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Making Jews Dutch

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Conclusion: Making Jews Dutch

Central to this study was the question of what happened to the Dutch Jews after the Emancipation Decree of 1796. How did they become part of the Netherlands, and how did it affect their identity, sense of belonging, and religion? I investigated the emergence of various Dutch Judaisms as a response to secular discourse and analyzed their transformation in light of the shifting boundaries between the secular and the religious. By closely examining the trials and tribulations of the Ashkenazi community in Amsterdam, this research has shown that citizenship is in the eye of the beholder.

Five interrelated chapters focused on how the boundary construction between the secular and the religious redefined Judaism and the Jewish community. The first chapter discussed the changing relation between the state and the Jews. The Emancipation Decree altered this relationship fundamentally, and although the idea of equality lingered for decades before the actual Decree, the Decree legitimized government involvement and provided legal anchors to the Jewish citizen. Chapter two described government policy toward the Jews, which became possible after the Emancipation Decree. Making the Jews citizens created an incentive for their integration. As such, the Emancipation Decree enabled the Dutchification of the Jews and launched the 'governmental' civilization offensive. The third chapter departed from government policy and investigated how Jews internalized the new discourses on citizenship, religion, and Jewishness among themselves. This chapter focused on the blending of religious and secular discourses in Jewish rituals. The fourth chapter discussed the image formation of the Jews, which accompanied and legitimized governmental and *maskilic* reforms. Jews and non-Jews contributed to Jewish image formation. The fifth and final chapter analyzed the renegotiation of medical and religious authority and its effect on the Jewish religion. It showed the entanglement of medical and religious discourses in Jewish rituals as well as the redefinition of Jewish rituals as either beneficial or harmful to the body.

1. Modes of Jewish response to secular discourse

This study identified different modes of Jewish response to the pressures of a secularizing environment. The Jewish entry into Dutch society, the acquisition of

citizenship, and the construction of various Judaisms resulted from changing discourses on equality, the state, and religion, as they spurred new attributions of meaning to Jewishness and Judaism. The creation of the Jewish citizen did not come about in a fortnight or result directly from the Emancipation Decree. The latter only laid the foundations, the fundamentals for the Jew as a full-blown member of Dutch society. Jews from all angles of the spectrum actively constructed and remodeled their religion and identity. Citizenship did not happen to the Jews; likewise the Jews did not integrate into a solid and immovable Dutch society, but reconstructed and redefined their place in the Netherlands. Jews were not sitting ducks for secularist hunters; nor did “Judaism die,” to paraphrase Jaap Meijer. The wide variety of different modes of response display Jewish agency as Jews actively turned themselves into Jewish citizens—for some a bit more citizen than Jew, and for others the other way around. Jewish responses ranged from adaptation to adoption as Jews cherry-picked secular and religious discourses to sustain, construct, and legitimize their Jewishness.

Because various responses have been identified throughout the chapters, I will discuss each mode of response individually. In some situations more than one mode of response is at work; therefore, I distinguish ideal types of Jewish responses. These responses, however, are not abstractions devoid of historical examples.¹

Withdrawal

Jews withdrew from (Jewish) society as a response to the civic duties, national obligations, and unspoken expectations that came along with citizenship. They refused the strings attached to this gift. The Lehren family became a nucleation site for Jews who refuted the moral and social implications of citizenship. This family became a symbol for an isolated Jewish community, inward-looking, with its back turned to Dutch society. Focal points of disagreement included the idea of Judaism stripped of civil powers and identification with the Dutch nation-state. The new *mélange* of secular and religious discourse on Jewishness countered the Lehrens’ conceptualization of Judaism as something only between Jews.

¹ Max Weber, *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, translated by H.P. Secher (New York: The Citadel Press, 1962), 5, 25–58. Cf. Werner J. Cahnman, “Ideal Type Theory: Max Weber’s Concept and Some of Its Derivations,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 3 (1965): 268–80.

The Lehrens aimed at fostering a unified sense of belonging among Jews. Their activities strengthened the mutual bond between Jews and continued the Jewish transnational network. With this idea in mind, the Lehrens invited and provided for Hasidic immigrants from Eastern Europe. Moreover, they collected funds for Jewish scholars and communities in the Holy Land. In addition, the *Torat ha-Qenot responsa* collection united rabbis throughout Europe to rally against Reform Judaism. For the Lehrens, the Jewish community was bounded by religion and not by national borders; they identified with other Jews. Jewish scholarship and religious observance provided for them with the glue of a Jewish community. They refuted the new hybrid Jewish identity, and Hirschel's ascetic and Hassidic lifestyle stressed the Jewish *status aparte*. As such, being Jewish was internally and externally separate from Dutch society.

This turning away from society particularly comes to the fore in Hirschel's struggle for a separate *minyan*. With the establishment of a *minyan*, the Lehrens distanced themselves from the united Jewish community and the Supreme Committee for Israelite Affairs' enlightened reform program. Typically, the Lehrens' withdrawal was not a total rejection of everything new, but the creation of a new place for Jews; therefore Hirschel Lehren used the legal implications of citizenship to legitimize his *minyan* but refuted its social implications. Lehren's introduction of a Sephardic liturgy became key for the Committee in criminalizing the *minyan* as an unlawful sect, enforcing their ideal of integration into Dutch identity. Interestingly enough, the Sephardic model in this context did not function as a *maskilic* ideal.

Rejection

Besides Lehren's reinforcement of a transnational Judaism, smaller Jewish initiatives appeared, refuting (religious) reform and the abolition of the Jewish community's political power. The petition "For the Sake of Heaven" that requested the restoration of the old order stands out among these, as it actively collected and organized Jewish voices resisting the far-reaching implications of citizenship. In this respect, the request in 1819 from Jewish community members to excommunicate Abraham Memram for transgression of the dietary laws and blasphemy is also an example of Jews refuting the implications of citizenship. Oblivious to the new political situation, several Jews clung to the traditional power structures. They rejected the imposed privatization of religion or

the idea of religion without authority, as advocated by the *maskilim*. As it turned out, some Jews still regarded Judaism as a socially and politically experienced religion.

Besides organized opposition, other Jewish responses show a refusal to incorporate the social, religious, and moral implementations of citizenship. They resisted the dispositives of the state. For example, evasion of military service was a common strategy among Jews. Despite the loss of poor relief, Jews refused to be admitted into the army. They fled, feigned sickness, or rioted. As a result of this widespread resistance, the Jewish Corps failed. The maintenance of speaking Yiddish and refusing to learn Dutch should also be seen in this light. Moses Löwenstamm's use of an interpreter even though he had been raised in the Netherlands displays a rejection of Dutch citizenship. For centuries after the Emancipation Decree, Yiddish remained the lingua franca of Dutch Jews, and various rabbis preached in it until the middle of the nineteenth century. Even at schools for the Jewish poor, the introduction of Dutch was slow. Finally, Jews continued working in the trades despite the removal of restrictions and promotion of the crafts. Jews apparently resisted the universal appeal of citizenship and cooperation with the new power structures.

Essentializing contested Jewish practices

Sacralization of contested Jewish practices was a mode of response creatively applied by orthodox factions in Jewish society. The pressure to abandon conspicuous Jewish practices led to a reappraisal of those same practices. Theological reinterpretation provided the contested practices with a new basis and legitimization. One of the most outstanding examples of this process is the religious interpretation of the Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew. The pressure of scientific discourse on the foundations of the Ashkenazi pronunciation resulted in a religious reading of pronunciation. Defenders of the Ashkenazi pronunciation referred to authoritative Jewish sources to sustain and establish this custom as divinely ordained. Other contested rituals, such as Jewish burial practices and *mezizah*, likewise received a renewed theological foundation. This — to paraphrase a Talmudic saying — erected a fence around Torah. This was done both intentionally and unintentionally. It was not the ritual *an sich* that required protection, but the political context that constructed it as a symbol of a corrupted Judaism.

Conspicuous and therefore contested Jewish practices served as loci of power struggles. Government policy restricting and criminalizing the use of Yiddish in the

synagogue fostered the interpretation of Yiddish as an essential identity marker. Although Yiddish did not have a religious status, defenders of its use referred to discourses on Jewish etiquette and common consensus on how Jews were expected to behave. Yiddish was part of being a religious Jew. Other conspicuous practices, such as the beard fashion and *hamankloppen*, became essentialized as reflecting the real core of Jewishness. The attribution of new meanings to Jewish visibility was a counter-response to the universalism of the Enlightenment. With the reappraisal of Jewish distinctiveness, Jews developed a counter-discourse and reclaimed the public space.

Embracing

Not all Jews, however, looked suspiciously at religious reform and citizenship. The *maskilim* warmly welcomed the Emancipation Decree and imposed Dutchification. They internalized the political, social, and economic opportunities citizenship provided for the Jews and Judaized the national identity markers. Outstanding *maskilic* immigrants nucleated and established organizations such as *Tongeleth*, *Felix Libertate*, and the *naye kille*. They fulfilled pivotal positions in the High Consistory as well as the Supreme Committee for Israelite Affairs and profoundly influenced the course of Dutch Jewish history. With reference to political discourse on equality, the *maskilim* legitimized their handling of Jewish matters and refutation of the *parnasim's* and rabbinate's authority. Also, they strategically employed scientific discourse to authorize their religious reforms. The *maskilim* embraced citizenship as a decisive factor in Jewish life, which expressed itself in various ways.

The *naye kille* explicitly used secular dispositives, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, to authorize their secession. Their new Jewish regulations incorporated the Declaration and placed it alongside traditional Jewish community regulations concerning synagogue behavior and membership fees. Dutch *maskilim* defended their interference in the Jewish community, over and over again, by referencing the idea of equality. Political discourses on equality sustained their representation of the traditional Jewish community leaders as usurpers and persons luxuriating in power.

Besides embracing political discourse, the *maskilim* legitimized their religious reform with scientific discourse. Circumcision, burial regulations, and Hebrew pronunciation were all judged and reevaluated according to new scientific insights.

Mezizah was condemned for its potential health risk and uncivil appearance. Likewise, early burial, considering the phenomenon of the apparent death, was risky. Scientific research on the development of languages and phonation, according to the *maskilim*, demonstrated that the Ashkenazi Hebrew pronunciation was a corruption of the original sound of Hebrew.

Moreover, the *maskilim* incorporated the discourse on citizenship into their idea of Jewishness. *Naye kille* and *Felix Libertate* members began to regard political and military participation as essential aspects of Jewishness. According to *maskilic* reasoning, the ability of Jews to enlist in the military was a return to previous times and a restoration of rights. In this respect, Jews merely acted upon a lost privilege. Committees, such as the High Consistory and the Supreme Committee of Israelite Affairs, continued this blending of religious and secular discourses in their version of Jewishness. Numerous ordinations, decrees, regulations, reforms, and so on aimed at (re)building a Jewish community in accordance with Dutch identity. Removing the visible barriers between Jews and the Dutch nation became a key point for *maskilic* reform. And thus Yiddish needed to be replaced with Dutch, the educational system needed to be expanded with a secular curriculum, and religion needed to be modernized. In this respect, Jewishness and citizenship became two sides of the same coin.

In addition to the authorization of Jewish rituals with secular discourse, Jews from all angles of the religious spectrum actively blended the discourse on citizenship with the religious framework of Jewish rituals. Samuel Berenstein creatively mixed his vision of Judaism with the discourse on national citizenship and introduced national boundaries into the idea of Jewishness. The *maskilim* likewise blended the discourse on citizenship into the existing religious framework. They explicitly used the popular genre of Purim productions to educate the Jews on citizenship. Moreover, they employed the genre to propagate their solutions to the Jewish question and legitimize their critical stance toward traditional Judaism.

Selective incorporation

Orthodox factions in the Jewish community carefully selected secular discourse to authorize traditional Jewish structures. Haim's alteration of the Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen, for instance, is a fine example of adjustment. Haim Judaized the

secularizing message of the Declaration and twisted it in such a way that it placed sovereignty in the Jewish community and made Jewish law compulsory. Haim applied the concepts of liberty and freedom of religion to sustain and legitimize the authority of Jewish law. According to his version, Jews had the liberty to choose Judaism. By taking up the new political principles, Haim exposed the unspoken assumptions and expectations of the new revolutionary order that Dutch Jews would free themselves from the shackles of traditional religion. The petition "For the Sake of Heaven" also creatively applied the new political discourse and used the concept of the authority of the people to request a restoration of the traditional Jewish structures. As such, Jews Judaized the secularizing message of the new revolutionary order. They used the concepts of liberty and sovereignty of the people to maintain the status quo and expose the contradictory discursive strands in citizenship.

The struggles of Hirschel Lehren to legalize his private *minyan* should likewise be regarded as an attempt to employ the concept of freedom of religion. This strategy failed because the law only provided freedom for established religions. His wealth, however, enabled him to set aside the fines and continue. Even though Lehren was unable to successfully employ the legal structures, he nonetheless used the law to sustain and maintain his separatism. His aversion to the unspoken implications of citizenship did not prevent Lehren from using the system in order to reject it.

The attempts of orthodox scholars to reinforce the status of *mezizah* should also be taken into account. Referring to Maimonides as a physician and noting his approval of *mezizah* as beneficial to the child's health is an example of the selective use of medical discourse by orthodox scholars. Here, orthodox scholars insisted on the health benefits of *mezizah* and used the argument of authority to validate their practices. Other scholars interpreted the words of Maimonides ("until it draws blood") literally and invented a device that could replace the mouth. They employed modern technology to maintain a traditional practice. This pragmatic approach also comes to the fore in the events surrounding the gunpowder tragedy. Dutch rabbis were quick to use this event to enhance their status. As these examples show, the orthodox did not completely reject secular discourse but merely subordinated it to their version of Judaism. For them, secular discourse was only valuable so long as it could serve their power structures; Jews selectively shopped in the supermarkets of secular discourse.

Lip-service

The response for lip-service to the new political order while maintaining the traditional values and structures were epitomized in the person of Samuel Berenstein. His ambivalence in matters relating to the Dutchification of the Jews shows this particularly well. Although Berenstein presented himself in his Dutch sermons as an enlightened Jew advocating reform and the Dutch language, his actions and archives tell a different story. Berenstein continued preaching in Hebrew and German, although his Dutch writings demonstrate his proficiency in Dutch. However, he continuously employed the argument of not knowing Dutch in order to refrain from preaching in the vernacular. Moreover, with regard to the Dutch translation of the Hebrew Bible, he likewise feigned unfamiliarity with Dutch and delayed and frustrated its appearance.

His father-in-law Moses Löwenstamm's actions also show signs of paying lip-service. Löwenstamm's welcoming the revolutionaries while at the same time sabotaging their regulations demonstrates this. Another example is his public approval of Jewish conscription while an unpublished sermon explicitly rules against it as incompatible with religious observance. The Hebrew language served Moses well, as the Dutch were unable to decipher his hidden agenda.

The lip-service strategy frustrated reform policies. Numerous examples show slow implementation or even refusal to implement governmental decrees. For instance, Jewish teachers and rabbis from Germany and Poland without knowledge of Dutch continued to be employed. This hindered the introduction of Dutch and was a reason why rabbis continued to preach in Yiddish. Likewise, religious reform was frustrated. Early burial, the absence of black pallbearer clothing, and the maintenance of the custom of *hamankloppen*, although banned on paper, still remained in use. This holding on to traditional practices exposes the tensions between freedom of religion, citizenship, and Jewishness. For some Jews, the need for religious reform was not so self-evident. The refusal of former *parnas* and treasurer S.M.A. Prins to give up the custom of *hamankloppen* and his argument with Chief Rabbi Samuel Berenstein over the authority of religious change shows this. The refusal to implement the new regulations reveals the power struggles between top-down policies and the Jewish population. In this respect, the government-initiated Rabbinical Committee of 1864 concerning the abandonment of *mezizah* fits the lip-service strategy. No real, serious attempts were made to reevaluate this practice, and the majority of the Dutch rabbinate merely used the opportunity to

theologically establish the religious necessity of the ritual. As such, their willingness to lend an ear to the call of the Dutch government appeared to be a sign of loyalty but was actually a way to retain the status quo and reinforce rabbinic authority.

In between all of these types of responses was the overall response of indifference. Both the rabbinical elite and the Jewish masses stoically received the new ordinances and regulations from the Supreme Committee of Israelite Affairs. Despite the radical secession of the *naye kille*, refusal of conscription, and maintenance of Yiddish, the majority did not interfere with the changes. The *parnasim* and the rabbinical elite accepted the burial and circumcision legislation without resistance or objections. Also, the Jewish poor remained predominantly indifferent to the reform of the Jewish school system. For the poor, the daily struggles for sustenance and reliance on family income prevented them from enrolling their children in school, let alone formulating an answer to the changes or refuting the implications of the incorporation of a secular curriculum into the Jewish educational system.

2. Limitations of research

Research is always bound by limitations, not least by the generalizations, abstractions, and abbreviations inherent in any analysis. This observation can of course also be applied to this study. First of all, the time period, the discursive framework, the focus of research, and the topics all narrow the historical events into several modes of response. Secondly, this study only employed examples from Dutch Jewish history in so as far they shed light on the restructuring between secular and religious spheres. This in turn means that the research focused especially on government policy in relation to the Jewish community.

Besides the above-mentioned limitations, this research did not intend to exhaustively provide a detailed account of all events in Dutch Jewish history. For instance, it omitted details on orthodox nucleation and the Lehrens' endeavors to foster a transnational Jewish identity. This study did not delve into their activities in the Holy Land, their sabotaging of the appointment of a new chief rabbi of Amsterdam after the death of Berenstein in 1838, or their battle against the reform-minded Rabbi Herzfeld from Zwolle. Also, the finer points of political history, the difference between consecutive Dutch governments, and the internal political changes in the Jewish community were omitted from this study.

On the basis of an intensive analysis of the data, this study identified modes of response that reveal the interplay between secular and religious discourses. As a result of this Grounded Theory approach, this research overcomes the binary constructions that have characterized most descriptions of this historical development. The study explicitly focused on persons and not so much on institutions or political history. For instance, although I touched upon it, I did not address in detail the ongoing negotiations among the different religious currents within in the Jewish community. Therefore, this study did not focus on the Supreme Committee for Israelite Affairs' negotiation techniques for soothing the orthodox faction while implementing reform policies in the Jewish community. A similar technique characterized the seminary, which carefully negotiated between implementing a secular curriculum while maintaining an orthodox direction.

3. Future research

This book described the Dutch Jewish community's transition from strangers to citizens and provided an example of religious change. The analysis of Jewish modes of response after the granting of citizenship offers a model for other religious minorities that have been granted citizenship or are the subject of integration politics. For instance, it took more than half a century of government policy before the Jews began to use Dutch, and even a century longer before they abandoned Yiddish all together. The different modes of response to integration politics can help identify the possible unwanted results of government policy and can give insights into the different trajectories minority communities can take.

A remarkable outcome of Jewish reform and the representation of the Jews as in need of regeneration was radicalization. Instead of complying with the reform endeavors and taking on the role of Jewish citizen, some Jews turned away from society. Thus, instead of integrating Jews into society, the government policy and reforms backfired and alienated Jews. Not all Jews welcomed the social, political, and economic opportunities as positive; actually, the Jewish community was unified in constructing its own anti-discourse and nucleation process. The Lehrens continued to be attractive to Jews after the period discussed in this study. Moreover, Zionism became an option for Jews who saw no future for Judaism in the Netherlands. Citizenship for the Jews thus challenged Jewish religious unity. A result of citizenship was the inescapability of a hybrid identity. For better or worse, Jews were citizens. However, the interpretation of

what precisely citizenship entailed for the Jews and what implications it had differed profoundly and continued well after the period of this study. Citizenship divided the community, polarized, antagonized, and made it actually more difficult to reform the Jewish community.

In addition to the conflicting results of government policy in relation to religious minorities, this research has given attention to the role of image formation in government policy. Discourses on the Jews as backward, uncivil, and unmodern spurred reform endeavors and legitimized legislation. What was regarded as true knowledge about the Jewish community created the wish for reform and problematized their religion, loyalty, integration, and so on. This goes back and forth from discourse to dispositive and image, creating an inescapable circle of self-affirmation. This study has highlighted the interactions between image formation and government policy, and as such can help us better rethink the hidden agendas behind portrayal and policy; namely, noting that helping a religious community to regenerate, however well-intentioned it may be, also characterizes that community as backward and thus, in a way, fosters stereotyping and discrimination.

Besides the implications of government policy in relation to religious minorities, this study has attempted to problematize the definitions and categories the researcher uses as she steers the research results, perspectives, and conclusions. Defining the religious or the secular is a result of the way we structure and permit knowledge. Government policy and reform endeavors result directly from these knowledge systems or discourses. Related to this is the problem with binaries. The categorization of either-or narrows the research focus. It constructs the story of the *maskilim* progressing to modernity and the orthodox returning to former times. It obscures the overlapping of ideals between the groups, the fluid boundaries between ideas, and the fact that both groups both reacted and formulated answers to questions about Jewish citizenship. Finally, this study has hopefully provided a way of analyzing (Dutch) Jewish history without the pitfalls of teleological expectations and with sensitivity to the discourses that underlie our behavior and perceptions.

In addition to fostering a new sensibility with regard to the analytical tools used in the study of Jewish history, this study has introduced a new term to describe group formation. The term nucleation emphasizes the temporality of boundaries and characteristics. By moving away from static descriptions, nucleation stresses that

history is always progressing and always unpredictable. Nucleation can likewise be useful in the analysis of new religious groups or identity formation. Because the term surpasses the essentialization of group characteristics and focusses on dynamics instead, it can shed light on how groups come into being, dissolve, or crystallize. In all of these ways, this book has drawn attention to the myriad ways of making Jews Dutch.