an alteration.[61]

Polak supported his argument with the comment that 'even the Portuguese-Jewish community of The Hague has converted the prayer for the Royal Family from Spanish to Hebrew'. Polak finished his argument by emphasizing that he did not wish to tamper in any way with the usage of Sephardic rite in the High German Jewish community, which had to be maintained at all time. Polak's proposal was approved unanimously by the other members of the church council.

This language issue may seem trivial, but is full of meaning. The quest for differentiation from the Portuguese-Jewish community ('after a century of independence') went hand in hand with a continued identification with that same Portuguese-Jewish heritage. After all, the wish to differentiate from the Portuguese Jews was only partial: legitimacy for the linguistic alteration in the liturgy was found in the Portuguese (!) Jewish community of The Hague, and Polak explicitly mentioned that the Sephardic rite had to be remained intact. This cherished relic of their past clearly differentiated them from the High German communities in the Netherlands, and provided the High German Jewish community with a sense of authenticity.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Polak came to represent an orthodox identification within the High German community that nourished a High German self-understanding of religious superiority. In 1913, Polak, then chair of the High German community, stressed to newly installed members of the church council that 'the community is orthodox, and nothing that can be identified as liberal may be brought up'.[62] This simple statement not only underlines the prevailing perception of orthodox Judaism in the High German community, it also suggests that it was a highly contested notion within the High German community, even among the community leadership.

Three months later, the then chair of the High German community criticized some of his fellow members the church council over their absence in synagogue during the High Holidays. One of the persons present critically noted that 'former board members, no matter how liberal in their thinking, visited the church at certain occasions. Today's board members do not contribute to the decorum in any way. They

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[61] NSA Minutes 18956-1909, 28-3-1897.

[62] NSA Minutes 1909-1919, 6-2-1913.

refuse to dress-up in black when they go to church, but not when they visit the Loge [Concordia].'[63]

When chief rabbi Dünner approached the High German community to receive refugee Russian Jews 'to work the fields', their answer by telegraph service was not to be mistaken – 'don't send'.[64] The High German community leaders explained their point of view with a cover letter. According to them, only 'negroes, coolies and Chinese were used for working on the fields, since no one else can endure the heat of the tropic sun.' Moreover, it would not be possible for the immigrants 'to live as good Jews'.[65] In their letter to Dünner the community elders wrote: '[T]he vast majority of the Israelites that are resident here are very liberal and do not in the least trouble themselves with the observance of Jewish rites, merely twenty or so Israelite well-to-do families run a kosher household and do not desecrate the Sabbath and holidays, and to do so have to bear large financial sacrifices […] I need not point out that it is almost impossible for a person of limited means to live as a good Jew […]'[66]

The comments of the High German leadership illustrates the porous nature of actual day-to day life in the colony, wherein the possibility of an orthodox Jewish life-style was not always a matter of choice, but was also imposed by institutional constraints that were brought about by the sheer geographical distance between the Surinamese-Jewish communities and the main centres of Jewish life elsewhere (Europe, the North American mainland). It is remarkable that even though Surinamese-Jewish community leaders repeatedly reported on the essential 'liberal life-style' of the Surinamese Jews (which included themselves) and the impossibility to live as 'good Jews' in Suriname as early as the late nineteenth century, it would take more than a century for the Surinamese Jews to officially renounce their orthodox status.

After World War II, various attempts to unite the two Jewish congregations stumbled on divergent ideas regarding the religious signature of a joint Surinamese-Jewish community.[67] While the Portuguese Jews strived for a connection with Reform Judaism, the High Germans clung to their orthodox affiliation – even though only few orthodox-Jewish families remained in Suriname. Arguably, since Portuguese-Jewish identifications in Suriname had never relied on religiosity in the first place, but rather

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[63]   NSA Minutes 1909-1919: 10-5-1913.

[64]   See also Chapter II, page 62.

[65]   NSA Incoming Letters 1871-1912: 12-6-1882; NSA Minutes 1880-1893: 28-6-1882.

[66]   NSA, Outgoing Letters 1856-1883: 3-7-1882.

[67]   In May 1979, in a joint meeting, the church council of both communities expressed their interest in maintaining a merged and Liberal community. Yet, it took another thirty years before a merging and transformation to Liberal Judaism was a fact. NSA, Correspondence and Minutes, 1975-1981, 17-5-1979.

on a colonial elite status, renouncing their orthodox status was a less sweeping move for the Portuguese Jews than for the High German Jews of Suriname, for whom an orthodox status was their fundamental anchor in Judaism.

Colonial nostalgia

The fact that the Surinamese-Jews persistently maintained and reconfirmed such notions of difference brings to mind Fredrik Barth's observation that cultural distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility or contact: 'boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them'. It entails processes of differentiation whereby distinct categories are maintained despite people crossing borders.[68] Indeed, apart from institutional cooperation, social relationships between High German and Portuguese Jews had become increasingly intertwined, most notably through the ever-increasing number of mixed marriages. In the early twentieth century, Rabbi Roos observed that, 'there is hardly a family that is not strongly connected with members of the other community.'[69] Yet, despite all the social contacts, mixed marriages and religious cooperation, the notion of difference remained deeply rooted in the historical consciousness of the Surinamese Jews.

Does this prevailing notion of difference between the Portuguese and High German Jewish communities, then, indicate a historical continuity with the late eighteenth century, when the cultivation of differences was part of the quest for social status based on either colonial eliteness or religious superiority? It is unlikely that the Portuguese-Jewish community leaders were still preoccupied with writing their colonial-elite narrative during the late nineteenth or twentieth century as they had been a century earlier. The Portuguese Jews were now part of an emerging middle class in Suriname. Not only had social and economic differences between the Portuguese and High German Jews evaporated, the Surinamese Jews had transformed from a typical colonial group into a local and creole community.

This does not imply that notions of difference between Portuguese and High German Jews did evaporate. In fact, when notions of difference between the High German community and the Portuguese Jews were no longer part of a contemporary quest for Jewish authenticity or a way of claiming an elite status, they became part of

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[68] Barth makes this comment in a slightly different context. He refers to 'social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life stories. Secondly, one finds that stable persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses. […] cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence.' This argument also works the other way: when cultural differences between groups disappear, this does not necessarily detract from the relevance of separate ethnic or cultural identifications, nor does the disappearance of cultural differences automatically usher the end of boundary-maintaining or boundary-making processes (Barth 1969:32-3).

[69] Benjamins 1914:388.

historically invested claims of Portuguese-Jewish identity instead. In other words, when the colonial narrative of the Portuguese Jews was no longer tenable, present tense was simply replaced by past tense.[70] During the early nineteenth century this notion of colonial eliteness still referred to a lived past, shared by community-members who had experienced themselves the years of crisis, the end of the era of Jewish plantocracy and the decay of the community. In the course of the nineteenth century, the image of the rich Sephardi Jew got deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Portuguese Jews, no longer as a reality, but as an idea of lost glory and history coming to an end.[71]

During the twentieth century, the Portuguese-Jewish narrative of colonial eliteness – as displayed in *Essay Historique* and repeated over and over again by contemporary writers – came to dominate the general conceptualization of Surinamese-Jewish history. Surinamese Jews increasingly informed themselves about the formative years of their community: the early settlers, the first rabbi's, the first synagogue and so on. Some of these articles were little chronological sketches of historical events; others contained more detailed historical information.[72] These writings often express amazement and deep interest in a mystified past. With their communities slowly disintegrating, Surinamese Jews looked back with nostalgic regret at the vanished communities of their ancestors.[73]

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[70] A recent example of this phenomenon is the following piece in the Surinamese newspaper *De Ware Tijd* (27-8-1992). In reaction to an earlier published article, it reports: 'The mixed listing of Sephardi and Ashkenazi family names […] can raise some objections as both groups have totally different backgrounds. The Sephardim were the rich people: traders and bankers […] Ashkenazim […] were mostly artisans, handymen, small traders ("sjacheraars"), traders in second-hand clothing etc. A family name as "Kleerekoper" means everything. Therefore one should not mention [High German] family names like Wolf or Wolff, Wolfert, Duym etc. together with Sephardi family names as the latter will probably take offence thereto.' Note that mixed relationship and mixed marriages in past and present times have made family names unreliable as markers for attributing identities. For instance, one of the members of the Duym family presented himself to me as 'being Portuguese from both sides'. To this person, Duym was clearly a Portuguese family name.

[71] Aleida Assmann describes this transition from an experienced past, shared by a group of people, to a trans-generational historical awareness, as the transition from social memory to culturalized and politicized forms of historical memory (Assmann, unpublished paper presented at the International Huizinga Conference - Theatres of Memory, Amsterdam 2004).

[72] For instance, Hilfman 1907, Hilfman 1909, Oppenheim 1907, Oppenheim 1909a, Oppenheim 1909b, Oudschans Dentz 1911, Oudschans Dentz 1927, Zwarts 1928. The writings of Ph.A.Samson, although of a later period, also fits this list. This historical interest in Surinamese Jewish settlement coincides with the general interest of American Jewish historians in colonial Jewish history during this period (including Surinamese Jewish history). During the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, the American journal *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society* published several articles on the earliest history of the Surinamese Jews, and Suriname was a popular destination for American Jewish rabbis who visited the Suriname at a regular base during this period. See De Bethencourt 1925,Sola Pool 1917, Felsenthal and Gottheil 1896, 1901a and 1901b, Hollander 1897, and Kohut 1895.

[73] David Lowenthal has pointed at the social embedding of historical culture in his essay on America's rejection of the past during the first century of the Republic. Lowenthal noted that 'not until Americans

The renewed interest in Jodensavanne during this time – not as a place of residence, but as a place of remembrance and historic identification – likewise reflects nostalgia for the past. In 1906, the religious teacher of the Portuguese-Jewish community, P.A. Halfhide, initiated a first cleaning operation of the *Beth Haim* of Jodensavanne. The isolated location of Jodensavanna prevented adequate maintenance of the site, however, and within years forest vegetation reclaimed its place. Various cleaning operation have followed since, but mostly to no avail.

An important moment of remembrance and commemoration took place in April 1937, when the High German community celebrated the centenary of its synagogue building at the Keizerstraat. Various commemorative articles appeared in Surinamese newspapers and Dutch-Jewish magazines.[74] The landmarks in Surinamese-Jewish history and High German historical consciousness were commemorated: the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, the arrival of the first Portuguese Jews in Suriname halfway the seventeenth century, the Jewish privileges, Jodensavanne, the use of the Portuguese rite in the High German congregation, and the deterioration of the community in the contemporary period. An historical founded notion of cultural difference had given way to a one-sided identification with a Portuguese Jewish past. Silenced was the history of the coloured Jews or the slave population that facilitated colonial Jewish life in Suriname; this 'moment of retrospective significance' left no space for their stories.[75]

When talking with Surinamese Jews during my fieldwork trips in 2003 and 2006, Jodensavanne was on everybody's lips, and with unconcealed pride Surinamese Jews referred to the heydays of the Jewish planters elite. Perhaps one of the most notable continuities in Surinamese self-understanding is the perceived linkage with a Sephardi past. Even if the family tree cannot support a genealogical connection to the sugar elites of the olden days, then there is at least a spiritual feeling of connectivity to the era of David Cohen Nassy.

Recall, moreover, the nostalgic memoirs of the elderly lady, which started of this study: the feeling of loss and bygone days expressed by her reminiscences; the Portuguese branch of her family, which formed the entry to her family history; the reference to her grandfather, 'who still lived in Jodensavanne as a little boy'. Today, the very narrative that once lay at the heart of Portuguese and High German dichotomies has become the basis of a collective identification of Surinamese-

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became generally dissatisfied with the present did they begin to long for the past as such, to revere history for its own sake, and to fantasize a Colonial or Revolutionary golden age' (Lowenthal 1976:106).

[74] See Centraal Blad voor Israelieten in Nederland, 1-4-1937; Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad, 16-4-1937; Neerlands Jodendom, 25-3-1937 and 8-4-1937; *De West*, 18-4-1937.

[75] Trouillot 1995:26.

Jewishness, shared by most, if not all, Surinamese Jews.[76] This collective linkage with a colonial past seems to have replaced 'old' notion of cultural difference among the Surinamese Jews.

What about the religious self-confidence that once characterised High German self-understanding? Whereas the colonial narrative so vividly displayed by David Cohen Nassy still resonates in the historical representation of the Surinamese Jews, in contrast, the notion of religious superiority of the High German Jews has slowly but surely lost ground when there was no longer a Jewish 'other' to claim to be superior to. Today's self-understanding of the Surinamese Jews shows no traces of the idea of religious purity that was once the backbone of High German notions of Surinamese-Jewishness. Instead, non-observance is often used strategically in the contemporary Jewish community: 'being a Jew in Suriname' (instead of the Netherlands, Israel, the United States) has offered a way out of the strict rules of an observant Jewish life-style.[77]

The transforming colonial environment of Suriname affected the relation between Portuguese and High German Jews in many ways. Although the differences between both communities can partly be related to cultural sensibilities also seen elsewhere (most notably in Amsterdam), these differences became part of a discourse of colonial eliteness that prevailed in the race-based slave society of Suriname. Poor Jews – in public imagination generally associated with High German Jews – who often lived side by side with the Afro-Surinamese population threatened the boundaries of Jewish whiteness and the carefully constructed self-image of the Portuguese-Jewish

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[76] Note that today it is not longer possible to differentiate between Portuguese or High German Jews because of intermarriage and –recently – the merging of both congregations.

[77] Such strategic use of the local particularities is not a strictly contemporary phenomenon, however, and is reminiscent of the affair of the 'shaving of the beards' more than two centuries ago. According to orthodox doctrine, Jewish men are not allowed to shave between *Pesach* (Passover) and *Sukkoth* (Feast of Tabernacles) as a sign of grief. The *Askamoth* of 1754 of the Portuguese-Jewish community ruled that no *Yachid* (member) has the right to shave or cut his hair on penalty of excommunication and a fine of a hundred guilders. Although this rule was no longer included in the *Askamoth* of 1787, it was still observed as a convention. However, two years later a group of clean-shaven Sephardi men asked for permission to enter the synagogue. As they were refused entrance initially, a fierce discussion between opponents and proponents of shaving the beard ensued. At the end, it was decided that henceforth clean-shaven men were entitled to attend synagogue services during Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. Now, the question of the beards is in itself not a specific Surinamese phenomenon or striking event. Similar debates took place in other Jewish communities around the world, especially in Europe and Northern America. The beard was an important outward sign of a Jewish identity. Shaving the beard, then, was considered as a clear choice for assimilation and adaptation to a non-Jewish environment. What was typical for the Surinamese Jews, however, was the argument used by the Surinamese Jews to shave their beards. According to the 'shavers' serious health-risks were involved with growing a beard during more than two or three days in the tropical environment of Surinam, particularly in combination with the 'special character' of the Surinamese Jews, that is, their 'phlegmatic and bilious temperament'. NA 1.05.10.01: 528, 27 and 28-10-1795. See also Samson 1959.

community as a colonial elite. Whereas colonial eliteness stood at the heart of Portuguese-Jewish self-understanding, religious observance provided the High German Jews with an aura of respectability and social status that was denied to them hitherto.

Initially, it were often the Portuguese regents who were the first to push for clearly demarcated boundaries between the two Jewish communities as they put forward their request for an official separation in 1724. In subsequent years, the Portuguese *Mahamad* would continue this line by officially forbidding her community members to visit the High German synagogue[78] (in 1753; the High German reacted within weeks with a similar decree) and the first prohibition on mixed marriages (in 1754; the High German regents followed suit in 1772). Again, in 1836, it were the Portuguese regents who opposed against a possible union between both communities. Boundaries were firmly established by the Portuguese Jews when they were no longer self-evidently upheld by their members. In general, exclusionary regulations drawn by the High German leadership seem to have been primarily a reaction on earlier exclusionary measures taken by the Portuguese regents.

Although this kind of boundary-making and upkeeping is illustrative of the self-understanding of a Jewish leadership who continued to cultivate intergroup differences until well into the twentieth century, it does not say much about community life outside the scope of synagogue, or about community-mixing 'from below'. The remark of Rabbi Roos (who served in Suriname between 1893 and 1912) that 'there is hardly a family that is not strongly connected with members of the other community' reveals the contrast between community boundaries as they were defined and demarcated by the community leadership, and the everyday negotiation of these boundaries by Surinamese-Jewish men and women. At times, these boundaries were contested, but more often, they were simply by-passed as the Surinamese Jews got on with their lives. This is not to say that notions of difference were entirely invented by the community leadership: the many conflicts that continued to trouble a smooth conjunction of both religious ceremonies suggest otherwise.

The events discussed in this chapter illustrate the unruliness of localization and the persistency of some claims of identity. The increasing entanglement of both communities – because of mixed marriages and joint services – did not preclude a prevailing notion of difference. This history of Jewish inner-group relationships cannot be understood outside Suriname's colonial context. When the community became increasingly smaller and lost its appeal as a New World destination for Jewish migrants after the collapse of Suriname's plantation economy, the two Jewish communities were driven to at least attempt a conjunction of some sort. After a localization process of almost three centuries, notions of difference between

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[78] Note that the High German reacted within weeks by issuing a similar prohibition.

Portuguese and High German Jews did evaporate eventually. In the course of the twentieth century, the aura of eliteness that was associated with the colonial nostalgia of the pre-crisis era became a notion that was widely shared by all Surinamese Jews – Portuguese and High German alike. The colonial experience of sugar planting and slavery, their *couleur locale*, and their liberal life-style – in short their 'creoleness' – provided the Surinamese Jews with a sense of authenticity vis-à-vis Dutch Jewry.

VIII

BLACK, WHITE, JEWISH?
COLOUR, HALAKHA AND THE LIMITS OF JEWISHNESS

Ganna, a young Jewish girl, had always been friends with Jan, an Amerindian slave child who belonged to one of the neighbours. When they were children, they were often found playing together. This was not an uncommon situation: despite slavery and unequal power relations, close relationships between slaves and free (white) settlers were part of daily life in colonial Suriname.[1] Slaves, freemen and white settlers lived in close proximity, sharing the same habitat, especially in Paramaribo.[2] One day, however, Ganna and Jan broke all the rules and boundaries of a colonial slave society. Ganna invited Jan into her home and they had sex. Eight days later, when Jan visited her again, drama unfolded as the boy and girl were caught in the act by a visiting neighbour and three female slaves. When Jan tried to escape, he was captured with the help of some slaves. A neighbour immediately warned the father of the girl, the High German Jew Hartogh Levij, while keeping Ganna and Jan locked in the house. When the father of the girl denied the sexual relationship between his daughter and the slave,

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[1] See Brana-Shute 1990.

[2] Some believe that these events took place on a Jewish plantation, probably because the owner of Jan was a planter (for instance, Beeldsnijder 1999). I believe the events were actually situated in Paramaribo. Although the archived documents do not specify the place of event explicitly, the whole story breathes the atmosphere of Paramaribo, not in the least because of the testimony (recorded in Paramaribo) of the visiting neighbour 'the taylor Japie' (a typical urban profession) who is referred to as 'living in this place' (*alhier woonachtig*). NA 105.04.02: 258.

the neighbour reported the whole ordeal to the Court of Police. A lawsuit followed with a dramatic outcome: after spending several month's of imprisonment in Fort Zeelandia, Ganna was flogged and banned from the colony; Jan was sentenced to death and executed.[3]

The gruesome story of the flogging of Ganna Levij and the execution of slave Jan is, in essence, a story of Jewish whiteness and colonial boundaries. In colonial Suriname, daily lives of both colonized and colonizers were both deeply affected by colonial power relations. Ganna Levij was a High German Jewish girl; possibly of modest background (obviously she did not belong to the Portuguese-Jewish plantocracy). Although Ganna's Jewishness set her aside from non-Jewish white settlers, she did belong to the community of European whites in Suriname. As such, she was subjected to the rules and legislation of the white community, which strictly forbade sexual interaction of white females with enslaved, non-white males. Her story shows that Jewish life in Suriname was bounded by Suriname's colonial environment, and can only be fully understood when placed in the context of colonial whiteness and colonial boundaries.

Ganna Levij and slave Jan are an extreme example of how men and women, in one way or another, crossed the community boundaries or contested existing notions of Surinamese-Jewishness. The dramatic course of events in this particular case is related to the fact that it involved sex between a white female and an enslaved male. Sexual relationship between white women and black or coloured men (either enslaved or free) were considered a subversion of colonial authority and male white prestige. According to Ann Laura Stoler, '[c]oncern over protection of white women, intensified during crises of control – threats to the internal cohesion of the European communities or infringements on its borders.'[4] Although Stoler refers to the perceived danger of sexual assault on white women by black men – referred to as the 'Black Peril' throughout the British Empire – rather than voluntary interracial sexual

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[3] The events of this case took place between October 1730 and April 1731. The case documentation includes the testimonies of all the parties involved: the statements of Ganna and slave, the eyewitness accounts of 'the taylor Japie' (as well as statements of three female slaves). See NA 1.05.04.02: 258. This case was not unique. In 1711, two similar cases of sexual intercourse between white women and black slaves had resulted in the promulgation of an edict which ruled that any single white woman who has had intercourse with a Negro – referred to as 'unnatural whoring' – was to be flogged and banned from the colony, while a married woman was to be branded as well. The black men in their turn faced execution. The conviction of Ganna Levij and slave Jan is thus in accordance with this edict (even though Jan was not black, but was referred to as a *rode slaaf*, meaning a red, hence Indian slave). For the Edict of January 28, 1711, see Schiltkamp 1963. Apparently, the banishment of Ganna Levij was no easy affair: no skipper was willing to take Ganna back to Holland. Eventually it was decided that the first Jewish family that would leave for Holland should take Ganna along, or alternatively, the skippers would have to draw lots in order to determine who should take Ganna Levij on board (Beeldsnijder 1999).

[4] Stoler 2002a:58.

relationships, the connection between the guarding (and making) of white community boundaries and concern over white women's purity in relation to colonial (male) authority is evident in these cases of sexual relationships between white women and slaves.

Sexual relationships between white women and non-white men remained a rarity throughout Suriname's colonial history. There are, however, many other types of mixed relationships in Surinamese-Jewish history that have manifested themselves as critical events in the Surinamese-Jewish community. In addition to the mixed marriages between High German and Portuguese Jews that have been discussed in the previous chapter, two other types of mixed relationships played an important part in the localization of Surinamese-Jewish community boundaries: mixed marriages between Jewish males and Afro-Surinamese women (both enslaved and free), and Jewish-Christian mixed marriages. Broadly speaking, it is also in this chronological order that Surinamese-Jewish community boundaries were contested: while High German – Portuguese issues dominated community affairs in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was the debate on colour and Jewishness that took centre stage during late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century (although its beginning can be traced back to the 1750s). Colour and social status were constantly at play, resulting in an ambiguous, continuously shifting position of coloured Jews within the community. The history of the coloured Jews provides an excellent entrance point into the ways Surinamese-Jewishness was inextricably bound to Suriname's changing colonial social order.

1 RACIALIZED BOUNDARIES: THE SHIFTING STATUS OF COLOURED JEWS

In the slave colonies of the New World, Jews became part of the dominant group of colonial whites – something that would not have been possible in the Old World. Especially in a Caribbean slave society like Suriname, issues of colour came to dominate boundary politics within the Jewish communities.[5] This notion of Jewish whiteness was not a pure self-imaging enterprise of the Portuguese-Jewish plantocracy alone: High German Jews were as preoccupied with colour as their Portuguese co-religionists. Although their status certainly not clear-cut and a matter of course, the

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[5] Though not only there. As noted by Segal, in Cochin (India) powerful caste distinction reinforced colour-based distinctions within the Jewish community of Cochin. Here, discrimination by white Jews against darker skinned Jews involved taboos on intermarriage and on free association on social and religious occasions. Various contemporary accounts have remained of the seventeenth century Jewish community in Cochin, when Cochin was under Dutch Rule and the Jewish Cochin community was incorporated in the Amsterdam Sephardi trade network. The designation *branco* (white) was used to denominate those Jews born in Europe (Portugal) in contrast to those born in India, that is, those who were free from the imputation of inter-marriage with Indians (Segal 1993).

colonial administration did consider the Jews as white (save for the group of coloured Jews) by classifying them as such in the colonial administration and records. That the Surinamese Jews were legally subjected to all the rules and boundaries applicable to colonial whites illustrates the story of Ganna and Jan.

This notion of Jewish whiteness deeply affected internal community affairs, as appears from the shifting status of coloured Jews in the Surinamese-Jewish communities. Some important changes in the way community boundaries were drawn date back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was during this period that an increasing number of mixed relationships between white Jewish males and Afro-Surinamese women, including the growing numbers of their coloured offspring, gave rise to a continuous stream of issues and questions put forward to the *Mahamad*: to what extent could they become members of their community, and what was their status?

Coloured Jews and *halakha*

The first coloured Jews – or mulattos as they were called – were the offspring of colonial master-slave relationships. Although officially forbidden, sexual relationships between white men and slave women were a common phenomenon and widely accepted in Suriname, as well as in other Caribbean societies. Such relationships sprang from the forced intimacy of slavery and ranged from violent sexual encounters to more lasting relationships between white men and African women. As noted by Raymond T. Smith, 'White man married white women but entered into non-legal unions with women who were black or "colored" that is, of mixed race […] Because the dual marriage system permitted white men to have "outside" unions with black and colored women, while being married to white women, it wove a complex tapestry of genetic and social relations among the various segments of creole society.'[6]

Little is known of the early colonial period (early eighteenth century) when a coloured Jewish group first came into existence. The archives covering this period did not survive the ravages of time and Suriname's extreme tropical climate. Some of the children that were born from mixed Afro-Jewish relationships were raised as slaves; the more fortunate ones were put under the care of the Jewish men who did take some responsibility for their concubines and their illegitimate offspring. Some were given freedom, received Jewish names and upbringings, and found their way to the social and religious communities of the Portuguese and High German Jews.

The coloured Jews are explicitly referred to in the documents of the 1754 *Askamoth* (community regulations). In this year, their status within the Jewish community was changed significantly. Apparently, some of the coloured Jews had been accepted as full members of the community prior to this change in regulations.

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[6] Smith 1996:61-2.

The full incorporation of coloureds, and 'even *Carboegers'* (those with one mulatto and one black parent) is also mentioned by a group of coloured Jews in 1793. In a memorandum to Governor De Frederici, they write:

> That it is not unknown to them [...] that in the older days, the person of Gabriel del Mato, Joseph Rodrigues del Prado and Jacob Pelengrino [?], who were not Mulattos but even Carboegers, enjoyed similar rights and privileged as members [white Jews] enjoyed in the Jewish churches [sic].[7]

Now, it was explicitly stated that coloured Jews were no longer to be admitted as *Yachidim* (full members), 'as some of them have meddled with cases concerning the government of the community; therefore it is determined that from now on they will never be considered or admitted as Yachidim and will only be admitted as *Congreganten*'.

The exclusionary rules in the 1754 *Askamoth* did not only affect those of Afro-Jewish descent. The same article that confined mixed Portuguese and High German marriages also stated that white Jews who married mulatto women were to lose their status as *Yachid* 'forever' and become a *Congregant*, without the possibility ever (!) to be readmitted in the grade of *Yachidim*.[8] Their offspring would be considered as *Congreganten* until the second degree (that is, their grandchildren), after which re-admission to the rank of white Jews would be possible.[9] This rule was reconfirmed in 1789.[10] In 1772, the High German community issued a similar regulation, denying full membership to coloured Jews, as well as to those marrying mulatresses.

The introduction of regulations against certain practices (interracial marriages or controversial burials) does not automatically imply that such practices were in fact widespread and therefore needed to be regulated, however. The first burial of a coloured Jew at the *Beth Haim* may have invoked the community leaders to institute a law to prevent any future cases. Therefore, a community regulation against a certain practice or behaviour does not give any indication of whether such practices were in fact a common occurrence. These regulations should rather be considered as an

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7   Memorandum of the coloured Jews to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

8   Note that these rules differ from the regulations pertaining to mixed Portuguese – High German marriage. In case of the latter, a *Yachid* would be downgraded to the rank of *Congreganten* as well; however, this degradation would only last for the duration of the marriage. When, for instance, a Portuguese widower who had previously lost his prerogatives as a *Yachid* after marrying a High German wife, would remarry to a Portuguese woman, he would be readmitted to the rank of Yachidim.

9   Re-admission was subject to the condition that that such persons where born out of white fathers and within wedlock

10   NA 1.05.11.18:106, 114.

indicator as to how practices were perceived, valued and judged by community leaders.

During the closing decades of the eighteenth century, a constant flow of requests reached the community elders to admit 'the free mulatto' so-and-so, or 'the slave bought for freedom'[11] such-and-such as *Congregant* to the community. Interestingly enough, all requests were agreed upon and the absence of a Jewish mother was never put forward as an obstacle for becoming part of the Jewish community in either case. The only requirement for admission was a basic tuition in Jewish law and custom. Slowly but surely, the group of coloured Jews grew up to about 100 admitted *Congreganten*.[12]

Both the Portuguese and High German regents reacted to this 'colouring' of the community by sharpening the rules of community participation and erecting inner-group boundaries. The result was a remarkable combination of inclusion, exclusion and intermingling, which is displayed in full by a decree of the High German community of 5 November 1780:

> It has been resolved, that henceforth a *Yachid* who requests for one or more of his children to be admitted as *Congregant* to the community, will have to verbally avow to the *Mahamad* that he is the father of those children. In addition, [the petitioner] has to present letters of manumission (freedom) of the Court of Police of Suriname for the aspirant *Congregant*.
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> […]
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> Furthermore, it is has been resolved that in case of death, a Judeo Mulat or Mulatress belonging to one of our *Yachidim* and not being a *Congregant*, shall not be buried among the *Congreganten*; a separate row will be laid on at the *Beth Haim* for that purpose. Neither will their funeral be accompanied by *Levaja*, only the *Sjamas* [sexton] of the *Hebra* will accompany the mourners to appoint a burial plot.

And in a resolution of 6 April 1788:

> [At the cemetery] an area has been designated for the burial of Mulatto *Congreganten* as well as for other Jewish mulattoes […] For that purpose, a list has been presented to the board of the *Hebra* with the names of

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[11] When a slave was 'bought for freedom', it meant that the new owner had bought the slave in order to have the slave freed (manumissioned).

[12] See Nassy 1974b:44, 142. It should be realized, though, that the group of coloured Jews would always remain rather small and never accounted for more than 10 % of the total number of Surinamese Jews.

admitted mulatto *Congreganten*, and other Jewish mulattos belonging to our community.[13]

The inclusion of illegitimate mulatto children indicates the social acceptance of the widespread practice of concubinage and its institutionalization in the community laws. Furthermore, the reference to 'a Judeo Mulat or Mulatress belonging to one of our Yachidim and not being a Congregant' in both the resolutions of 1780 and 1788, reveals another category within the Surinamese-Jewish community: apart from the white *Yachidim* and the free coloured *Congreganten*, the High German community apparently included a group of slaves of mixed Afro-Jewish descent. Because of their enslaved status, they could not become members of the religious congregation. According to the community regulations, the religious community included *Yachidim* and *Congreganten*: the 'Judeo Mulattos' were apparently neither. That these persons were considered to be part of a socially defined community nonetheless is indicated by their burial at the community's *Beth Haim*. As it seems, coloureds – even slaves – could participate in the social Jewish community; the religious community boundaries were far more rigid: only freed slaves could become a member.[14]

It has been argued that coloured Jews were only admitted as *Congregant* because they lacked a Jewish mother.[15] This idea is flawed. I have not found any evidence that supports the idea that *halakhic* law was used as the ultimate determinant who could or could not become a member of the religious community – at least not as a matter of precedence and not until the second half of the nineteenth century. Up until then, all community laws and bylaws refer to the colour of skin and a slave or freeman status as the primary boundary making attributes. This might be remarkable from an orthodox-Jewish point of view, but is sensible and the most straightforward explanation when following a Surinamese line of reasoning. After all, the entire Surinamese slave society was based on, justified by, a colour-coded racism.

The perception of the coloured Jews as 'a matter out of place' (in contrast to coloured Christians whose existence is not generally referred to as an exotic historic phenomenon) is primarily a current construction, resulting from the surprise of – mainly – Jewish historians and present-day Surinamese Jews over the absence of a dominant *halakhic* discourse in the historic Surinamese-Jewish community in combination with the currently prevailing conception of the Jews as white. Put

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[13] NSA *Escamoth* 1734-1821: 6-4-1788.

[14] Note that during the nineteenth century the expanding practice of manumission in Suriname in combination with a new manumission law brought about a number of cases in which slaves were actually admitted to the community. I will come back to this later.

[15] For example, Frankel 1999:3.

differently: coloured Jews are seen as paradoxical, because they are not supposed to have existed from a present-day western and orthodox-Jewish point of view.

Thus, from the mid eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century both the motivation and language of distinction within the Surinamese-Jewish community was racial rather than *halakhic*. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Amsterdam a century earlier. It is in the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam that the first references were made to black servants (presumably slaves brought in from the New World) and mixed-blood children of Jewish descent. In 1614, the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam appointed a separate plot at the *Beth Haim* of Ouderkerk for the burial of slaves, servants and 'Jewish girls not of our nation'.[16] A similar ordinance – also related to the cemetery – emerged in 1627. The *Mahamad* ordered:

> First, that no black or mulatto will be able to be buried in the cemetery except for those who had buried in it a Jewish mother: […] And further […] that none shall persuade any of the said blacks and mulattos, man or woman, or any other person who is not of the nation of Israel to be made Jews.[17]

In contrast to the Surinamese situation, here the language of exclusion is racial, but still within a *halakhic* framework, as shown by the explicit reference to a Jewish mother. It remains unknown whether deceased blacks or mulattos with a living Jewish mother (instead of a mother already buried at the cemetery) were denied burial space at the *Beth Haim;* however, this may only have had hypothetical meaning. The cemetery regulations were further detailed in 1647 when a separate section of the *Beth Haim* of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam was assigned for the burial of 'all the Jewish blacks and mulattos'. However, some important exceptions were made to this rule: those 'born in Judaism' whose parents were legally married according to Jewish law and custom, and those married to whites were allowed to be buried in the main part of the cemetery.[18] Even though this clause would obviously rule out most of the mulatto Jews, it shows that the motivation used for this racial segregation was still primarily *halakhic*. Although the differences with the Surinamese case may appear trivial, they are in fact very significant. In Suriname, no difference was made between legitimate coloured Jews and illegitimate coloured Jews: both were listed as *Congregant*.

It is essential to distinguish between regulations that discriminated against free coloured Jews, and regulations that discriminated against black slaves or servants,

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[16] Cohen 1991:305

[17] Schorsch 2004:430. See also Bodian 1997:196. Pieterse 1970:4.

[18] Bodian 1997:196.

although both are often put forward as examples of a similar racial attitude. Compare, for example, the following instances: an ordinance of the Amsterdam community of 1641, which stated that 'Sephardic women should not send their Black and mulatto girls (slaves) to reserve seats for them in the synagogue's woman's gallery'; a Portuguese-Jewish document of 1753, which mentions that the synagogue at Jodensavanne possesses a separate door for blacks (*Porta dos Negros*); a rule in the 1754 Portuguese *Askamoth*, which stated that 'considering the respect of the Holy Place, it is forbidden to black, mulatto or Indian women to enter the synagogue, with or without their masters children'; and an Amsterdam decree of 1644 that said that 'circumcised Negro Jews' were not to be called for the Torah or given any other prerogatives in the synagogue 'because such befits the reputation of the congregation and good governance'.[19]

The first three regulations – although racially motivated – do not refer to any practices of inclusion or exclusion in the community since it refers to servants, not community members.[20] The reference to the 'circumcised Negro Jews' is of a fundamentally different nature, albeit also far more ambiguous: it implies that circumcised black Jews were recognized as Jews, but were separated from the rest of the community because of their colour of skin. This decree is explicitly exclusionary and – because of the lack of any reference to *halakhic* understandings of Jewish identity – primarily racially motivated.

The story of the 'Darhe Jessarim'

Let us return to Suriname. At the dawn of the eighteenth century, coloured Jews assumed an ambiguous position in the Surinamese-Jewish community. The continued incorporation of coloured Jews, albeit as *Congregant*, went hand in hand with the increased tendency to fence them out; a tendency that is observed from the mid - eighteenth century onwards. Little by little, the inescapable colour-line of a colonial slave society drove the *Congreganten* to the margins of the community: the hindmost benches of the synagogue, the swampy and unwanted areas of the burial grounds, and the denial of all sorts of ritual rights in the synagogue and during the liminal phases of life. Especially the instances of death and burial became decisive moments of group identity politics. For instance, coloured Jews were denied the right to say an *ascaba* (soul-prayer) for other coloured Jews, nor could white Jews perform this prayer for

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[19] For a description of these examples, see Cohen 1991:161. For the 1754 Askamoth , see NA 1.05.11.18:106.

[20] The regulation concerning the *Porta dos Negros* is not fully clear on this matter, but it may be assumed that the separate door for blacks in the synagogue of Jodensavanne was put in place for servants.

them. And what is the symbolic meaning of ruling that the coloured Jews were only allowed to sit on the benches of the *abelim* (those in mourning)?[21]

The status of coloured Jews and their relationships with the dominant white segments of the Jewish community can be illustrated by the story of the Darhe Jessarim.[22] Apart from some shattered fragments of an earlier date, the main source of information to reconstruct the history of the Darhe Jessarim are the archived documents pertaining to the dispute between the coloured Jews and the Portuguese *Mahamad* over the status of the Darhe Jessarim between 1793 and 1794. These documents involve the correspondence between Governor De Frederici; the 'couleurlingen' as they called themselves, headed by the coloured Portuguese Jews Ruben Mendez Meza and Ismael de Britto; and the Portuguese regents Bueno de Mesquita, Brandon and de la Parra. It is in these documents that the background and chronological course of events are described in full as part of the argument between the parties involved. Of particular interest is a memorandum by Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto on behalf of and signed by circa 35 coloured Jews and dated 2 September 1793, and the reaction of the Portuguese regents on foresaid memorandum, dated 7 March 1794.[23]

Various scholars have recounted the history of the Darhe Jessarim.[24] According to Robert Cohen, the coloured Jews established their own fraternity Darhe Jessarim in 1759 in reaction to the racial differentiation and accumulation of exclusionary practices in the Portuguese-Jewish community. Oudschans Dentz called the fraternity a '*godshuis*' (House of God) located in Paramaribo. Both writings have contributed to the idea of a separate synagogue or prayer house for coloured Jews, located at the Sivaplein in Paramaribo that existed for several decades, after which it was dissolved by a governor's decree at the urgent request of the Portuguese *Mahamad*. According to these readings, the dissolving of the fraternity in 1794, and the mysterious 'demolishing' of the prayer house at the Sivaplein in 1800 marked the end of the coloured Jews as a group that mysteriously 'disappeared' in the early nineteenth century.[25]

Although Cohen's retelling of the history of the Darhe Jessarim is fascinating, his account misses some important details that slightly alter the meaning of the Darhe

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[21] NA 1.05.10.01: 527, Memorandum of the coloured Jews to Governor De Frederici, 2-9-1793; also NA 1.05.11.18: 106, 114, *Askamoth* 1754 and 1789.

[22] The Darhe Jessarim is also referred to in Chapter V in relation with the controversial burial of the coloured Jew Joseph Nassy in 1790.

[23] Note that the reaction by the Portuguese regents involves two separate letters to Governor De Frederici, both issued on the same date. NA 1.05.10.01: 527, 7-3-1794.

[24] See Cohen 1991, Oudschans Dentz 1929, Oudschans Dentz 1955:168-72, and Schorsch 2004:252-3.

[25] Oudschans Dentz 1929, Oudschans Dentz 1955.

Jessarim. Most importantly, I believe that the idea of a separate religious community for coloured Jews is largely inaccurate. There is no evidence that the Darhe Jessarim ever functioned as a separate congregation for coloured Jews. Arguably, it was only when a small meeting place was built on the ground of one of the members of the fraternity, that the Darhe Jessarim obtained the function of a prayer house; that is, in addition to the official synagogue services, not as a separate religious congregation for coloured Jews.

According to the memorandum of Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto, their fraternity was indeed founded in reaction to the accumulation of restrictions in the Portuguese community: their limited religious rights, the marriage regulation that confined every white Jew to the status of *Congregant* after marrying a coloured Jews, and so on.[26] The establishment of their fraternity was not intended to separate themselves from the Portuguese-Jewish community, however, and Ruben Mendes Meza referred to the fraternity as a 'Siva' (from *yeshiva*):[27]

> That they [...] gathered each time after the common [synagogue] service and prayer time of the Jewish Nation, and collectively said some prayers and psalms for each others edification, as is permitted to a fraternity or Siva without joining some or other congregation in this colony.[28]

Rather than functioning as a 'separate meeting house' where the coloured Jews could take up the full membership rank of *Yachidim* denied them at hitherto[29], their fraternity had the 'aim to edify' (*oogmerk tot stichten*).[30] According to Ruben Mendes Meza, the Darhe Jessarim was not a separate congregation for coloured Jews, but a *yeshiva* for both coloured Jews and whites (*Blank Jooden*) who chose to join them, and operated as a such for a period of 34 years. During this time, 'the Jews in this colony' never gave any expression of disapproval. In contrast, they had honoured their meetings with their presence, and had even financially supported the fraternity. Moreover, it had been

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[26] Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-17793. Note that the history of the Darhe Jessarim only recounts the history of the coloured Jews belonging to the Portuguese-Jewish community and do not include the coloured Jews of the High German community.

[27] Note the differences between a fraternity, *yeshiva* and congregation. Fraternities (societies or brotherhoods) play an important role in Jewish community life and are organized around a specific task or topic, especially around sickness, death and burial. *Yeshiva* are educational institutions for the study of Jewish texts (primarily Talmud). Congregation refers to the total group of members that constitute the religious community (in Dutch: *gemeente*).

[28] Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

[29] As suggested by Schorsch (Schorsch 2004:252-3).

[30] Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

the Portuguese regents who had made a call to all coloured Jews to invite them to join the fraternity in 1779.[31]

This status quo continued until 1790 when the relationship between the Darhe Jessarim and the Portuguese *Mahamad* became more tense. It was in fact David Cohen Nassy who played a prominent role in the renegotiating of the community boundaries vis-à-vis the coloured Jews in the 1790s. In March 1790, Nassy, in the role of the *Mahamad*'s secretary, initiated a publication that 'all mulattos and coloureds who want to assemble in their church under the title of *Congregant*, had to apply at the house of the regent Dd [David] Nassy to have their names listed'.

The coloured Jews perceived this call for registration as an attempt to restrict their status in the religious community further, and they refused to have themselves officially registered as *Congreganten*.[32] The Portuguese regents tell us a rather different story; not a story of exclusion, but of undefined and unclear community boundaries. In the following passage, extracted from their memorandum to the governor, the Portuguese regents give their account of the events (dated: 7 March 1794):

> That several of the Portuguese Jewish Nation, out of personal affection, reared some of the children of their slaves and mulatresses in the Jewish religion [...] that some of them were manumitted on request of their patrons, while other were born in illegitimate status after their manumission – that they learned about their [Jewish] origin from their mothers, took the names of Portuguese Jews, and mingled in the community of the Portuguese from childhood on, without the Regents having knowledge of their date of freedom or birth.

> That even though some of them were known by name [...] they could not be registered in the book of *fintas*, as several of them never showed their letters of manumission to the regents, nor did announce a birth [...].

> That the Regents, acknowledging that they professed Judaism from childhood [...] and did their prayers in our church; out of respect for our religion and for their peace of mind, have buried them in our graveyard, and let them enjoy all religious comfort, without demanding any *finta* in general.

> That the *Junta* [Regents and old Regents], considering the fact that their numbers had increased in due course, had believed it to be reasonable to tax them according to the *Askamoth* [community regulations], also to distinguish between those who were free and those still in slavery, as well as to identify those who belong to the High German Nation [...] to prevent

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[31]   Oudschans Dentz 1927:27.

[32]   Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

this irregularity, the Junta issued a Notification dated 18 March 1784 to gain knowledge of this [uncertainty] [...].

Which notification reads: 'that the *Mahamad* and *Junta*, considering the several daily difficulties with Jewish free mulattos, which following the *Askamoth* of the community could be regarded as *Congreganten*, but are not formally known to belong to our Portuguese Jewish Nation [...], want to be informed with name and surname on these persons and especially on those of the High German Nation, as they cannot mingle among us, in order not to cause any conflicts with the other community.'

Thus, from the vantage point of the regents, the registration of the coloured Jews was not an act of exclusion, but part of a broader project to redefine the community boundaries and reorganize the congregation, not just vis-à-vis the coloured Jews, but also in relation to the High German Jews.

The coloured Jews referred to themselves in their memorandum as 'not being *Yachidim* or *Congreganten*'. Presumably, they were part of that unregistered group the regents referred to, and whose status in the community the regents sought to clarify. The group of coloured Jews as represented by Mendes Meza and Britto feared that mandatory registration was a first step towards a definite status as *Congregant*, which would automatically lead to restriction of their privileges. The fact that they had been able to maintain an ambiguous status hitherto (consciously or otherwise) had provided them with a means to tacitly disregard some of the restrictions that normally applied to *Congreganten*. It is unclear, however, whether Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto represented all coloured Jews within the Portuguese community, or merely those with an undefined status.

This debate on mandatory registration was only a prelude of things to come. The tumultuous events surrounding the burial of Joseph de David Cohen Nassy on 18 April 1790 served as the proverbial last drop that lead to full escalation of the conflict between the coloured Jews and the Portuguese Jews. The conflict over the funeral of Joseph Nassy was used as a pretext by the Portuguese-Jewish regents for questioning the Portuguese community boundaries. After the controversial funeral of Joseph Nassy, the *Mahamad* concluded that the coloured Jews acted too self-willed and independent from the *Mahamad's* rule. The coloured Jews on their part conceived the acts of the *Mahamad* as a blatant denial of their rights. It was on 28 April 1790 that the coloured Jews, led by Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto, addressed themselves directly to the Portuguese regents and requested full community rights, and an equal status as *Yachidim*.[33] Surprisingly, the Portuguese regents invited the coloured Jews to make up a draft version of rules and regulations by which they intended to organize and run their fraternity, not as a *yeshiva*, but as a separate congregation.

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[33]   Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

The coloured Jews subsequently delivered their draft regulations on 4 May 1791, at which point the schism between the two parties only widened. The *Mahamad* refused to acknowledge the proposed document since it appeared that the coloured Jews' idea of a separate congregation differed fundamentally from their point of view. The coloured Jews envisioned a separate congregation where they could enjoy the religious privileges denied to them in the Portuguese religious community, but which would still be under the protection of the Portuguese community. Note the essential last point, which implied that the coloured Jews would still be entitled to poor relief from the Portuguese community, burial at the communities *Beth Haim,* and other rights reserved for community members.

A separate congregation for coloured Jews under the umbrella of the Portuguese-Jewish community was clearly beyond what the Portuguese regents had in mind: their wish was to segregate the coloured Jews from their white community, not by creating a separate religious community where the coloured Jews could enjoy the privileges of white Jews, but by creating a form of apartheid. They foresaw a separate place of worship for coloured Jews, while at the same time maintaining full privileges exclusively for white Jews; surely, the coloured Jews would not be granted privileges in the rituals surrounding death and burial and should – at best – only be allowed limited rights to poor relief. The regents would only be able to sustain their concept of apartheid by explicitly forbidding white Jews to support the coloured Jews in erecting and maintaining their own community in any way.

Bitterly disappointed, the coloured Jews realized that they would be better off as listed *Congreganten* of the community than as a separate fraternity. After a period of no less than two years, the coloured Jews readdressed themselves to the regents:

> That the petitioners [...] after all their fruitless requests to the Portuguese Jewish Nation had thought they would not do any wrong, when they would renounce their first intention and would only continue with their untroubled prayer meetings, which, although organized under the name of Darhe Jessarim, are hold as a private college or meeting in a house built on the territory of one of its members[34]

This time the Portuguese leadership was less cooperative: they ordered the immediate dissolution of the Darhe Jessarim. Any continued activity would be fined 150 guilders for the founders and 75 guilders for any other member involved in the fraternity.

In their struggle for recognition, the coloured Jews now turned to the colonial administration to support their cause. They accused the *Mahamad* of wrongful behaviour and requested the governor to acknowledge their fraternity. The Portuguese regents were outraged. In a long and biting exposé, they stated that the 'agreement

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[34]   Memorandum of the Couleurlingen to Governor De Frederici. NA 1.05.10.01:527, 2-9-1793.

with the request of the mulatto Jews would jeopardize the colony's peace and result in a society wherein anyone could circumvent the law.' The law – Dutch colonial law and Jewish community regulations that is – should be enforced, and as the authorized board of the Jewish community, the *Mahamad* was responsible for the observance of the law by the community members. While the appeal of the Portuguese regents may appear an attempt to enforce existing laws, the underlying motive of the *Mahamad* was more likely aimed at upholding colonial ideas on colour and social status, and the rule of a white community leadership over its coloured subordinates. In their memorandum to the governor, the Portuguese regents display a deep concern with any implication that 'a manumitted Negro would be equal to a White'.[35]

Perhaps, it is in this final statement that we should search for the underlying sensibilities regarding the riotous funeral of Joseph de David Cohen Nassy. Joseph de David Cohen Nassy was a manumitted slave; now, what if he had been a slave of David Cohen Nassy, one of the prominent members of the Portuguese-Jewish community? Such a conjecture – which is not unlikely – touches the sore spot. The funeral of a formal slave with the honours and all the regard normally accorded to a white community leader: the whole situation would have been utterly offensive and incomprehensible from the perspective of David Cohen. In the words of Robert Cohen: 'the gripe of a former master, who has seen his former slave buried with the honours of a leader'.[36]

Eventually, the governor agreed with the arguments put forward by the *Mahamad,* and the coloured Jews were ordered to submit to the authority and rule of 'the Regents and Deputies of the Portuguese Jewish nation'. The Darhe Jessarim was officially disbanded in 1794.

Based on the story of the Darhe Jessarim some observations can be made. First, the sheer fact that anno 1794, a group of coloured Jews, among whom several manumitted slaves, dared to challenge the authority of the white Jewish elite is remarkable. Although the Portuguese-Jewish regents tried to depict the coloured petitioners as a troupe of troublemakers, manumitted slaves, and unknown persons who half-heartedly participated in Jewish religious life, this was clearly not the case. In an earlier letter to Governor De Frederici, the Portuguese regents had stated that 'some of the signatories are insolvent, underage and without any possessions. Some however are well-to-do. Together they want, as it seems, to form a corpus'.[37]

Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto, identified as the leaders by the Portuguese regents, were far from being the average lower class coloured or

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[35]   Portuguese regents to Governor De Frederici, NA 1.05.10.01:527, 7-3-1794.

[36]   Cohen 1991:165.

[37]   Portuguese regents to Governor De Frederici, NA 1.05.10.01:527, 11-11-1793.

manumitted slave, however. They were well-educated and worldly men: the sheer length of their memorandum (twenty pages) indicates their erudition and social standing. Not only could they read and write, but they possessed extensive knowledge of Jewish law and ritual, too. They were also familiar with rules of engagement of political elite life in the colony, readily engaging the establishment through petitioning and making an appeal to the governor. Moreover, Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto were both sergeants in the coloured division of the civil guard of Paramaribo, while Ruben Mendes Meza's brother even ranked as captain in that same militia.[38] This places the whole conflict in a slightly different perspective. These men were clearly the exponents of an emerging coloured elite. Not only did they challenge the authority of the *Mahamad*; more importantly, they challenged their own subordinate status as coloureds in a race-based society.

A second observation involves the periodization of the conflict over the status of the Darhe Jessarim. It is no coincidence that the increasingly exclusionary practices vis-à-vis the coloured Jews – with the conflict over Darhe Jessarim as its acme – took place during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although the increasing numbers of coloured Jews in the Jewish community played its part in fostering this trend, the prime explanation should be sought in the general context of a 'colouring' Surinamese society. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Suriname society was no longer that dichotomized society of the early colonial years; instead, Suriname's social realm had become highly creolized. Colour lines had blurred, and interracial mixing had become common practice.[39] Like elsewhere in the Caribbean, the system of slavery gave rise to ambiguous interpersonal relationships. Master-slave relationships cut across black-white boundaries, connecting people of different race and social status. Consequently, a considerable coloured population had come into being. Some coloureds had shared in the estates of their white relatives and achieved considerable wealth, which further undermined the social structure of a race-based society, where skin colour determined ones social position.

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[38] The brother of Ruben Mendes Meza was Evert de Courval. Both had the same Afro-Surinamese mother but apparently different fathers; De Courval was a Christian. Personal communication with J.J.Vrij, 28-9-2006.

[39] Take, for instance, the much-discussed case of Elisabeth Samson, a wealthy free black woman. Her intended marriage to a white man in 1764, and actual marriage to another white man in 1767, shocked the colonial elites of Suriname. In a reaction to the intended marriage of Elisabeth Samson, the colonial officials tried to have the Directors of the Society of Suriname promulgate a law against marriages between black women and white men. This attempt failed, however, as the Directors decided that in Holland there was no law against such reunions. Although Elisabeth Samson probably was the first black woman to marry a white man, it is known that several coloured women (mulattas) preceded Elisabeth Samson, even as early as 1714. Marriages between white men and coloured women where considered far less disgraceful than marriages with black women. This can be illustrated by the fact that the future Governor Jan Nepveu married a mestiza in 1766. On free blacks and coloureds in Suriname, see Hoefte 2004. Cynthia McLeod wrote a study of Elisabeth Samson: McLeod 1996.

Paradoxically, the impairment of a racially defined society was countervailed by a heightened sensitivity towards the different shades of skin colour, the degree of miscegenation and the different social status attached to each category. The *Askamoth* of the Portuguese-Jewish community, for example, exhibit an increasing racialization of the community regulations: while the 1754 *Askamoth* only distinguished two racial categories, mulatto and white, by the time of 1787 it would distinguish a plethora of categories under the heading of *Congreganten,* which included 'all Jewish mulattos, blacks, mestices and castices who carry the name of, or are known to be descended of the Portuguese or Spanish Nation'.[40]

Considering these racialized regulations, it is remarkable that the coloured Jews referred to themselves as '*couleurlingen*' [coloureds]. The term 'coloured' or '*couleurling*' encompassed all those of mixed descent: those with very light skin who phenotypically appeared to be European, as well as those with darker appearances. Although the term 'coloured' was used as a general reference to the free middle sections of mixed descent, it was not an official legal category. This provided the Portuguese regents with an additional argument to question the legitimacy of the memorandum of the coloured Jews to the governor: they argued that the memorandum was written to represent the interest of a section of the Surinamese population that officially did not even exist.

In their letter to Governor De Frederici, the coloured Jews did neither clarify nor elaborate why they called themselves '*couleurlingen*'. It may have been an attempt to veil the heterogeneous composition of their group: calling themselves mulattos (as the Jewish regents did) may have offended the mestizos or castices among them. Yet, the self-identification as '*couleurlingen*' may also have been an attempt of the coloured Jews to manoeuvre themselves outside of the authoritative reach of the Portuguese-Jewish regents. By naming themselves 'coloured' instead of mulattos (or any of the other denominations referred to in the community regulations), the coloured Jews could claim that the Portuguese-Jewish regents had no authority over them, which entitled them to establish their own congregation. The coloured Jews clearly favoured an undefined position, above a defined but marginalized status as *Congregant*. The regents, in contrast, had everything to gain from clearly defined community boundaries, as is legitimized their authoritative powers vis-à-vis the colonial administration. In the end, the interests of the regents corresponded with those of the colonial administration: an inclusive Jewish community supported the colonial policy of indirect rule of the Surinamese Jews.

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[40] NA 1.05.11.18: 114.

Marrying the other (II): white-coloured mixed marriages and dissolving colour lines

Although the coloured Jews drew the short straw in the conflict over the Darhe Jessarim, the legitimacy of racial distinction had undeniably lost ground in the Surinamese-Jewish community. The fact that these coloured Jews dared to challenge the Portuguese Jewish elite indicates a changing status quo, not only in the Jewish community, but also in the Surinamese society at large. The Surinamese-Jewish community was changing and would continue to change. Important catalysts in this process were white Jewish men who married coloured women. These men – who only made up a few households – turned out to be essential in the history of the coloured Jews and shifting status in the Surinamese-Jewish community.

The first to question the legitimacy of a racial differentiated community were white Surinamese Jews who had lost their status as full-fledged members of the religious community because of their marriage to coloured women. The 1754 *Askamoth* not only explicitly stated that mulattos were no longer to be admitted as full members (*Yachidim*), it was also ruled that white men who married coloured women lost their status of *Yachid*:

> That all white persons, who come to marry mulatresses, either according to our religious law or only for the Magistrates [custom law marriage], will be degraded as *Yachidim* and will be listed as *Congreganten* and considered mulatto until the second generation.[41]

This loss of status should not be underestimated as some of these men were former regents and now had to share ranks with the coloureds: an enormous loss of prestige! Their story gives the history of the coloured Jews an unexpected turn.

Take David Abraham de Vries, who had lived in concubinage for eleven years with the coloured *Congregant* Mariana Levij, and fathered three sons. In 1796, he decided to marry Marianna Levij and acknowledge his sons as his legitimate offspring, something that was generally considered a good deed in Suriname. Now, shortly after his marriage, he had received an extract from the resolution of 1772 and an accompanying letter in which he was informed that he had lost his rights as a *Yachid* by marrying Mariana Levij, and hence was degraded to the status of *Congregant*, 'the same class as a mulatto'.[42] In his return letter to the *Mahamad*, David Abraham de Vries pleaded:

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[41]   NA 1.05.11.18:106.

[42]   Recall that *Yachidim* were full-fledged community members, while *Congreganten* were community members with limited rights only. The group of *Congreganten* included coloured Jews, and further intermarried persons who had lost their status of *Yachid* after their marriage, as well as those born out of wedlock.

> Please note what kind of individual I have married. A person who has lived together with me as a Jewess for eleven years, who has observed all the duties of a good housewife, and gave birth to three sons, who have all been circumcised according to Jewish law and custom. Moreover, my present housewife could hardly be considered a coloured person since her brother is doing his civil service with the whites.[43]

His urgent request to be readmitted as a *Yachid* was ignored by his community elders. In an ultimate attempt to accomplish his re-admission, Abraham de Vries turned to the governor. Upon close reading of his writings to the governor, David Abraham de Vries clearly manifests his creole mentality and localized cultural framework. In his quest for rehabilitation, he points at the spirit of times – 'given that we now live in an era of Freedom, Equality and Fraternity' – and local Surinamese social values:

> [T]he supplicant humbly requests to be discharged [of his *Congregant* status], since it was out of humanity, virtue and decency that incited the supplicant [to marry Marianna Levij], as well as in recognition of her fidelity proven to me for eleven year, and the fatherly heart to legitimate his children.
>
> The supplicant has demonstrated that a certain Abraham de Parra, a mulatto whose mother was a negress, was tolerated among us as a *Yachid*, like Dina de Vries today, whose mother is a *bokkin*.[44] Moreover, it has already happened here [in Suriname] that Christian clergy men have married mulatresses, yet remained practicing as clergyman and continued to be members of their congregations. Therefore, the supplicant believes he did not commit a sin, or acted against God's commandments.[45]

Similar expressions of creolized Jewishness are found in a missive of Emanuel Elias Emanuels, addressed to the High German *Mahamad* in 1826. Emanuel Emanuels was white, eloquent and well educated. As an adjunct and former member of the High German *Mahamad*, he belonged to the elite of the Surinamese-Jewish community.

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[43] NSA Box 24 AJA: 21-4-1796. For the incorporation of light-skinned coloureds in white militias of the civil guard, see Vrij 2005:28.

[44] In common parlance, the indigenous population was referred to as *bokken;* a *bokkin* was an Indian woman. Benjamins 1914

[45] NSA Box 24 AJA: 21-4-1796 and 2-7-1796. De Vries refers to the mulatta Nanette Susanna Petersen, who married successively the clergymen Donkermann and Sporong in the 1780s. Not long after his marriage with Marianna Levij, David Abraham de Vries died. Marianna – now referred to as widow de Vries – remarried the white Jacob Salomon Samson. Their marriage was religiously consecrated on the 18th of March 1799. Only two weeks after their marriage, the newly weds received a letter from the High German regents: from now on both husband and wife would be listed as Congreganten. Also Jacob Salomon Samson's protested fiercely against his loss of status, but without success. Samson 1956b:3.

Like his predecessors, Emanuels lost his status of *Yachid* after his marriage to a coloured woman.

The opening lines are revealing: Emanuels presented himself as 'Emanuel Elias Emanuels, Citizen, Resident of the colony and also Member of the community'.[46] A citizen's spirit put into words! Like Abraham de Vries, he refered to 'this Age of Enlightenment, wherein prejudices against such [mixed] marriages have nearly disappeared'. Equally interesting is the comparison he drew between his 'so-called misbehaviour' of marrying a coloured woman – 'not even a mulatto, but a *poestice*' – and the alternative of continuing his extramarital relationship with his mistress, with whom he had shared his life for more than fourteen years. This, according to Emanuels it would be an 'ungracious, downright criminal' thing to do, not in the least since it would leave his children in an illegitimate position. Emanuels concluded his argument with a pointed picture of the social acceptance of mixed marriages in the higher echelons of the Surinamese society, where white men could marry coloured women without losing their social status:

> Neither in society nor in the church community will a white [men] who marries a mulatto of a different faith lose his prerogatives. I will give three examples out of the numerous mixed marriages that exist.
>
> Mr. Jacob de Frederici of the Christian faith married Miss Jacoba Wolff, a mestizo whose father was a Christian whose mother was a Jewess. Nevertheless, Mr. Frederici was promoted [after his marriage] as an officer of the Civil Service, a member of the Church Council and elected into the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice of this colony. Presumably, Mr. Frederici held other high positions that the supplicant cannot remember.
>
> And is not Doctor Turkow of the Christian religion, married to Miss Meintje Sanches, a mestizo whose father is an Israelite and whose mother a Heathen? Has this marriage proven to be a constraint in his promotion as a surgeon major? Finally, was Reverent Sporong not married to a mulatress?[47]

When the *Mahamad* received the letter of Emanuel Elias Emanuels, they arranged a meeting. The next day, the High German *Mahamad* decided that it was not possible to determine the origin of Marianna Marcus Samson with certainty. Therefore, Emanuels would be readmitted as a *Yachid*.[48]

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46   NSA Miscellaneous: 27-12-1826.

47   NSA Miscellaneous: 27-12-1826

48   NSA Minutes 1827-1831, 18-01-1827.

Thus, while it was accepted for coloured Jews to be incorporated in the Jewish community, it was – depending on the level of miscegenation - not acceptable for white Jewish men to marry them.[49] Based on the stories like that of Abraham de Vries or Emanuel Emanuels, it can be concluded that it was not the *Congregant* status of coloured Jews as such losing ground in the community. De Vries and Emanuels where white Jews who – after their degradation as full members following their marriage with coloured women – became involved in conflicts with their *Mahamad*. Their main imperative appears to be their loss of social status, rather than a fundamental objection against a racially defined Surinamese-Jewish community. Rather than contradictions between black and white, pure and simple, these conflicts were primarily quarrels pertaining to (male) whiteness and social status. However, as the number of mixed marriages and mixed relationships increased, the legitimacy of racialized community boundaries was undermined from the inside.

The first step towards the full incorporation of coloured Jews in the religious community was – again – related to the cemetery. In 1802, the *Mahamad* of the Portuguese community decided to abolish all differences in burial rites between *Yachidim* and *Congreganten*.[50] In the years thereafter, the number of requests by coloureds to be admitted as *Congregant* tripled. Now, whole families requested to be admitted as *Congreganten*, such as the family of Lea Jacob Levy, who successfully requested her eight children and grandchildren to be admitted as *Congregant* to the High German community.[51] Between 1830 and 1840, an estimated 35 to 50 requests were made for the admittance of coloureds or manumitted slaves as *Congregant* in either the Portuguese or High German Jewish community. Moreover, the number of slave requests for admittance increased considerably. The Surinamese-Jewish community was changing and would continue to change.

The community elders realized that a continued practice of racial differentiation would only result in numerous new conflicts that would disturb the community. In August 1838, the High German regents decided that *Congreganten* were no longer to

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[49] Noteworthy is the fact that Marianna Marcus Samson, the coloured woman in question, was a *poestice* and light skinned. In general, such light-skinned 'coloureds' were included in the category of whites, as Mr. Emanuels did not fail to emphasize. However, Marianna Marcus Samson was also born out of wedlock, which in itself would confine her to a *Congregant* status (despite her light skin). Although the community regulations did not mention any penalty on marrying someone of such status, such marriages were frowned upon. In 1831, two members lost their status after a marriage with women who were born out of wedlock, but were readmitted, as 'such distinctions do not correspond with the present time'. NSA Minutes 1827-1831, 4-9-1831.

[50] NA 1.05.11.18: 437, 13-4-1802.

[51] NSA Repertorium 1838-1841: 24-2-1839. At the risk of repeating myself, one should keep in mind that in absolute terms we are talking small numbers. At the start of the nineteenth century, the group of coloured Jews counted about 100 individuals.

be buried separately at the *Beth Haim*.[52] This decree was reconfirmed in May 1841. Burial on separate places was no longer permitted, since the appointment of less honourable burial plots to community members who in one way or the other were not considered full members, was considered discriminatory and no longer justified. This emancipation of *Congreganten* on the burial ground was extended to their membership of the religious community at large. In the same month, the chair of the High German community deliberated 'if it would not be more in accordance with the spirit of times of the present age, to dissolve this distinction between Israelites not born from white parents and other members and grant equal rights to the admitted Congreganten.'[53] The Church Council agreed and a letter was sent to the governor to obtain his approval – which he granted on the 17 May 1841.[54] After more than half a century of recurring conflicts over the status of coloured Jews, the archives suddenly fall silent.

Does it mean that colour ceased to be an issue in community affairs from the mid nineteenth century onwards, or that anybody, black or white, could join the Surinamese-Jewish community? On the contrary, when colour was no longer used to differentiate between *Yachidim* and *Congreganten*, the practice of including blacks or coloureds into the community (free or slave) was increasingly restricted. A first indication of this altered practice is provided by the District registers .The District register of 1846 listed about 60 coloured Jews, the majority were High German women.[55] A fair number of other coloureds, whose family names and housemates suggest Jewish fathers, were not listed as Jews, but as members of a Christian congregation. In fact, it became common practice during this episode in history that the coloured offspring of mixed relationships were incorporated in Christian congregations.[56] At first sight, this practice seems to indicate a redefinition of (white) Surinamese-Jewish community boundaries during the nineteenth century. This was also noted by (non-Jewish) contemporaries like Adriaan Francois Lammens, a Dutch lawyer who served in Suriname, when he remarked:

> 15 January, the children of a Jewish gentleman, the lawyer Presburg, were baptized by a protestant pastor, and thus incorporated in that church

...

52 NSA Repertorium 1838-1841: 16-8-1838.

53 NSA Minutes 1837-1841: 12-5-1841; Outgoing Letters 1838-1855: 17-5-1841.

54 NSA Minutes 1837-1841: 19-5-1841.

55 The district register of 1846 (though incomplete) lists 44 coloured Jewish women and 22 coloured Jewish men. The overrepresentation of coloured women only applies to the High German community: 41 were listed as High German Jews: 10 men and 31 women; 25 coloured persons were listed as Portuguese: 12 men and 13 women. National Archive Suriname, 36: District register 1846. The digitalized data of the 1846 district registers was kindly donated by P. Dikland.

56 See NA 1.05.08: 635-639; 1.05.11.09:58-69. National Archive Suriname, 36: District register 1846.

community, even though the father and the mother did not join that church. That the Jews were very indignant about this incident was to be expected, but does raise some surprise since all their children begotten by their housekeepers, and thus out of wedlock, are raised in one of the other church communities, that is outside Judaism. Apparently, this was not the case in the old days, since there are coloureds [in Suriname] who are dedicated to the Jewish religion[57]

However, as noted before, also the opposite happened. The early nineteenth century saw a considerable increase in the number of coloureds and manumitted slaves – the latter had to be incorporated in a religious congregation by law, be it Christian or Jewish – that requested to be admitted as *Congregant* to the High German and Portuguese-Jewish communities. Despite some heavy debates among the regents, most requests were acknowledged, although, as *Congreganten*, they were still excluded from the inner-circles of the religious Surinamese-Jewish communities. Thus, while some Jewish men chose to incorporate their coloured children in Christian congregations, others chose for their children to be admitted to the Jewish community. The underlying motives for these different practices remain unclear.[58]

When the distinction between *Congreganten* and *Yachidim* was resolved, new rules were drawn regarding 'the admittance of free persons and persons who belong to the rank of slaves'. Slaves could now be admitted as members of the community under the condition that they would receive freedom within a fixed period of six months, and after the payment of a sum of three hundred guilders to the community cash.[59]. These new regulations were first drawn-up by the Portuguese-Jewish community on 11 March 1841, but were enforced in both communities.[60]

The slave regulations were closely related to the new Manumission Law of 1832. According to this law, one of the conditions for manumission was submitted evidence that the slave in question was admitted in a recognized church community, which also included the Jewish communities. In other words, 'heathens' could not be manumissioned. This exerted the pressure on the community elders to admit slaves

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[57]   Quoted in Lammens 1982 :171.

[58]   I have not found any documents that could shed some light on this matter.

[59]   See NA 1.05.11.18:50; NA 1.05.11.18:117; also NA 2.07.01.05:447, 11-3-1841 and 11-12-1842. Later, the requirement of a guarantee of three hundred guilders was replaced by the regulation that a newly admitted person could not make any claim of community support during the first ten years of membership. Interestingly, in a letter to the governor, the High German community elders wrote: 'since the community does not have a separate cemetery for free persons and slaves, conflicts have arisen concerning the burial of slaves. To end these collisions the Church Council has decided to expedite the obtaining of manumission.' NSA Outgoing Letters 1838-1855: 22-12-1842.

[60]   Like the resolution of May 1841, the exact status of these regulations remains unclear. Presumably they were not officially ratified, as the slave regulations were part of the lingering negotiations over the new church regulations during this period, but were put into daily practice nonetheless.

into their communities.[61] The regulations of 1841 were relatively short lived, however. The end of slavery in Suriname in 1863 automatically ushered the end of a religious community based on social (slave-freeman) status.

2   THE LAST BOUNDARY: JEWS AND NON-JEWS, COLOUREDS AND CHRISTIANS

When colour ceased to be an overt criterion for discrimination within the Surinamese-Jewish community halfway into the nineteenth century, new boundaries were erected and other exclusionary practices became dominant. Instead, *halakhic* law, and particularly the importance of a Jewish mother, would become more decisive from the mid nineteenth century onwards. The renewed interest in *halakha* in the late nineteenth century was not only the outcome of a changing colonial order in Suriname, but also can be explained by the renewed ties of the Surinamese-Jewish community with the Dutch Jewish community.

It was during this period that important proponents for a shift to *halakhic* rule were introduced in the Surinamese-Jewish community: the arrival of Chief Rabbi Lewenstein in 1857 marks the first of a series of arrivals of Dutch rabbis and religious teachers to Suriname. Their presence would kindle a latent wish of the Surinamese-Jews community leaders to re-establish their relationship with world Jewry in general and with the Amsterdam mother community in particular. It so happened that the Amsterdam chief rabbinate was consulted in these issues pertaining to Jewish-Christian relationships. Somewhat paradoxically, the position of the Chief Rabbi and the advice from Amsterdam would only further complicate matters for the Surinamese community: what were they to make of these viewpoints, which were primarily based on orthodox, *halakhic* interpretation of Judaism, with little regard to the specifics of the Surinamese situation?

The ever-growing number of mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews, and, related, the status of non-*halakhic* children, caused much dissent among members and community leaders alike. What had never been at issue before, now became a constant source of conflict: the importance of a *halakhic* Jewish identity. The meaning of those conflicts surpasses individual narratives of social status or community exclusion, and exposes all the twists and turns of a community in transition. They express a creole

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[61]   Mordechai Arbell writes that the Jewish community leaders were forced to accept children of manumissioned slaves that had converted to Judaism as community members by governmental decree in 1856. The necessity of such a decree would indicate an aversion towards the incorporation of manumissioned slaves. However, as it seems, Arbell's assertion is based upon a misreading of the document. The governmental decree in question, requests the High German community leaders to specify which manumissioned slaves, slaves and slave-children enjoyed religious education in their community. Compare Arbell 2002:109 and AJA, Box 1676, Folder 15 document 88/1856.

mental framing of the Surinamese Jews, and – simultaneously – a continued wish to belong to the worldwide (orthodox) Jewish community. It is during this period that Jewish-Christian mixed married couples acted as the protagonists of more liberal notions of Surinamese-Jewishness, a position that was clearly at odds with the more orthodox notions of the Dutch rabbis that served in Suriname.

Marrying the other (III): Jewish – Christian mixed marriages and the revival of *halakha*

Until the early nineteenth century, Jewish-Christian relations had never been a major issue in the making of the Surinamese-Jewish community. The community regulations of the late eighteenth century that rigorously condemned marriages between Portuguese and High German Jews, and between white and coloured Jews, did not even consider the possibility of a Jew marrying a Christian; a proposition that may have been considered too preposterous to contemplate at that time.

The first known marriage between a Surinamese Jew and a Christian woman dates from January 1820, when the *castice* David del Prado married the *mulatta* Simcha Pardo, who had recently been baptised and had joined the Lutheran church.[62] Two years after their marriage, in February 1822, David del Prado lost his position in the community as a ritual butcher: his marriage to a Christian woman, and the admission of his children to a Christian congregation, had made him 'absolutely unsuitable to slaughter for the Jews'.[63] His marriage could not have any consequences for his prerogatives as a *Yachid,* however – as a *castice* who was born out of wedlock, David del Prado was listed as a *Congregant*. In fact, he had been one of the signatories of the memorandum of the coloured Jews in 1793, when a coloured Jews challenged the Portuguese regents over the status of the Darhe Jessarim.[64]

A few months later, in April 1820, the Portuguese Jew Abraham de Moses Bueno de Mesquita married Rebecca Lynch Pindy, a young Christian woman who converted to Judaism upon their wedding. Abraham Bueno de Mesquita certainly was not an average Surinamese Jew: he had clashed with the *Mahamad* over his non-conformist behaviour on several occasions; he had been expelled from the colony by Governor De Frederici in 1798; and he had served on a warship for several years before returning to Suriname where he met Rebecca Lynch Pindy. After having a

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[62] For the marriage between David del Prado and Simcha Pardo, see NA, 1.05.11.16:8, 31-12-1819; NA, 1.05.11.16:15, 16-1-1819. For the coloured, *castice* background of David del Prado, see NA, 1.05.10.07:313, Register of taxable freemen (*Register van belastingplichtige vrijlieden*), 1806-1818 (courtesy of J.J. Vrij).

[63] NSA Minutes 1820-1827, 17-2-1822.

[64] J.J.Vrij pointed me at this conjuncture.

daughter and a son,[65] Rebecca and Abraham were now to be united in matrimony. Their marriage was a first sign of altering relations between Jews and Christians.

Female members marrying Christian males were judged rather differently, however. When the widow Weil, born Elias, married the Christian Bercks in 1823, the church council discussed whether the widow Weil should lose her prerogatives as a member of the High German community, following the same line of reasoning regarding Portuguese – High German mixed marriages. The council decided to seek the advice of the local Jewish lawyer Presburg in this matter first,[66] and even consulted the Amsterdam regents. It appears that, ultimately, the widow Weil was allowed to maintain her community membership: the District registers of 1831 lists a member of the High German community under the name of Rebecca Berkx, which is likely to be the same person. Yet, Mrs. Berkx was no longer wholeheartedly considered a full member: when she requested to have a burial plot reserved adjacent to the grave of her first husband, the community elders turned her down.

During the first part of the nineteenth century, mixed Jewish-Christian marriages were still isolated cases. Although these events did force the community elders to reconsider their community boundaries – perhaps serving as a prelude for things to come – it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that Jewish-Christian relationships would become a decisive factor in the negotiation of Jewishness in Suriname. The number of mixed Jewish-Christian marriages increased, and Christians started to enter the community. At first, their presence remained confined to the exterior circles of the community, as partners they were part of a socially defined community but without actively participating in the religious congregation. It was the religious status of their offspring, however, that would become a moot point of discussion among the Surinamese Jews.

In 1872, the president of the High German community received a request from the Christian Monsanto to have his daughter Simcha, conceived by his wife, the High German Sally Heilbron, admitted to the High German community. The president was quite blunt in his reaction when he stated 'that Jewesses who married Christians, are not supposed to be members of the community any longer, and as such should not be levied with finta or church tax'; in his opinion neither could her child be a member of the community.[67] This verdict is remarkable considering that the child should be considered Jewish under *halakhic* law, and it evoked reactions by other members of

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[65] Cohen 1982a:98.

[66] NSA Minutes 1820-1827, 29-7-1823; 14-8-1823. It is a remarkable coincidence that Presburg himself would have his children baptized and admitted to a Christian congregation some years later. Lammens 1982 :171.

[67] NSA minutes, 1867-1880, 3-6-1872.

the church council who clearly did not approve of the words of the chair; it was decided that the child was to be admitted to the community after all.[68]

The majority of the disputes regarding mixed Jewish-Christian marriages involved Jewish men and Christian women, however, as was the case of the family Bibaz. It was in October 1893, when the Portuguese Jew Bueno Bibaz addressed himself to the church council. He was the brother of the deceased Izak Bueno Bibaz, and had befriended the widow of his brother, Mrs. A. Bueno Bibaz-Kennedy, and their two children: Selina and Johanna Bueno Bibaz. A month earlier, the mother of the children (herself not Jewish) had requested the church council to have her children admitted to the Portuguese-Jewish community and 'have them participate in catechism [sic]'.[69] The request was denied, however, upon which Bueno Bibaz wrote to the church council:

> Aforementioned brother [of the undersigned] was strongly inclined to have his children raised as Israelites – as is known to the Church Council. Upon the death of his brother, the undersigned had offered his help and care for his brother's children, and it was thus that the undersigned supported the request of the mother to sign up the children in the church registers knowing that this was the wish of the deceased. The undersigned had been taken aback by the letter of the church council, as it was beyond him to think that there are church regulations, which ruled that children of an Israelite – this much is sure – should be removed from Judaism […]. It has particularly drawn the attention of the undersigned that these regulations have never been applied before, and that the children of his brother are the first ones to be subjected to these rules […]. He regrets that the Mosaic [Law] knows such regulations, which have originated from the advise of certain rabbis in Amsterdam who value notions, concepts and customs that belong in centuries long gone and disgrace the purely Mosaic [Law].[70]

Parallel to the developments surrounding Jewish-Christian mixed marriages, the number of non-Jews that were admitted to the community had reduced significantly ever since the arrival of Dutch rabbis. The lament of the brother of the deceased Isak Bueno Bibaz that the 'regulations that remove the children of an Israelite from Judaism' were applied to his brother's children for the first time in 1893, is not quite

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[68] When an American rabbi visited Suriname 70 years later in 1943 he noticed 'the lack of missionary activity' when referring to the practice of raising children of Jewish mothers and non-Jewish fathers outside Judaism (see Samson 1951:6). It remains unclear, however, whether this practice results from active exclusionary politics from the side of the community elders or was driven by a conscious withdrawal from the community by the mixed married Jewish women themselves (or their Christian husbands).

[69] NA 1.05.11.18: 509, 27-9-1893. Recall that the use of Christian terminology was widespread in the Surinamese-Jewish communities.

[70] NA 1.05.11.18: 509, 16-10-1893.

justified. The orthodox rule under Chief Rabbi Lewenstein (and the rabbis that followed him) had already put a hold on the practice of admitting non-Jews to the High German community in 1857.[71] Moreover, an important move towards a post-slavery defined community had been taken in 1887. In that year, the old regulations concerning the admission of 'free persons and persons who belong to the rank of slaves' that dated from 1842 were replaced by a new set of rules that followed halakhic guidelines. From that date on, non-Jewish children could only be admitted to the community at age thirteen, properly circumcised, and only when the 'religious regulations concerning the admission of proselytes in Judaism were followed'.[72]

How are we to understand this debate on mixed Jewish-Christian marriages in Suriname, and the reluctance to incorporate their offspring into the community? Was this *halakhic* turn simply the outcome of the reconnection of the Surinamese-Jewish community with the Dutch-Jewish (and to a lesser extent) American-Jewish world, and spurred by the presence of the Dutch rabbis? From a Jewish perspective, it would be tempting to conclude that the Surinamese Jews had, by the time of these incidences, returned to *halakhic* law, which simply stated that children of non-Jewish mothers are not Jewish by definition. Yet, such an interpretation would not do justice to the far more complex process of change that was taking place in the Surinamese-Jewish community at the time. Rather than a simple, binary shift from a racialized to a *halakhic* discourse on Surinamese-Jewishness, the disputes regarding mixed Jewish-Christian relationships show the convergence (or even confusion) of the two paradigms

Throughout the nineteenth century, 'non-Jews' in Suriname had increasingly become black or coloured 'Christians' because of the large-scale Christianization of the Afro-Surinamese population that had taken place by then. Thus, while the term

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[71] The minutes of the High German church council of 16 November 1885 read 'for 1857 [the coming of Chief Rabbi Lewenstein] various admission took place, however since the arrival of the Chief Rabbi, no admissions have taken place'. NSA Minutes 1880-1893, 16-11-1885. Note that Lewenstein initially clashed with the members of the Portuguese-Jewish church council over the admittance of non-Jews to the community. He even consulted the Chief Commission over this issue. In 1860, Chief Rabbi Lewenstein addressed himself to the Chief Commission with the question whether he, as a Chief Rabbi, could be forced to admit persons of another faith into the Jewish religion, especially since 'in the colony the motives for changing or adopting a religion are often far removed from profound conviction, and there seemed to have been never an objection to accept so-called proselytes (converts) as long as they paid a certain security in cash'. See, Letter of Chief Rabbi Lewenstein to Chief Commission, NA 2.07.01,.05: 447, 18-10-1860. In a reaction, the Church Council of the Portuguese-Jewish community responded cynically that Chief Rabbi should be praised for his sharp observations of the Surinamese nature in such short period of time (Lewenstein had arrived in Suriname three years earlier). Apparently, Lewenstein had to give in on this point. In March 1861, Venus van Louise Johanissen, a manumissioned slave-woman, was admitted as a member of the Portuguese community. Venus only spoke Sranan, as appears from the fact the Lewenstein made a speech in Sranan in which he instructed Venus of her duties as 'a Jewess'. For the case of Venus van Louise Johanissen, see Teroenga 13:6 (October 1952). Also Meijer 1955:45.

[72] NSA Minutes 1880-1893, 11-8-1887; 28-8-1887; 15-9-1887.

'Christian' included whites and Afro-Surinamese, the majority of these Christians were, by then, of Afro-Surinamese descent. When the distinction between *Congreganten* and *Yachidim* was officially abandoned in 1841, colour was no longer allowed to function as a means of differentiation – at least not in any formal documents and official proceedings of the community. Hence, the protagonists of the disputes concerning mixed relationships were referred to as Christians; yet, most probably the persons at issue were coloured. The rather sudden turn to *halakha* in the making of Surinamese-Jewishness during this period should at least partly be understood in terms of the hidden notions of colour it possibly entailed.

Such an interpretation is warranted. Let us return to the family Monsanto-Heilbron. According to the District registers, in 1846 all coloureds with the family-name 'Monsanto' were member of a Christian congregation, while all white Monsanto's were registered as Portuguese Jews.[73] Although the request of Mr. Monsanto and Mrs. Heilbron to have their daughter Simcha incorporated into the High German community was submitted 25 years later, Monsanto – the father of Simcha –was most likely not a white Christian, but a coloured Christian. What exactly evoked the fierce reaction of the High German president? Was it because a matrimonial union between a Jewish woman and a Christian man was against *halakhic* law? Or did it have to do with the fact that this marriage involved a union of a white Jewish woman and a coloured man? Many white settlers (Europeans and locally born) would have regarded such a reunion as utterly offensive as noted before. A similar question can be raised in the case of the children of the widow Bueno Bibaz-Kennedy, who were refused membership of the Portuguese-Jewish community. In the same District registers of 1846, all Kennedy's are listed as either 'coloured' or 'free negroe', making 'Kennedy' a typical Afro-Surinamese name during the nineteenth century. This leads me to believe that the widow A. Bueno Bibaz-Kennedy was in fact a coloured woman who wished to have her daughters incorporated into the community.[74]

If we accept that the disputes surrounding Jewish-Christian mixed marriages were at least partially driven by racial motives, what are we to make of this turn to *halakha* in Suriname? On the one hand, the reinforced diasporic connection of the Surinamese Jews in the mid nineteenth century should be understood as an autonomous historic development, which explains the revival of *halakha* in Suriname at least in part. This process of diasporic connecting was an unexpected side effect of the granting of Jewish civil rights in 1825, because of which the Surinamese Jews were placed under the umbrella of the Chief Commission of Israelite Affair. This

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[73] National Archive Suriname, 36: District register 1846.

[74] Izak Bueno Bibaz (the deceased husband) was a white Jew. In the district registers, we find him as a two-month-old baby, who, together with his parents, sister, brother and the family of Abraham Gabay Fonseca lived in a house in the Maagdenstraat.

paved the way for the coming of a series of rabbis and religious teachers to Suriname during the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, who brought with them orthodox notions of Judaism. Yet, one may also wonder whether the appearance of a *halakhic* notion of Jewish identity during this period was, in fact, also a covert means to preserve the whiteness of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Although the language of differentiation had transformed from racial to *halakhic,* the essence of the community had not changed: its boundaries remained colour-based. When internal differentiation between white Jews and coloured Jews was no longer tenable, and the abolition of slavery in 1863 rendered all special rules concerning the admittance of manumitted slaves useless, the old custom of relatively easy admittance of non-Jews to the community must have become more and more threatening in the eyes of the white Jewish community leaders. Adherence to the 'old custom' would imply a continued 'colouring' of the Surinamese-Jewish community; instead, *halakha* may have offered an attractive alternative perspective.

Into the twentieth century: between a localized mentality and a diasporic consciousness

Issues surrounding mixed marriages continued to trouble the Jewish communities in Suriname throughout the twentieth century. By then, a definitive decline of the Surinamese-Jewish community had set in. From the early twentieth century onwards, Suriname had increasingly less to offer and many Jews left Suriname in search for a better education, a job or driven by a marriage. The socio-cultural consequences of these demographic changes were accordingly: empty synagogues, little interest for cultural or religious activities, and not enough Jewish clientele to bear the costs for a ritual butcher, rabbi or circumciser. The remaining community members increasingly intermarried with non-Jews, initially mainly Christians (white and Afro-Surinamese) but later also Hindustani. Amsterdam and American rabbis were consulted on numerous occasions to give guidance on how Surinamese-Jews were to deal with the status of mixed marriages between Jewish men and non-Jewish women, and the position of their non-halakhic offspring.[75]

    One such discussion involved the family Abrahams. It happened in 1935, and Abrahams was a recent member of the High German community. According to his

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[75] Note that I have not come across any example in the archives where advice is sought on the status of coloured Jews; either this was a consequence of the autonomous operating Surinamese-Jewish leadership when these issues took centre stage (late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century), or issues considering the status of coloured Jews were simply considered local affairs, in which interference of the Amsterdam community was unwelcome. A subtle illustration of the changes in the community during the late nineteenth century is a small remark in the Minutes of 1878, which mentions the consultation of a Dutch Chief Rabbi concerning a collection to finance a new Church building for the Reformed Christian community in Nickery. While in the past the Surinamese-Jews were not inclined to turn to the Dutch rabbis for advice in these matters, they now deemed formal approval was in order 'to have a guideline for future cases'. NSA Minutes 1867-1880, 6-3-1878.

own testimony, his Jewish education had failed him in many ways: he had never encountered anything 'Jewish' in his parental home and his whole social environment was more Christian than Jewish. He had married a Christian woman and had fathered five children: two boys and three girls. When his oldest son fell seriously ill, the question arose where the child would be buried in case of his death. Although the child recovered from his illness, he and his wife decided to baptize the child and incorporate him in a Christian congregation. Later, the other children were baptized as well, except for the youngest one. It was not until some years later that Abrahams first engaged in Jewish circles, raising his interest in the 'Jewish case'. He educated first himself, and later his children, in Jewish law and custom, and started to visit the synagogue on a regular basis. He even had his sons circumcised by the *Mohel*. Even though he realized the possible misfortune he may bring down on his children (considering the increasing violent athmosphere against Jews in Europe during the 1930s) he and his wife had made up their mind and wished to have their children accepted as Jews.[76]

The debate whether to admit Abrahams' children into the community spun out over several church council meetings in a two-year time span. Repeatedly, it was remarked that one should not consult Dutch chief rabbis in this matter, as they were not able to judge the Surinamese situation. However, they were equally anxious about the reaction of the Dutch mother community: would the Dutch chief rabbis condone their acknowledgement of children of non-Jewish mothers?[77] Would they still be acknowledged as an orthodox community by the World Jewish Congress? Yet, it was also questioned whether it would be fair to demand an orthodox conversion from potential new members, 'since none of the community leaders lived as orthodox Jews themselves.'

It was during one of those meetings that the case of Mr. Nelom presented itself. Nelom was black. This very fact was explicitly mentioned in the margins of the minute book. Even though Nelom showed a certificate, signed by three orthodox rabbis that confirmed his *halakhic* conversion, the church council decided not to incorporate Nelom into the community based on this document alone. First of all its validity needed to be verified by the Chief Rabbi of the American orthodox community, as 'there is a lot more to the admission [of Nelom].'[78] The exact meaning of these words remains unclear, but the intention of this remark should be obvious. In the end, it was decided to turn to the Dutch Chief Rabbis for advice on both the admission of Nelom and the children Abrahams.[79] The letter describing the matter is quoted at length as it

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[76]   NSA Minutes 1933-1955, 10-6-1935.

[77]   NSA Minutes 1933-1939, 30-5-1935.

[78]   NSA Minutes 1933-1939, 19-11-1935.

[79]   NSA Minutes 1933-1939, 19-9-1935, 19-11-1935.

reveals many of the tensions that characterized the Surinamese-Jewish community during the twentieth century:

Dear Sir,

Issues have arisen in our community pertaining to the incorporation into Judaism of children of members who are married to non-Jewish women,

In the past, such children – after having undergone the necessary formalities required by a teacher – have been incorporated into Judaism and have been registered as members.

Furthermore, there are cases where the Church Council has decided, pending a decision to be taken later on their membership into the Community, to allow these children to be ritually circumcised on the eighth day.

Recently a Surinamese-born full-blooded negro has presented himself, who has been accepted as a Jew by the *Bet Din* of the Yemenite Community in New York and has been acknowledged as such by the Chief Rabbinate of New York. Previously mentioned person is a regular visitor of the Synagogue and has been honoured with church rituals.

The sister-community of the Dutch Portuguese Israelite Community of this town has, over the years, accepted children from non-Jewish mothers into Judaism and acknowledged them as members of the Community, while there are other cases where these persons have married members of our Community.

Recently, a request was put to the Church Council by one of its members who is married to a non-Jewess, to accept his wife and children into Judaism.[…].

The matter at hand here is of vital importance to our Community and the languishing Jewish life here in Suriname.

The Council has taken the opportunity to ask the Teacher of our Community, Mr. Agsteribbe, to put this matter forward to you during his European leave, with the intention to obtain a Rabbinical decision on aforementioned issues and – if possible – to establish guidelines for the future.

Given that the circumstances and conditions of Suriname differ so greatly from elsewhere and that non-Surinamese rarely have a feeling for the circumstances which have been established over the course of history and tradition, it is a great pleasure to the Council that this important matter can be discussed with a Teacher who has lived in Suriname for eight years and who can be considered to be completely informed with all the peculiarities,

which can be put to use to view this matter from all different points of view.[80]

As appears from this letter, there were various important issues at hand in the community at the time. Not only mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews gave rise to unrest in the community; the dilemma was corroborated by the fact there were no alternatives, such as a Reformed or Liberal Jewish congregation, to whom non-*halakhic* Jews could turn to. Given the diminishing size and languishing strength of their community, the Surinamese Jews simply could not afford to exclude these potential members from their community. Moreover, as the Portuguese Jews were less scrupulous about admitting converts to their community, the relations between Portuguese and High German Jews were put in a different light. How should the more orthodox-inclined High German community respond on mixed marriages of their members with converted Portuguese Jews, whose conversion – in the perception of the High German church council – was illegitimate?[81] Simultaneously, the issue of the black Surinamese convert Nelom, shows that colour was still a sensitive issue in the Surinamese-Jewish community during the early twentieth century. The explicit emphasis on the man's blackness indicated the ambivalence of the Church Council towards his colour. He was not merely a convert or a coloured convert; he was a black. However, as his conversion was authorized by a *Bet Din*, all the High German Jewish community leaders could do was to accept Nelom as a member of their community.

And the family Abrahams? It appears that at least some of Abrahams' children did become members of the community eventually. Still, their admission did not solve the underlying issue, which resurfaced about 35 years later in a tumultuous meeting of the church council.[82] The initial topic under deliberation was the development of youth work, as some weeks prior to the meeting, two members of the church council had started youth activities, doing sports, playing games, teaching Hebrew and so on. While this initiative to enhance the community cohesion was supported enthusiastically, questions arose as to which children were actually allowed to participate in these activities. It was at this point in the meeting that a certain Abrahams (presumably family, possibly one of the sons, and married to a Christian

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[80] NSA Letter to Chief Rabbi S.J.S. Hirsch, Outgoing Letters 1933-1945, 4-12-1935.

[81] In fact, both the Portuguese and High German community remained officially orthodox, until 2004 when the – by then merged – Jewish community of Suriname joined the Liberal community of Amsterdam.

[82] NSA, Minutes 1970-1976, 14-4-1971. The manner in which the minutes of this particular meeting are recorded is quite remarkable: they are almost a verbatim record of all that was said during the meeting. Hence, one can read that the whole affair passes somewhat incoherently, with people speaking at the same time, and different topics getting mixed-up.

woman as well) asked if the Jewishness of the children was a prerequisite for participating in these youth activities. He explained that his children were regularly addressed to as 'goi' and his son was told: 'stay where you are, you are not a Jew.' Abrahams finished his interjection by stating that although he was not the only one who was married to a Christian, and although he undertook a lot of voluntary work for the community, he felt that he and his children were excluded from the community.

At this point, the meeting developed into a heated discussion on the limits of Jewishness. The discussion focused on the status of children of mixed couples: did they belong to the community? Could they participate in community activities? In the end, the chair decided that concerning the children of Abrahams, although he would rather permit all children to participate in the activities, there were certain rules that had to be observed. The assembly then continued to another point of consideration. Abraham's son had requested a *chupa* (religious ceremony) for his marriage to a Catholic girl … one can imagine that it turned out to be a riotous church meeting indeed.

The incorporation of Hindustani into the inner-circle of the Surinamese Jews added a new 'others' into the ongoing discussion on community boundaries. A member of the Portuguese community confided to me:

> I am married to a non-Jewish wife.. But my children, they are members of the community, you know. Their non-Jewish mother was never a problem. It is different for women. Especially for a daughter it was important that they married a Jew, for sons it was considered less important. So when the community became so small [during the 1950s] people moved away, because there were no Jews left to marry their daughters. All my daughters have married non-Jewish men though. What was a problem, was my daughter marrying to a Hindustani man. One of the community members even told me: 'A Jew remains always a Jew, except for your daughter, because she is married to a Hindu.'[83]

The status of mixed married couples of whatever ethnic fabric remained ambiguous. While some community members urged the church council to acknowledge mixed marriages and their offspring as Jews, other community members were more inclined to orthodoxy and often opposed such practices. They reproached past and present church councils for their 'dictatorial way of acting, forcing those who were authorized [rabbis and religious teachers] to approve thing they did not agree on, abusing the fact that these teachers were depended of the church council for their income'.[84] Discussions continued throughout the twentieth century. Whereas the Portuguese-Jewish community leaders were inclined to incorporate converts into their community,

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[83] Interview dated 15-6-2006.

[84] NSA Incoming Letters 1945-1952, 23-9-1948.

the High German community leaders was more reserved towards the making of 'proselytes', as converts were called. They feared not only the loss of one of the last pillars of their self-understanding, they also feared to lose their international acknowledgement as an orthodox community.[85]

Although the adherence to a *halakhic* notion of Jewish identity in a community where mixed marriages were a rather rule than exception seems to be a form of self-denial, it can also be understood as a last connection to the 'olden days'. In a community that had lived without rabbinic assistance for decades and had to do without the provisions to live a 'proper' orthodox life, attachment to an orthodox identity is about holding on to the last threads of authenticity. In the end, however, a continued affiliation with orthodox Judaism turned out to be a road to nowhere. At the end of the twentieth century, with less than fifty practicing Jews remaining, the – by then merged – Portuguese and High German communities decided to join the Liberal Jewish community in 2004, thereby doubling the number of their members at once, as from now non-*halakhic* offspring of mixed married community members could – if desired – be listed as community members as well.

3   DEFINING SURINAMESE JEWISHNESS: BETWEEN COLOUR AND *HALAKHA*

Surinamese-Jewishness was never a direct translation of European or Amsterdam Jewishness. In the colonial social order of Suriname, traditional notions of Jewishness were given new meanings, and developed into unique cultural configurations in which colonial classifying practices, social status, Jewish religious law and custom (*halakha*), and notions of ethnic and racial difference played their role in demarcating group boundaries of the Surinamese Jews. This making of Surinamese-Jewishness was not a static phenomenon, nor was it uncontested. Processes of creolization and localization stretched the boundaries of the Surinamese-Jewish community. Especially from the late eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century, dramatic changes took place in the way interior borders were defined and guarded by the community elders. In this period, both the relationship between Portuguese and High German Jews as well as the status of coloured Jews dominated discussions over community membership, and were central elements in the making of a colonial narrative. While white Jews differentiated themselves from community members of mixed Afro-Jewish descent, social distinctions between Portuguese and High German Jews were maintained as well.

The shifting status of coloured Jews in the Surinamese-Jewish community reveals the importance of colour and social status in the making of Surinamese-Jewish identity in both communities. The discrimination between white *Yachidim* and

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[85]   For instance, NSA Minutes 19-12-1981.

coloured *Congreganten* should not be understood as an implication of *halakhic* understanding of Jewish identity (in this case the lacking of a Jewish mother) or the wish to at least partially keep up with *halakhic* living. From the mid eighteenth to mid nineteenth century both the motivation and language of distinction in the Surinamese-Jewish community was racial rather than *halakhic*, which is a strong sign of a creolizing Surinamese-Jewish community. To stress this point, the issue of the coloured Jews was closely related to practices of colonial racism, making it a New World phenomenon *per se*.

It was the local political environment of a race-based slave society – a political and social environment from which the Surinamese Jews could not seclude themselves – in combination with the sheer geographical distance with Europe, and the absence of religious leadership that stimulated the development of such creolized notions of Jewish identity. Issues of colour were not only to be found in New World Jewry, however. The language of race and racism can also be found in the metropolis. In the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community, the issue of black or coloured Jews appears in the community documents of the early seventeenth century, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter. These experiences are closely connected to the colonial experience of Amsterdam Jews, who brought their slaves or servants from the colony (Suriname, Curaçao, Brazil) back home, creating colonial boundaries and colonial categories in the Amsterdam community.

The assertion that children of non-Jewish (coloured) mothers were incorporated in the community for pragmatic reasons – to assure a continued existence of the community despite a shortage of Jewish women – is not tenable. There are no indications of an asymmetric demographic distribution among male and female Surinamese Jews. As noted before – and in contrast to migration patterns of non-Jewish settlers – Jewish migration to Suriname was generally a family affair, involving men, women and children.

The changing status of coloured Jews was a reflection of Suriname's colonial context. The increasing marginalization of coloured Jews from the heart of the community and – ultimately – the conflict between the Portuguese-Jewish regents and the coloured Jews are all directly related to the transformation of Surinamese society. The fact that Suriname's social realm had become highly creolized and that mixed-colour relationships had become common practice by the late eighteenth century, resulted in a process of increased racialization and increased sensitivity towards colour of the Surinamese society at large. The same applied for the Surinamese-Jewish communities.[86] Yet, over time, this led to a situation in which the legitimacy of a racially defined community was increasingly challenged. The fact that a group of

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[86]   A parallel can be drawn to the situation in the Southern American states where racial segregation was realized after the abolition of slavery through the enforcement of the Jim Crow Laws between 1876 and 1965.

coloureds dared to challenge to authority of the white Jewish elite is a clear manifestation of this crumbling legitimacy of colour-based distinction. It is worth pointing out that the conflicts surrounding the Darhe Jessarim and the burial of Joseph Nassy, was a dispute between coloured Jews and the Portuguese community leaders. To my knowledge, no major controversies have ever occurred in the High German community over the secondary status of coloureds. The conflicts in the High German community that I encountered all concerned the degradation of white Jewish men after a mixed marriage, and not so much the *Congreganten* status for coloureds in itself. The different views of the two communities on the position of coloured Jews may have been a result from their distinct colonial experience: the High German Jews were never part of the Surinamese plantocracy on large scale, nor where they as preoccupied with colonial eliteness as the Portuguese Jews. Moreover, the fact that the group of coloured Jews threatened to join the High German Jews at some point in the conflict with the Portuguese regents, suggests that the relationship between white and coloured Jews in the former was less controversial altogether.

Apart from the overall influence and effect of Suriname's social reality on the Surinamese-Jewish community, the story of the coloured Jews also shows some differences with Christian congregations in Suriname. The secondary status of coloured Jews in the Jewish communities can be understood as the consequence of a policy of conditional inclusion. Yet, the attitude towards the coloured population was generally more exclusive in the Jewish communities than in Christian congregations. Although the Reformed and Lutheran churches were (are) known as essentially white colonial bastions that were extremely reluctant to accept coloureds in their midst (save some educated and coloured elites), baptismal registers of the Reformed and Lutheran churches show that,during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the majority of the persons receiving baptism were, in fact, non-whites.[87] Half a century later, only 30% of the Protestants (excluding the Moravian church) were whites, circa 64% were coloureds, and 6% were blacks.[88] In contrast, the Surinamese Jews never counted more than 10% coloureds in their midst during the late eighteenth century, while halfway the nineteenth century their share had declined to about 5%. Thus, the relative number of coloureds was much higher in the Protestant churches than in the Jewish congregations.[89]

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[87] Personal communication with J.J. Vrij, 18-10-2007.

[88] Teenstra 1842:10. During the nineteenth century, slaves and free coloureds found their way to the Catholic and Moravian churches, which profiled themselves as 'coloured churches' and preached in Sranan Tongo. See also Van Lier 1971:172 and Vernooij 2002.

[89] The exact status of free blacks and coloureds in the Christian churches is an issue that needs further research. Various incidents suggest a marginalised status of blacks and coloured in the Christian churches. J.J.Vrij encountered the casus of a black woman who was ordered to seat at the ultimate table during the Holy Communion in 1738; while in 1767 it was decided that free blacks could only be buried

(continued)

Boundary-making practices in the Jewish community are difficult to compare with Christian congregations, however. Apart from the observation that community boundaries do not have the same meaning in Christian and in Jewish communities (because of the importance of decent in Jewish identifications), the sex ratios in both communities were fundamentally different. Mixed-colour relationships are believed to have been less common in the Surinamese-Jewish communities than among the Christian settlers, if only for the white male surplus among the latter group. In addition, their unstable, somewhat discriminated position may have restrained the Jews from strongly affiliating with a group that enjoyed even less status in the colony.

The history of colour and social status in the making of Surinamese-Jewish identity shows an important turning point halfway the nineteenth century. The transformation from a racial to a halakhic-defined community marks one of the critical periods in Surinamese-Jewish history, and appears as a counter story to the general history of Surinamese-Jewish localization. The explanation of this halakhic revival should partly be sought in the reinforced diasporic connection during this period through the influence of the Chief Commission, and the orthodox Dutch rabbis serving in Suriname from the mid nineteenth to mid twentieth century. However, as I have argued in this chapter, the rather sudden revival of halakha in the making of Surinamese-Jewishness during the mid to late nineteenth century may also be explained by the hidden notions of colour it entailed. In a post-slavery society with racial practices loosing their legal basis, halakha was an effective and accepted way to preserve the whiteness of the community. Whether halakha was indeed used strategically remains, however, speculative.

Not only had the language of distinction changed in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, also the essence of the debates on community boundaries had altered. Until the mid nineteenth century, the main preoccupation of the community leaders was the colouring of the community and the maintenance of differences in social status between coloured and white Jews; the proposition that both coloured Jews and white Jews were indeed Jewish remained unchallenged and was never at stake. From the mid nineteenth century onwards, however, the focus turned from coloureds to Christians. The progressive loss of Jewishness of the Surinamese-

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on a segregated area at the churchyard, the *Nieuwe Oranje Tuin.* (J.J.Vrij, e-mail conversation, 18-10-2007). In 1794, the Portuguese regents wrote to Governor De Frederici that they believed the Christian churches to have separated benches for the officers of the coloured militias of the civil guard. They also wrote that 'free mulattos' could not assume any honoured position in the Christian communities, like a deacon or a member of the church council, nor perform any ceremonial service (Response of the Portuguese regents to the memorandum of the coloured Jews: NA 1.05.10.01:527, 7-3-1794). See also Wolbers 1861:770. The position of coloureds was changing as well in the Christian churches during the nineteenth century; this much is indicated by a light-skinned coloured (a *castice*) who functioned as a sexton in the Reformed Church in the 1820s (J.J.Vrij, e-mail conversation, 18-10-2007).

Jewish community, its increasing unorthodox membership, and with that, its place and status in worldwide Jewry, were the issues that increasingly preoccupied the community leaders.

A final comment concerns the people involved in this process. Rebecca Bercks, David Abraham de Vries and Marianna Levij, Emanuel Elias Emanuels and Marianna Marcus Samson, Mr. Monsanto and Mrs. Heilbron, the widow Bibaz-Kennedy, the family Abrahams, and all those persons that married 'the other': they have shown once more that the mixed married were – and still are – the catalysts of a redefinition of community boundaries *par excellence*. They tried to stretch the limits of Jewishness with their personal choices in life, thereby challenging prevailing claims of commonality.

IX

CONCLUSION:
CREOLE JEWS AND COLONIAL INTERPLAY

The story of the Surinamese Jews is a story of a colonial Jewish community that, over the course of history, became ever more interwoven with the local environment of Suriname. Ultimately, as it is today, the community has all but disappeared. Ever since their first settlement, Jewish migrants from diverse backgrounds, each with their own narrative of migration and settlement, were faced with challenges brought about by this new environment; an environment that was a colonial order and, in essence, a race-based slave society. A place, furthermore, that was not static, but constantly changing: economically, socially, demographically, politically and culturally.

Against this background, the Jewish community transformed from a migrant community into a settlers' community, and both the Portuguese and High German Jews adopted Paramaribo as their principal place of residence from the late eighteenth century onwards, thus entering a multi-cultural and socially complex urban environment. Radical economic changes – most notably the decline of the Portuguese-Jewish planters' class – not only influenced the economic wealth of the Surinamese Jews as a group, but also had considerable impact on their social status in Suriname's society.

The overall socio-economic picture of the Surinamese-Jewish community during the nineteenth century is not that of a uniform colonial elite, but of a socially stratified community trying to make a living in Paramaribo's urban colonial environment. After 1825, when civil rights were granted to the Surinamese Jews, a whole range of new economic opportunities opened up as a result of which they would, slowly but surely, penetrate into the colonial administrative bodies in the course of the nineteenth

century. Notwithstanding the incorporation of individual Jews in the top of the colonial regime – as officials, magistrates and entrepreneurs – the Surinamese-Jewish community as a whole had lost their significance as a powerful, ethnically distinct group at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The story of the Surinamese Jews is not just a narrative of a localizing European community, but rather a prime example of the many ways in which a colonial domain, and
(to a lesser extent) diasporic connections put their stamp on everyday life and affected the demarcation of community boundaries and group identifications. Within the framework of Suriname's colonial domain, the Surinamese-Jewish community debated, contested and negotiated the pillars of a Surinamese-Jewish group identity not only among themselves but also with the colonial authorities. Given the predominance of colour and social status as boundary-making attributes in Suriname's colonial environment, it is not surprising that exactly these two attributes took centre stage in Surinamese-Jewish identifications. As a locally oriented plantation colony, located at the margins of an expanding world, diasporic connections of the Surinamese Jews were predominantly of a religious nature through which religious goods and advice in religious matters were imported. The appointment of Dutch rabbis and religious teachers as religious leaders of the Surinamese-Jewish community was one of the most tangible benefits of these diasporic connections. During the nineteenth century, the connection between the Surinamese-Jewish community and Dutch Jewry was strengthened, partly related to an expanding Dutch colonial state in Suriname. However, the sense of belonging to a worldwide (orthodox) Jewish community also provided for a need for authenticity when Jewish life eroded in Suriname.

To understand the questions of belonging that were at issue in the Surinamese community, I have presented several case studies that manifest contestations surrounding the manifold of distinctions and boundaries that structured daily Surinamese-Jewish life. Some of the case studies presented are well-known episodes in Surinamese historiography, other have been dug up from the footnotes of history. Marrying the 'other' has been a recurring theme in these cases whereby, over the course of history, the 'others' changed from 'white and Jewish' to 'coloured and Christian'. Recently, a new potentially 'other' has entered the scene. The image of the synagogue and the adjoining mosk (see cover photo) still appeals to the idea of Suriname as peaceful multicultural society; world events, however, have somewhat scratched this harmonious imagery. The palm trees – still visible in the top photo – have been removed from the synagogue grounds on instigation of national security services: they would provide an ideal hide-out for potential terrorists – or so the story goes at least.

Having come to the end of this study; what is there to conclude, and what answers can be proposed to the historical questions and theoretical problems set out at the beginning, the processes of change that directed the localization of the Jewish

community in Suriname, and the interaction between the underlying forces of colonialism, creolization and diasporic identifications?

Delimitating 'white' creolization

In this study, I have attributed the complex interplay between Suriname's colonial domain and Surinamese-Jewish identifications to be a case in point of a creolizing Surinamese-Jewish community. Creolization acted as a constitutive force in shaping the social environment, the philosophy of life and the actions of Surinamese Jews. As such, Surinamese-Jewish creolization was predominantly concerned with a process of 'becoming creole'; the development of a localized mental framing and a notion of difference that distinguished the Surinamese Jews from those Jews living in their metropolitan homeland communities.

It has been argued that – being in a free and dominant position able to bring their cultural institutions with them – Europeans were less susceptible to cultural change than the enslaved Africans were.[1] Although I do believe this to be true largely, this assertion leaves important points unaccounted for, as the freedom of white European settlers certainly was not unbounded but circumscribed by the local colonial order. No matter how free the Surinamese Jews were, they could not refrain from the hostility and forced intimacy that was an important characteristic of everyday life in the colony. This resulted in a notion of creoleness that was associated with having 'intimate knowledge' of living in a (former) slave society permeated by colour-coded racism.[2] One only has to recall the epitaph of 'the young man David Rodrigues Monsanto who was killed by the cruel uprising negroes'; the stories of the Jewish men who had their illegal offspring manumitted and incorporated into the Jewish community; or the story of Ganna and Jan, who were cruelly punished for crossing one of the most intimate boundaries of a colonial slave society, to underscore this combination of fear and intimacy. The fact that they were far removed from their homeland communities was also a significant practical impediment, which curtailed their choice of action in some or other way.

Surinamese-Jewish creolization was a historically demarcated process that started during the first settlement of Jews in Suriname, took place during the eighteenth century and reached its definitive stage in the nineteenth century. Far from

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[1] For instance, Mintz and Price 1992:3-6.

[2] Brathwaite 1971:xv. Compare with Franklin W. Knight's commentary that 'Race, colour and legal condition became inescapable aspects of the local societies and deeply internalized in the everyday values of the inhabitants' Knight 1997:276. Van Lier referred to this context as a 'borderline situation' a context of slavery and colonial conditions 'on the fringes of the world economy' and 'in a country where the settled and cultivated areas lie on the edges of the mighty jungles of its uncultivated interior', a context that created 'a state of mind in both masters and slaves which was ruled by fear.' (Van Lier 1971:7-8).

being a monolithic process, creolization was the sum of all those individual experiences of migration, settlement and adjustment, and generations of living in the colony. For some Jews, creolization was an active process involving personal choices, all packed in one lifetime; for others, creolization was just a fact of life, slowly evolving over the course of their family-histories.

Take, for instance, the prominent Surinamese Jew Egbert van Emden (see Chapter IV). When van Emden settled in Suriname in 1818, he found himself in an environment that was already creolized. Living his colonial dream, he quickly adapted to his new environment. He married into a one of the richest Jewish families in the colony, and purchased several plantations; to communicate with his slaves he had to learn some Sranan. His political career brought him into the highest echelons of Suriname's social and political environment. In line with his social status, Van Emden purchased a large mansion at the Wagenstraat where no less than 36 house slaves took care of the housekeeping. Typical for Paramaribo's housing patterns, Van Emden and his family (in total 11 persons) took their residence in the street-facing mansion, while the backyard lodged several free coloured families, counting another 16 persons.[3] Notwithstanding that Van Emden was a newcomer in the colony; he (together with his father-in-law Salomon de la Parra) came to personify the political emancipation of the Surinamese Jew even though he converted to Christianity in 1847.

Now, consider a fictitious Portuguese-Jewish female who lived fairly isolated on her (or her husband's) plantation at some point in time in the eighteenth century – let us call her Ribca de Abraham Fernandes. Her story would be something completely different: born and raised on a plantation, her colonial dream (if she ever had one) had since long evaporated. The once fertile soils of her plantation had become exhausted; instead of suger cane or coffee, wood was now the main, but hardly profitable, agricultural produce. Living her entire life in the plantation district, predominantly surrounded by Afro-Surinamese people and rarely visiting the 'city', she only mastered Sranan. When she decided to draw up her will by a Jewish jurator, a translator 'in the Negroe English language' had to assist, as she did not understand Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch. The food she ate was certainly not standard European-Jewish fare, but consisted of local products (tayer, banana's, cassava) that were prepared in a kosher fashion, at least for as much as practical conditions allowed. Her view of the world was probably influenced by Afro-Surinamese popular beliefs; she had a strong belief in *ogri ai* (the evil eye)[4], and when she or her children were sick,

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[3] National Archive Suriname, 36: District register 1846. One of the free coloured families that lived in the backyard was the family Wijngaarden. As noted before, the family names Wijngaard and Wijngaarden were given to manumissioned slaves of the De la Parra family (see Chapter VI, page 197).

[4] *Ogri ai* is a widespread folk believe in Suriname. It concerns the power to harms persons (especially children), pets en plants with a single glance. Children affected by *ogri ai* are apathetic, pale, and feverish, and with glazed eyes. According to Surinamese folk believe *ogri ai* can be cured by certain

she consulted an Afro-Surinamese herb doctor prior to consulting a regular Jewish physician. As such, one can consider the woman to be creole, but that does not mean to say that she had abandoned her Jewish beliefs and religion. In fact, she could still have been a devout member of the Portuguese-Jewish community, although from a Dutch-Jewish perspective her observance may have seemed rather frayed at the edges.

The divergent stories of Egbert van Emden and the fictitious Ribca de Abraham Fernandes illustrate the different, even opposite, colonial experiences that constitute the continuum of Surinamese-Jewish creolization. Egbert van Emden's experience of creolization was primarily an experience of localization into an already creolized environment. In contrast, the creole mentality of the Portuguese-Jewish woman in question was not the result of an active choice of migration and adaptation, but rather a consequence of life. Being born and raised in the colony, one may even wonder whether the feelings of 'adjusting' and 'uprooting' actually fit her personal experience. Yet, from a community-wide perspective this is exactly what happened during that historical era. In her daily and intimate interactions with a slave-population, she actively contributed to the process of creolization herself, making her an agent of creolization. As such, she did not adjust to an already creolized environment, she was part of the creolization process herself.

The disparate stories of Egbert van Emden and Ribca de Abraham Fernandes illustrate, moreover, that creolization was not confined to a certain segment of the Surinamese-Jewish community. As such, they stress the inherently different colonial experiences in a socioeconomically heterogeneous community. Although prominent Jews caused the most striking and controversial conflicts in the Surinamese-Jewish communities (not seldom it were former regents who challenged existing rules and regulations) this does not imply that Surinamese-Jewish creolization was strongly class-related or reserved to the higher echelons of the Surinamese Jews. It does indicate, however, that prominent and educated Jews were less prone to submit oneselves to the identity claims of the community leadership. Literacy was an important prerequisite for negotiating one's status and finding one's way in the maze of written memories, requests and counter requests. Whereas affluent Jews would logically be more sensitive to the requirements of colonial elite self-understanding, the relation with the metropole or to the connection between colour and social status, lower class Jews were more subjected interaction with Suriname's non-Jewish and non-white population on an everyday basis.

The continuum of Jewish creolization in Suriname ranged from tangible manifestations of cultural production to the development of a creole mental framing among the Surinamese Jews. Recall once more the creole grave markers that dot the Jewish cemeteries of Paramaribo (Chapter VI). In my opinion, these wooden sticks

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prayer said by a religious Jew.

with their typical round and heart shaped tops – some with a Star of David attached – subscribe to the idea of a creolizing Jewish community in Suriname during the nineteenth century. Arguably, the creole grave markers are indicators of a creolizing lower socio-economic segment of the Surinamese-Jewish community – those Surinamese Jews who could not afford an expensive tombstone.

The development of a separate community of coloured Jews would have been an evident example of Surinamese-Jewish creolization. An impetus towards this process was given with the attempt of Ruben Mendes Meza and Ismael de Britto to have their fraternity Darhe Jessarim recognized as an independent Jewish congregation in 1791. In this particular case, the influence of power-inequality as a determining factor in creolization processes manifests itself clearly: the coloured Jews could only maintain a separate congregation with the support of the Portuguese-Jewish and colonial authorities who – as it happened – fiercely opposed such an act of separation. The establishment of an independent coloured Jewish community in Suriname was nipped in the bud; one can only speculate over what would have been the outcome of such an event if history had taken a different course. Still, there would be no speaking of coloured Jews if interracial relationships and miscegenation had not resulted into a redefinition of community boundaries among the Surinamese Jews.

Not every transformation seen in the Surinamese-Jewish community can be labelled as 'creole' or seen as a manifestation of creolization. Some issues, such as boundary-making practices between the Portuguese and High German communities and their disintegration over the course of history (see Chapter VII), or the increasing number of non-observant Jews in Suriname from the nineteenth century onwards, relate to notions of difference and processes of secularisation seen in Jewish communities around the world. Creolization, with its strong spatiality and contextualisation of inequality and domination, seems hardly a suitable term for analyzing these developments. Although these developments may not be adequately described as creolization, they were evidently connected to a process of localization into the local (colonial) of context of Suriname nonetheless. Notions of difference between Portuguese and High German Jews in Suriname were not simply transplanted from Europe to Suriname. In the race-based slave society of Suriname, the implications of a free and white status (for the moment disregarding the more complicated status of the minority of coloured Jews) influenced notions of difference between the Portuguese and High German communities.

The development of a creole mentality forms the thread of a Surinamese-Jewish history of belonging and is manifested through the role of colour and social status in demarcating Surinamese-Jewish community boundaries; through the writing of a colonial narrative of eliteness by the Portuguese Jewish regents; through the conflicts over 'good Judaism' in Suriname; through the notion of Surinamese-Jewish difference that created various conflicts with Dutch rabbis; up to the nostalgic memories of Jodensavanne and the era of a Jewish planters elite, which form the heart of Surinamese-Jewish historical consciousness. Indications of such a creole mental

framing can be found in extensively documented conflicts as well as in casual remarks, loosely referring to the historic experience of colonialism and interracial mixing.

Although the development of a creole mentality did evolve in a colonial context of cultural interaction, it derived its meaning in relation to the metropole. Put differently: Jewish colonial migrants became 'creole' because of their cultivated difference vis-à-vis the motherland and their representatives. After all, the fact that local colonial practices of differentiation and racial discrimination fuelled Surinamese-Jewish identity discourse is, in my opinion, strong evidence of a creolizing Surinamese-Jewish community, but only becomes meaningful in contrast to a *halakhic* discourse of Jewish identity. It was the local environment of a race-based slave society – a political and social environment from which the Surinamese Jews could not seclude themselves – in combination with the sheer geographical distance with Europe and the absence of religious leadership that provided the framework for the development of such creolized notions of Jewish identity.

Surinamese-Jewish creolization did also occur outside a Jewish diasporic framework. The historic experience of the Surinamese Jews shows that the colonial domain did affect those so-called white European communities with long settlement histories in colonial societies; 'so-called' because creolization caused these 'European' communities to deviate from the metropole. Dutch expatriats who served as colonial servants in Suriname from the mid nineteenth century onwards no longer identified the Surinamese Jews as 'Europeans'. Jewishness and white creoleness had become largely overlapping identifications, as the Jews were largest permanently resident white community in Suriname. As such, the development of a creole (self)-identification of the Surinamese Jews was not only contextualized by a local framework, but also derived from the interplay between colony and metropole, and most importantly, their mutual interaction.

Connecting concepts: creolization and diaspora

The development of a creole consciousness among the Surinamese Jews was neither comprehensive nor was it uncontested. The sheer fact that there was a continuous history of conflicts over Jewishness and Jewish behaviour in Suriname indicates that while some Surinamese Jews had become creoles, others still maintained notions of Jewishness generally associated with an orthodox Jewish world outside. A Leitmotiv in Surinamese-Jewish history is the ongoing tension in the Surinamese-Jewish communities between participating in a local environment and becoming ever more local and creole on the one hand, and a continued sense of belonging to a worldwide Jewish community on the other. This field of tension appears from the conflicts over the notion of colonial eliteness versus religion-based understandings of Jewishness, but also manifests itself in the complex relationship between past and present, wherein colonial nostalgia, creole awareness and diasporic consciousness were characteristic of how the Surinamese Jews viewed and dealt with their past.

Although Surinamese-Jewish history has certainly known wealthy merchants that did fit the image of a classic Jewish trade network; the fact that Suriname was a plantation colony primarily fostered a locally-oriented community. I do not imply that the Surinamese Jews fully operated outside a diasporic framework. The community archives give shattered indications of such a religious defined diasporic relationship: a traveller collecting donations for the 'Holy Land'[5], an occasional donation for the construction of a synagogue elsewhere, an extra prayer on behalf of the persecuted Jews of Russia. However, when rabbi Dünner approached the Surinamese Jews for the admittance of Russian Jewish refugees, their reaction was 'don't send'.[6] Apperently, diasporic identifications among the Surinamese Jews were more about a sense of belonging to a worldwide Jewish community, than about an active participation of the Surinamese Jews in a multi-branched and worldwide Jewish community.

During the nineteenth century, ties between the Surinamese-Jewish community and Dutch Jewry were strengthened through the incorporation of the Surinamese-Jewish congregations in a Dutch Jewish framework supervised by the Chief Commission of Israelite Affairs (*Hoofdcommissie tot de zaken der Israëlieten*). It may be argued that this relationship was primarily the outcome of an expanding (colonial) state control by Dutch authorities over Surinamese affairs, rather than a clear-cut diasporic connection between Surinamese Jews and Dutch Jewry. At the very least, it shows that diasporic relationships should not be studied in a political vacuum: in the Surinamese-Jewish case, the colonial and the diasporic connection were clearly overlapping configurations that cannot be disentwined.

Still, rules and regulations coming from the diaspora may deeply influence and determine the extent, direction and pace of adapting to a local environment, whether they are enforced by an authorative body or appear as a dominant discourse on conduct and authenticity. In the orthodox-Jewish world, such strong and dominant discourse aimed at the preservation of religious traditions and ethnic boundaries, and assimilation was (is) almost by definition considered a disgrace. Recall the incident over the role of the Jewish militia members during the funeral of Governor Texier in 1793; this discussion was in essence a discussion over 'good Jewishness' in Suriname. The High German Jews who were involved in this conflict, referred to a code of conduct, which – in their opinion – applied to every Jew. They clearly despised the actions of the Portuguese Jew Joseph Arrias who had his duties as a colonial resident

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[5]   In 1812, Rabbi Haim Seby visited Suriname to collect donations for maintaining the cemeteries 'in the Holy Land'. According to his testimony to the High German regents, Seby had travelled for seven years, had been hold up by French warships and robbed of his collection donations for as much as two times, then ended up in London, gained permission to travel to Barbados on a Britisch warship, and sailed from there to Paramaribo where he collected 5,270 guilders. Seby left Suriname after a period of four months. In later years, several travellers from the Holy Land would visit Suriname for the purpose of fundraising for Palestine (Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Samson Archive: 319.9).

[6]   See Chapter VII.

outweigh his duties as a Jew (observing the Sabbath that is). The influence of Dutch rabbis is equally worthwhile in this light; it was under their guidance that the Surinamese-Jewish communities made a (re)connection with the diaspora during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The fact that a dominant discourse of Jewish conduct could be maintained in the colony, although frayed at the edges, derived from the free status of the Jews in Suriname and the fact their migration and settlement in Suriname took place within the context of an existing diasporic framework. This in itself made it more difficult for the Surinamese Jews to deviate from their cultural heritage, and less necessary to create new cultural understandings. The African slave population, in contrast, clearly lacked such a widely shared cultural manual, nor had they free access to any kind of cultural network. In fact, by the time that the African diaspora, as a cultural construct, could have come into existence, the creolization of the Afro-Caribbean communities was already definite. In the Afro-Caribbean case, creolization and diaspora seem to have been two distinct processes indeed: one is generally associated with cultural transformation by force (creolization), while the other (the African diaspora) is associated with a search for authenticity in a state of freedom and post-slavery.[7] With the absence of a widely shared diasporic framework that could create and transfer cultural understandings, creolization was basically the only route available for the Afro-Caribbean communities during the centuries of slavery.

In contrast, in the case of the Surinamese Jews, who had continued access to their cultures of origin, both processes – creolization and diaspora-formation – took place from the early moments of settlement, initially as overlapping processes, later as contradicting senses of belonging. The result is not a smooth process of change, but a process full of contradictions, where claims of authenticity are sought not only in the diaspora ('you are a bad Jew […] if we were in Holland we would have thrown you under the bridge'),[8] but also as in the creole and the local ('how should we have to act against such a religious leader who wants to make alterations in the service of worship which may be appropriate for Europe, but which are fully unsuitable for this colony?').[9]

A beautiful example of the possible field of tension created by such an entangled identification became apparent during the discussion regarding the controversial memorial of Dario Savreeda in 1911 (Chapter VI). Let me recall the situation. Rabbi Roos was very clear in his objections towards Savreeda's eccentric memorial, with it's

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[7] In his study of the celebration and framing of Emancipation Day in Suriname, Alex van Stipriaan dates the beginning of an Afro-Surinamese diasporic consciousness to the early twentieth century (Van Stipriaan 2006:157.

[8] The High German Jew Meyer Levij Arons shouting at the Portuguese Jew Joseph Arias during the funeral procession of Governor Texier.

[9] Colaço Belmonte in opposition against the appointment of Chief rabbi Lewenstein.

Christian symbols and depictions of Allegro and Adante. Some of the regents argued for advice in this matter 'from Europe' (thus not necessarily from the Netherlands), as they hoped for more 'suitable' advise from other rabbis. Such 'diasporic shopping' was a recurring phenomenon for a community that was only orthodox by name. The chair, however, advised against an European advice in this matter, arguing that Europeans would be unfamiliar with the Surinamese situation where community leaders enjoyed a far-reaching authority over religious matters (in Europe such authority belonged exclusively to the territory of the religious leadership, that is, the rabbis). Eventually, it was decided that 'living in a Christian community' only the cross-sign would be removed; the rest of the memorial would be left untouched. Rather than give in to the demands of the rabbi, the Jewish community leaders choose to prevent possible conflict with the Christian colonial elite.

The unremitting tension between a creolized Surinamese-Jewish identity and the wish to continue to belong to the global (orthodox) Jewish community shows that creolization is an intrinsic part of the process of diaspora. The entangled processes of localization, creolization, diasporic identifications and colonial relationships are a characteristic feature of the Surinamese-Jewish colonial experience; all entailed a fair share of free choice and compulsion, resulted in a complex identification wherein legitimacy was both sought in the diaspora as well as in the local.

Creole Jews or European whites? The semantics of colonizers and creoles

A final consideration involves the classification of the Surinamese Jews as European whites, as colonizers and as creoles. Jews clearly assumed an ambiguous position in the colonial society of Suriname. Their whiteness placed them in the camp of the colonizers; their Jewishness separated them from the white colonial community in which they were incorporated first, while their long history of settlement in Suriname made them susceptible to the creolizing environment they lived in. In this general perception of the Surinamese Jews, the group of coloured Jews forms a strong counter story toward universal claims of Jewish colonial eliteness and Jewish whiteness.

As a historically changing and internally divided group, the Surinamese Jews offer a good vantage point from which to study the complexity of white European colonial communities and the ways the colonial domain affected these communities. European colonial communities were neither monolithic nor stable groups. Colonial rule was based on the assumption that European communities were demarcated entities of common interest and culture and shared racial attributes that were separated from colonized groups by self-evident boundaries.[10] The Surinamese-Jewish history underlined how flawed these assertions are, and shows the unruliness of colonial reality. The Surinamese Jews were white but also coloured, colonizers but also locals,

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[10]   Stoler 1989:635, and Stoler 1992.

colonial elite but also colonial poor. Far from constituting 'a homogenous community of common interest', the Surinamese-Jewish case underscores scholarly claims against such a perception of colonial elites.[11]

The history of the Surinamese Jews shows that neither whiteness nor Europeaness was self-evident or absolute markers of identification. In Chapter V, I argued that some of the identifications the Suriname Jews – by themselves, but also by the colonial authorities and non-Jewish contemporaries – can only be fully understood when a one-dimensional approach of the Surinamese Jews as a colonizers community is abandoned for a more subtle, multi-layered conception of the Surinamese Jews. Especially during the nineteenth century, the status of the Jews became more indefinite. After two-hundred years of settlement, the Jews had become locals, and were referred to as 'creoles' or 'natives' in colonial reports (they were most certainly not referred to as 'Europeans'). The localization of the Surinamese Jews – in other words, their creoleness - contrasts with the social and political position of the upper echelons of the Jewish population who held important positions in the Surinamese colonial administration, and the many others who operated as minor officials in the colonial apparatus,

The vantage-point of the 'Jew as colonizer who turns creole' raises some theoretical issues, in particular concerning the relation between 'colonizer' and 'creole'. The question is, then, whether colonizers, creoles and natives were actually exclusive categories and, if so, how they related mutually? For instance, could one transform from the one into the other? At what point did colonizers and colonized become 'creoles' or 'natives'? And to what extent should a migrant community be detached from its home-society or diaspora in order to be understood as 'creole' or 'creolized'? Some may think this is a rather pointless semantic, but I believe it to be relevant for understanding the position of the Jews in colonial Suriname. After all, as noted by Robin Cohen, there would have been no point in distinguishing a 'creole' from a 'colonizer' if there were no perceived differences between the two.[12]

Yet, the difference between a colonial, who is born in and identifies with the metropole, and a creole, who is born in the colonies and identifies with this local environment (or is so identified by others), is exactly what distinguishes the Surinamese Jews from the Dutch colonial officials, during the nineteenth century. A parallel is easily drawn with the Latin American *criollo* elite who dissociated themselves from their European background and eventually took the lead in Latin America's independence movements during the early nineteenth century. In Latin America, the once colonizers had transformed into Libertadores. Ultimately, the

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[11]   For a strong argument against such monolithic perceptions of colonial elites and colonial rule, see in particular the work of Ann L. Stoler and Frederick Cooper (for instance Stoler 1989, 1992, and 2002a; Cooper and Stoler 1989 and 1997).

[12]   Cohen 2007:3.

Surinamese Jews passed through all stages, and transformed from colonials, to 'creoles' into 'natives'. They became 'Surinamese' and thought of themselves as 'belonging' to this country.

The history of the Surinamese Jews shows us that there were no self-evident categories in Suriname. The standard definition of colonizers as a group that comes from abroad by default does not apply to the Surinamese context. In an environment where almost everybody came from elsewhere, the semantic meaning of this characteristic loses its strenght. What counted was someones colour of skin, someones socioeconomic position, and someones legal status (free or enslaved). The intangibility of the Surinamese Jews as whites, as coloureds, as colonizers and as creoles, and even as Jews, has made this study very much an exploration of the ambiguous interspaces of a colonial slave-society.

The meaning of the Surinamese-Jewish experience also transcends the specific context of a colonial slave-society. In the history of the Surinamese Jews irrevocable changes went hand in hand with a continued search for authenticity and commonality. Localization involves uprooting, adjusting and alienation; it generates dilemmas. Although conflicts and discordant events are strong examples of the interaction between collective identifications and adjustments to a new environment, the Surinamese-Jewish case shows that such conflicts are not necessarily confined to the first generations of migrants. The fact that Portuguese and High German Jews continued to cultivate differences for almost a century after boundary-crossing had become a fact of life, shows the persistency of certain cultural constructions. This makes localization not only a process involving change and adaptation, but also a process of continuities.

As I have argued in this study, the localization of Surinamese-Jewish identifying practices accelerated between the mid eighteenth and mid nineteenth century, that is one to two centuries after a Jewish community was established in Suriname. Only when locally-born Jews had become the majority; when institutionalized forms of political exclusion of the Jews had lost their legal basis; and when mixed marriages and mixed relationship had become recurring events, did Surinamese-Jewish identifications take a definite turn. Important conflicts within the Jewish community (concerning Portuguese and High German Jews relationships or the status of coloured Jews), but also between Jewish and non-Jewish whites (because of the increasing visibility of the Jews and the penetration of Jews in social and political environments previously out-of-bound) took place within this time-span; conflicts that strongly indicate a reformulation of Surinamese-Jewish identity during this period. The often heard idea that the localization of migrant communities is only a matter of time, should be taken with due caution. Even though change is inevitable, the path and pace of localization may vary greatly and may not be in accordance with the expectations of dominant groups within a certain society.

Fieldwork and history have a way of bringing people's ideas down to earth' Sidney Mintz once noted.[13] And, of course, he is right. No matter how high-flown our conceptualization of history; or how sophisticated our theories of cultural change and (up)rooting, the colonial Jews of Suriname did not use concepts as localization, creolization or diasporic consciousness. They may have referred to themselves as whites, perhaps as creoles, but did not consider themselves to 'have' an identity or to be subjected to colonial identity politics. They thought of themselves as 'belonging' to a Jewish Nation, to a religious community, to a class of people or a racial category. Whereas the analytical outcomes of this study can be concentrated into three main conclusions, the diverse stories and case-studies presented in this book, as well as the countless narratives that remain untold, have a meaning and validity outside theories of localization, creolization and colonialism. These distinct, sometimes disparate, stories show that Jewish belonging in Suriname was never self-evident, but always contested, not only amongst the Surinamese Jews themselves, but also by the world outside.

After three hundred years of residence, Jews are irrefutably an intrinsic part of Suriname's historical memory, and Surinamese-Jewish identifications are firmly rooted in Suriname. The elderly woman whose reminiscences are recounted at the beginning of this study, boldly declared: 'I am a Surinamese and a Jew. I do not want to be a Jew in Jerusalem. I want to be a Jew in Suriname'. For Surinamese who take pride in a mixed descent, a Jewish ancestor (preferably in combination with an Amerindian ancestor) does add some extra spice and status to their genealogical narratives. Still, it is their history of masterhood – rather than slavery and subordination – that continues to differentiate the Jews from the Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani majority.

In Suriname's postcolonial society, the interplay between creolized notions of Jewishness and a prevailing diasporic consciousness has also left the Surinamese Jews with a contested identity. Their Surinamese identifications has made them strangers to Dutch Jews who do not share their history of colonialism, and strangers to a Jewish orthodox world that contests their Jewishness. What this means became clear to me during one of my stays in Suriname. I was told of a sixteen year old boy of non-*halakhic* origin (his grandfather was a Jew) whose dark features indicates his mixed descent and who strongly identifies with his Jewish background. He dreams about a life in Israel, perhaps even marrying an orthodox Jewish girl and starting a family in his Promised Land. Behind his back, a *halakhic* Jewish visitor from the Netherlands whispers: 'I hope he will never go; it will be such a disappointing experience. He

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[13] During the *International Workshop on Creolisation and Globalisation*, March 2002 (Rotterdam, the Netherlands) where Mintz featured as a keynote speaker.

believes in his Jewish identity, but no orthodox Jewish father in Israel will ever accept him as a suitable candidate for his daughter.'

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GECREOLISEERDE JODEN:
GEMEENSCHAPSVORMING IN KOLONIAAL SURINAME.

In de geschiedenis van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap zijn conflicten en buitensluiting onlosmakelijk verbonden met culturele aanpassing, insluiting en culturele nieuwvorming. De geschiedenis van Jodensavanne en de Portugees-Joodse suikerplantages vindt haar contrast in het verhaal van arme Joodse migranten, die vanuit het overbevolkte Amsterdam hun heil zochten in Suriname. De geschiedenis van de Surinaamse Joden is eveneens het verhaal van rijke Joodse suikerplanters die buitengesloten werden van het sociale leven van de witte koloniale niet-Joodse elite, van Europese Joden die geminacht werden door de Portugees-Joodse regenten en van gekleurde Joden en hun ondergeschikte positie in een gemeenschap waarin lidmaatschapsrechten in belangrijke mate raciaal bepaald werden. De geschiedenis van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap biedt bovenal een fascinerende blik in de complexiteit van witte koloniale gemeenschappen. Maar al te vaak wordt er stilzwijgend van uitgegaan dat de Europese koloniale gemeenschappen in essentie Europees bleven en niet noemenswaardig verschilden van de gemeenschappen in het moederland. Echter, geen enkele groep die deel uitmaakte van een koloniale samenleving kon zich onttrekken aan de machtsongelijkheid en vijandigheid die inherent zijn aan elke koloniale samenleving en die in extreme mate het dagelijkse leven reguleerden in de Caribische slavensamenlevingen. Dit geldt bij uitstek voor de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap met haar lange vestigingsgeschiedenis in Suriname.

Deze studie bespreekt de verschillende manieren waarop binnen de context van de Surinaamse koloniale samenleving vorm werd gegeven aan een Joodse gemeenschap die zich daar vanaf het midden van de zeventiende eeuw vestigde. Zij richt zich in het bijzonder op de kritieke momenten van verandering op het gebied van gemeenschapsvorming, sociaal-cultureel bewustzijn en identificatie en zoekt naar

conclusies over de interactie tussen kolonialisme, creoliseringsprocessen en de dynamiek van diaspora gemeenschappen.

De geschiedenis van de Surinaamse Joden kan inzicht geven in de specifieke manifestaties van creolisering in een witte koloniale gemeenschap. Deze benadering van het creoliseringsbegrip wijkt af van het gangbare Afro-Caribische creoliseringsmodel dat de nadruk legt op de historische ervaring van gedwongen transportatie, onderdrukking en dwang, die aan de basis stond van cultuurverandering binnen Afro-Caribische gemeenschappen. Europese gemeenschappen veranderden in witte creoolse gemeenschappen en werden door tijdgenoten ook als zodanig aangeduid. Deze witte koloniale gemeenschappen onderscheidden zich van het moederland, niet alleen door een mentaal veranderingsproces, maar ook door een zekere 'verkleuring' als gevolg van gemengde relaties. Daar waar de creolisering van Afro-Caribische groepen is gebaseerd op het idee van culturele nieuwvorming, manifesteert een gecreoliseerd bewustzijn bij de Surinaamse Joden zich voornamelijk, maar niet uitsluitend, door hun lokaliserende identificatie. Deze veranderende identificaties vinden niet alleen plaats in interactie met Suriname's lokale context – de Afro-Surinaamse bevolking, de niet-Joodse koloniale elite en de bestuurlijke vertegenwoordiging - maar ook in interactie met het 'thuisland' en de Joodse gemeenschap daar. Eén van de centrale thema's in deze studie is het spanningsveld dat zich binnen de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap manifesteerde tussen enerzijds het deel uitmaken van de Surinaamse koloniale samenleving en de ontwikkeling van een gecreoliseerd bewustzijn en anderzijds het voortdurende besef en verlangen te behoren tot een wereldwijde Joodse gemeenschap en de specifieke eisen die daarmee in verbinding werden (en worden) gebracht.

Deze studie is gebaseerd op archiefonderzoek in particuliere en nationale archieven in zowel Suriname als Nederland, gedrukte bronnen en secundaire literatuur. De archieven van de Portugees-Joodse en Hoogduits-Joodse gemeenten vormden het startpunt van het empirisch onderzoek, aangevuld met materiaal uit onder andere Nederlandse koloniale archieven. De aard van het materiaal vertolkt bij uitstek de stemmen van prominente Joden en Joodse regenten en geeft slechts beperkt inzicht in de gedachten en overwegingen van vrouwen, gekleurde Joden en al die anderen die geen deel uitmaakten van het meer vooraanstaande deel van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap. Toch speelden juist deze groepen een centrale rol in de conflicten over gemeenschapsvorming in de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap. Door *close reading* is geprobeerd hun stemmen en verhalen zo veel mogelijk deel uit te laten maken van de hier gepresenteerde geschiedenis. Deze thematisch afgebakende studie kent geen precieze periodisering. Hoewel het zwaartepunt ligt op de late achttiende tot vroege twintigste eeuw, maken vroegere en latere perioden ook deel uit van deze studie.

De centrale hoofdstukken van dit boek zijn verdeeld in twee delen. In het eerste deel *Forging a community* komt de vestiging- en ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis van de Surinaamse Joden aan de orde en wordt aandacht besteed aan de migratiegeschiedenis

en samenstelling van de Joodse gemeenschap, de belangrijkste plaatsen van vestiging, het sociaaleconomische profiel en de politieke en religieuze configuraties waarbinnen de Surinaamse Joden opereerden. Deze hoofdstukken vormen het decor voor de hoofdstukken van het tweede deel, *Cultivating differences, localizing boundaries*.

De vroege migratie van Joden naar Suriname bestond voornamelijk uit Portugese Joden. In de achttiende eeuw nam het aantal Hoogduits-Joodse migranten toe en in 1735 werd een aparte Hoogduits-Joodse gemeente opgericht. Aanvankelijk waren het vooral welgestelde Joden die zich in Suriname vestigden en die hun geluk kwamen beproeven in de snel groeiende plantage-economie van Suriname. Later kwamen de verarmde Europese Joden. Soms uit eigen beweging, vaak via een semigedwongen groepsmigratie, georganiseerd om de druk op Joodse gemeenten in Amsterdam te verlichten. Aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw stagneerde de migratie van Europese Joden naar Suriname. Suriname had haar aantrekkingskracht als migratiebestemming verloren en het Noord-Amerikaanse vasteland werd de belangrijkste migratiebestemming voor Europese Joden. De omvang van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap stabiliseerde op circa 1400 personen, verdeeld over twee gemeenten van min of meer gelijke omvang en samenstelling.

Deze kleine Joodse gemeenschap bepaalde voor een aanzienlijk deel het gezicht van de witte koloniale gemeenschap in Suriname. In de tweede helft van negentiende eeuw was het aandeel Joden nog ongeveer de helft van de totale witte bevolking; later nam dit aandeel af tot ongeveer een derde gedurende de vroege negentiende eeuw. Hoewel in Suriname Joden deel uitmaakten van de witte gemeenschap, begon de Joodse gemeenschap vanaf het midden van de achttiende eeuw te 'verkleuren'. Deze gekleurde Joden waren de nakomelingen van witte Joodse mannen en vrije of onvrije Afro-Surinaamse vrouwen. Hun aandeel nam af van circa 10% in de late achttiende eeuw tot ongeveer 5% halverwege de negentiende eeuw. Vanaf de late achttiende eeuw werd de stedelijke omgeving van het multiculturele Paramaribo de belangrijkste woonplaats van zowel Portugese als Hoogduitse Joden. De vele interculturele interacties die het alledaagse leven in Paramaribo vorm gaven hadden ook vergaande gevolgen voor het creoliseringproces van de Surinaamse Joden.

De sociaaleconomische context van de late achttiende en negentiende eeuw laat zich in enkele bewoordingen kenmerken door de neergang van de Surinaamse plantage-economie, verarming van een aanzienlijk deel van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap - in het bijzonder binnen de Portugese gemeenschap - en door een herdefinitie van het Joodse sociale leven in de stedelijke omgeving van Paramaribo. Tegen het einde van de achttiende eeuw had een voortslepende guerrilla-oorlog tegen maroons (ontsnapte slaven die gemeenschappen vormden in het regenwoud en vandaar uit aanvallen uitvoerden op de kwetsbare plantages) een al verzwakte plantage sector verder gedestabiliseerd. De financiële crisis op de Amsterdamse beurs in 1772 en 1773 had voor vele planters desastreuze gevolgen. Jodensavanne, eens het centrum van het Portugees-Joodse gemeenschapsleven, werd een verlaten dorp en het seigneurale Portugees-Joodse gemeenschapsleven werd verplaatst naar de stedelijke omgeving van

Paramaribo, waar zowel Hoogduitse als Portugese Joden emplooi vonden in kleinschalige handel (36%), ambachtelijke beroepen (23%) en administratieve banen (26%) in het uitdijende koloniale apparaat (cijfers zijn gebaseerd op een analyse van de wijkregisters van 1845).

De afnemende economische slagkracht van de Joodse gemeenschap bleef niet zonder gevolgen voor het Joodse gemeenschapsleven. Niet langer in staat om de kosten van een rabbijn te dragen, werden de Joodse gemeenten afhankelijk van de koloniale staat voor subsidiering van hun religieuze aangelegenheden. Het waren echter vooral de talloze alledaagse culturele interacties die voeding en betekenis gaven aan de vorming van een gecreoliseerd Joods leven in Suriname. Deze interacties varieerden van de gedwongen intimiteit van het plantageleven in een overwegend Afro-Surinaamse omgeving tot de dynamiek van het multiculturele Paramaribo, waar vanaf de late achttiende eeuw een toenemend aantal gemengde relaties voeding gaf aan een groeiende vrije, gekleurde bevolking en complexe sociale relaties.

In de oligarchisch georganiseerde Joodse gemeenschappen bekleedden de wereldlijke leiders een belangrijke en machtige positie. Buitengesloten van hoge posities binnen het koloniale bestuur, vormde het regentschap binnen de Joodse gemeenschap een aantrekkelijke en statusverhogende positie. Het jaartal 1825 markeert een belangrijk omslagpunt in de Surinaams-Joodse geschiedenis. In dat jaar kwam er een einde aan de uitzonderlijke staatsrechterlijke positie van de Joodse gemeenten in Suriname. De zogenaamde Joodse privileges, die anderhalve eeuw de ruggengraat hadden gevormd van zowel de interne organisatie van de Joodse gemeenschappen als van de relatie tot andere facties in de Surinaamse politieke arena, kwamen ten einde in ruil voor volledige burgerrechten.

Gelijkberechtiging opende de weg naar volledige incorporatie in het koloniale politieke bestel van Suriname. Joden waren nu verkiesbaar voor hoge posities; in de praktijk duurde het nog een halve eeuw voordat volledige participatie van de Surinaamse Joden een feit was. In 1890 waren de politieke verhoudingen zodanig dat meer dan de helft van de leden van de Surinaamse Staten (het koloniale parlement) Joden waren. Hoewel deze politieke dominantie belangrijk is geweest voor de beeldvorming van de Joden als machtige groep, wisten de religieuze gemeenten hier niet direct van te profiteren. Gedurende de late achttiende en vroege negentiende eeuw, transformeerde de Surinaamse Joodse gemeenschap van een sociaaleconomische vooraanstaande groep met een aparte juridische status in een in toenemende mate gemarginaliseerde kerkgemeenschap in het midden van de negentiende eeuw. De incorporatie van individuele Joden in de top van het koloniale bestuur in Suriname kon niet voorkomen dat de Surinaamse Joden als een machtige etnische en religieuze minderheid aan betekenis verloren.

Als planters, kleine handelaren, ambachtslieden en koloniale ambtenaren vormden de Surinaamse Joden een overwegend lokaal georiënteerde koloniale gemeenschap die maar beperkt deel uitmaakte van transAtlantische, diasporische netwerken. De reorganisatie van het Nederlandse Jodendom en in het bijzonder de

installatie van een Hoofdcommissie voor Israëlitische Zaken in 1814 (waaronder de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenten vanaf 1825 ressorteerden) zorgde voor een versteviging van de diasporische relatie tussen de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap en het Nederlandse Jodendom. Deze relatie, die niet los kan worden gezien van de koloniale relatie tussen Suriname en Nederland, zorgde voor een verdere afname van de autoriteit en onafhankelijkheid van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap. De complexe relatie tussen een latent diasporisch bewustzijn onder de Surinaamse Joden enerzijds en een zoektocht naar authenticiteit binnen de koloniale omgeving van Suriname anderzijds (en welke ten grondslag lag aan diverse conflicten op het gebied van identificatie en gemeenschapsvorming in de negentiende eeuw) vormen de focus van het tweede deel van deze studie.

Het overkoepelend thema van de hoofdstukken in het tweede deel zijn de vragen, discussies en conflicten die gepaard gingen met veranderende identificaties in een creoliserende koloniale gemeenschap. Het koloniale domein van Suriname (dat niet alleen bepaald werd door de bevolkingsgroepen en politieke autoriteiten in de lokale omgeving van Suriname, maar ook door de relatie met de Nederlandse koloniale staat en haar vertegenwoordigers) met zijn vele culturele interacties en specifieke machtsverhoudingen vormden het kader van Surinaams-Joodse identificatieprocessen. Koloniale ideeën over kleur en sociale status waren even bepalend in de afbakening van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschapsgrenzen als orthodoxe opvattingen over Joodse identiteit. In dit deel van het boek worden verschillende casussen gepresenteerd waaruit blijkt dat de vele scheidslijnen die het dagelijkse leven van de Surinaamse Joden structureerden, continu werden aangevochten, bijgesteld of herbevestigd. Gemengde huwelijken spelen een centrale rol in dit deel van de studie.

Een vergelijking van verschillende beelden en classificaties van Joden door niet-Joden laat zien dat de notie van Joodse witheid niet alleen ambigu was, maar ook conditioneel. Ideeën onder de witte Christelijke kolonisten over de positie van de Joden in Suriname's sociale hiërarchie botsten niet alleen met de getalsmatige dominantie van de Joden in Suriname, maar ook met de politieke macht van de Joodse elite. Tegelijkertijd ondermijnde de aanzienlijke groep arme witte Joden het beeld van witte suprematie en het door kleuronderscheid gelegitimeerde koloniaal gezag in Suriname. Het terugkerende beeld van de Surinaamse Jood als de wrede en ongedisciplineerde planter dat wijdverbreid was in de polemische geschriften van negentiende-eeuwse abolitionisten bevat sporen van een Europese traditie van antisemitische denkbeelden en stereotypen, maar geeft evenzeer blijk van de minachting binnen de metropool voor de vermeende onbeschaafdheid van een witte creoolse gemeenschap die kennelijk vergeten was hoe zich fatsoenlijk te gedragen. De *outsider*status van de Surinaamse Joden laat zich goed illustreren door hun positie in de burgerwacht, maar ook door de 'instabiele' classificatie in volkstellingen en de daarop gebaseerde bevolkingsstatistieken Gedurende de vroege koloniale periode was het voornamelijk hun religieuze 'anders-zijn' die de Joden apart zette van de niet-

Joodse witte bevolking. Tegen het einde van de negentiende eeuw lijkt er echter een gecreoliseerd beeld te bestaan van de Surinaamse Joden. Als lokale bevolkingsgroep vormden zij samen met de Afro-Surinaamse bevolking (en naar het laat aanzien de kleine lokale groep witte kolonisten van niet-Joodse afkomst, zoals de *Boeroes*) een weinig eenduidige categorie in de bevolkingsstatistieken die werden opgenomen in de jaarlijkse rapportages van het koloniaal bestuur in Suriname.

De begraafplaats dient zich aan als een vruchtbare plaats voor de studie van een gecreoliseerd Surinaams Jodendom. Een studie van de Joodse begraafplaatsen in Suriname ïllustreert een aantal belangrijke momenten in de creoliseringsgeschiedenis van de Surinaamse Joden. Gedurende de vestigingsgeschiedenis van Joden in Suriname veranderde het fysieke gezicht van de Joodse begraafplaatsen ingrijpend. Op de Hoogduits- en Portugees-Joodse begraafplaatsen in Paramaribo maakten traditionele Joodse grafstenen plaats voor creoolse grafmarkeringen. De typerende houten grafpalen en betegelde tombes zijn een duidelijke indicatie van een transformerende Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap in de negentiende eeuw. De begraafplaats was bovendien één van de plaatsen waar Surinaams-Joodse identiteit werd gecreëerd en aangevochten. De conflicten gerelateerd aan dood en begraven reflecteren het verloop van een veranderend Surinaams-Joods zelfbeeld. De fixatie op kleur en sociale status, dominant in de late achttiende eeuw, maakte in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw plaats voor een toenemende focus op secularisering en gemengde huwelijken met niet-Joden.

De veranderende koloniale omgeving van Suriname beïnvloedde op verschillende manieren de relatie tussen Portugese en Hoogduitse Joden. De vaak gespannen relatie tussen beide gemeenschappen is ten dele terug te voeren op een diep gewortelde notie van sociaal en cultureel verschil, welke vanuit de 'Oude Wereld' en in het bijzonder vanuit de zeventiende-eeuwse Amsterdams-Joodse gemeenschap werd meegenomen naar Suriname. In Suriname werd deze notie van verschil onderdeel van een discours van koloniaal elitedom en de plaats van Joden in de sociale hiërarchie van deze slavensamenleving. Arme Joden die zij aan zij leefden met de Afro-Surinaamse bevolking ondermijnden het zorgvuldig geconstrueerde zelfbeeld van de Joodse elite. Daar waar het Portugees-Joodse zelfbeeld gevormd was rondom het idee van Joodse witheid en elitedom, zochten Hoogduitse Joden veelal authenticiteit in een orthodoxe levensstijl. Vooral in de late achttiende eeuw zorgden deze identificaties herhaaldelijk voor botsingen tussen beide gemeenschappeen.

Hoewel de gemeentebesturen bleven vasthouden aan het idee van twee onderscheidende gemeenschappen tot ver in de twintigste eeuw, begonnen in de loop van de negentiende eeuw de grenzen tussen beide gemeenschappen steeds meer te vervagen in het dagelijkse leven. De opmerking van Rabbijn Roos (die tussen 1893 en 1912 diende in de Hoogduitse gemeenschap) dat 'er nauwelijks een familie is die niet sterk verbonden is met leden van de andere gemeente' is in dit verband veelzeggend en illustreert het contrast tussen officiële gemeenschapsgrenzen zoals deze in stand werden gehouden door de gemeentebesturen en de alledaagse sociale omgang tussen

de leden van beide gemeenschappen. De toenemende verstrengeling van de Portugese en Hoogduitse gemeenten door gemengde huwelijken en gedeelde religieuze diensten belette niet het voortbestaan van een notie van verschil tussen beide gemeenschappen. Een analyse van groepsgrenzen tussen de Portugees- en Hoogduits-Joodse gemeenschappen toont de weerbarstigheid van veranderende identificatieprocessen en de hardnekkigheid van bestaande identiteitsnoties in relatie tot een veranderende sociale werkelijkheid.

Pas in de loop van de twintigste eeuw verdween het vermeende onderscheid tussen Portugese en Hoogduitse Joden naar de achtergrond. De aura van koloniaal elitedom, dat sinds jaar en de dag de kern had gevormd van Portugees-Joodse identificatieprocessen werd nu een breed gedeeld zelfbeeld in de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap. De koloniale ervaring van het plantageleven, hun *couleur locale* en liberale levenstijl – kortom, hun gecreoliseerde mentaliteit - verschafte de Surinaamse Joden een notie van authenticiteit, met name ten opzichte van het Nederlandse Jodendom.

Hoezeer gemeenschapsvorming onder de Surinaamse Joden onlosmakelijk verbonden was met Suriname's koloniale orde blijkt uit de geschiedenis van de gekleurde Joden en hun positie in de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap. Een geschiedenis die zich laat kenmerken door een opmerkelijke combinatie van insluiting, uitsluiting en vermenging. Verhalen over Joodse mannen die hun onechte kinderen die zij verwekten bij Afro-Surinaamse vrouwen lieten registreren als leden van de Joodse gemeenschap toont de flexibiliteit aan waarmee halachische regels werden toegepast in koloniaal Suriname. De tweederangsstatus van gekleurde Joden in zowel de Portugese als Hoogduitse gemeenschap laat zich verklaren door koloniale ideeën over kleur en sociale status die bepalend waren voor de afbakening en interne organisatie van de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap.

Halverwege de negentiende eeuw kantelde dit raciale discours vrij plotseling naar een halachische discussie. Deze transformatie van een raciaal naar een halachisch gedefinieerde gemeenschap vormt een keerpunt in de geschiedenis van de Surinaamse Joden. De aandacht werd nu gevestigd op gemengde huwelijken met Christenen. Kleur verloor haar betekenis als onderscheidend kenmerk, althans in officiële stukken. Dat kleur niet van de ene op de andere dag ophield een rol te spelen in het proces van Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschapsvorming lijkt niet meer dan logisch in een gemeenschap die generaties lang mede op basis van kleurgrenzen was georganiseerd. In het Suriname van na 1863 was het naleven van halachische wetten over Joodse identiteit een effectieve en geaccepteerde manier om de witheid van de gemeenschap te bewaren. Of halacha inderdaad strategisch werd ingezet in de Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap blijft uiteraard speculatief.

Concluderend kan gesteld worden dat creoliseringsprocessen bepalend zijn geweest in gemeenschapsvorming bij de Surinaamse Joden. De vorming van een gecreoliseerd bewustzijn en denkkader blijkt - onder andere - uit de rol van kleur en sociale status in de afbakening van gemeenschapsgrenzen, uit het zelfbeeld van de

Portugees-Joodse elite dat gevormd was rondom een idee van koloniaal elitedom, uit de nostalgische herinnering aan Jodensavanne en uit de creoolse grafmarkeringen op de Joodse begraafplaatsen in Paramaribo. Hoewel de ontwikkeling van een creools bewustzijn plaatsvond in interactie met de lokale, koloniale context van Suriname, wint zij aan betekenis in relatie tot het moederland en haar bestuurlijke vertegenwoordigers. De spanning tussen een gecreoliseerd Surinaams-Joods zelfbeeld, geworteld in een koloniaal verleden, en de wens om te blijven behoren tot de wereldwijde orthodoxe Joodse gemeenschap, laat zien dat creolisering en diaspora twee nauw verbonden processen zijn, waarbij authenticiteit zowel wordt gezocht in de diaspora als in de lokale omgeving. De Surinaams-Joodse geschiedenis laat bovenal zien dat er geen vanzelfsprekende categorieën bestonden in koloniaal Suriname. Joden waren wit, maar ook gekleurd; rijk, maar ook arm; kolonisator, maar ook 'local'. Het perspectief van een gecreoliseerde Surinaams-Joodse gemeenschap toont de weerbarstigheid van Suriname's sociale werkelijkheid en maakt deze studie tot een zoektocht naar de tussenruimten van een koloniale slavensamenleving.

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